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The Spirit at War with the Flesh

Free Indeed: A Study in the Epistle of Galatians
Galatians 5:13-26
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Opening Discussion

1. So what is legalism? How can we discern what is and isn't legalism in our own lives and in the churches or organizations that we are in?

2. Is it possible to become legalistic about our "freedom?" In what way?

3. Which is the greater enemy of our freedom in Christ, legalism or license? Why?

Bible Study

1. Read Galatians 5:1-12 and review briefly what you learned in that text.

2. Compare 5:1 with 5:13. Notice the similarities (remember the word "serve" in 5:13 is the Greek word for slave).

   It seems Paul's statement regarding subjecting ourselves again to the yoke of slavery from verse 1 would help us define "opportunity for the flesh" in 5:13. What, then, does he mean by this statement in v. 13?

3. To simply define the flesh as "sinful nature" or something similar is to miss Paul's point as it relates to legalism. How has he defined the term "flesh" in Galatians so far? (1:16, 2:16, 3:3, 4:29)

   Paul is not going to suddenly change the meaning of his terms halfway through his letter. "Flesh" in Galatians refers to what?

   What is the symbolism as it relates to the flesh in circumcision?

4. Define the differences between someone who lives by the flesh (legalist) and someone who walks by the Spirit, according to 5:13-26. What is the difference between "deeds" in verse 18 and "fruit" in verse 22?

5. In 5:19-21 Paul is arguing that legalism is not only bondage but it's trusting the flesh to do something for us that it's incapable of doing. Compare Romans 7:14-25. What is the solution both from Galatians 5 and Romans 8?

6. What is true of every believer according to Galatians 5:24? Compare Galatians 2:20. Therefore what from Galatians 5:25?

Application

1. The issue in Galatians is an issue of a core belief. Can you (your flesh) make yourself righteous or must the Spirit of Christ make you righteous? One is something I merit by my good behavior; the other is one I simply receive by grace. For one, obedience is an attempt to make myself righteous; while for the other, obedience is an outflow of what the Spirit is doing in me.

   At the core of your being what do you really believe concerning who makes you righteous? Is it you in the power of your flesh or the Spirit on the basis of grace? If the Spirit's work is not on the basis of grace (undeserved) then you're right back to "meriting" the work of the Spirit which is back to law.

   If you do not believe you can make yourself righteous (the flesh) then all practices of legalism must be confessed as sin (5:7). Ask God to reveal the legalism in you and commit to doing what is necessary to rid it from your life.

2. If we are dependent on the Spirit of Christ to make us righteous, then our passion in life should be to pursue Him and learn what it means to walk by the Spirit. As a group, come up with 5 practical things you can do to learn and cultivate a Spirit-filled walk.

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