

Walking in the Spirit: Faithfulness

Galatians 5:13-26

January 31, 2010

FBC Waynesboro

Paul had he lived in our day and in our country would have loved this time of year. The bowl season has just ended and the Super Bowl is just ahead. The NBA is in full swing and March Madness is coming fast. Spring training is just around the corner and the PGA Tour has arrived on the west coast. And the World Cup is just in front of us. Paul loved sports. Read his letter and he uses the sports of his day as tools for teaching truth. He says for example that he does not run without a goal and does not just punch the air but he disciplines himself to bring himself under control so that what he preaches to others he lives out in his life so as to be a bridge and not become a barrier (1 Corinthians 9:25-26). Or when he gets near the end of his life and wants to describe his journey he uses image from the world of running and fighting: I have finished the race and fought the good fight. And here at the pivot point in this passage that is pointing us to how we are to live lives controlled by the Spirit he makes a statement and raises the question: you were running well; who hindered you? The word for hindered comes right out of the world of racing in which it was not abnormal for someone to cut in front of another to slow them down just enough to get them off stride and to impede their progress. Paul is asking these believers: who did that to you? That is why your life is not filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit; that is why you are struggling so much; that is why you are so downcast and depressed and not jubilant with joy. And I want to ask you again this morning at the beginning of this sermon: who is hindering you? Here is a promise: the more committed you are to Jesus as Lord of your life in every way the more certain it is that Satan will place people in your life whose role is to throw you off stride; they don't mind you being a person of faith, they just don't want that dimension of your life to dominate all that you are and all that you do. And the extent to which we listen to their voice is the extent to which we cannot hear His and thus lose the sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Paul is teaching us here how to walk or live in all the fullness of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So he returns in verse 13 to the theme with which he began in verse one. What we learn in the first twelve verses of this chapter is that we can only live in the fullness of the Spirit of God when we know

what true freedom and true faith really are. True freedom comes from God to us through Jesus Christ as Lord. We are most free when we are in fullest submission and surrender to Jesus. True faith comes through the Spirit of God by trusting and obeying Jesus alone which makes us right with God and then enables us to pursue all that being right with God represents as it is revealed in love for God, love for one another and love for others. And now Paul turns in verse 13 to show us how this freedom and this faith is lived out in the real world of everyday life. He deals first in verses 13-15 with what real freedom looks like as it comes to us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, among us, and through us.

We are called to freedom. This is the foundation upon which we live out our lives. Jesus sets us free from sin. Although sin is present in us, it no longer has any power. Jesus breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free. We sing that. It is true. Now Paul wants us to see clearly the corruption that Satan brings to us when the Savior sets us free. It is that we accept Jesus as our Savior who has saved us from our sin but we continue to live in ways that are directed by what we want to do but we don't really grieve over that way of living because we are resting in our salvation. I sin. I pray. He forgives. Such a view of salvation is sinful and falls woefully short of what it means to be saved. To be saved is to be set free from sin for service so that our lives are not driven by our own desires. Our eyes are lifted upward toward the One who gave Himself for us and outward toward those for whom we are to give ourselves. We are free for service. Our freedom from sin is seen in our service to one another in the body of Christ. And Paul is clear here about what kind of service this is and where it is first expressed. It is the kind of service in which we care for others without any need to be noticed for our caring and that care is expressed fundamentally and foundationally to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. It is here in our relationships to one another in the body of Christ that we show how free we are and others see how free we are. We are not dominated by sin or to say the same thing in a different way; we are not dominated by our own self-centered concerns. So what do we do when we are hurting? We go and help somebody who is hurting. What do we do when we are struggling? We come alongside and care for someone who is struggling? We are called to freedom. Freedom from sin and freedom for service and freedom that fulfills the law, 14. The one word is this word: love your neighbor as yourself. Now here is the idea: it is not that you must learn to love yourself. We are born knowing how to do that. Our whole

focus from birth is on ourselves. We do not love God by nature. We do not love others by nature. It is the transforming work of the grace of God that enables us to love Him and to love others. And to love others as ourselves is simply to love them in the place of ourselves. It is to deny ourselves and to die to ourselves so that we can deliver to them the grace of God and the love of God and the compassion of God. These kinds of relationships can only come to the body of Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. They are not normal. Normal is defined in verse 15. Biting is nipping. It leads to devouring. It leads to people consuming one another. It is a body absent the Holy Spirit and it is individuals whose grumbling and complaining and negative attitudes and I could go on show that they are not free and that they are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Here is the bottom line: True freedom is seen in a church where because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit we genuinely care for one another more than we care for ourselves.

So what does genuine faith look like? It is a life that is being progressively ordered under the control of the Holy Spirit as we day by day put to death the desires of the flesh. What Paul spells out in Romans seven is set before us here in short form. The desires of the flesh with which we are born which are basically our doing what we want to do. It is seeing life from the perspective of what makes us happy and planning live so as to get to the place of happiness. We are born this way. Life under the Spirit is life lived for the glory of God in the cause of His Kingdom which requires death to our own desires and devotion to His Word and His Way lived out in a world that is moving rapidly in the opposite direction. Which of these two is easier? Do you understand then why there is always this huge war going on in the life of the believer between what I want and what God has said? A war that is won only when we submit and surrender to the Spirit of God and thus are led by the Spirit which is seen in the fruit of the Spirit. But before Paul shows us the beauty of the fruit of the Spirit he wants us to see a sampling of the works of the flesh.

I want us to see four things generally about the works of the flesh before we look at them specifically. First, notice that they are works. These are things that we do. We do these things by nature. They represent the foundation for the focus of our lives. Second, they are not from God. These are not derived from God and thus are not directed to Him. They are from us and they are for us and they are about us. Third, they are plain. They are all hidden longings that given

time and space become very plain to us and to others. Fourth, they are endless because there is no amount of activity that is generated by us that can bring us to the place of contentment. God has designed us so that we will never be a peace until we quit fighting against Him and are faithful to Him. Now when you look at the list here there are two things that become clear: first, it is chaotic and confusing appearing to jump from one thing to another which is the way we are when we are looking for meaning in life apart from a real and radical relationship to God. Second, there are four major categories that are addressed here that represent the real deep longings inside every human soul. I want to show you these and show you how they are represented here and how over time they lead to chaos. First, we long for relational intimacy. We want to know and be known. We want to be accepted and embraced. And the deepest intimacy that we can know apart from God is sexual so what is the first thing that is listed. We crave intimacy but we were designed so that the intimacy we crave cannot be satisfied by sex separated from surrender to God and set in the context of marriage. So when we do not find satisfaction in that relationship that we thought would satisfy us we go from sex outside of marriage to other kinds of immorality to the flaunting of all kinds of immorality. Relational intimacy is a basic need of every human. And God made you and me so that He is the only one who will ever be able to satisfy our deepest longings for intimacy.

Secondly, we long for religious stability. Now the Bible is clear that we are not born longing for God and we do not by nature seek after God. But we are born with this desperate desire for something or someone bigger than us to take care of us and to take care of evil. And we want this someone to be comfortable and cuddly so as to cozy up to where we are without demanding anything of us. So, we are prone to create “gods” from the very beginning. A god who loves you as you are and lets you be. A Jesus who saves your soul and secures you for heaven without changing your life. A Spirit who is always there to give you what you need with you defining that need. This is the Trinity of *The Shack* and it is why this very unbiblical book has sold over ten million copies and been translated already into more than thirty languages. It satisfies the cravings of our flesh. Paul addresses this craving in two words here the second having to do with manipulations through words and actions that are for the purpose of getting our god to do what we desire him to do.

Thirdly, we want to feel good about ourselves. We are born with this desire. Now that in and of itself is interesting because this deep desire with which we are born assumes that we know from the start that something is wrong with us. But we do not want to face that fact. So what do we do? We do what we have done from the start: we point our fingers at others. I am always amazed at how at younger and younger ages our children are learning psycho-babble so as to be able to say clearly and believe that their problems are not their own doing. There is here a long list of works of the flesh all of which have to do with others but the real focus is us. Why would we hate somebody? Could it be because they have pointed out things about us that we don't like to see and these things don't help us feel good about ourselves. Why is their strife? Isn't it because we don't get our own way? We are born with a deep desire to feel good about ourselves as we are and God has designed us so that no matter how much self-esteem teaching we do, it is only a conniving cover for the glorious truth that we are sinners who are born loving ourselves and not God and are thus miserable until we submit to this God who loves sinners and sent His Son to die so as to save sinners.

Fourthly, we long for freedom. We want to be free to live as we please to live and find perfect pleasure in living this way. But what we find is that living as we please does not bring pleasure. That is why the child who has grown up in the home with the rigid rules and the rugged punishments for violating those rules can't wait to get free from that home to do what he wants to do. And when he breaks out he begins to do just that and finds that it does not bring pleasure. It brings pain. But rather than looking beyond himself to the God delights in Him and wants to deliver Him from this self-destructive path, he just gone down path after sinful path looking for that place of perfect pleasure. Both the last two words describe lives that are out of control looking for freedom. Do you see the irony? And the words that end this long list make it plain that there is no end to this path until these people who live like this are awakened to the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus.

Do you know someone who is living life in the above ways? Are you? Paul says that you do not belong to God. But everything you are looking for is found in Him. There is no intimacy like the intimacy that we enjoy in communion with God through His Son and by His Spirit. There is no security and stability like that which we find in Him. And there is no sense of self that can exceed knowing that we are

the children of God and there is no freedom that can compare with that of that He brings to us through His Son. And all of that can be yours today as you yield your life to Him.