

Explore the Bible: True Fruit

September 19, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Oct. 7 focuses on Galatians 5:13-26.*

The theme of true freedom continues from last week's text (Galatians 4:8-20) into the beginning of chapter 5. As Paul stated clearly, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (5:1a). Rather than remain in slavery to sin or the Law, Christ gave himself for true freedom.

While it may not be necessary to read the first half of chapter 5 as a class, it is both humbling and humoring as the teacher to read how Paul will connect freedom with fruitfulness. Paul's frustration with the "agitators" points to how they were unfruitful because of their slavery to the Law. On the contrary to this, a true believer's freedom should result in fruitfulness.

Consider musing on the gravity of the situation in verse 4. *After reading it aloud, ask your group to talk about how "religiosity" keeps us from knowing Christ. How does focusing on being enslaved to the Law alienate us from Jesus?*

Freed (Galatians 5:13-15)

Being "free" is not a license to live a life of "free for all." It is a release from slavery, which should be celebrated by making good use of freedom. Notice how instead of a privilege, Paul refers to it as a calling, even a "vocation." *How is freedom something more significant when seen as a calling on a person's life?*

Instead of being "sinful," freed ones are meant to "serve" in love, especially loving neighbors. *Why does Paul have to say this?* Evidently service (a type

of fruitfulness) was not as evident as sin in the Galatians' living. As we read this accusation, we need to see that each of us is as guilty of not serving in love automatically. The question is clear: *Will we change in light of this?*

Controlled (Galatians 5:16-18)

Since we believe salvation in Jesus Christ results in the Christian being filled by the Holy Spirit, it only makes sense for us to see that living "by the Spirit" is the right way to go. In some Protestant circles however, living by the Spirit's leading results in more concern and fear than excitement. *Why is this the case?*

Living in sinful nature, which Paul has already spoken against, is not just a contradiction to the freedom of salvation. Even worse, it is the daily struggle against the very One who should be leading our day-to-day lives: God's Spirit. *What should we make of the conflicting nature of sinful nature and the Spirit?*

The simplest way to make sense of this is for us to realize that we need to desire the Spirit over our own natural desires. *How do we set this in motion? Why is it seemingly more difficult to want what God wants more than what we want?*

Abandoned (Galatians 5:19-21)

In case you are (or the Galatians were) wondering what exactly these sinful desires were, Paul developed a considerable laundry list. *As a group, have everyone read each of these on their own. Next, ask those who are willing to share to tell how any of these have controlled their lives before, and what it was like to abandon these natural desires.*

When we allow sinful desires to rule over us (which is slavery, not

freedom), there is a real warning of disinheritance. It is not God who disinherits us, but we who disqualify ourselves as heirs. This is similar to abdicating our own thrones of freedom, which does not seem worth the cost.

Produced (Galatians 5:22-26)

The nine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit often are memorized and quoted. While these are each significant attributes, Ann Jervis reminds us that the fruit is “singular, and so the...qualities are various aspects of the generative power of the Spirit” (L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians*, 149).

The produce of the Spirit then should be reflected in the lives of those who live by the Spirit. And as verse 25 states, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” It only makes sense to imitate and emulate the One whom we pattern after in contrast to what our nature leads us to do.

How is the list of nine qualities daunting to us? It is important to notice that if we focus on living by the Spirit, these traits will become automatic and natural. The best part of this is there is nothing wrong with producing these traits! “Against (these) things there is no law,” which means it is better to be convicted of living by the Spirit than living in sin.

Conclusion

There is one temptation of thought that we must be sure to avoid. Living in the freedom of the Spirit to be fruitful is not the same thing as works-based salvation. Paul is not saying we should focus on achieving fruitfulness, because that is not grace, nor is it within our capability to achieve. We can only be fruitful because living by the Spirit makes us fruitful.

In another letter to the Ephesians, Paul gives the notion that when we are saved from sin “by grace through faith,” it is for the purpose of being fruitful followers and disciples. Once again, we see the calling of the Christian to produce divine fruitfulness.

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