

The Works of the Flesh

Gal. 5:16-21

16. Now I continue saying, be habitually walking about (= living your life) in spirit (or: by [the] Spirit), and you should under no circumstance (may by no means) bring to fruition (carry to its goal; end up with; bring to maturity) the full rushing passion (the over-desire) originating in flesh (pertaining to flesh; corresponding to flesh-[righteousness]; belonging to [a system] of flesh).

17. For the flesh [system or nature] is constantly rushing passionately down upon (or: against) the spirit, and the spirit down on (or: against) the flesh, for these things are constantly lying in opposition to each other (lying set to displace each other), so that -- whatever you may habitually be intending (wanting; willing; purposing) -- these things you repeatedly can not be doing.

18. Yet since (or: if) you folks are continuously being led in spirit (by [the] Spirit; to [the] Spirit), you do not exist (you are not) under Law [= the flesh system].

19. Now the works (actions; deeds) of the flesh [religion] (whose source and origin are the flesh; pertaining to the flesh [system; or: nature]; whose results and realm are the flesh) [are] seen and made apparent in clear light, which are (continue being) the works of a prostitute (or: [the] Prostitute): uncleanness, excess (immoderation; outrageous behavior),

20. idolatry, sorcery (employment of drugs and enchantments; magic rites), hostilities (enmities; alienations; enmities), strife (contentious disposition), jealousies (or: zealous emotions), stirring emotions (rushing passions; furies), factions, standings-apart (divisions), sects (religious denominations; parties with a particular opinion; choosings from preferences),

21. envies, murders, intoxications (times of being drunk), festal processions (or: excessive feastings), and things like to these [whether religious, or personal], which things I continue predicting (saying beforehand) to you folks, just as I said before, that those habitually practicing (performing) such [religious, or personal] things will not inherit (receive a distributed allotment of) God's kingdom.

The above passage is one of the few places within my translations where I add commentary to the text, in brackets. I remember grumbling at translations that did this, e.g., Wuest's, and the Amplified, and would often cross out their additions. Well, now here I've done it. My reason is that I feel so strongly about what I have seen here, that I wanted to make it jump out at the reader. But, just in case it didn't do that for you, I want to share a view which I think is central to the thoughts of Paul in his letter to the Galatian churches.

What is the context of this passage?

Let's back up. In ch. 3:24-25, Paul makes the following summation:

24. so that, consequently, the Law has come to be (has been birthed into existence) and continues thus our supervising guardian and attending escort [with a view to, aimed and moving] into Christ, to the end that we could (may) be made fair and equitable (just, free of guilt, and in right relationship within the Way pointed out) from out of Faith.

25. So now with the coming of The Faith, we no longer continuously exist (are) under [the]

supervising guardian or an attending escort!

Here, Paul shows a plan, and the attainment of its goal. There was use made of the Law as a "supervising guarding and attending escort," and the goal of this escort and guardian was to direct us "into Christ, to the end that we could be made fair and equitable (just and rightwised, and placed into the Way) from out of "faith," as a source.

Verse 25 makes it clear that the Law, as a guardian and escort, is no longer active as such for those who have been placed within the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ.

Then Paul uses the metaphor of the child-to-minor, in ch. 4. In vs. 2 he tells us that the minor "exists being UNDER those to whom the trust is committed (guardians), until the father's previously set [time or situation]." Now in vs. 4, he explains that the Father's time came, and God sent-off His Son... (5) "to the end that He could buy out (ransom; redeem reclaim [from slavery]) those UNDER [the] Law - so that we could receive the placement as a son..." In vs. 3, he had identified these same ones as "having been enslaved UNDER the system's elementary principles." I suggest that this last phrase is a reference to the Law. You see, the minor "differs nothing from a slave" (vs. 1). Keep in mind that the contrast in this metaphor is between the Law and faith/Christ.

So in 4:9, he chides them for "progressively turning around AGAIN, upon the weak (impotent; infirm) and poor ELEMENTARY and RUDIMENTARY PRINCIPLES... to AGAIN become, and perform as, SLAVES anew (back again)."

I suggest that these "principles" were the Law. Notice vs. 10, that they were again "continuously watching closely and observing days and months (or: new moons) and seasons (appointed situations [e.g., feasts]) and years."

Now look at 4:21:

"Go on telling me, those of you constantly wanting to exist (be) UNDER Law, do you not continue hearing the Law?" Here, he makes clear the subject of his concern for them: going back to do the rituals of the Law.

So in vs. 22, he gives the allegory of the two women/two mountains, and presents the contrast of "slavery" to "freedom." Recall that his metaphor of slavery is a figure of being immature: being UNDER the Law.

Consider closely vs. 29:

"But nevertheless, JUST AS THEN [reference to the allegory of the two women], the one being born down from (in accordance with) FLESH [think: slavery; Law] was constantly persecuting the one down from spirit [note the contrast: here "spirit" represents faith/Christ/freedom], so also now."

So who were then persecuting those of the spirit? The Judaizers! They wanted them to be circumcised (ch. 5:1-2). If they "should proceed to being circumcised, Christ will benefit [them] nothing!" And circumcision equated to coming UNDER the Law once again (vs. 3).

Now look at 5:5:

For we, in spirit (or: by [the] Spirit) -- forth from out of faith -- continuously receive by taking away, as with our hands, from out of [the] expectation (hope) which belongs to and whose source and reality is the fairness, equity and freedom from guilt in right relationship within the Way pointed out.

Here we see spirit and faith being the reality of being within the Way pointed out (Christ). This is the contrast to circumcision and the cultus of Law referred to in vs. 1-3. Vs. 6 establishes, again, that "[it is] FAITH: continuously working effectively through Love." Vs. 7 correlates this to "the Truth."

Again, 5:11 brings up circumcision: a work of the flesh, which symbolizes the entire "flesh system" of a "flesh religion," and this is set in contrast and opposition to the cross. Paul wishes that those Judaizers would cut themselves away (or: off, from the local bodies). Vs. 13 can now be seen in its proper light:

For you folks were called upon the foundation of (on the basis of; for the purpose of) freedom, [my] brothers. Only not (Just not) the freedom [which is leading] into a starting point (an opportunity, occasion or incentive) for (to; in) the flesh [= circumcision with the flesh ordinances and ceremonial laws of Judaism, or personal license], but to the contrary, through the Love be continuously slaving for one another (serving and performing the duties of a slave to each other).

Note: "the foundation of (the basis and purpose of) FREEDOM!" The purpose of this freedom? "Serving and performing the duties of a slave to (for) each other."

Next, vs. 14: how the Law of God is now fulfilled: "You will love your near-one (associate; neighbor; the one close by your position), in the same way as, or as he were, yourself." This "one word (thought; idea; message; expressed thought)" is the idea and purpose of the Logos, the Word.

All this has brought us to our text, vs. 16-21, and our main topic. Can you see that the continuing context is a contrast of the old covenant to the new? The flesh ordinances to the directives of the Spirit? The slavery/childhood to freedom/maturity/sonship?

Vs. 16 gives an imperative: "Be habitually walking about (= living your life) in spirit (or: by [the] Spirit)..."

Now what is the contrast? "... and you should under no circumstances bring to fruition (end up with; carry to its goal) the full-rushing passion originating in flesh."

What flesh? Now this has an application on the natural level, but considering what Paul has been talking about, I don't think he has switched his theme mid-stream. Walking in the spirit (Spirit) is the contrasting counterpart to walking in the flesh system of the religion of the old covenant.

What vs. 17 is speaking of is what Paul and those of the new covenant were experiencing from those trying to get them back under the old covenant. It also refers to what Paul was doing before his conversion.

Now look at Paul's conclusion in vs. 18: being continuously led in spirit (by the Spirit) is contrasted to not existing UNDER Law [the flesh system].

To conclude: go to the top and read vs. 19-21. All the "works of the flesh," that Paul lists there, can be seen in every religion, and calls to mind the description of "Mystery: Babylon" given in the Unveiling (Revelation). Paul was here sealing his argument for not returning to the flesh works of organized religion - in his day, the works of the Law. He presents the

contrast to this in vs. 22-23, "the Sprit's fruit." Note that the source of this fruit is Christ Jesus, who put an end to the flesh system by crucifying it (as the sacrificial Lamb) - vs. 24 - together with the experiences (emotions; feelings; sufferings; passions) and over-desires (the fanaticism of the Pharisees).

Also note, Paul ends vs. 21 contrasting the flesh's works to God's kingdom. This is like what Jesus taught, where He said, "you have heard it said [in the Law]... but I say unto you [His teaching of the kingdom]." This understanding of Paul's use of the word "flesh" also corresponds to what he said in Rom. 8:9, "Yet you folks are not constantly existing within flesh (you are not in flesh), but rather within spirit, since indeed God's Spirit is continuously housing Itself (making His abode) within you folks." That is, the new has come.

**His peace and joy are with you,
Jonathan**