

Text: Gal. 5:13-15, 19-21

Title: "Serving the flesh: the opposite of the love of the justified"

Time: 7/14/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The Apostle Paul has two concerns in the letter to the Galatians. First, after defining the true gospel and exposing false gospels (1:1-2:14), Paul wants these young believers to stand fast in the liberty of the true gospel, which means that they continue to believe that true justification is by faith and not by works.

To be justified means that our legal problem as those condemned by the law of God is completely obliterated by simple faith in Jesus Christ. Circumcision avails nothing for justification. No other religious work or rite can avail anything for our justification. Only faith in Christ avails anything (5:6).

But notice also in that key verse the second thing that Paul wants the young believers of these new Galatian churches to understand about this justifying faith in Christ. Faith in Christ that avails for justification is a faith that works by love. The liberty we read about here, which fully justified people possess by faith and not works, is a freedom to do works of love.

One good analogy I have found helpful in this regard is the relationship of a train to its train tracks. No train can climb up on its tracks by itself. It must be put on the tracks by someone else. And without those tracks, the train cannot help transport anyone. But once a train has someone put it on its tracks, the train is now free to be very useful for transporting people from place to place.

In the same way, we have been put on the tracks of justification by faith. We did not put ourselves into justification. Left to ourselves, we would be condemned and not justified. But Jesus Christ died for us and the Holy Spirit brought us under conviction, and we believed and were born again in Christ by His Spirit. God placed us on the tracks of justification by faith.

And now we are free to do what we could not do before. We can ride the tracks of justification in the power of love, and so become a help to people. The faith that avails for our justification is a faith that has a new liberty to work by love. The rest of the book of Galatians focuses on how to live a life of love on the tracks of justification so that others are served. True justification is for works of love.

But this means also that true justification is not for the flesh. Faith that is free to serve the flesh is the opposite of faith that is free to work by love, and this morning we will begin our study of this second part of the book by looking at what Paul says about the opposite of the love of justification – serving the flesh. We will notice three things from the passage about serving the flesh.

I. Serving the flesh is false freedom (v. 13).

Illustration: Imagine the train filled with passengers traveling safely down the tracks to their destination, which then suddenly begins to feel that these train tracks are a bit constraining. The train sees a grassy meadow to the right with a beautiful lake. He has never tried swimming before, and he wonders what that would be like on a hot summer day like this one. And so he begins to want to be free from his tracks.

Finally, he jumps off his tracks and tries to head for the cool lake. What happens? Well, the train crashes and burns. The freedom from the constraints of the tracks that was so appealing turned out to be a false freedom – a cause of bondage and destruction instead of freedom and blessing.

Application: Paul says that there is a kind of freedom available to brothers who are justified to which we are not called. This false freedom can be expressed this way – “I am saved by faith, I have eternal life, and so now I do not have to love anyone – I can indulge my fleshly desires instead.”

Well, there is a very serious problem with that. Very simply, the faith that talks that way is not the faith that saves – it is an imposter. The liberty that lives that way is not the liberty of salvation; it is false freedom. Paul is very clear that the faith that avails for our salvation is a faith that works by love.

If you have the kind of faith that wants to go to heaven without ever committing yourself to works of love, you may not have the right kind of faith to be saved. The faith that saves is a faith that repents of sinfulness, recognizes our unworthiness, understands the brutal sacrifice of Christ in our behalf, and measures well the magnitude of God’s love in providing this salvation for us. It truly believes these truths of the gospel, and truly believing them includes a sense of our need to love and serve Him in response to such love as this.

Another way to think about this reality of true justification is what Paul says about spiritual life in Romans 6. We are naturally spiritually dead, but when we believe and are justified, we also become alive spiritually. That spiritual

life has two characteristics: (1) it is eternal (Rom. 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord"), and (2) it is new (Rom. 6:4, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in *newness of life*"). *Eternal* and *newness* describe the same spiritual life. If you do not have newness of life, you do not have eternal life either.

Illustration: From Pastor Ashbrook's *Bird's Eye Tour of the Bible*: "Charles Blondin was once the greatest tightwire artist in the world. A plaque down river from Niagara Falls memorializes his feat of crossing the gorge with his manager on his back. One morning he was performing in London. His wire was stretched between two tall buildings. It had been announced that he would cook breakfast on the wire. At the appointed time he appeared with a small wheelbarrow. Wheeling it to the center of the wire he suspended it, lighted a kerosene stove, fried an egg and made coffee. When he had finished, he put his dishes in the wheelbarrow and proceeded to the other building.

"It seemed as if all the boys in London were assembled there to talk to him. Picking out their spokesman, Blondin asked if he had been afraid when the artist was out on the wire. The boy assured him that he had not been afraid. He never doubted the acrobat's ability. Blondin pushed the conversation further by asking if the boy believed he could put a man in his wheelbarrow and take him to the other side. The boy replied that he believed that and would not be afraid to see it done. Then, Blondin called the small talker by saying, 'Get in my wheelbarrow and I will take you over.' At that point the confident boy disappeared as if he evaporated."

It is one thing to believe to the point of an unwillingness to get into the wheelbarrow, and quite another to believe to the point of getting in. Many professing Christians believe up to a point, but it is not the point at which they get into the wheelbarrow. It is not to the point at which they possess a trust in Christ that begins to work by love.

What kind of faith is your faith in Christ this morning? Has it changed your life and given you a desire to work by love? If not, it may be something false that cannot save.

II. Serving the flesh is selfish (vv. 13b-15).

Illustration: What makes a train that functions well on its tracks a wonderful invention? It is a transportation technology that is useful to the service of others. A train on the tracks or an automobile on the road does not make much sense if there are no drivers and passengers.

Application: In the same way, trying to fulfill the law while failing to help and serve others does not make much sense either, and verse 14 tells us why. Verse 13 says that we are to serve one another. The verb *serve* comes from the Greek noun for *slave*.

We serve one another in our local church by becoming faithful members, exercising our gifts in such a way that they are a blessing to each other, committing ourselves to the teaching and learning necessary to making useful disciples of Christ, and avoiding what verse 15 mentions – biting and devouring one another.

Evidently, the circumcision controversy had fostered a serve-the-flesh problem in these Galatian churches. The word *consumed* in this passage is used one other time in the NT. It is on the lips of the sons of thunder, James and John,

after a Samaritan city refused to host Jesus and the disciples. These men volunteered to call fire down from heaven to consume the city (Luke 9:54).

If we have the faith that works by love, we will not neglect one another, much less bite and devour one another. Selfishness makes a local church ministry impossible, and serving the flesh is selfish.

III. Serving the flesh is pollution (vv. 19-21).

Illustration: In August of 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency's federal cleanup crew mistakenly allowed pollution to flow into the Animas River. The spill at the Gold King Mine in southwestern Colorado released 3 million gallons of wastewater tainted with iron, aluminum, manganese, lead, copper and other metals into formerly pristine waters. Rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah were polluted, with stretches of waterway turning an eerie orange-yellow. Life along the river was ruined by the pollution.

Application: In our study of Revelation, we read about the river of God. Psalm 46:4 mentions it too, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." God is more careful than the EPA. There is not going to be any pollution in His river, or His city, or His kingdom (v. 10b).

Paul takes the time to list these works of the flesh that pollute the lives of sinners:

1. Adultery - breaking your marriage vow.
2. Fornication - having sex outside of marriage.
3. Uncleaness - the inner corruption of the heart that includes impure thoughts driven by impure influences.

4. Laciviousness – sensuality – living life to satisfy the fleshly appetites – always needing to have a good time
5. Idolatry – worship of things not God – how we spend the Lord’s Day
6. Witchcraft – includes the use and abuse of drugs
7. Hatred – James says that friendship with the world is hatred against God (Jam. 4:4).
8. Variance – strife – a competitive spirit that has to prove itself better than others – the opposite of Phil. 2:3
9. Emulations – jealousy – a zeal for self-interest
10. Wrath – plural – episodes of losing your temper
11. Strife – dissensions – this is the opposite of Phil. 2:2 – allowing our differences to become more important than our commonalities.
12. Heresies – divided factions and cliques
13. Envyings – complaining comparisons
14. Murders – euthanasia and abortion must be included here
15. Drunkenness – drinking intoxicating beverages; recreational use of narcotics
16. Revelings – the kind of party you can only have with alcohol
17. And such like – This list could go on and on, the pollutions of our sinful flesh are limited only by our corrupted imagination!

In every case, the flesh does this work because it wants to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. But these pleasures ultimately pollute a life with pollution that God will not allow into the kingdom of God. There is no love in these works of the flesh. If this list or one similar to it characterizes our life, the Bible says we have no part in the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Why? Because saving faith works by love. Saving faith precludes living this way. Certainly, saving faith grows in Christlike love over time, but where

there is living faith there is this growth process happening. Is it happening for you?

Conclusion: Serving the flesh is false, selfish, and polluting. Have you been saved out of this flesh-serving by the faith that works in love? If not, you can be. God's promise of salvation is very simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching