



## The beauty of Jesus

Galatians 5:22-23

Fruit of the Spirit - Love

Sunday October 13<sup>th</sup>

Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

### A confused young man

In the year which saw the end of the second world war, a young man by the name of Jim Packer became a true believer. He had been brought up in what he called "religious formalism," but at the age of 19 he was truly converted. Many changes took place, life. He found direction, "I wanted nothing more than to know and to do God's will." He found friendship, "shy, gawky and not well-cultured" he began making close friendships with fellow Christians "and the sense of loneliness which had previously weighed him down had largely passed away." Most of all, "He knew God and the knowledge of God brought him joy."

But as he grew in his newfound faith Jim had a problem. Some fellow Christians gave him the impression that they had reached an inner state of total victory over sin, and that did not ring true with his own experience! The phrase they were all using to achieve this state was "let go and let God. All you had to do was to "let go and let God" and you would reach a state in which no internal strife, no inner battle! But that did not ring true with Jim's personal experience! No matter how much he tried to "let go and let God," he continued to be, "a churned-up young man, painfully aware of himself, battling his daily way, as adolescents do, through manifold urges and surges of discontent and frustration." The internal battles continued! Fortunately Jim Packer was a reader, and he discovered the Bible's teaching that I want to share with you from Galatians chapter 5 today.

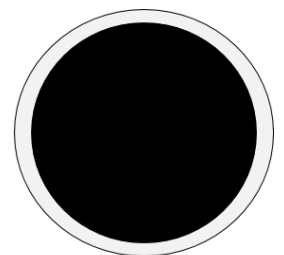
### The conflict of normal Christianity

The first thing Jim learnt was that it was normal for a Christian to experience a battle inside. The Christian friends who gave the impression that as they were experiencing non-stop victorious, triumphant, lives free from internal conflict were mistaken! The Bible teaches that conflict is a normal part Christian experience: *"The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."* (v.17-18)

Paul is not talking about the conscience-conflict everyone in the world feels between what they know to be right, and what they do. For example, there is the story of the old Cherokee man who told his grandson, "Grandson, there is a battle between two "wolves" inside us all. One is evil, the other is good." Paul is not referring to that universal battle, he's talking about a battle unique to Christians between the old sinful nature and the new nature. Let me explain.

We are born into the world with a sinful nature, which wants to do, the horrible list 15, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." (5:19-21) We can represent this fallen sinful nature, or "flesh" by a dark circle. (I have left a little crescent of light around the edge to represent "common grace." Human beings are not born devils, there is what we call "common grace", people are capable of helping others, putting their lives at risk to rescue someone in danger, and so on. The devil has no crescent good, but because of God's common grace in the world at large, men and women are preserved from being devils.) We are all born with a sinful

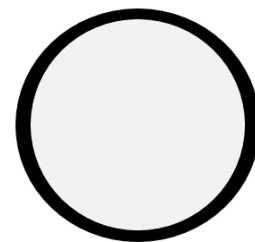
Old sinful Nature



nature which wants to do these things, and this nature is proven every day in the tabloid newspapers, it's revealed in every soap opera, it's the subject of all internet click-bait.

But when we are converted we are given a new heart and a new nature! We discover new desires for God and for righteousness (along with a new hatred for sin and unrighteousness!) The Holy Spirit had made us "born again," and now lives inside us. We can truly say, "I have the desire to do good" (Romans 7:18), and "in my inner being I delight in God's law." (Romans 7:22) If we were to draw this new heart we'd put a big circle of righteousness right at the centre. This is the new nature God has given to every true believer, with the Holy Spirit mysteriously living inside our new hearts, Christ dwelling within by his Spirit, producing the fruit of, "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

The new Nature, "Spirit"



But notice, there is still a dark crescent around the outside of that new heart! We have a new heart, a new nature, Praise God!, but some of that old sinful nature still hangs about us as long we live in these old bodies. It will be gone in heaven, when we are given new resurrected bodies, but while we live in this old body, every believer will experience the downward pull of their old sinful natures.

And herein lies the cause of the battle that every true Christian experiences in their hearts every day! "*What a wretched man I am!*" (Romans 7:24) This is Biblical teaching: we have a new nature, yes, but it is housed in an old body. So we say to every believe, don't be surprised if, though born again by the Holy Spirit, you yet find yourself pulled in two directions! On the one hand, we know and love what is good, we long to obey Christ, we want to live pure and holy lives. But on the other hand, we find old desires, dark thoughts, sinful cravings pulling us in another direction. If this is what you experience, don't be alarmed, don't be discouraged, don't doubt your experience - this battle is the normal Christian life!

When I was in my twenties I remember having a heart-to-heart chat with an elderly Christian man in my church, he was in his 60s. I asked him something like, "Does the battle get easier the older you get?" I was just curious. And I never forget what he said, he said, "No, in fact," he said, the older I get, the fiercer the battle!" The battle between the dregs of the old sinful nature, and the new nature is with us till we pass from this world until the next.

### The Way of Victory

The path of victory, is not to "Let go, do nothing, and let God do everything," that's not what the Bible teaches. The path to spiritual victory, is daily bearing in mind the following:

First, we must daily recognise that we can do nothing on our own (John 15:5). That's what we learnt last week, without being connected to Jesus Christ, without remaining in him, the Vine, without the power of his Spirit, we can do nothing, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). If we wake up in the morning, no matter how many years we have been on the road, and think, "I can live for Christ today in my own strength, I can think and speak and act right in my own strength" we will fall flat on our faces every single time! But if we wake up, acknowledging to God in prayer, our total weakness, our utter folly, our complete ignorance, well, that's the start of a triumphant day!

Second, we must daily crucify the old sinful nature. This is where Jim's friends wrongly advised him when they said he had to just "let go", stop trying, just let God do it all. To the contrary, the Christian must declare war on the sinful desires that he or she finds rising from his sinful nature. Look at verse 24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." When we were converted we put our old sinful natures on the cross, and as Paul puts it in Romans 8, we continue to do so, "by the Spirit" we "put to death the misdeeds of the body." We have and continue to declare war on that ugly list: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." Four different kinds of wickedness described:

Sexual sin, 3 items: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery—these cover the whole range of sexual sin. Then there is religious sin, 2 items: idolatry (the ease with which we substitute money or people or careers for God), and witchcraft—opening up to the demonic. Relationship sin, 8 items: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish

ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; the largest list is made up of sins against other people, or sins against the community. Sins of drink, 2 items : drunkenness, orgies. Paul ends like this, “and the like”, as if he’s just got going! There is more on this list, as men invent more ways to sin, so the list grows. A Christian says to himself, to herself, every day, “These are all evil things, I have already crucified them and day by day, with the Spirit’s help, I am going to declare war on them.”

Are we putting to death our sins? The moment a proud thought comes into our minds, we must kill it, the moment a hateful thought blows through our heads, we stamp on it, the moment an impure thought presents itself, we turn away, the moment a selfish thought, we snuff it out, the moment an action that might divide two people, we murder it? “The first great secret of holiness lies in the degree and decisiveness of our repentance,” writes John Stott. “If besetting sins persistently plague us, it is either because we have never truly repented, or because, having repented, we have not maintained our repentance. It is as if, having nailed our old nature to the cross, we keep wistfully retuning to the scene of its execution. “

The path to a realistic and joyful Christian life is to daily acknowledge our utter weakness, second, to engage in a daily battle, a daily repentance of sin, a daily turning away, and thirdly, we must daily live by and be led by the Spirit. The most noticeable feature of Galatians 5:16-26 is how often the Holy Spirit, the glorious and blessed Third Person of the Godhead is mentioned. Seven times! “So I say live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (16), “If you are led by the Spirit” (18), “The fruit of the Spirit” (22), “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (25)

False teachers had come into the churches of Galatia, trying to lead the new young believers off this true new Spirit-filled, Spirit-dependent path. Some were legalists, who said, “Obey this law, obey that law.” There are Christians who are legalists, the Christian life is for them a matter of obeying a whole list of dos and don'ts—legalists had come into the churches of Galatia. Paul responds, “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (5:1) Other were libertarians. Do what you want, live as you please. Jesus has forgiven all your sins, sin doesn’t matter any more, do it! Again Paul replies, “Do not use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature.” (5:13) Both legalism and libertarianism are steps off the true path. The true Christian path is to live according to the desires of the new nature, to be led by the Spirit. What does being led by the Spirit look like? It’s not difficult! It’s Hearing, reading and meditating on the words inspired by the Spirit, the Scriptures. It is having fellowship with the people of God who are called the Temple of the Spirit, the place where he lives. It is asking for the Spirit’s power and grace and enabling in everything we do. The Scriptures, Fellowship and Prayer.

I remember a pastor saying to a group of pastors (he wasn’t a young bloke), “I always seem to be encouraging my folk to read their Bibles, say their prayers, meet with Christians.... I sometimes sound like a stuck record to myself!” And I remember the rest of the pastors encouraging him, “Keep going brother”, “That’s the right thing to do.” Because through reading our Bibles meeting with God’s people and prayer, we are enabled to live by the Spirit and be led by the Spirit! Living by the Spirit, says John Stott, “will be seen in our whole way of life—in the leisure occupations we pursue, the books we read and the friendships we make. Above all, in what older authors called “a diligent use of the means of grace” that is a disciplined practice of prayer and Scripture meditation, in fellowship with believers who provoke us to love and good works, in keeping the Lord’s day as the Lord’s day, and in attending public worship and the Lord’s Supper. In all these ways we occupy ourselves in spiritual things. It is not enough to yield passively to the Spirit’s control; we must also walk actively in the Spirit’s way. Only then will the fruit of the Spirit appear.”

What about Love, the first fruit of the Holy Spirit? Let me say three words about love. First, a love for brothers and sisters is the first and primary sign of new life, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:14) Second, love is about actions more than feelings. The world has it exactly upside down. Marriages break down because the one doesn't “feel the love” for the other anymore. New Testament love is not primarily about emotions but about actions. How do we know? “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”(1 John 4:9-10) Love is gritty get your hands dirty, your brow sweating, and sometimes your heart breaking. Third, though love is automatic it is also commanded. John continues, “Dear friends, since God has loved us, we also ought to love one another.” We are not called to like each other, but we are commanded to love one another. It’s automatic AND we are commanded to love. May God teach us today.