



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

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Theme: Overcoming Spiritual Conflict

Text: Galatians 5:16-24

How can I be a good Christian? This should be the question that every believer should be asking. Many people would answer that question by saying something like: "I should keep the Ten Commandments. But believe it or not, this is not the answer that the NT gives. It is certainly not the answer that Paul gives to our question. Paul would answer that question something like this: "Rely upon the power of the Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in your lives. The fruit of the Spirit is a list of spiritual character traits, which the Holy Spirit longs to create in us. When we manifest those fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we are being good Christians.

Well then, if the Ten Commandments are not the standard for good Christian living, what is their purpose? What is the purpose of the Law of Moses? First let me state it negatively. God did not intend that the Ten Commandments or the Law of Moses should be what makes me right with God. In other words, I don't get into a right relationship with God and I don't earn His favor by trying to keep the Ten Commandments. Paul says this clearly earlier in this letter to the Galatians: "Clearly, no one is justified before God by the law because, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" It is only when I put my faith in Jesus' death on the cross and in His resurrection that I enter into a right relationship with God.

So I still need to explain what the purpose of the Law and the Ten Commandments is. The Apostle Paul wrote that the purpose of the Ten Commandments and the Law in general was to make me conscious or aware of my sin. Paul writes of this purpose in his letter to the Romans: "Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." The purpose of the law is to show us what great sinners we are and how far we fall short of God's glory. When we begin to see that, the Holy Spirit points us toward Christ's death for the forgiveness of our sins. Or we could put it another way: The purpose of the Law is to lead us to Christ. Paul says this in Galatians 3:24-25: "The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." All of this is the background to the text that we will study today in preparation for our study of the fruit of the Spirit.

In verses 16 and 17 of our text, Paul reminds us that there is a great spiritual battle that rages in our hearts and souls. What he has in mind here is not our struggle against Satan, but our struggle against our own flesh. Paul uses the word flesh to refer to that part of us which has still not been redeemed. It is that part of us that wants to drag us away from the will of God into sin. The flesh is a powerful force in our lives. Paul writes that the flesh



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and the Spirit seek different goals, so that they are always locked in mortal combat with each other. The Spirit cries out, "It's all about Jesus!" Our flesh cries out, "It's all about me!" Trying to obey the Law will not help us overcome it. But Paul has good news: The Holy Spirit is more powerful than the flesh. So he says, "...walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." The good news is that the battle can be won if we rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that the conflict between the Spirit and our flesh is one that never stops. That is why we must rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit continuously in our lives. He alone can empower us to win the battle against the flesh.

Once he has described the constant conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, Paul gives us a sample list of what the flesh looks like in action. There are some shocking sins on that list, such as sexual immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, and orgies. Idolatry and witchcraft are no longer prominent in our society, but sexual immorality still is. Paul also lists some subtle sins that are just as opposed to the will of the Spirit as any other sin. Paul mentions for example, hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, and envy. If we have become more or less victorious over the so-called shocking sins, we need to be extra careful of the more subtle sins of the heart. The interesting thing about this list of vices, is that non-Christian philosophers often composed lists of vices that were quite similar to this one. But there is a huge difference between Paul's list and the philosopher's list. The Philosophers had no way of gaining a spiritual and moral victory over these vices. Paul knows that there is victory in the Spirit.

Paul believes that the normal person will recognize sinfulness when he/she sees it. That is why he gives the list. Then he contrasts the fruit of the Spirit with the vices of the flesh. He also believes that his readers will recognize spiritual and moral goodness when they see it. As we surrender to the power of the Spirit in our lives, we not only gain victory over the sinful acts of the flesh, we also begin to see the fruit of the Spirit begin to blossom and grow in our lives.

Paul closes this section with these words, "Since we walk in the Spirit, we must keep in step with the Spirit." The phrase, "keep in step" is military terminology which means to march in ordered rows. The Holy Spirit has a purpose for our lives and a path that He wants us to walk. Keeping in step with the Spirit requires conscious effort and active discipline on our part. But if we constantly rely upon the power of the Spirit, He will cause us to become good Christians by producing His fruit in our lives.