

# Galatians 5:13-26

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[0:00] I want to talk to you today about Christian obedience, living out a holy life as a Christian. One of the accusations that people often throw at the Christian faith is that it leads to immoral behaviour.

If the Christian life is all about Jesus paying for my sins, and it's all about grace and faith in what Jesus has done, not what I can do, then you're just encouraging immorality, aren't you? You're just encouraging spiritual and moral laziness, and you can kind of see the logic, can't you? Paul has said to us in Galatians that Christians are free from the law as a way of being right with God, and so we're accepted by God apart from my works.

So you could think, couldn't you, my works don't matter, and I can do whatever I like. If you've understood the grace of the Gospel rightly, then actually that mistake should be really close in your mind.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on Romans, said, if you're preaching a salvation that's not been misunderstood in that way, then you'd better re-examine your sermons.

[1:19] There is, he says, this kind of dangerous element of the doctrine of salvation, where God treats us graciously through Jesus, so I could end up living recklessly.

It's one of the ways that Christian people are tempted, isn't it? To disobey God, I'm alright, I'm forgiven. It doesn't matter what I do, grace will cover it. And the risk of that kind of thinking has been building up in Galatians, a bit like a pressure cooker.

And Paul is going to correct that mistake at last now, in this section. Have a look at verse 13 at the top. Now Paul is clear there, isn't he, that for the Christian, fulfilling the law still matters in the Christian life.

The list of works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit there, it shows us, doesn't it, that the way we live matters in the Christian life. Grace doesn't change whether you should obey God's law, but how you should obey God's law.

And that is the big point of this passage. How do I approach obedience? And how does Paul teach me to do it? Well, he says three things here.

[2:56] First of all, he says, know your enemy in Christian obedience. Know your enemy. I wonder what you think the biggest barrier is to your Christian holiness and your obedience to God.

It might be the kind of sins of others, the behaviour of others. It might be the circumstances of your life. If only my life was different and I'd be a better person.

But actually, Paul says, doesn't he, that the greatest barrier to your personal obedience is much closer to home. Your greatest enemy is in fact you.

Verse 16 and 17. I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.

Paul says, the great enemy of God's influence, of the Holy Spirit's influence in your life, is the flesh. It's the natural human heart and mind and direction that we all have and that we all live without Christ, isn't it?

[4:12] That the flesh is the executive power in a person who does not have the Lord Jesus in their lives. And he says the flesh and its desires are against the Spirit.

So the enemy of true obedience is within. An enemy who is unrelenting and merciless. Who assaults all of the time, all areas of your life.

There are no ceasefires, there are no kind of agreements with the flesh to be made. No, the flesh, Paul says, opposes the Spirit. And that's that.

That's what it does. And that opposition, he says, keeps you from doing what you want to do in Christian obedience. And we know what Paul means, don't we?

If we're honest, we know that our worst enemy is us. The heaviest weight and the biggest problem we face in the Christian life is ourselves.

[ 5 : 15 ] And our own flesh. And the desires that lurk within. How does the flesh operate? Well, the flesh's main tactic is to oppose the Spirit of God.

It's to push out the Spirit of God. And in Galatians, I think we've seen this already. The flesh does that in two ways. There are two things that the flesh really loves to do in your life.

One is to encourage and foster spiritual laziness. Spiritual laziness. And the other is spiritual legalism.

The two are the kind of opposite ends of the scale, aren't they? But the flesh does both of those things. Both of them are trademark tactics of the flesh. To push out and oppose God's presence in your life.

So he'll create spiritual laziness, won't he? He'll use that old chestnut. Yeah, but God's grace will cover it. Won't it?

[ 6 : 23 ] The flesh will tell you it is far easier and better to watch a film for two hours. Than to pray for two minutes. That the flesh will be your best friend.

If you're going to be spiritually lazy. That the flesh will happily cuddle up to you on the sofa for days on end if you just want to watch TV. It'll be your best friend. It'll hug you and it'll be fine with you.

Until someone says, let's pray. And the flesh wakes up, doesn't it? And it turns on you in that moment. Or you go to read the Bible and you want to do it.

And as soon as you open up the page, the flesh wakes up and he starts attacking, doesn't he? And he spits at the spirit. And you drop off and your mind goes anywhere apart from what the passage is saying.

The flesh, he wants you to be spiritually lazy. But then he swings the other way as well. He wants to lead you into spiritual legalism.

[ 7 : 25 ] And this is the really clever bit, isn't it? That the flesh does. He'll use God's law as a way to push God out. And that's what the flesh has been doing with the Galatians, isn't it?

He says to them, no, no, no. You keep God's law. Get under God's law and make it about you. And your performance of it.

Make your righteousness about ticking the boxes. Work at God's law yourself. It's a really common tactic that the flesh uses. And it gives the appearance of godliness, doesn't it?

But Paul explains it actually has the opposite effect. Do you see? That the works of the flesh are evident, he says. Verse 19 to 21. All those things.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, envy, jealousy. All of those things. They are what the Christian legalist actually ends up doing. So do you see the irony and the kind of cunningness of the flesh?

[ 8 : 30 ] The irony is that in your own strength in the flesh, you attempt to sort of pull your own socks up, don't you? And be a good person. And be a righteous person.

But you are trying to fight fire with fire. You're trying to fight the flesh's desires with the flesh. And if the flesh tries to fight the flesh, then either way the flesh is going to win, isn't he?

The flesh will always get what he wants. If you let the flesh lead you. Paul writes to the Colossians. And they're in a similar situation as the Galatians.

He says to them, Why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch. He says, These have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

The flesh loves that kind of thing, doesn't he? He loves to get you to do stuff that looks godly, in a legalistic way, so that he can push God out.

[ 9 : 46 ] That he can oppose God. So that he can indulge in what he wants. So he'll be just as comfy with you, taking a sacrament, as he would be with you in the cinema, as long as you're lazy, and you're legalistic about it.

It's true. That God, the flesh, can use both of those things to push God out. So do you see, Paul is saying, isn't he, Christian obedience, it's a constant war.

It's a constant war against an enemy, and the enemy is us. He's within. The flesh. So know the enemy. Secondly, know the strategy.

Know the strategy. Paul, helpfully, just gives us a really straightforward command, doesn't he, in verse 16. I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Or verse 18, be led by the spirit. Or keep in step with the spirit, verse 25. The strategy that Paul presents, against the flesh, in all of its wily opposition to God, in your life, is to be under the influence, and under the command of the Holy Spirit.

[ 11 : 13 ] And since the flesh, never gives up, does he, in his war against the spirit, notice the word, walk. Walk by the spirit.

It is a constant, daily, ongoing, continual submission, to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It's not a one-off thing, is it? When you kind of believed, and then it just happens the rest of your Christian life.

It's a constant thing. if you've not trusted, in, and are living for, Jesus Christ, we're really glad that you're here, and we want you to be here, every week.

But really, this is something that, that you cannot do. You cannot resist the flesh. He is too strong for you.

He is too deeply within you. You cannot do this, without the spirit. Paul has said elsewhere, that to be a Christian, to trust in Jesus, for your rightness with God, is to be transformed, when Jesus, indwells Christians, by his Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 21 ] It's as if, Jesus himself, invades, the flesh. There is a kind of, D-Day, isn't it? On the beaches of your life.

And the spirit, comes in, and takes back, occupation, of the heart. It's a power transfer, in the command center, of your heart. He becomes, the new liberating presence.

Jesus says, we are born again, by the spirit. The spirit takes over. So, what does it look like, to walk, by the spirit?

What is that? It is clear, that Paul, isn't describing here, a kind of, passive thing. Is it? And that you just, let happen. No, it's a walk.

It involves you, in some way. It's active. So, am I waiting for a feeling? Or, am I waiting for, kind of, impulse?

[ 13 : 19 ] Or, do I need to go on a, a pilgrimage, to some, spiritual place, and feel the spirit, guiding me? Let's, let's break it down. To walk by the spirit, is, to actively, let yourself, be led, in the direction, he wants you to go, isn't it?

Paul uses words like, led, and walk, and keep in step. To be led by the spirit, instead of where, the flesh wants you to go. And the path, he leads you on, is the path, actually, we've already been, walking on, and exploring, throughout, the letter of Galatians.

First, he leads you, away, from your own, fleshy, law keeping. That's what Paul says, in verse 18, if you're, led by the spirit, you are not, under law.

The flesh, will try, and push you, under, the law of God, in the sense of, trying to do it, to work, to be right with God. He'll encourage, legalism.

But notice, how Paul, intentionally, changes the word, that describes, what the flesh, and the spirit do. Did you notice, the flesh, does works, verse 19, but the spirit, produces fruit.

[ 14 : 44 ] See, that's the contrast, isn't it? The flesh, wants to make, Christianity, all about you, and your works, and your law keeping. But the spirit comes, and enters in, and produces fruit.

It's different. The spirit comes and says, no, no, it's not that way. It's not about you, doing this stuff. Turn around, from what the flesh, is trying to do, and follow another way.

So he leads you away, from works, towards fruit. Second, he leads you then, towards, and affects in you, Jesus Christ, as the source, of power, of your obedience, and power of your obedience.

Now that's a, a long sentence, isn't it? It's simply, what we've been seeing, through the letter, of the Galatians. It is a walk of faith, in Jesus, rather than, in your own works.

Paul has alluded to it, already, hasn't he? The life that he has, in union with Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. He says, it's no longer I, who live, but Christ, who lives in me.

[ 15 : 55 ] And Christ, does that, through the presence, of his Holy Spirit. Who unites us, to one, who has lived, a perfect life, and lets us share, in his credit.

The flesh, says, look to yourself, and do it. The Spirit says, look to the Lord Jesus, who has done it. And as the Spirit, unites us, with the perfectly, obedient Jesus Christ, actually, what you will find, is that, true obedience, bears fruit, in your life.

Freedom, from the demand, to do it, yourself, unexpectedly, helps the Christian, to start, really doing it.

it's, it's counterintuitive. Calvin said, that when consciences, observe the law, not as if, constrained by the necessity, of the law, for righteousness, but freed, from the law's yoke, they willingly, obey God's will.

And that is profound. Let me try and illustrate it, I've kind of given this story before, at home, our three year old boy, he does the hoovering, he has a go at it, he's not good at it, at all, but he does it, that is the crucial thing, he does it.

[ 17 : 28 ] And he does it freely, he'll just, kind of play with the hoover, and just kind of do it. He does it freely, because there is no sense, where he must meet, the rigorous demands, of his mum and dad's cleaning, or his mum's cleaning.

He gets rewards, and pleasure, from the well done, and that is great, because in the end, it is dad or mum, who will do the cleaning, isn't it? And the fruit, of his obedience, comes from a liberation, of any oppressive law, demanding his obedience, to buy my, or his mother's love.

And that is what it is, to walk by the spirit. The spirit leads us, into true obedience, in that way. So Paul adds at the end, doesn't he, that the list of the fruit, of the spirit, verse 23, against such things, there is no law.

As if to say, those walking by the spirit, find themselves, in harmony with the law. At last. Actually fulfilling it.

Precisely, because they aren't, following the flesh, with its legalistic, box sticking of the law.

Through self justification. Spirit people, end up doing it, because the spirit, unites them, with the one, who has done it.

[ 18 : 58 ] And it has to be, an active, and constant, and continual thing, doesn't it? We've really got to, kind of, let the spirit do this. We can't let the flesh, take us back under the law.

The flesh is the enemy, and he's always pulling us back, into self-justifying, law keeping, to buy God's love. So we need to know, the enemy don't we? We need to know the strategy.

And as we close, we need to sense the victory, of Christian obedience. We need to sense the victory. The flesh is so cunning, isn't he?

And he lingers deep within us. But, Paul wants to encourage us here, because if you think about it, the flesh, the old person, that was there, he kind of still hangs around, doesn't he, in a Christian, the flesh, has picked, a very, very difficult fight.

The flesh, in the life of a Christian, has picked, an awesome adversary, to fight with. He's picking a fight, with someone, actually, that he can never defeat, in the end.

[ 20 : 11 ] He picks a fight, with the spirit. He opposes, the spirit. Who is the spirit?

Well, he is God, isn't he? The flesh, look at him, spitting, lashing out, raging, bent on malice, against no one, no one, but God himself.

He doesn't care about anyone else. God he hates. God, Christ, living in you, by his Holy Spirit. He's saying to God, isn't he, come and have a go, if you think you're hard enough.

And the battle is only, going to go one way. Notice the note of victory, in verse 24. Those who belong to Jesus, have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires.

The flesh is a formidable enemy, and we know it. But he is a defeated enemy. And the word crucify there, is really significant. As a person trusts in Jesus, death and resurrection, in the crucifixion, he's experiencing there, the beginning of the demise, of his great enemy, the flesh.

[ 21 : 29 ] G.K. Chesterton, with characteristic wit, describes the flesh, like a bull in a china shop, or actually, a rhino in a restaurant. He says, if a rhinoceros, were to enter this restaurant now, there is no denying, that he would have great power here.

You can imagine the scene, can't you? But he says, I should be the first to rise, and assure him, that he had no authority, whatsoever. There are notes of positivity, aren't they, in this passage.

That while the flesh can cause havoc, his authority, in the life of believer, is removed. The assaults of the flesh, are merely, kind of, whimpering echoes, of an embittered tyrant, who has lost his grip on power.

The spirit, comes in, and the flesh has no authority. Notice how Paul says, he keeps you from doing, what you want to do.

Which implies, doesn't it, that, at a fundamental level, the Christian has been transformed, and they are, allies, not with the flesh, but with the spirit. Against the flesh.

[ 22 : 46 ] There is no sense, where this battle, this opposition, is a, is a kind of, even sided battle. This is not a war, of attrition, where both sides, are sort of, taking pot shots, from the trenches.

There is no sense, that the flesh, could kind of, come back, and overwhelm the person, and steal the person back, from the spirit. Not at all. No, the born again, man or woman, belongs to God. And so, for the flesh, the game is up. And the spirit, is shining the spotlight, on the flesh, as he lashes out, in the darkness, in your life.

And it is, a miracle, isn't it, of the spirit, that you can know, the enemy. And that you're even aware, of what he's trying to do. You can sense him, and you can see, his corruptness, as he cuddles up to you, next to you, on the sofa.

The spirit, shines the spotlight, on the flesh, as an enemy, who is defeated. Christina Rossetti, writes about her struggle, with the flesh.

[ 23 : 58 ] She says, or she prays, God, strengthen me, to bear, myself. To bear myself, that heaviest weight, of all to bear.

Inalienable, weight of care. And we do know, what she means, don't we? We are our own, worst enemy, in the Christian life.

But we've got, a strategy here. And not only that, we've got God, himself, in our lives.

So Paul says, walk by the spirit. Let him lead you, away from yourself, and your own, striving and law keeping, and be led, towards the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done it.

And actually, you will find yourselves, doing it, in that freedom. Let's pray.