

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 08

What is the difference between the church of Christ/Christian and Denominational Churches?

John 17:20-21

Feb 26, 2017

Communion: Wayne Webb

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Saturday 2/25 Clean Up: Ed Saunders

John 17:20-21 (NASB)

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **21** that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

- 1 🎵 How Majestic [DH 2238]
- 2 🎵 139 - Great is Thy Faithfulness [ALL] 139
- 3 🎵 399 - We are God's People [ALL] 399
- 4 🎵 Doxology [DH 1981]
- 5 🎵 405 - I love thy kingdom Lord [ALL] 405
- 6 🎵 410 - Standing on the Promises [ALL] 410
- 7 🎵 Family of God [DH 2357]

You folk are asking some deep questions.

This week's question is just as difficult to answer as last weeks.

But, I'll give it a go.

This question is so rich, that I should devote a series to our Restoration Heritage.

Indeed, it used to be in our Bible Colleges and Seminaries, that at least a semester course on Restoration Heritage history was given. As I recall, I had two classes: one by Dr. Bill Blake, and one by Dr. John Wade.

In our Restoration Heritage, we are looking at how in the 18th century, folk became disgruntled with the exclusiveness of the denominational churches.

When we use English words to translate a word from Scripture, we sometimes miss the meaning of the original Greek. And that may be true of the word "church."

You've often heard me say that we are a New Testament Church. But, what does that mean?

Jesus said in

Matthew 16:18-19 (NASB)

18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

When you look carefully at this Scripture, you will notice that Jesus used two terms to designate the organization He is creating. He uses the word "**church**," and the word "**kingdom**."

The Jewish world would especially appreciate the word "**kingdom**," while the Roman world would appreciate the word "**church**."

The Greek word for "church" is **ekklesia**.

If I said "The Church is The Called Out," and I said "the Church is the **ekklesia**," I would be saying the same thing.

The Greek word means, "called out."

We as the church are the "called out ones."

Imagine we were over at the fairgrounds, and it is filled with thousands of people.

Over the sound system the announcer says, "Everyone who was born in Guadalupe please come to the center of the arena."

In this context, the folk from Guadalupe who come to center the arena would be the **EKKLESIA**.

It's usage was that of a town crier going through the city calling for a gathering of a particular group.

The people who belonged to that group would stop whatever they were doing and come out of their businesses, or homes, or restaurants, or bars, where ever they were and go to a gathering.

That is who the church is.

The problem is sometimes we don't look much different from the world.

It's hard to tell us apart.

And, yet we believe that we have been called out

1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

We believe that Orcutt Christian Church is a part of a movement to call people out of the world, out of the denominations, and into the one body of Christ.

Our rich Restoration Heritage is completely devoted to the unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We desire that people return to the Words of the New Testament, and return to the church of the apostolic times.

How, then, do we folk at Orcutt Christian differ from all the other evangelical churches in Santa Maria?

I do pray that this answers your question: “***What is the difference between the church of Christ/Christian and Denominational Churches?***”

I. What Do We Hold In Common With Evangelical Denominations

In the tract you received this morning, Dr. LeRoy Lawson said:
“We answer paradoxically. The distinctive about this Christian church is that it has no distinctives. In fact we deliberately seek not to be different, because our goal is unity, not division. Christianity has suffered long enough from deep divisions.”

And, while Roy is certainly right about our goal is unity, not division, there are both things we have in common with the denominational churches, and things that are differing.

It is our goal to achieve unity on the restoration of primitive Christianity.

And, to be objective, we have to say that there are a number of points in which both we and the evangelical denominations agree.

We agree on at least 13 items:

- 1.** The divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
- 2.** In the tri-personality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 3.** The Bible alone is a revelation of the divine character and will, and of the gospel of grace by which we are saved; and as a rule of faith and practice.

4. The divine excellency and worthiness of Jesus as the Son of God; his perfect humanity as the Son of Man; and his official authority and glory as the Christ--the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King, who is to instruct us in the way of life, redeem us from sin and death, and reign in and over us as the rightful Sovereign of our being and Disposer of our destiny.

We accept totally the inspired revelation presented to us in the New Testament, which includes:

- (a)** The incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the eternal Word of God
- (b)** The life and teachings of the divinely anointed Lord and Savior. He touches all questions of salvation, duty and destiny.
- (c)** The death of Jesus as a sin-offering, bringing us redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.
- (d)** His resurrection from the dead, abolishing death and bringing life and immortality clearly to light.
- (e)** His ascension to heaven and glorification in the heavens, where he lives as the Mediator between God and Man--our great High Priest to intercede for his people; and our King, to rule until his foes are all subdued and all the sublime purposes of his mediatorial reign are accomplished.
- (f)** His supreme authority as Lord of all.

5. The personal and perpetual mission of the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world of sin, and teaches righteousness and judgment, and to dwell in believers as their Comforter, Strengthener and Sanctifier.

6. The alienation of mankind from God, and their entire dependence on the truth, mercy and grace of God, as manifested in Jesus, the Christ, and revealed and confirmed to us by the Holy Spirit in the gospel, for regeneration, sanctification, adoption and life eternal.

7. The necessity of faith and repentance for salvation, and of a life of obedience in order to the attainment of everlasting life.

8. The perpetuity of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as divine ordinances, through all ages to the end of time.

9. The obligation to observe the first day of the week as the Lord's day, in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by acts of worship such as the New Testament teaches.

10. The church of Christ, a divine institution, composed of those who by faith and baptism, have openly confessed the name of Christ; with its appointed rulers, ministers and services, for the edification of Christians and the conversion of the world.

11. The necessity of righteousness, benevolence and holiness on the part of professed Christians, alike in view of their own final salvation, and of their mission to turn the world to God.

12. The fullness and freeness of the salvation offered in the gospel to all who accept it on the terms proposed.

13. The final punishment of the ungodly by an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

At a time when there is so much need for the united sympathy and labors of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, it is important to avoid all false issues and urge no differences that are not real and serious.

These thirteen items certainly present a broad basis of agreement in conceptions of divine truth which may rightfully be termed universal.

II. What Differences Do We Have With The Evangelical Denominations

This is where I disagree with Roy Lawson, who says:

“The distinctive about this Christian church is that it has no distinctives. In fact we deliberately seek not to be different,”

There are some particulars in which we differ from some of the Evangelicals.

1. While agreeing as to the divine INSPIRATION of the Old and New Testaments, we differ on the question of their equal binding AUTHORITY on Christians.

With us, the Old Testament was of authority with JEWS, the New Testament is NOW of authority with CHRISTIANS.

We accept the Old Testament as true and as essential to a proper understanding of the New, and as containing many invaluable lessons in righteousness and holiness which are of equal preciousness under all dispensations, but as a BOOK OF AUTHORITY to teach US what WE are to do, the New Testament alone, as embodying the teachings of Christ and his apostles, is our standard.

2. While accepting fully and unequivocally the Scripture statements concerning what is usually called the trinity of persons in the Godhead, we repudiate alike the philosophical and theological speculations and insist only on the "form of sound words," given to us in the Scriptures concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. While agreeing that the Bible furnishes an all-sufficient revelation of the Divine will, and a perfect rule of faith and practice, we disagree with the denominational creeds.

We have but one creed, and that is "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

What he has revealed and enjoined, either personally or by His apostles, we acknowledge as binding; where He has not bound us, we are free; and we insist on standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, carefully guarding against all perversions of said liberty into means or occasions of sectarian strife.

4. With us, the Divinity and Christhood of Jesus is more than a mere item of doctrine -- it is the central truth of the Christian system, and in an important sense the Creed of Christianity.

It is the one fundamental truth which we are jealously careful to guard against all compromise.

To persuade men to trust and love and obey a Divine Savior, is the one great end for which we labor in preaching the gospel; assured

that if men are right about Christ, Christ will bring them right about everything else.

We therefore preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.

We demand no other faith for one to be baptized and become members of His Church.

All who trust in the Son of God and obey Him, are our brethren, however wrong they may be about anything else; and those who do not trust in this Divine Savior for salvation and obey his commandments, are not our brethren, however intelligent and excellent they may be in all beside.

In **inferential judgments** we reach conclusions as nearly unanimous as we can; and where we fail, we exercise forbearance, in the confidence that God will lead us into final agreement.

In **matters of expediency**, where we are left free to follow our own best judgment, we allow the majority to rule.

In **matters of opinion** which the Bible is either silent or so obscure in its revelations as not to admit of definite conclusions we allow the largest liberty, so long as none judges his brother, or insists on forcing his own opinion on others, or on making them an occasion of strife.

5. We recognize the agency of the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion. However we reject all theories of the Divine and human natures which logically rule out the word of God as the instrument of regeneration and conversion, or which make the sinner passive and helpless. We reject the ideas that one has to have supernatural tokens or special revelations in order to be accepted into God's Kingdom. Rather, we insist that people shall hear, believe, repent, and obey the gospel--assured that if we are faithful to God's requirements on the human side of things, He will ever be true to himself and to us in accomplishing what is needful on the DIVINE side.

Our business is to preach the gospel, and plead with sinners to be reconciled to God; asking God, while we plant and water, to give the increase.

6. While agreeing with all the evangelical in the necessity of faith and repentance, we differ in saying that faith, repentance, and confession of the Messiah are all the Bible requires for baptism and church membership.

We present to them no Articles of Faith other than the one article concerning the Divinity and Christhood of Jesus;
we demand no narration of a religious experience other than is expressed in a voluntary confession of faith in Jesus;
we demand no probation to determine their fitness to come into the church; but instantly, on their voluntary confession of the Christ, and avowed desire to leave their sins and serve the Lord Christ, unless there are good reasons to doubt their sincerity, they are accepted and baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and INTO the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They are thus wedded to CHRIST, and not to a set of doctrines or to a particular denomination.

7. We not only acknowledge the perpetuity of baptism, but insist on its meaning, according to the Divine testimonies:

"He that believes and is baptized SHALL BE SAVED."

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

We therefore teach the believing penitent to seek, through baptism, the divine assurance of the forgiveness of sins, and that gift of the Holy Spirit which the Lord has promised to them that obey him.

8. The Lord Supper, holds a different place with us from that which is usually held by the denominations. We invest it not with the awfulness of a sacrament, but regard it as a sweet and precious feast of holy memories, designed to quicken our love of Christ and cement the ties of our common brotherhood.

We therefore observe it as part of our regular worship, every Lord's day, and hold it a solemn, but joyful and refreshing feast of love, in which all the disciples of our Lord should feel it to be a great privilege to unite.

9. The LORD'S day, not the Jewish Sabbath, is a New Testament observance, which is not governed by statute, but by apostolic example and the devotion of loyal and loving hearts.

10. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, not sects, is a Divine institution. We do not recognize sects, with sectarian names and symbols and terms of fellowship, as BRANCHES of the Church of Christ, but as unscriptural and anti-scriptural, and therefore to be abandoned for the one Church of God which the New Testament reveals. We fully believe that God has a people among these sects, and we call on them to come out from all party organizations, to renounce all party names and party tests, and seek only for CHRISTIAN union and fellowship according to apostolic teaching.

Moreover, we believe that the time has now fully come to insist on the abandonment of sects and denominations and a return to the unity of spirit and union and cooperation that marked the churches of the New Testament.

It will thus be seen that our differential character is found not in the advocacy of new doctrines or practices, but in rejecting that which has been added to the original simple faith and practice of the Church of God.

Could all return to this, it would not only end many unhappy strifes and unite forces now scattered and wasted, but would revive the spirituality and enthusiasm of the early church.

We are not asking any to cast away their confidence in Christ, or to part with any scriptural truth, but to cast away that which is concocted by human injury, and cling to the New Testament.

Is it not reasonable?

Is it not absolutely necessary, to enable the people of God to do the work of God?

III. Where We Agree With Some, But Not All

Points in which we Agree with Some, but not with All.

1. In regard to immersion, we agree with all immersionists. The meaning of the Greek term; its literal and metaphorical uses in the New Testament; the incidental allusions to the primitive practice;

the testimonies of the ecclesiastical history as to the primitive practice; the testimonies of the leading reformers, such as Luther, Calvin and Wesley, and the admission of a host of lexicographers and scholars to admit the truth as to the meaning of the word and the primitive practice; these have led us to the definite and fixed conclusion that immersion is that which Christ ordained.

2. We hold that baptism is only for those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ, have confessed him before the brethren, have turned away from sin, and that makes us opposed to infant baptism.

3. Most denominational adherents say that baptism is for those who have been forgiven. But the language used in the Scriptures declaring what baptism is for, is so plain and unequivocal, that the great majority of Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics, admit it in their creeds to be, in some sense, for the remission of sins.

Both the Roman Catholics and many denominational groups insist that in baptism regeneration by the Holy Spirit is actually conferred. We disagree with this theory. With us, regeneration is accomplished before baptism because the person has had a change in heart, and in faith and penitence must have yielded up his heart to Christ--otherwise baptism is nothing but an empty form.

We say that FORGIVENESS is distinct from REGENERATION.

Forgiveness is an act of the Sovereign--not a change of the sinner's heart; and while it is extended in view of the sinner's faith and repentance, it needs to be offered in a sensible and tangible form, so that the sinner can seize it and appropriate it with unmistakable definiteness. In baptism he APPROPRIATES GOD'S PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS, relying on the divine testimonies:

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

We therefore teach all who are baptized that if they bring to their baptism a heart that renounces sin and implicitly trusts the power of Christ to save, they should rely on the Savior's own promise--"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

4. In regard to the beginning of the Church of Christ, there is general agreement among leading theologians and ecclesiastical historians to date it from the day of Pentecost succeeding the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. With us, it is held that the first church of Christ was planted at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost referred to, of which we have account in Acts 2; that the Jewish institution, with the authority of Moses as lawgiver, passed away when Jesus bowed his head on the cross and said, "It is finished"; that the lawgiver, the covenant, the laws, the subjects, the promises of the new institution, are different from those of the old; and that from that time onward the terms of salvation, the rules of life, the laws of association, the spirit and genius of religion, are to be learned from Christ and his apostles. The Bible, therefore, takes on very simple and easy divisions. The Old Testament is introductory to the New. The four gospels present the knowledge of Jesus, and the evidences on which our faith in this Divine Redeemer should rest. The Acts of the Apostles show how the gospel of salvation was preached and accepted, how sinners were made Christians, and were associated in churches as a spiritual brotherhood. The epistles were addressed to CHRISTIANS, furnishing a knowledge of Christian duties, rights, privileges, dangers, trials, and hopes, and preparing them unto all good works. The Apocalypse is supposed to deal with the fortunes and final destiny of the Church of Christ.

5. In point of church government we agree in the main with Congregationalists and Baptists; but not altogether. The distinction of CLERGY and LAITY is not known among us. All Christians are royal priests to God. Preachers, teachers and rulers are not a caste in any sense. For the sake of order and efficiency we have elders or bishops, deacons, and evangelists; yet in the absence of these our members are taught to meet, to keep the ordinances and encourage each other to love and to good works, and may baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, or do whatever needs to be done to promote their own growth and the salvation of sinners.

We are a free church, and not under some ecclesiastical denominational control.

6. When this movement began, the plea for the union of Christians was peculiar to it. The growth of that sentiment, however, has been so extensive of late years, that it can no longer be said to be peculiar. One important feature of it remains with us as peculiar still. While there is a general confession of the evils of sectarianism, and a general desire to see a union of Christians brought about, no definite basis or plan of union has been presented that all can agree to. We have, however, from the first, presented and practiced a definite plan of union.

There is now a very general acknowledgement of the evils and mischiefs, if not of the actual sin, of disunity. Still it must be confessed that the union movement is in a nebulous state. The subject is handled by most writers in a gingerly way. There is painful evidence that the best minds are cramped by their ecclesiastical associations, and are groping after some scheme of union or of sect-affiliation, that will avoid the sacrifice of their prized denomination.

The highest aim they propose is a CONFEDERATION of sects for general purposes, in which all agree, leaving all local and rival interests and opposing doctrines to adjust themselves as best they can. These efforts fail to reach the roots of the disease, and they timidly propose no more than a temporary expedient.

We insist that unity and union are practicable, because in the apostolic church established by our Lord, the church embraced in one faith group people from all genders, all races all classes, all nationalities.

We call all people to return to the words of the apostle Paul:
Ephesians 4:1-6 (NASB)

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is one body*

and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

We propose that all put their trust in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and for His sake leave their sins and renounce all other lordships

We propose that all accept and profess the one creed that all can agree on that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. All doctrinal tests but this must be abandoned.

We propose that all believers are admitted into this fellowship by immersion, upon the authority of Jesus Christ, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We propose there be no distinction of clergy and laity; but all were brethren, and none was to be called Master or Father. The order of the church must harmonize with this. Nothing must be insisted on as of Divine authority, or be made a test of fellowship, for which there is not a THUS SAITH THE LORD, in express precept or approved precedent.

In all matters where there is no express precept or precedent, the law of love should lead us to that which will promote edification and peace.

In inferential matters, unanimity is to be sought, but not forced.

In matters merely prudential, the majority should rule, care being had, however, not to transcend the limits of expediency by contravening any Divine precept; and regard always being had to the prejudices and the welfare of all.

Where Christ has left us free, no man has a right to judge his brother. The largest liberty is here allowed, limited only by the spirit of the apostolic teaching:

Philippians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

We say that it can not be Christian union unless it is union in Christ, and we are all committed to following His commands. We do not, therefore, propose the union of denominations; but call on all the people of God in the various sects to come out from them and unite in the faith and practice of the New Testament.

We are the called out.

Baptist from New England felt the call and united on these principles.

Methodists from the Carolinas heard the call and became Christians only.

Presbyterians from Virginia and Kentucky gave up their denominational names and became one in Christ.

That is our Restoration Heritage.

Does this simple rational proposition work?

It seems to work here at Orcutt Christian Church.

If here, why not everywhere?

Prayer and Invitation

February 26 Lesson 13 Christ Creates Holy Living

Devotional Reading: [Romans 6:1-11](#)

Background Scripture: [Galatians 5:18-6:10](#)

GALATIANS 5:18-26

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

GALATIANS 6:1-10

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load. 6 Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us

do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

KEY VERSES

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.—

Galatians 5:22, 23

Introduction

A. The Portrait of God's Person

If you happen to see a finely executed oil painting, not just a reproduction but the handiwork of an artist with a brush, look at it closely. From a distance, we see a singular image. But up close, we can see the many-layered colors that create the vivid image. The unity of a fine painting is the result of thousands of details.

So it is with lives transformed by the saving work of God. Such lives make a singular impression on us. They reflect how God saves undeserving sinners through faith in his Son. But that singular impression is the result of many fine details. God's grace reshapes every aspect of a saved sinner's life.

Our text provides an experience like close examination of a fine oil painting. In it Paul paints a word portrait of God's person. Closely examined, its details reveal a singular image of divine transformation.

B. Lesson Background

This is the final lesson of this unit's consideration of Paul's letter to the Galatians. At the risk of oversimplifying, *freedom* could be a one-word summary of Paul's emphasis up to the beginning of today's lesson. For former pagans, this meant freedom from slavery to falsehood. For those who came to faith in Christ from Judaism, it meant freedom from repeated failures to keep God's law.

But freedom can be a dangerous thing. Can we trust ourselves to do what is right if we are free from law or threat? That's the fundamental question Paul addressed as today's lesson picks up where the text of last week's concluded.

I. Charter of Life in the Spirit

([Galatians 5:18](#))

18. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The Law of Moses marked Israel as God's people. But in Christ, we are marked as God's people in that we are *led by the Spirit*. The Spirit's power transforms us to reflect God's own character, displaying in our lives the grace by which God brought us into his family.

This has important implications. Not being *under the law* sounds to some like a license to do as one pleases, as if "anything goes." But in this law-free life, God's Spirit leads people to become like God, not to become more entangled in their own selfishness. In fact, it is by being led by God's Spirit that we actually fulfill the teaching found in God's law.

NOT THE LETTER, BUT ...

In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio makes a deal with moneylender Shylock. If Antonio does not repay the debt, he will have to pay a literal "pound of flesh." When Antonio cannot repay, Shylock is ready to exact the punishment. But Portia, a wealthy heiress, appeals to Shylock to show mercy when she says, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd. ... It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Shylock is not moved by this appeal. So Portia quibbles with him about the precise wording of the agreement. Exacting a pound of flesh will cost Antonio blood as well as flesh. Since Shylock's threat did not mention blood, the "letter of the law" means he cannot get his pound of flesh.

Paul's appeal to be led by the Spirit rather than the law has the force of directing us to what God intends to happen as we follow him. Paul's opponents were interested first and foremost in a strict

obedience to the Law of Moses. Paul challenged them to see, here and elsewhere, that “those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” ([Romans 8:14](#)).—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to help new Christians make the transition from life “under the law” to living the Spirit-led life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In speech patterns

In behavioral habits

In relationships

In attitude

Other

II. Details of the Self-Ruled Life

([Galatians 5:19-21](#))

A. Sexual Sin ([v. 19](#))

19. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

For purposes of contrast, Paul reminds readers what life in *the flesh*, the self-ruled life, is like. His list of vices falls into four groupings across three verses. The verse before us has the first group: terms for sexual sin.

Sexual immorality is any sexual activity other than that between one woman and one man who are married to each other. *Impurity* suggests both sexual acts outside the marriage context and the effect that such acts have on those engaged in them. Sexual sin affects deeply. It involves physical dangers, but even more it endangers heart and mind.

Debauchery shows the extent to which sexual sin takes a person. This term refers to behavior that is shocking to public decency. Even cultures far from godly standards uphold some standards of sexual propriety ([1 Corinthians 5:1](#)), but a life of selfishness will find a way to shock any society.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to demonstrate that a life faithful to God’s design for sex is superior to any other?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In marriage

In singleness

In conversation

Other

B. Occult Practices and Selfishness ([v. 20](#))

20. idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

The two words at the beginning of this verse comprise the second group in Paul's list. *Idolatry* involves making gods in images chosen by humans ([Isaiah 2:8](#); etc.). *Witchcraft* is the attempt to use substances to manipulate the spirit world (compare [2 Chronicles 33:6](#)).

The seven that follow the first two constitute Paul's third group. *Hatred* is the opposite of God's gracious love and the sure result of a selfish perspective. *Discord* translates a term meaning disharmony among people. *Jealousy* is a strong passion that resents others' success. *Fits of rage* are strong expressions of anger and conflict. *Selfish ambition* is the forming of mutually hostile groups to advance one's own interests. *Dissensions* take that party spirit to higher conflict. *Factions* suggest not just false belief but persistent, destructive division.

C. Self-Destruction ([v. 21](#))

21. and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The semicolon after the word *envy* indicates that it goes with the previous grouping of selfishness. It refers to the desire to deprive others of what they have.

Paul concludes with two terms that represent public displays of the self-destructiveness produced by sinful selfishness. *Drunkenness* (intoxication from alcohol) suggests individual self-destruction. Drunkenness is part of the wild-party atmosphere of *orgies*, which includes unrestrained immorality (contrast [Romans 13:13](#); [1 Peter 4:3](#)). Since those who persist on this path live outside God's

kingdom in the present, they can hardly claim to belong to it in the future.

III. Details of the Spirit-Led Life

([Galatians 5:22-24](#))

A. Foundational Characteristics ([v. 22a](#))

22a. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
The list of acts of the flesh serves as a contrast to Paul's point: what the life controlled by the Holy Spirit produces. All the Spirit's work reflects God's character and actions. A hundred terms would not capture everything, but the short list that begins here provides a sketch that is more than adequate.

As with the previous list, this one groups similar characteristics. It begins with three foundational aspects of the Christ-follower's character: *love, joy, and peace*.

The kind of love Paul has in mind is not conditioned on how deserving of love the object is. Rather, the kind of love in view flows from grace that blesses the undeserving. It is the kind of love God demonstrates toward us ([John 3:16](#)). When God's Spirit creates the same kind of love in the heart of the Christian, we are impelled to love those who do not deserve it and can give nothing in return.

Joy is the outlook of celebration that flows from knowing what God has done. God's Spirit reminds us that God has triumphed through the work of Christ. This gives us reason to rejoice regardless of circumstances ([Philippians 4:4](#)).

Peace reminds us of Old Testament statements about the peace that God grants his people ([Numbers 6:26](#); [Psalm 29:11](#); [Isaiah 9:6, 7](#); [55:12](#); etc.). More than the end of hostility, such peace means positive goodwill and fellowship ([Luke 2:14](#)). As God has made whole our relationship with him, his Spirit empowers us to make relationships whole with others.

B. Relational Characteristics ([v. 22b](#))

22b. forbearance, kindness, goodness,

The second grouping consists of characteristics that undergird relationships. *Forbearance* is patience regarding the failings of others. As God is patient with us, his Spirit empowers our patience toward others (compare [Romans 2:4](#); [3:25](#)).

Kindness names the attitude that seeks to do positive good to others in all circumstances. Again, because God treats his people in this way, his Spirit enables them to treat others likewise ([Colossians 3:12](#)).

Goodness further develops the idea of kindness, putting the attitude into action. Those empowered by the Spirit do not simply want the good; they actually do good things for others ([Ephesians 5:9](#)).

C. Devotional Characteristics ([vv. 22c, 23](#))

22c, 23. faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

The list concludes with three general characteristics that undergird all the believer's actions. *Faithfulness* in this context communicates a willingness to practice without fail what one believes. As God has been devoted and persistent to fulfill the promises he has made, so also his Spirit empowers us to be persistently devoted. We conduct ourselves just as faithfully as God has. We are dependably loyal to our Lord and to our fellow believers. We even dependably love our enemies.

A second general feature undergirding Spirit-filled action is *gentleness*. The gentle do not seek to assert rights or privileges. As Christ emptied himself of privilege in becoming human, so do those empowered by his Spirit (compare [Ephesians 4:2](#)).

Self-control is the ability to keep one's desires in check. This was a characteristic widely admired in Paul's time, but not widely practiced any more then than it is now. Coming at the end of Paul's list, this term reminds us that with the Spirit's many positive impulses, our desires no longer become the basis for selfish, destructive thoughts and actions (compare [2 Peter 1:5-7](#)).

Those who exhibit the characteristics listed can be trusted to fulfill God's purpose, as expressed in his Word, in any situation. The Spirit-led require no threats of punishment. We serve God with a

joyous freedom that wants nothing more than for his salvation to transform our lives.

What Do You Think?

How far along are you in each area of fruit production? How will you speed the process?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Areas in the germination phase: just sprouting

Areas maturing: taking in nutrients

Areas in the pollination phase: your fruit is an example to others

D. Victory in Life's Struggle ([v. 24](#))

24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The fruit of the Spirit grows as the works of *the flesh* recede. That process has its decisive start at the beginning of the Christian life. Uniting with Christ in his death by faith at the time of baptism ([Colossians 2:12](#)), believers put to death the old, selfish life. What that life found attractive becomes repugnant in the new life. This does not imply instantaneous, complete victory over the old life. The struggle continues ([Galatians 5:17](#)), but Christ's victory at the cross assures our victory.

([Matthew 7:20](#)).

IV. Practicing the Spirit-Led Life

([Galatians 5:25-6:10](#))

A. In Community ([5:25-6:6](#))

25. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The Christian follows the Spirit's empowerment and lives by the reality of the cross. To *keep in step with the Spirit* is to put into routine practice the fruit of the Spirit. It means really living what we confess to be true about God's saving grace.

26. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

To keep in step with the Spirit means seeking God's glory, not our own. We encourage and support one another in this. Since Christ died for our brothers and sisters, his Spirit does not permit us to act in rivalry with them.

6:1. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

A person genuinely empowered *by the Spirit* cannot have a superior attitude toward one who sins. The empowered person can act only in gentleness, a fruit of the Spirit, not asserting one's own prestige. Spirit-led gentleness seeks what Christ sought: the restoration of the fallen, with constant awareness of one's own need for God's grace.

FORGIVENESS TO RESTORATION

Mary's 20-year-old son, Laramiun, was shot and killed in a fight at a party in 1993. The 16-year-old who pulled the trigger, Oshea Israel, was tried and convicted as an adult.

At the time, Mary called Oshea "an animal" that "deserved to be caged." But as a Christian, Mary finally decided that she had to forgive Oshea. She visited him in prison, and when he was released after 17 years, she asked her landlord to invite Oshea to live next door to her. She says, "Unforgiveness is like cancer; it will eat you from the inside out." In the attempt to restore Oshea, one result was that Mary herself was restored!

We may never be called on to exercise the kind of forgiveness-to-restoration Mary demonstrated. But don't we like to think we could?—C. R. B.

2. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

By helping to restore one another, we are fellow laborers who share one another's loads. Sometimes the only burden to be lifted is as simple as one of quenching thirst ([Matthew 10:42](#)). Restoring the fallen is, well, more burdensome. But Christ empowers us to do so. As we do, we join with Christ in fulfilling the purpose of the cross: forgiveness of sin.

What Do You Think?

What would a “mutual burden-bearing ministry” look like in a church? How will you help get one started?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of establishing connections

In terms of developing empathy

In terms of cultivating openness

Other

3. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

The opposite of the Spirit-led life that helps the fallen is the flesh-led life that builds up self. Pursuing personal glory denies the most essential truth of our salvation: the grace of God. In that denial we deceive no one but ourselves.

4. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,

Life in the Spirit produces not self-promotion but self-testing.

The cross-oriented person asks, “Does my life reflect the grace of God?” That is not a question of comparing ourselves with others. Compared with others, we realize that we are all sinners in need of grace. Seeing the work of grace in our lives, we rejoice in the Lord who is at work within us.

5. for each one should carry their own load.

Paul speaks paradoxically. We bear one another’s burdens, he says, when we seek to restore those fallen in sin ([v. 2](#)). But others’ failures or successes form no basis for one’s perspective on one’s own life. That question belongs only to the individual. By the Spirit’s empowerment we both help one another and accept full responsibility for self.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to help people bear their own burdens?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning financial issues

Concerning relationship issues

Concerning personalities that are chronically “needy”

Other

6. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

In standing fully responsible before God, we do not think of ourselves as self-made people. We rely on Christ, and we rely on those who have taught us the gospel. To communicate with such a person is to share tangibly from God’s good gifts with those who have shared God’s greatest gift with us.

B. With Persistence ([vv. 7-10](#))

7. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

The Galatian Christians have already discovered how easy it is to forsake the gospel for old-life distortion when they added circumcision to faith in Jesus ([Galatians 1:6-9](#)). The same could happen again, should they again follow something rooted in the old life rather than in the grace God shows in Christ. God does not allow those who sow abandonment of grace to harvest grace. He will not allow his grace to be treated with hypocritical contempt.

8. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Following the old life yields a death-like result: *destruction* is the decay of death. But the life led by *the Spirit* means the opposite: *eternal life*. Christians are to persist in the good news of Christ as heard in its pure truth. Doing so will enable us to put into practice (sow *to please the Spirit*) the grace of God that makes us his people forever.

9. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

The grace-based, Spirit-empowered life is a life of constant challenge. As Christ endured the cross to bring God’s grace, his people endure hardships as they live by God’s grace, looking forward to the victory of God yet to come.

What Do You Think?

How do you defeat weariness personally? How can you help others do so as well?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In understanding the relationship between physical and spiritual weariness

In terms of overcoming “compassion fatigue”

Considering the role of the Holy Spirit

Other

10. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The grace-based life expresses God’s grace by doing all kinds of good to all kinds of people. Our deepest kinship is with those who have received God’s grace, our fellow Christians. To them we have first duty to express God’s grace with our generous actions.

But we need never ask whether the call of grace stops at the doors of the church. Since Christ died for all and calls all to belong to him, then his people do good for all as well.

Conclusion

A. Grace and Power

Today’s text sets forth key ideas. One is that God has a purpose for our existence. We are to be like him in his goodness, grace, and love. We find true satisfaction only when we fulfill that purpose.

A second key idea is that we fail to fulfill God’s purpose when we pursue something that supplants God’s grace. We too often prefer a life centered on selfishness instead of God’s gracious love. Paul uses a single word to stand for this dark, universal tendency: *flesh*. By that he does not mean that our physical bodies or their desires are evil in and of themselves. Rather, he means that as a person lives by selfishness instead of God’s grace, that person lives as if God were not in the picture. That person lives as if *flesh* is all that matters.

But there is an antidote to the life of the flesh: God’s Holy Spirit.

He empowers a person to overcome the old life that ignores God, adopting attitudes and behaviors that reflect what God has done. The Spirit's power is sure, but it requires our cooperation so that we fulfill God's purpose and reflect his grace.

Today's text gives us a huge task. But it gives us just as big a reason: the grace of God that grants eternal life by faith in Christ. And it gives us just as great a power: God's Holy Spirit, who enables us to overcome the old life to reflect God's grace.

B. Prayer

O God, may we always express your grace in who we are and what we do! We pray this in the name of the one who died for us. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Life in Christ is more than a change of behavior. It is a change in citizenship.

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