

Place: Lurgan Baptist 27:11:2001

Reading: Galatians 5:13-26

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

9. KEEPING IN STEP

Charlie never learned to keep in step. He was in the high school band for four years. He played the trumpet. Everyone tried to help him keep in step. The frustrated band conductor used to march right beside him in the practices. Other members of the band offered their help. But Charlie just couldn't do it. It got to be a quite a show every time the band performed. During the annual festivals the band would march in the downtown parade, and there was Charlie, out of step, out of time. All the half-time marching for the football season featured the same comic mistake. Charlie couldn't keep in step. It's not like he didn't try. He was always attempting to do better. Sometimes he would skip along trying to get in step. Other times, he would hold his left foot high, and hop on his right one, trying to find the correct time to put down the left one. But he never found it. He just didn't have a sense of timing. In many ways Charlie reminds me of many believers who try to live the Christlike, Spirit filled life. They want to be in step. They just can't seem to pull it off. They hear the beat, they just can't keep it. Yet Peter tells us, " For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps." (1 Pet 2:21)

My we are to follow the footprints the Lord Jesus left behind. Some people think that we are to do this by Imitation, that is we are to attempt to imitate the life of Christ. But keeping in step in the Christian life, is not done through Imitation but by Identification. It's not that we live the Christian life by trying to imitate the lifestyle of Christ, rather, He lives His resurrected life through us because we have received Him by faith. My the Christian life is not lived by Imitation, (trying to be like Him) but by Identification (Identifying with His death, burial and resurrection) It is true that the Lord Jesus on occasions invited people to follow him. Do you recall what He said to Peter and Andrew, " Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt 4:19) They left their nets and followed Him ! After His resurrection, Christ said to Simon Peter, " Follow me." (Jn 21:19)

Now, how does following Christ become practical in the life of a Christian ? How can a believer learn to keep in step with the Saviour ? The answer is found in

(Gal 5:16) where Paul says, " Walk in the Spirit." Now lets do a quick review. When you receive Christ as personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your heart (Rom 8:9) This is a gift. (Acts 2:38) In turn, the Holy Spirit gives believer's a variety of gifts.

(1 Cor 12:4) These are Spirit-given abilities to serve the Lord Jesus through the Spirit's power ! But the Bible also teaches us that the Holy Spirit wants to produce the graces of the Spirit in and through the life of a believer.

Well, what are these graces ? They are the Christlike traits which the Spirit of God produces in our daily lives. They make us the person we should be !

And to be this person, we must " walk in the Spirit," or " live by the Spirit,". Its living daily in the power of the Holy Spirit. My to walk in the Spirit means living for Christ day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit ! It is keeping in step with the Saviour ! Now let me try and open up this theme in the Scriptures. In (Gal ch 5) Paul which deals with this subject and he talks about three things.

(1) THE CONFLICT

There is a war going on inside the believer. (5:16-17) Another translation puts it like this, " for the desires of the flesh are opposed to the Holy Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature) for these are antagonistic to each other." The word " contrary," means " to be opposite," or " to be in continual opposition." The " old you," and the " new you," don't get along at all. The flesh and the Spirit are mortal enemies. Civil War ? Yes ! You see, soon after we become Christians, and begin to discover the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we make a startling discovery. We find that we have all kinds of opposition. A number of enemies will try to keep us from walking in the Spirit. These enemies will in."

2. THE HUMAN RACE:

It can refer to the world of people humanity ! That is how it is used in (Jn 3:16) " For God so loved the world " Christ wasn't talking about the mountains and the bodies of water, He was talking about people. God loves all the people in the world. The word " world," is used in both ways in (Jn 1:10) " He was in the world (physical) and the world was made by Him, and the world (human) knew Him not."

3. THE EVIL SYSTEM:

" Love not the world neither the things that are in the world " (1 Jn 2:15) That refers to the invisible spiritual system of evil. The world's system is opposed to God. The English language often uses the word

" world," in the sense of a system. When we speak of the world of sports, the world of politics, or the world of medicine we refer to a system of ideas, activities and purposes that relate to a specific area of society. So

" the world," can also refer to Satan's activities, ideas and purposes as they are manifest on earth. Living the Christian life involves carefully interacting with the world but not being submerged in it.

When a boat is in the water, there's no problem, but when the water is in the boat, you've got problems. Its all right for a Christian to be in the world, but its not very good for the world to be in the Christian. (a)

(b) THE INFERNAL ENEMY: THE DEVIL:

Peter says, " be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. " (1 Pet 5:8) Satan is never to regarded lightly for puny man is no match for him. He tempted Eve: (Gen 3:1) He tempted Christ:

(Matt 4:1) He perverts God's Word: (Gen 3:1) He opposes God's work: (Zech 3:1) He hinders God's servants: (1 Thes 2:18) He ensnares the wicked:

(2 Tim 2:26) He deceives the nations: (Rev 20:7) He disguises himself as an angel of light: (2 Cor 11:14)

He contended with the angel Michael: (Jude 9) He instigated the fall of the human race: (Gen 3:13) He seeks to devour: (1 Pet 5:8) He accuses God's people:

(Rev 12:10) He once had the power of death: (Heb 2:14) and the whole world lies in his power:

(1 Jn 5:19) My have not discovered that the devil will seek to hinder you in every way possible ? (a) (b)

(c) THE INTERNAL ENEMY: THE FLESH:

And (Gal ch 5) deals with this enemy, the flesh.

(5:16) " the lusts of the flesh," (5:17) " the flesh lusteth against the Spirit," (5:19) " the works of the flesh," Now let me say three things about " the flesh."

1. The Flesh RESIDES WITHIN Us:

Something very specific is intended by the use of this term " the flesh." By the flesh, Paul does not mean " the body." The human body is not sinful, it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit, but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the lusts (desires of the flesh) You see, the flesh, stands for that part of man's nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. " I know, that in me, writes Paul, " that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." (Rom 7:18) The flesh, represents the sinful tendencies that become a part of your existence at birth. All of us were born " in the flesh." Sometimes the Bible refers to this flesh nature as " the old man." Our old man is our old nature. It is our old or natural nature. It is everything our physical birth makes us. But then something wonderful happens. We receive Christ as our personal Saviour. We are born spiritually (Jn 3:5) and at that moment we receive a new spiritual nature. The Bible refers to this new nature as the new man. Now, your new spiritual nature represents everything you can be by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The unbeliever is a one-natured man, the flesh, the believer is two-natured, the old sinful flesh and the new Spirit-nature, which came to him at his conversion.

Paul explains the contrariness of these " the flesh lusteth against the Spirit " (5:17) You see, the old nature does not vacate the premises when the New Tenant takes up His residence. Here is a dark room at night, its has a darkness nature, in common with the night outside.

Now you come into that room, switch on the light and at once a new nature is manifest a light nature, at variance with the night outside. Now that the new nature is present, has the old darkness nature gone ? Turn out the light and see ! No, the old is still there, but the new counteracts it. So when we admit Him who is " the Light," into our lives the new does not eradicate the old, but it counteracts it ! (1)

2. The Flesh RESOLVES WITHIN Us:

" The flesh lusteth against the Spirit," or " the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit." These opposite appetites are illustrated in the Bible in different ways. For example, the sheep is a clean animal and avoids garbage, but the pig is an unclean animal and enjoys wallowing

in the filth. (2 Pet 2:19) After the rain ceased and the ark settled, Noah released a raven which never came back. (Gen 8:6) The raven is a carrion-eating bird and found plenty to feed on. But when Noah released the dove, a clean bird it came back.

(Gen 8:8) The last time he released the dove and it did not return, he knew that it had found a clean place to settle down, therefore the waters had receded. Now our old nature is like the pig and the raven always looking for something unclean on which to feed. Our new nature is like the sheep and dove, yearning for that which is clean and holy.

Did you know that the cuckoo is a very curious bird ?

Its a bird that does not hatch its own eggs. Instead of building itself a nest it appropriates someone else's. It is a squatter, it put its eggs in another birds nest. Perhaps one day a sparrow will find another egg in the nest, and not having got an " A " level in maths, it goes on hatching, in ignorance of the imposition. In time, it hatches out, not only its own little fledglings, but a young cuckoo. Then, while, the mother bird goes to find food for her young brood, and brings it to the nest, she finds them all with open beaks crying out, " Feed me, feed me." And everything depends on who is fed. If the cuckoo gets the food, it grows and very soon ousts the little sparrows from the nest. So my in the nest of your life there is a dual nature. There is the flesh lusting and saying " feed me," and there is the Spirit lusting and saying " feed me," and it all depends who you feed, who will control your life that day.

Think about this. One Sunday morning your new nature wants to get up, go to church and hear the Word and remember the Lord ! But your old nature fights it. " You are tired," an inner voice says. " You've had a tough week, don't get up so early. Have a rest. You deserve a break." Have you heard that voice ? Have you ever known that struggle ? The new nature likes to give. Someone is in need. The nature wants to give some money to help them. But the old nature says, " Oh, you can't afford that. Don't do that. They don't deserve it anyhow." The new nature wants to tithe to the church as the Bible teaches. The old nature says, " No way ! They don't need all that money down at the church." The old nature wants to look at a filthy programme and the new nature says, " those scenes will pollute your mind."

Conflict like this exists in a thousand different scenarios every day of life ! Do you know anything about it ? 1. 2.

(3) The Flesh REMAINS WITHIN Us:

When you receive your new nature, at the time of your conversion, you do not lose your nature. To be born of the Spirit does not mean the old flesh disappears ! Some tell me that the old nature may be eradicated or eliminated. Paul did not think so. He says, " For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not I do." (Rom 7:19) If you think your old sinful nature has been eradicated, tell me please, and I'll come around and have a chat with your husband or wife !

John says, " If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 Jn 1:8) " I have not sinned for some time," said a lady to Mr. Spurgeon. " You must be very proud of it," he replied. " Yes, indeed, I am," she said. I tell you, the more holy a person becomes the more he will shrink from claiming the attainment of sinless perfection. Indeed someone has said, that the old nature is born within us, and it will be borne by us all the days of our lives. Hence, (1)

(2) THE CONTRAST

You see, God wants us to " walk in the Spirit," (5:16) or " live by the Spirit," but when we attempt this a contrast occurs and the contrast is between " the works of the flesh," and the " fruit of the Spirit." Paul talks about the negative first, he mentions:

(a) " THE WORKS OF THE FLESH,"

In (5:19) Here, like streams of filth belching up from the sewer of the old nature, is the result of yielding to the flesh. Interesting isn't it that these verses are written to Christians. My this is a warning ! If we allow the flesh to take control of our lives, even we as believers can be controlled by these vices. Becoming a Christian does not mean your old nature is gone. It is still very much with you. You have the same potential for sin, you always had because you're still human. Paul gives us a warning, " they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (5:21) The person who practices these sins, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul is not an act of sin, but a habit of sin ! Do you need to sit up and take notice ? You may not be a Christian ! But even believers can yield to the flesh and allow some of these vices to appear in their lives. Will you notice that Paul speaks here about:

1. SENSUAL SINS:

" Adultery," is unlawful sex between married people.

" Fornication," is sex between unmarried people.

" Uncleaness," means just that, a filthiness of heart and mind that makes the person defiled. (Titus 1:15)

" Lasciviousness," speaks of a wanton appetite that knows no shame.

" Drunkenness and revellings," (orgies) need no explanation. My all these sins were rampant in the Roman Empire and in our Western Culture today !

2. SUPERSTITIOUS SINS:

" Idolatry," is simply putting things ahead of the Lord.

My we are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things leaving God out of the picture completely ! The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car, house, boat, than serving Christ may be guilty of idoltary. (Col 3:5) " Witchcraft," means " the use of drugs." Magicians in Pauls day often used drugs to bring about their evil effects. Of course, sorcery is forbidden in the Bible as are all the activities of the occult. (Deut 18:9-22) So Paul talks about 1. 2.

3. SOCIAL SINS:

" Hatred," means " enmity," the attitude of mind that defies and challenges others. This attitude leads to

" variance," which is strife, the outworking of enmity.

" Emulations," means jealousies or rivalries. " Wrath," is outbursts of anger. " Strife," carries with it the idea of

" self-seeking, selfish ambition," that creates divisions in the church.

" Seditions, and heresies," could be translated " divisions and factions." " Envyings," suggests the carrying of grudges, the deep desire for what another has. (Prov 14:30) " Murders and drunkenness," need no

explanation ! Now stand back and have a look at " the works of the flesh." Do some of these vices ever appear in your life ? Are you ever guilty of some of these things ? If you are, then you can be sure you're not living by the Spirit. For over against " the works of the flesh," Paul places:

(b) " THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT,"

The contrast between " works," and " fruit," is important. A machine in a factory works, and turns out a product, but it could never manufacture fruit. Fruit, must grow out of life and in the case of the believer it is the life of the Spirit. Now spiritual gifts are shown by what we do, spiritual graces are displayed by what we are. The nine virtues that Paul mentions here can be divided into three groups.

1. The First Three Virtues Express the Godward Aspect of the Christian Life:

" Love," agape, this love is God's gift to us (Rom 5:5) and we must cultivate it and pray that it will increase.

" Joy," That inward peace and sufficiency that is not affected by outward circumstances. (Phil 4:10)

" Peace," " the peace of God all understanding." 1.

2. The Second Three Virtues Express the Manward Aspect of the Christian Life:

" Longsuffering," it conveys the idea of " patience with people." " Gentleness," the opposite of a harsh, crabbed temper. " Goodness," sheer downright goodness in a world gone foul.

3. The Last Three Virtues Express the Selfward Aspect of the Christian Life:

" Faith, or faithfulness," It means " dependability."

" Meekness," the right use of power and authority.

" Temperance," or " self control." My when you look at this ninefold cluster who do you think of ?

The Lord Jesus ! Of course the work of the Spirit is to make us more like Christ for His glory ! (1) (2)

(3) THE CONQUEST

For Paul brings us to the point of victory here in this matter of walking in the Spirit ! Look at what he says in

(5:24) Is the victorious Christian life possible ? Yes ! But there are certain factors we need to take on board.

There is:

(a) THE HISTORICAL ASPECT:

When Christ died I died ! Is this not what Paul is saying in (5:24) The Amplified puts it like this,

" And those who belong to Christ Jesus, the Messiah, have crucified the flesh the godless human nature with its passions and appetites and desires." The verb indicates something that happened in the past. When

was the flesh crucified ? Two thousand years ago. Where ? On the cross where the Lord Jesus died !

Do you recall Pauls words in (2:20) Or " I have been crucified with Christ " When was Christ crucified ? Two thousand years ago. What about our flesh ? It was nailed to the cross too. God says its been crucified. Its dead ! Does this mean we will never yield to worldly desires anymore ? No ! It means we don't have to ! Paul says the same thing in (Rom 6:6) " Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him." Now please note that Paul does not tell us to crucify ourselves, because this is impossible. Crucifixion is one death a man cannot inflict on himself. He tells us that the flesh has already been crucified. My at Calvary, God has dealt with the question of Self as well as the question of Sin by putting us to death with Christ.

In a certain church was an old deacon, who was suspicious of anything new. A dried up old die-hard was he, sitting in judgement on all who refused to be ruled by his view of Scripture, acid of temperament and barren of soul. To this church came a young man with the fresh dew of God upon him, a young man of vision, gift, charm, and one who possessed an unusual grasp of Scripture and a great measure of wisdom. His ministry was blessed of God to the salvation of souls and the edification of believers. But inevitably perhaps, some of his views did not square with this old man who ruled the deaconate. For years that deacon did in all in his power to discourage, oppose and criticise the young pastor. One day another member of this church asked the young preacher how he managed to put up with this deacon.

" William," was the starling reply " I died to John five years ago." This young pastor had grasped the secret of the believers death with Christ ! Now the fact that the believer died with Christ on the cross does not remove the sin nature or make it inoperative ! You see, there is:

(b) THE MENTAL ASPECT:

That we must reckon ourselves dead to self, and this should be done continually by the Christian. Paul calls this " reckoning," in (Rom 6:11) The word " reckon," is " to count, compute, to take into account."

My at Calvary God dealt fully and forever with all aspects of the question of sin. But we have to " reckon," this to be so. We have to take this into account in the moment of temptation ! The story is told of two Irishmen, Pat and Mike, who found a most unusual turtle. The animals head had been completely severed from its body, but the turtle was still running around as though nothing had happened. Pat maintained that it was dead, but Mike denied it strongly and the argument waxed louder and louder until O'Brien came along. They decided that O'Brien should arbitrate the matter and that his verdict would be final. O'Brien took one look at this remarkable turtle and said, " It's dead but it don't believe it." Is that not the problem with many of us who are believers ? We are dead but we do not believe it ! My what a tragedy for it is this truth fully and unreservedly believed that breaks sin's stranglehold in the life once it is believed. Is the victorious Christian life possible ? Well, we must take on board (a) (b) and now:

(c) THE PRACTICAL ASPECT:

Look at (5:25) " Walk in the Spirit," means " keep in step with the Spirit," not to run ahead and not to lag behind. This involves the Word, prayer, worship, praise and fellowship with God's people ! My the

best way to deal with the "lust of the flesh," is simply to walk in the Spirit. If you are controlled by the Spirit of God and are Christ-conscious on a daily basis because you are feeding on His Word, you're going to have less problems with the flesh. Your mind cannot be occupied with two masters at the same time. You cannot be concentrating on Jesus Christ and at the same time concentrating on the lusts of your own flesh. You have to dispel the lust of the flesh in order for the Spirit of God to control your life !

Sammy was a playful and frisky dog. He would run after anything and everything. If a bird landed nearby, the dog would take off after it. If one of the children from the neighbour walked close to the yard, Sammy would take off yelping after them. But Sammy was on a leash. When Sammy reached the end of the leash Bam ! The leash would stop him sometimes quite violently. But Sammy was smart. He got tired of having his neck nearly pulled off. So Sammy learned to stop just before he reached the end of his leash. One day the owner was in the yard with Sammy, and Sammy didn't realise his leash was off. A bird flew by, the dog would take off, but as he reached the usual end of his leash, he would stop. A child passed and away went Sammy, but the leash was not around his neck but he had been trained to go no further than the leash allowed. My does Sammy not remind you of many of us ? We don't understand that the old leash, the flesh has been dealt with. We are still under the control of the old nature, the flesh calls and we come running !

My you don't have to do what the old nature tells you to do anymore. You have a new exciting choice. You can " Keep in Step with the Spirit."