

Wade Street 18.06.06 11am Galatians 5:16-6:5

We've reached the end of our series on Paul's letter to the Galatians, and it's my task this morning to look at the end part of the letter, and to tie it all up in a neat package. Oh if only it were so simple !!

Some of Paul's stuff that he talks about is really far from simple, and I'm sure that has come across to us in the last few weeks as we've studied this epistle to the Christians in Galatia.

Yet again today we hit the recurring theme that liberty does not mean licence. Freedom in Christ is not really about how we might like to interpret the word freedom. It is not a freedom to do as we please, with total disregard for who or what might suffer as a result of that freedom. It is not a running wild, as I talked about a few weeks ago.

We saw last time that the letter made a shift, around the beginning of chapter five, from doctrinal teaching to how this works out in practical living. Paul does this in each of his letters.

So our question that we face this morning is , 'if liberty is not to disintegrate into licence' if our freedom in Christ is not to lead to wildness, how does that happen ??

And the answer comes back loud and clear from this passage –by The Holy Spirit.

We're exhorted to 'live by the spirit' (v16)

Do you remember that depressing list which included, amongst other things, sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, factions and envy ?? These are all products of a sinful nature. But, and here's the great news. The Holy Spirit is contrary to that nature, in fact they are in conflict with each other, says Paul.

So if we 'live by the Spirit' then we are able to really live out this freedom for which Christ has set us free.. We're able to actually enjoy our freedom thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Okay, you say. But what does it actually mean to 'live by the spirit' .?

As 'the Church' worldwide the Holy Spirit has recently been on the agenda, as Pentecost was just a couple of weeks ago. On Pentecost Sunday here Ian spoke about four things that result from the Holy Spirit – hope, holiness, power and love. One of the challenges for us today is to recognise and allow the work of the holy Spirit not just at particular times in the Christian calendar, but to invite the holy spirit to be present all the time, in all areas of our lives, relationships and church.

In the Bible we find the The Holy Spirit described as breath, as wind ,as. The 'ruach'

There *were* other explorers around the time of Christopher Columbus who set sail looking to discover a new world. But the reason that Christopher Columbus was

successful where others weren't, was due to his willingness to sail with the wind. The others sailed against it. You see they were afraid of not being able to get home. If you sail into the wind, against it, then when it comes to turning round, you're pretty much blown all the way home. Columbus let the wind blow him out to new places, but always with the risk that he wouldn't get home.

Continuing the sailing analogy for a moment, going against the wind is actually really hard work. It involves tacking backwards and forward in zigzags, travelling well out of your way each time just to make a small amount of progress. In comparison running with the wind is exhilarating and sometimes a bit frightening. It involves letting out your sail and hanging on for the ride.

Paul refers to the Spirit's guidance in two different ways in this passage – and I think they point to two different ways the Spirit works as we live out our freedom in Christ. The first is being 'led' by the Spirit.

When we are led, someone else is taking the initiative. Being led implies that we are not fully in control. And that seems to be true of the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes our lives take directions that are unexpected. As the wind of the Spirit blows on us we don't always end up in the place we thought we were heading. The tug at the sails can steer us away from encounters that would be disastrous, from situations where we should not place ourselves, leading us all the time away from the sinful, towards true freedom.

And the second is 'keeping 'in step' with the Spirit.

A few years ago the President of the Baptist Union was Douglas McBain, and his strap line for the year was 'in Step with the spirit.' I would like to have the opportunity now to ask him what that actually meant, both for him on a personal level, and also in the light of his presidency. But seeing as I don't have that opportunity, I've had to think it through myself and this is what 'in step with the spirit as according to Liz Clayton, (and with a little bit of help from John Stott who writes an excellent commentary) means.

If we think that *all* we have to do is submit passively to the spirit's leading, just letting the wind blow us, then we've missed the point that Paul is making here.

Keeping in step is something we must actively and purposefully choose to do.

Keeping in step implies effort on our part to follow a particular path, a certain way. It is about following closely a position that we have committed to.

If you're a Tom Cruise fan you might remember a film from a few years ago called 'A few good men'. Quite an exciting military court room drama. Where Tom Cruise plays a young officer in the legal corp who ends up having to cross examine one of the top marines of the time over unacceptable training methods, that have resulted in a marine's death. And in that film one of the opening sequences is of a drum and rifle marching display, where the drill is so together that it begins to look as if it is simply a single organism, rather than individual marines. They stick so incredibly closely to the agreed marching line, and the results are amazing.

And so this morning we are invited, encouraged, exhorted, by Paul to adopt that combination of allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us, and in actively choosing to follow

and stick with that leading. And then certain fruits, says Paul, will become evident, they will grow in our lives.

Again we see that the Spirit and sinful nature are in stark opposition to each other. The fruits – love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control...couldn't be more different from that other list of hatred, envy, greed, discord, rage, factions. Etc.

I love the way these are described as 'fruits'. (For me they conjure slightly bizarre mental images of loving oranges and gentle grapes, and faithful apples) But it's that idea of them growing that I really like. And the link to Jesus' comments recorded in the gospels where he talks about trees bearing the fruit appropriate to them- good fruit from good trees. The Holy Spirit allows those fruits to grow and grow and grow.....

John Stott says

The first and great evidence of our walking by the spirit, or being filled by the spirit is not some private mystical experience of our own, but our practical relationships of love with other people.

An anonymous wit said the following when referring to the power of the Spirit at work in people's lives – sometimes so powerful that they fall over....It's not how you fall down that matters, but what you're like when you get back up.

God's Spirit brings hope, holiness, power and love. Sometimes we might be tempted to emphasise one aspect at the expense of another. If our expectation of the Holy Spirit is only that we will see signs and wonders and strange happenings, then maybe it's good to remind ourselves of these fruits, and to look again for them in our lives.

Paul, at the end of chapter five and beginning of six, gives some practical outworkings of what life in the Spirit actually means – not being conceited, not provoking people, not envying, speaking gently and bearing each others burdens.

And so, as we draw all this thinking about Paul's message to the Galatians together, and look for the message for us today, we're basically left with three areas.

1. The question of authority – how do we know what and whom to believe or disbelieve (this continues to be relevant as we live in post modern age where truth is supposedly relative).
2. The question of salvation – how do we get right with God? again, a hot topic now as we become increasingly unpopular when we say 'Jesus is the only way'
3. The question of holiness – how can we control the sinful desires of our fallen nature and live a life of righteousness and love? How open are we to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives?

House group questions.

18.06. 06 Galatians 5:16-6:5 In Step with the Spirit.

Again the question of liberty without licence, freedom without wildness, is raised. Paul says that it is the Holy Spirit that allows us to enjoy our freedom in Christ in an appropriate way.

Living by the Spirit is two-fold. It involves us being led (as a ship is blown by the wind) and also a keeping in step (where we actively choose to stick to a way of living).

These two things lead to fruits growing in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (In stark contrast to the sinful nature).

As a summary of Paul's letter to the Galatians, we are left with three questions:

1. The question of authority: how do we know what and whom to believe ?
2. The question of salvation: how can we get right with God ?
3. The question of holiness: how can we control the sinful desires of our nature, and live a life of righteousness and love ?

For Discussion

What does 'Living by the Spirit' mean for you ?

Is there a balance to be achieved between being 'led' and 'keeping in step' ? If yes, how ?

Where do you see the work of the Spirit being necessary in your own life, and in Wade Street Church ?

What has been significant for you in the study of the letter to the Galatians ? Why ?