

Flesh vs Spirit

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of October 2003.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled, Flesh vs. Spirit, and is based on Galatians 5, verses 13-26.

That next level. They then throw themselves on the ground. I was thinking about doing this, but I probably thought it wouldn't be that good. Throw themselves on the ground and start yelling and screaming, I've got to help him!

And then they'll actually say things like, You don't care. You don't give me anything. Now, the subtext behind this whole thing of this little tantrum of children, I've realised is, is that they want all their restrictions removed from them, from their parents.

They want all their controls removed that the parents have. They want permission to buy anything they want. They want their independence. They want their autonomy. They want to be free. They have their rights, and they want them now.

[1 : 07] The reality is, while the child is wanting their freedom, really what they want to do is they want to satisfy their own selfishness and individualism.

It's true, isn't it? The child just wants all these toys for itself. It's got to have it. It's got to satisfy these individualistic, selfish notions that it has. The sad thing is, as adults, when we're actually given a bit of that freedom, when we taste that freedom, we abuse it.

We use it. We use it for what? For ourselves. We become self-centred, individualistic. Our whole lives are based around ourselves.

Freedom is just a licence to do as we please. Oh, freedom, what liberties are taken in thy name? You see, it's the tendency of every single human, isn't it?

That deep down we have this tendency, this human nature that wants to satisfy ourselves. We want our freedom so we can do what we want to do.

[2 : 16] And as adults, that's what we do. Have a look around this world. Look at the brokenness, the hurt.

Look at all the unhappiness that we see around. People living lives to please themselves. Freedom. Freedom. It's not true freedom.

That's not what true freedom is all about. Last week you actually saw, over the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at this book of Galatians. And how Paul's been talking about freedom. Freedom found in the gospel there.

This great freedom that God gives us. That we can be a part of God's family. Not by anything that we do. It's a gift that God gives us.

A gift of being a part of his family. A gift of love. A gift brought by his son dying on a cross for us.

[3 : 17] This freedom we enjoy last week we saw. We enjoy freedom from the burden of law. From the freedom from having to do things.

The freedom to not have to try and earn God's favour. That's the freedom that Paul spoke about. In today's reading we can see that Paul affirms it in verse 13.

It'd be good for you to have your Bibles open at page 948. In verse 13 Paul says, For you were called to freedom. God calls us to this freedom.

But the problem is, we want to abuse that freedom. It's the problem that the Galatians actually got involved in. They abused the freedom that they had.

They thought we're free from the law now. We can do whatever we want. We're free from rules. Let's live it up. And so for them, it resulted in them loveless strife, of self-promotion, of self-vindication.

[4 : 25] For them, they lived very selfish lives in Galatia. And it's the same problem throughout history. In the church, terrible sins have been committed through people in the church saying, I have freedom.

I can do whatever I want. Paul points out, Paul looks at this problem here at the second part of verse 13.

Look at the way that he describes this human nature. He says there, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence. If you look down the bottom there, that word self-indulgence is another word for the flesh.

The word opportunity is a Greek word, a military Greek word. It's this idea of a beachhead. A great military would come across and they'd land on a beachhead. And from there, they would do this massive attack.

They'd leap out from this point, this central point. And Paul is saying, don't allow the beachhead to happen in your life, Galatia. Churches in Galatia.

[5 : 30] Don't allow this great freedom that you have to become a place where the human nature, this desire to want to fuel the self-satisfaction, don't allow it to base itself in your lives.

Don't allow the opportunity for self-indulgence. Now at this point, you can hear the teachers of the law crying out in the background. These are the people, these false teachers that have come through who have been trying to teach these Galatians, yeah, you've got to go back to the law.

If you want to live a relationship with God, yeah, sure, there's grace there. But then you've got to go back, be circumcised. These are the things you've got to do. You can just hear them, the teacher saying, yeah, see, look, Galatians, you're doing all these things.

You see, you got rid of the law and look what happens. If you had the law, if you had God's law, well, then you would know what God thought was contrary to his will.

You'd know what standards there are. You would know what would incite you to do the right thing. Paul goes on to explain that the Christian freedom is different.

[6 : 39] Paul recognises that what, as we saw last week, that is only slavery, the way of law. And this self-centredness of freedom that the Galatians are being involved in, Paul says, no, that's not what freedom's about.

And then we get this verse, the latter part of verse 13. But through love become slaves to one another. Did you hear the irony there?

I'll try and emphasise the word as I read it again. But through love become slaves to one another. Let me read the next verse. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment.

You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Don't you feel like just sort of going, well, we've just come back to the beginning again after all those weeks of arguing and all those arguments that Paul's getting. We're now back at being enslaved again and we're back there with the law again.

Great. How about that? Oh, all these couple of weeks Paul's been preaching up there completely, not a waste of time. We should have just been enslaved and gone to the law because that's where it's at. That's where Paul's come back to. No.

[7 : 43] That's not what Paul is saying. Paul is not saying that. What Paul is saying he wants us to take very seriously. Look there in verse 15.

If however you bite and devour one another take care that you are not consumed by one another. What Paul has just said he wants to say very clearly. Be careful.

Be careful what I'm saying. This is no joke. It could consume you by what decision you take on this. Well, how is it that this Christian freedom, this freedom that Christians have, how does it work itself out through love and serving one another, being slaves to one another?

How does Paul get to this conclusion? And in verse 16 we see there the answer. The reason why we are to be slaves to one another and loving one another is because we are to live lives by the Spirit.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the book Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In that book he writes this quote, Man is not truly one but truly two.

[9 : 00] It's a classic book that looks at human depravity. Dr. Jekyll, a respectable London doctor. Kindly, kind, religious, but in the course of him doing some scientific experimentations he comes across this drug that when he takes it turns him into Mr. Hyde.

It turns him into a repulsive deviant. Mr. Hyde, he goes out and performs all sorts of immoral, abominable acts and despite the shame Dr. Jekyll becomes addicted to this drug.

He becomes addicted to the Deeds, to this Mr. Hyde. He becomes more and more addicted to the point where it becomes even more, he becomes enslaved to it all and he does these terrible acts and after a while he decides that's it, I've got to stop.

I can't take the drug anymore. I can't be this Mr. Hyde anymore and so after two months of abstaining from the drug he weakens and he commits a brutal murder.

From then on it's a very steep slope. The evil side starts to dominate. His whole character becomes that of Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll gets left behind but in order to escape this dreadful the dreadful crimes that he has committed in the end he commits suicide.

[10 : 40] It's kind of a fascinating book a fascinating movie if you haven't read the book but it looks at this tension. In many ways the writer which I've just forgotten let me just have a quick look it's Robert Stevenson.

This writer in many ways is looking at the human nature the two sides to the inner conflict inside and he looks at this and he comes up with a fairly pessimistic attitude.

In the end it's pessimistic. This inner war well it's all just going downhill. We need something to try and keep this Mr. Hyde in check don't we?

So he doesn't get out of control that we don't become addicted to him. And so in our society we set up all these laws we set up all these rules and regulations so that way we don't get unchecked that we can keep our Mr. Hyde under control.

Well the Old Testament functions in that way in many ways. The teacher of the law said look that's the way that the law functions. It helps in that inner war. It guides you. It identifies sin.

[11 : 51] It provides standards. It's meant to try and promote you to do the right thing. But the reality of the law was it brought slavery as we saw last week. It has no power within itself to break that addiction.

It has no power in this battle. Paul has a much more positive outlook. He says if you live by the Spirit that's going to win the battle.

That is the way that it helps in this battle. If you look there in verse 16 live by the Spirit I say and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. A better translation of that verse is probably the NIV which says there and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

If you live by the Spirit then you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. You won't go down that path. Here we see that the Spirit is the way to deal with this problem.

It's the one that gives us the power. Look there in verse 17. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh. For these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want.

[13 : 03] But they're at opposite ends. Our sinful human nature, that fallen nature that we have that desires to bring about self-centeredness, it's opposed to what the Spirit wants.

The Spirit prevents us from allowing that human nature to take over. God's will. The Spirit sensitizes the believer to what is against God's will. It's the thing that makes us sensitive to what's God's will.

It's also the thing that sets the standards for the believer, the Spirit, God's Spirit inside us. It's the thing that gives us the values. But not only that, it is also the thing that empowers us.

It's the thing that the law could not do. That's why in verse 18, Paul says, but if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

You see, when we're empowered by the Spirit, we're able then to do what is right. That is, we're able to do what is the loving thing. Well, when we're doing what is the loving thing, the Spirit enabling us to do that, the loving thing, well then, as we see in verse 14, then we're actually fulfilling the law.

[14 : 19] Because that's what the law is. If you're loving one another, then you're fulfilling the law. See how it's the Spirit that fulfills the law in our life. You see, we're not subject to the law anymore.

It's the Spirit that does what the law was meant to do. It's the thing that works in our life. Well, sometimes it's difficult to tell who's winning a war.

But Paul makes it clear for us tonight in the passage. He tries to help us to sort of give us some telltale signs as to see who's actually winning this battle. He's trying to help us understand this Spirit versus the flesh.

Those who are living their lives by the human nature and those who are living their lives by the Spirit. And so he gives us two lists. Look there at the list in verses 19 through to 21.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious. Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

[15 : 27] Now I want you to just take a moment. Talk to the person beside you. What is it that you actually notice about this list? What strikes you about this list as we read it? These are the works of the flesh.

That is, that is the works of our human nature. When you read through this list, what strikes you about it? What's the underlying thing behind all that you read there?

Just talk to the person beside you. I'm going to give you 30 seconds. If you're not sitting beside someone, then you might have to move beside someone. time's ticking on.

Okay, looking at the list, what's the underlying, what underlines all these things in the list? What are some of the things that underline? Someone call out?

Bad voice? Or what were some of the things that you noticed about the list? All easy? Other things?

[16 : 45] All self-centred. All selfish. All about promoting the self. Absolutely.

See, Paul could have actually written this list and said, you are not the works of the law. Here, let me tell you. Well, it's lying, cheating. It's all about idolatry. It's all about sexual immorality.

He could have given us all these practical lists of all the things. But it's not just a practical list. There are some things there that are practical. But what are some of the other things that are not just the practical things? What are they? Pardon?

Envy? It's things from inside, isn't it? It's the things that are inside, the motives on the inside. And Paul is doing that list to help us see what is the works of the flesh? It's those things that are self-centred.

those things that are trying to look after number one, that is you. It's an attempt really to get rid of God.

[17 : 45] It's an attempt to make you number one in the world. That you are God. You want to replace God and his authority and you want to do what is best for you. That's the works of the flesh.

Well, let's have a look then. Paul goes on to make a brief comment at the end of that. I'm warning you, as I warned you before, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, here comes the next list.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Again, quickly chat to the person beside you. What do you notice about this list?

What's the underlying thing here? Selfless.

Selfless. Selfless. Absolutely. Notice they're selfless. Again, Paul could have written, you want to know what the fruit of the Spirit is?

[19 : 02] Well, it's going out and helping the poor person. It's going out and it could have given a whole list of practical things. But again, he points at the inner motivations. The fruit of the Spirit is this list.

But notice, it's a fruit, it's a tree. It would be very easy to sort of go look at the list and go, okay, let's have a look at this list. Love, yeah, I'm okay on that one.

Joy, well, you know, peace, patience. Man, am I patient. I have to listen to whatever it happens to be. I am so patient.

But that's not what this list is actually talking about here. And notice, it's the fruit of the Spirit. A tree produces all the fruit from it. Paul is making this here, it's a wholeness of this list.

Are you producing all these characteristics? See, it's very easy just to sort of point out one or two of them that we're doing okay in, but some of the other things that we're not. Paul points these lists out for us so that we can see fairly clearly the difference between living a life by the Spirit and living a life by the flesh.

[20 : 20] the reality is, the reality for us, they're in constant conflict, aren't they?

Think back to the week that's just passed. Think of the times where your anger raged, at times of envy, of dissension, factions.

Think of the time that we have this conflict, this battle raging on inside. Of us wanting to produce the fruit of the Spirit, but knowing there are these other areas that are still raging in our life.

The reality is that while we live in this flesh, this earthly flesh, it will be a battle for us. But the great promise is, is that we will win this battle.

That when we are in heaven, the battle will be finally won. That we will be able to enjoy the fruit of the Spirit. in great wholeness.

[21 : 25] Well, in light of this, in light of this battle, Paul finishes with some exhortations, some commands. The first one is in verse 24, and he wants us to acknowledge this new relationship that a Christian has, that they are dead to those things of the flesh.

So look there in verse 24. verse 24. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Just as Christ was crucified on the cross, we are to crucify those areas of the sinful nature.

Its power has been taken away. We are to acknowledge that. We are not to live in the flesh. But verse 25 then goes on also to tell us that we are to live lives in step with the Spirit.

Verse 25. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. That is, we are to walk side by side with the Spirit. We are to walk through our lives, acknowledging the role of the Spirit in our lives, walking with him, helping us in all these different areas, acknowledging that he is the one who wins the battle for us.

And if we acknowledge these things and we live in step with the Spirit, then we will have lives that treat others in a positive fashion. That is, we will live lives for the other person.

[22 : 55] Right back in verse 13, we will become slaves to one another. Look there in verse 26. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

If we live by the Spirit, then we won't be doing those things. Well, let's just reflect on a few of these things to conclude. I guess the first thing to reflect on is, if you are not a Christian, if you don't know what it is to have a relationship with God, if you don't know freedom, can I encourage you to accept God's gift freely given to you by Christ Jesus, for he is the one who has taken the punishment for us.

If you are a Christian here tonight, then are you living a life in step with the Spirit? Reflect on it for a moment.

Reflect on the people in this congregation, the people that you know. Think about it for a moment. Are you enslaved to them? Are you serving them?

Are you thinking of the good for them? Here's some perhaps more practical ways. After tonight, will you be listening to what the person has to say or will you be more interested in telling others about your problems?

[24 : 23] Think about yourselves. Are you here to build up your own egos? Are you there to serve others? Are your comments that you make to each other loving comments?

Comments that build each other up or comments that tear each other down? What about you welcoming strangers in our midst?

Are you loving towards them or are you sitting in your little groups where it's comfortable, where they're going to build you up rather than stepping out and loving others? Consider Jesus for a moment.

Consider here is the ultimate free person, Jesus. He is creator, sustainer. He has to be the one who is the most powerful.

He has to be the one most free. And yet he became a slave for you. He came on this earth and died to serve you.

[25 : 29] He was our supreme example of how we are to live for one another. What about if you're struggling with sin in your life? You're a Christian and you're struggling with a particular sin in your life.

How are you dealing with it? Think carefully. How are you dealing with it? Are you someone who puts in more structures? Who puts in more things of doing? I'm not going to do this sin by, I'm going to put all these things in place.

I'm going to do this, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to, all doing. Perhaps you're a person who needs to recognise that you need to get on your knees and pray that the Spirit will be working in your life.

It is the Spirit that changes us. It is the Spirit that will bring change. But perhaps you're a person who says, let go, let God.

Let's just let God do it all. I'm just going to sit back here and God, he's going to deal with all these problems. No. That's not what the Bible is saying either. We are to be people who walk in step with the Spirit.

[26 : 35] God will bring about the victory through his Spirit, but we are to walk beside him. There are three types of dog in the city.

The first dog spends its life chained to a post, whining and barking because he wants to be free.

He wants to be out of his master's control. Do you think that dog's happy? No. The second dog wanders the street.

He's owned by nobody. He is a law unto himself. He spends all his days rummaging in dustbins, trying to find a meal. Do you think he's happy?

No. There's a third dog that walks by his master's side. No lead, rarely strays far, always obeys his master's call.

[27 : 37] Do you think this dog is happy? There are three kinds of people. There are those who live under law. Those who put external controls in this battle of the moral life.

In reality, they want to break free from this slavery. There are those who have no moral constraints. They embrace permissiveness.

They lie, cheat, they sleep around. They're not happy either. Look at Madonna. He would have to be the ultimate person of living that type of life.

In a recent article I read last weekend, she's no longer happy with that way of life. She's trying to turn back to some new age religion to try and find meaning. Or there is the third person.

Those who walk by the master's side, living in step with the spirit. May we be people believing in step with the spirit. Amen.

[28 : 42] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

intimacy walk Thank you.