

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Living by the Spirit – 9-15 September 2017

Christ wants us to live and walk in His own Spirit. Thus, Paul says, “*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh*” (Galatians 5:16). Last week, we saw that love is the fulfilling not the abolishing of the law. All law is fulfilled in the Word, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;*” “*Love is the fulfilling of the law;*” “*This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*” We turn to study Galatians 5:16-25.

The Flesh Opposed to the Spirit – The flesh and the Spirit are in direct opposition. “*The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other.*” There is no agreement whatever between the flesh and the Spirit. The Spirit strives with men in the flesh, seeking to control the individual to the glory of God; but so long as the Spirit is not fully yielded to, there is no peace, but continual war and unrest. He who is not controlled by the Spirit of God, is controlled by the sins of human nature, and is therefore a slave: “*Every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin*” (John 8:34). On the contrary, “*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*” (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is clear that there is no agreement between the flesh and the Spirit. What about the flesh and the law? Remembering that “*carnal*” means fleshly, read Romans 8:7: “*The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*” So then the flesh and the law of God are in as direct opposition as are the flesh and the Spirit. Let us now read a little further, to see that this is not a three-cornered fight, but that the flesh is opposed to both the law and the Spirit, because both the law and the Spirit are one.

The Law and the Spirit in Unison – The story is really all told in Romans 8:1-8, from which we note the following: (1) The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk after the Spirit. (2) The flesh and the Spirit are in direct and deadly opposition, as already noted. (3) To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Why? because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God. (4) Thus we see that the opposition of the flesh to the Spirit is simply its opposition to the law of God. This follows as the natural consequence of the fact stated in Romans 7:14: “*The law is spiritual.*”

Those led by the Spirit keep the Law – Those who follow the Spirit fulfill the righteousness of the law. “*But if ye be led of the Spirit ye are not under the law*” (Galatians 5:18). So, those who fulfill the law, are not under the law. What a pity that there are so many who profess to be teachers of the Word, and who, more than all, make a special point of the baptism of the Spirit, who have so little spiritual discernment, and so little acquaintance with the Spirit of God, that they can use the words, “*Ye are not under the law,*” as meaning that the law of God is not to be observed! The only reason why any are not under the law, is that they are keeping it through the Spirit. To reject the law of God is to reject the Spirit, for “*the law is spiritual.*” Those who walk after the Spirit fulfill the law, and only such are not under the law.

Justified through the Spirit – There is nothing in Scripture to give the slightest ground for any one’s thinking that men are justified by the works of the law. It is the work of the Spirit of God that brings justification. But the works of the Spirit are perfect righteousness, even the righteousness of the law. The Spirit is the living, personal, invisible presence of Christ. It is by the Spirit that Christ dwells in the heart. This makes a complete new life. The old life passes away, as the old man is crucified with Christ, so that the life that is now lived in the flesh is the life of Christ. The law has nothing against Christ, since He has always done the will of His Father. There is no condemnation to such an one. He is justified. Why? because no unrighteousness – no transgression of the law – is found in Christ. Then he continues to walk in the law, not by his own power, but through the power of the Spirit. The justification is therefore all of Christ, and to Him alone is the glory. No man can boast, but he that glorifieth must glory in the Lord. Justification is not by the works of the law; but the very work of that “*justification,*” which means made righteous, is an assurance that the law is not ignored, but that the perfection of it is so put into and upon the believer that no fault can be found in him.

The works of the Flesh – Galatians 5:19-21 contain a partial list of the works of the flesh. The list given is only a sample of them, closing with the words, “*and such like.*” Note that they are the works of the flesh, that is, they are such things as are natural to mankind. Compare this list with that given by the Lord, in Mark 7:21-23, as things that come from within, from the heart of man. Compare both with Romans 1:28-32, as the things done by the heathen, who did not like to retain God in their knowledge. They are the things that are done by all who do not know the Lord. Then compare all with lists of sins in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, of things that will be done in the last days by those who even have a form of godliness.

How can it be possible that men professing to be Christians can be party to such horrible deeds? it is simply because they “deny the Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1). Worst of all is the fact that they are guilty of all these things while seeking the very highest profession of godliness, in that they profess to be led by the Spirit. They can only be led by a false spirit, if they believe that the “Holy Spirit” is separate from the Lord, when Scripture plainly says, “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17) and God sends “the Spirit of His Son” into hearts of believers (Galatians 4:6). Moreover, being led by a separate spirit from Christ, they are not true Christians, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Romans 8:9).

Works of the Flesh cannot be hid – The works of the flesh are manifest. They cannot be hid. That which is in the heart must show itself in the life, no matter how much one may endeavor to conceal it. “An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luke 6:45). All the evil things that are named in Galatians 5:19-21 remain in the heart if man denies the Spirit of God free access to utterly remove them. Righteousness of the Spirit is righteousness of the law, and therefore whoever rejects the law of God, or any part of it, thereby rejects the Spirit, no matter what his profession may be. So, although he may for a time succeed in concealing the existence of the wickedness of his heart, not only from the world, but even from himself, it is sure sooner or later to manifest itself. Then when the law of God shall have been so preached in the demonstration of the Spirit that all have heard its claims, and the multitude have rejected it, will the Spirit leave them to their own desires, and then will be experienced the “perilous times” spoken of by the apostle, for all the earth will be filled with violence, even as it was in the days that were before the flood.

And such like – Read again works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21; “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” One would naturally think not, for it is a bad list. Yet in reading them, one is apt to overlook some of the things named, and to dwell only on what seem to be the worst ones, as adultery, murder, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft. Those are quite universally regarded as out-breaking sins. But notice the words, “and such like.” That means that there are others in the same class, and moreover it means that all the things that are here named are identical in character. The Scripture tells us that hatred is murder. “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). Notice, anger is also murder, as said in Matthew 5:21-22. Envy, which is so common, also contains murder in it.

But who regards emulation as so sinful? Is emulation not encouraged everywhere? Are not children from their infancy taught to strive to surpass somebody else? Is not emulation fostered, not only by schools of all kinds, but also in the home, and in the church? So far from being regarded as sinful in the extreme, it is cultivated. And yet the Word of God assures us that it is of the same kind as adultery, fornication, murder, and drunkenness, and that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Is it not a fearful thing?

The love of self, the desire for the supremacy, is the source of all the other sins that are mentioned. Out of that have grown innumerable murders. And to think that many mothers are unconsciously training up their children to just such things, even while striving to bring them up properly, by saying: ‘See if you cannot behave better than so an so;’ ‘See if you cannot learn to read or to play better than such an one;’ ‘See if you cannot keep your clothes looking as nice as that one.’ Such expressions, which are every-day words in thousands of households, are teaching emulation – setting a false standard. The child is not taught to distinguish between the right and the wrong, and to love the right, but is simply trained to appear better than somebody else. That leads to deception, for all that is thought necessary is to present a better appearance than others, while the heart is corrupt. Those others may not be of very high character, and so the emulator is satisfied, even in this faulty exertion, with simply appearing better than some one who is himself very bad. Ah, the abominable works of the flesh are lurking where many least suspect them! The only remedy is the Spirit.

The Fruit of the Spirit – When the Spirit is given control, the works of the flesh will no longer be manifested, for the Spirit drives them out of the heart. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” There is no room for emulation there. “Against such there is no law.” Why not? simply because these things are the result of obedience to the law through the Spirit. It is impossible for the natural man to possess these good things. It is impossible for us of ourselves to love those who despise us, or to suffer long and be kind. It is not possible of ourselves to rejoice when we are ill-treated, or even to rejoice when somebody else, moved by the spirit of emulation, surpasses us, and takes from us a prize which we coveted. But all good things are possible in the Spirit of Christ. What a blessed condition one is in who possess the fruit of the Spirit!