

Galatians week 7 Gal 5:16-25

If you have been here over the past few weeks you will know that we have been following a sermon series looking at Paul's letter to the Galatians. At the church in Galatia there were two groups of Christians – those who had come from a Jewish background, and those who had been previously been Gentiles. All had become followers of Jesus.

But a group of Jewish Christians had been saying that in order to be properly accepted by God the Gentile Christians should follow the Jewish Law, and especially that they should be circumcised – the mark of belonging according to the Old Testament covenant.

In this letter Paul is saying, “No! That's not true! We are saved by grace when we believe in Jesus and commit to following him. We are saved by GRACE through FAITH – not by obeying the law.”

And now their lives should be led and controlled by the Holy Spirit, not by the Law, and certainly not by the desires of the flesh. In chapter 5:16-25 the point he is making is that circumcision, because it focusses on 'the flesh' is really on the same level as the other pagan

practices that he lists - fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing.

He's not saying that the Galatian Christians were doing those things, but he is contrasting two ways of living – according to the Spirit, or according to the sinful habits and pagan practices from which they had been set free.

So let's imagine two towns. In one everyone lives according to the desires of the flesh and in the other, according to the Spirit.

In the first, really anything goes. You can do what you like. You needn't worry about anyone else and you certainly don't want to think about God. These are some of the things that characterise that town.

(Volunteers to hold up signs)

Drunkenness, quarrels, idolatry, sorcery, impurity, anger, strife, envy.

But in the second town, people live by the Spirit.

They have committed to follow Jesus, his Spirit lives in them, and they are trying to love their neighbour as

themselves. And so these are some of the things that characterise that town:

(Volunteers)

Love joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control.

Now then, given the choice, where would you prefer to live?

Most of us have chosen to live here (fruits town), but there can still be a bit of a battle.

Sometimes we do quarrel, or envy, or drink too much, or get ratty.

Paul's encouragement to us from this passage is to live by the power of the Spirit.

To die to our old way of life, or to those things that can trip us up, and to live by the Spirit.

That's the symbolism in baptism.

Dying to those things we know to be wrong, all our sins being washed away, and then rising to a new life, lived for God and for others, a life of love, a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And that's an action we can do daily – dying to anything negative. Refusing to hold grudges, refusing to gossip, refusing to join in with people who are unkind, or doing things we know deep inside aren't what God wants.

Asking forgiveness if we fail.

And asking God to fill us with his Holy Spirit so that we can live the way he wants us to, just as Jesus did.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and he lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we turn to Jesus, and ask him into our lives, he come by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit begins to change us. (Heart and dove?)

He makes us more like Jesus.

He makes us more loving, more peaceful, more joyful, more patient.

He changes our hearts.

And that was what the Law was never able to do. That's why all through his letter Paul is saying, "Don't go back to the old way. It won't set you free, it will only enslave you."

It's the Holy Spirit who brings us freedom - not the kind of freedom to go and do whatever we want, but the freedom to live the kind of life that deep down most of us really want to.

Freedom to love without counting the cost or fearing we'll lose out.

Freedom from fear of what other people think of us, because we know we are loved by God.

Freedom from anxiety, because we know God's in control and his peace passes understanding

Freedom from anger and bitterness because the Spirit heals our wounds and frees us to forgive those who sin against us.

Freedom from addictions, because the power of the Spirit is greater than any power that binds us.

Freedom from any sense of inferiority, because we know that Jesus loves us so much he died for us, and we are the apple of his eye.

Freedom to give generously because we know God will provide for our needs.

Jesus said, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom".

Does that sound good to you?

It does to me!

Do you know that freedom? If not, ask God to set you free.

Take a look at all these fruits.

Are they growing in your life?

Is there one that you'd really like God to grow in you?

Later in the service there will be a chance to take a stone with one of the fruits written on it.

Pray.