

The Gospel in Galatians

Living by the Spirit

Lesson #12 for December 17, 2011

Scriptures: Galatians 5:16-26; Deuteronomy 13:4,5; Romans 7:14-24; Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 22:35-40.

1. This lesson discusses the basic battleground in the great controversy. Are we living by the Spirit? Or, are we practicing the works of the flesh? As Christians, are we exercising true Christian love? Or, satanic selfishness?
2. Where does the great controversy actually take place? Do you feel like a battleground? Where does Satan conduct his fiercest attacks? Is he fighting hardest with people who are already fully on his side? Or, with people who are trying to escape his wiles? How do we actually bury the old self? This is not a physical battle but a mental and spiritual battle. (Romans 7:14-24) And how do we win by walking in the Spirit? (Galatians 5:16) How does that work out in modern life in the 21st century? (Galatians 5:22,23)
3. Every honest Christian will admit that there is a daily struggle between the fleshly desires—the natural human wishes and wants—and the promptings and pleadings of the Holy Spirit. How do we get from the “works of the flesh” to “walking in the Spirit”? (COL 67.3) The only mechanism that seems to work is the one described in GC 555 and 1 Corinthians 3:18. “It is a law of the human mind that by beholding we become changed . . .” What happens to a child as he beholds his parents and does his best to become like them? Compare Psalms 115:1-8. The Assyrians worshiped a God of war; that is what they focused on as a nation. What modern-day “idols” do people worship?
4. As you look around you in the church or even in the world, how much of this kind of change do you see going on? If we are claiming to be an end-time remnant people, we hope to accomplish something that no other group has accomplished in the history of our world. Are we making progress in that direction? Are we “in the world but not of the world”? (John 15:19; 17:14)
5. Why do you think God allows this warfare to go on? Why doesn’t God just allow us to be “Once Saved, Always Saved”? How much day-by-day transformation would take place in that situation?
6. Do you find that it is easy to tell right from wrong? To identify a counterfeit, you must know the true very well. Is it always clear which influences are coming from the flesh and which influences are coming from the Spirit? Isn’t crucifying the old nature a daily task? (1 Corinthians 15:31,33) Is it the same as walking in the Spirit? How is walking in the Spirit related to self-control? (Galatians 5:23; 2 Peter 1:16) There are going to be two “messiahs” that are going to show up at the end of the world. Will it be easy to identify which is which? (Revelation 13)
7. In Paul’s writings there are several lists of sins. (Romans 1:29-32; Ephesians 4:1,17; Colossians 1:10; Galatians 5:19-21)
8. In the earliest Christian writings, the Christian life was described as “the Way.” (Compare John 14:6) Luke and Peter talked about this in several places. (Acts 9:2; 18:25,26; 19:9,23; 24:22; 2 Peter 2:2)
9. In the Old Testament, the life of the faithful Jew was described as *Halakhah*, “walking in

the law.” How is that different from “the Way” described by Luke and Peter? Is it easy to walk in “the Way”? Or, is it hard?

10. The Bible describes human beings as being born in sin. (Psalms 51:5; John 9:34) How did we get that way? What basic change happened when Adam and Eve became the first human sinners? How has that affected us? Do we understand how sin actually changes us? Do our children obey us because they fear us, or because they love us? Didn't Adam and Eve obey God voluntarily and freely?
11. There is a Christian bumper sticker which says, “Born once, Die twice; Born twice, Die once.” What does that mean? How does this relate to the daily walk that the Christian must experience if he is to remain a Christian?
12. How does this daily walk relate to those who claim that we are “Once Saved, Always Saved”?
13. Plato told his Greek students that human beings consist of a body which is basically evil and a soul. He taught that trapped inside that evil body is a soul which is good. This dualistic view of man was incorporated into certain Christian views in the early centuries. It was known as Gnosticism. On one extreme, it led to the ascetic movement. The ascetics believed that every fleshly pleasure—even eating food which tasted good—was evil. This group did their best to separate themselves from any human pleasure.
14. This type of thinking led to things such as the actions of Saint Simeon Stylites. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_Stylites) Living outside Aleppo, Syria, Simeon was so concerned about the sins in his life that he decided to build a tower ten feet tall and live on top of that tower. He thought it would be much more difficult to sin living up in the air many feet off the ground. As time went by, he made the tower taller and taller until he was up to 50 feet in the air. Soon, other Christians followed his example. The famous Order of the Stylites—the Pole Sitters—was the result. Ascetics believed that by putting the flesh to death, they were giving life to the soul.
15. By contrast, there was another group who also had that dualistic idea about human beings. They concluded that since the body was hopelessly evil, it really did not matter what they did with their bodies since the only part that was savable was the soul. They thought they were free to commit every kind of sin, more or less doing whatever they wanted. The gospel of John was written at least partially to counter the gnostic heresy.
16. Which side of the great controversy are we on? On a daily basis, do we sometimes do what the Spirit wants us to do and thus, place ourselves on God's side? At times, on a daily basis, do we also do what the flesh yearns to do and thus, place ourselves on Satan's side? Are we fighting on both sides of the great controversy? How do we actually go about favoring the side of the Spirit making it stronger and more powerful every day while we starve the old man of sin—gradually putting to death or crucifying the flesh?
17. Look at the list of sins described in Galatians 5:18-21. These are all manifestations of selfishness. By contrast, look at the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22,23. Notice that the first portion of the fruit of the Spirit is love. Does love produce joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and even self-control?
18. Notice a couple of interesting contrasts between these two lists. Self *demands* we follow its inclinations. By contrast, the Spirit *produces* its virtues.
19. The second major difference between these two groupings is that the works of the flesh

are plural while the fruit of the Spirit is singular. While Peter suggested in 2 Peter 1:5-7 that virtues need to be added in a ladder-like fashion, Paul seemed to suggest that the Christian virtues come all together as a single fruit. Which of these truths more closely describes your personal experience? What was Paul trying to emphasize? What was Peter trying to emphasize? Is this a fruit with many seeds? Are these seeds the characteristics that we are talking about?

20. There are a lot of things to think about in these lists. Is God trying to make things difficult? Does it really matter what we believe?

The present age is one of idolatry, as verily as was that in which Elijah lived. No outward shrine may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet thousands are following after the gods of this world—after riches, fame, pleasure, and the pleasing fables that permit man to follow the inclinations of the unregenerate heart. **Multitude have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal.** Many even of those who claim to be Christians have allied themselves with influences that are unalterably opposed to God and [178] His truth. Thus they are led to turn away from the divine and to exalt the human. *Prophets and Kings* 177.1

21. Erroneous views about God and about basic human nature can lead us to do many wrong things. Which of those “gods” are more attractive to us?
22. Contrast Paul’s list of virtues with what other Bible writers have said about sins. (Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Mark 7:21,22; 1 Timothy 3:2,3; 1 Peter 4:3; Revelation 21:8)
23. How do the Ten Commandments relate to Paul’s lists of sins and virtues? Would it be correct to say that obedience to the Ten Commandments will produce the fruit of the Spirit?
24. Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:8,10; and Galatians 5:14 tell us that love is the fulfillment of all law. Jesus Christ said that the law is summed up in love for God and love for our fellow man. (Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-28) Love for God is clearly spelled out in the first four commandments; love for our fellow man is described in the last six.
25. In contrast with the fifteen evil results, all of which come from selfishness, the nine virtues that Paul described in Galatians 5:22,23 have been grouped in various ways. Some have suggested that there are three groups of three included in this list. Some have suggested these groups of three suggest the preeminence of the Trinity. Others say they reflect how we should relate to God, to our neighbors, and to ourselves. Others see this list simply as a description of the life of Jesus Christ which we are to follow.
26. Almost everyone recognizes that the preeminent characteristic of Christianity is love. Love is a distinctly Christian virtue. (John 13:34,35) How many people in your church love like that? How does self-denial and crucifying the flesh relate to love? Is it possible to love without self-denial?
27. While we do not want to oversimplify the truth, it is fairly clear that most non-Christian religions focus on rules and the retributive results if one does not follow them. Many legalistic Christians take the same approach to God. How can we make sure that we are not doing the same? How can we gradually transform our lives from being self-centered to being God-centered? How can the Holy Spirit help us to accomplish this?
28. According to Paul, the victorious goal toward which we are striving can be accomplished

by following five steps.

- 1) Walk by the Spirit; or, let the Spirit direct our lives.
- 2) Let the Spirit lead us—following the example of Jesus—and no longer focus on our own behavior.
- 3) Then, we will live by the Spirit who gives us life and controls our lives through His guidance.
- 4) Then, we can keep in step with the Spirit.
- 5) But, this is only possible by crucifying self!

29. Why did Paul use the very strong word *crucify* to describe this step? Doesn't that seem extreme? Of course, this is figurative language. Paul was not asking us to build wooden crosses and nail ourselves to them. Are we really trying to crucify self? How much would it hurt to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye? (Matthew 18:8,9)
30. But, it is hard to deny the desires of the flesh. They always seem to come back. So, Paul said they must be crucified. What changes do we need to make in our lives to accomplish this step?
31. Is it possible to identify these spiritual truths in the lives of others? Should people be able to tell that we are true Christians? (John 15:34,35; Matthew 5:16) We need to help each other with these challenges. We need to encourage each other; and, as far as possible, we need to demonstrate the Christian virtues in our lives so others can see what it means to be a Christian.
32. How does all of this relate to the forensic aspects of Christianity? If our salvation rests exclusively on what Jesus has done for us, then why are we being asked to do all of this now? Is it clear how all this is supposed to fit together?
33. Assuming we are following the way of Christ, as we grow to become more and more like Him, do you think Satan will become more fierce in his temptations? Or, will Satan become less fierce? If we as end-time remnant Seventh-day Adventists are living in the last days, then we should be prepared for the time when we will have to face the Devil directly, and we should be prepared to stand up for what we believe, and we should demonstrate in our lives the truths that Paul was talking about in our passage for this week.

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Info@theox.org

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