

Sermon: The Cross and Holiness: Two Choices

Text: Galatians 5:24-25

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Introduction: The beginning of **chapter 5** Paul speaks about “freedom in Christ.” In this chapter Paul talks to the church about the results of her choices. We can revert back to the Law, do things with our own power or we can choose to allow God to make us what we need to be. **Verses 4-5** makes this choice, one of eternal consequence.

Galatians 5:4-5 (NIV) ⁴You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

It is the difference between death and life. The idea of law, works of the flesh, and what man unaided by God can and will do, is clear. Paul, though, encourages us to live *by the Spirit* (*in the Spirit*, **v. 16**).

Paul goes on to demonstrate where these two alternative choices will take you (**Gal. 5:19-21; 22-23**). You want to know if a person is holy, look at his/her life. For what are they known?

This brings us to our primary text:

Galatians 5:24-25 (NIV) ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

I have taken each of my sermon titles from John R. W. Stott’s book: *The Cross of Christ*. The title he gave for **verse 24** is *The Cross and Holiness*. The odd thing, though, is that Paul never uses the words *holy* or *holiness* in any verse of the Galatian letter. Even so, the principle is there. If we are Christians, we have been “set apart for service (ministry) to God.” God’s Spirit has made that possible.

Before God came into our lives to live, we had to make a choice on the direction of our individual lives. Jesus has said:

Luke 16:13 (NIV) ¹³“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

If you are going to be holy, i.e. devoted to God, there are choices to be made.

I. To Whom Will You Belong?

This is a choice that needs to be made certainly initially, but also daily, and forever. Many people see no need for a Savior or a Heavenly Father. They feel like they are able to save themselves. This plays right into the hands of Satan because he knows that kind of attitude will bring death and destruction. If you are going to belong to:

A. Satan

He is the prince of this world. He seems to have quite a following (some are obvious).

If we belong to Satan's family, our lives will reflect a certain kind of behavior that is controlled by the flesh or sinful nature as it is called here in the NIV text. These acts generally fall into four categories ([Galatians 5:19-21](#)):

distortion of our sexuality - sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

pseudo religion - idolatry and witchcraft;

ungodly ways of relating to people - hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy

intemperance - drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Paul sounds the alarm for those who follow this pattern of behavior: [Galatians 5:21b \(NIV\)](#) ^{21b} I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The other side of this fatal allegiance with Satan is the idea that we can make it by the *works* of the sinful nature (flesh, law).

Illus. It is a little like Christmas time. I prefer what some call a "live tree," although it isn't alive either. On the other hand, many people have artificial trees. I have seen some very lavish decorations. There are bulbs and tinsel, lights and ribbon, special sentimental ornaments to brighten up the holiday. The trees look great. They may even give the appearance of life, but they are dead. At the end of the season unless it is really alive, the tree and its contents are put away in boxes until the next Christmas. My tree goes out to the curb for recycling.

The works of the human nature are like that. All the style and creativeness in the world cannot make a real tree out of a fake. Only God can transform what is truly dead into life.

Something like that is only possible if we belong to:

B. Christ Jesus

He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. When we recognize Jesus for who he is, and yield ourselves to Him, our lives will bring forth evidence of that relationship.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

John tells us that we must abide or remain in Jesus to bear fruit. We must maintain contact with the Vine (**John 15**). This relationship with Jesus provides both the life and the motivation we need to excel here.

Gordon Fee says, “There is no need of Torah to say ‘you shall not kill,’ to people who by the Spirit are loving one another, nor to say, ‘don’t covet,’ to those who are actively pursuing the good of others out of kindness.”

We become *new* people under our new Master and Lord.

The difference between Satan and Jesus is that only Jesus can offer “real” life. Satan offers a kind of enslavement that is tempting and might even seem right, but ends in death.

When we fail to maintain our love of Jesus, there develops a problem of allegiance, and spiritual confusion ensues. Our relationship with Jesus is often expressed as a marriage. Can you imagine everyday when I begin my day if I would say: I wonder who I’ll have as my wife today?

It really boils down to the question and choice of:

II. Whom Do You Love?

The choices are between self and others, self and God. It is the dilemma of self-indulgence vs. self-control. If your wants, wishes and desires come ahead of everyone else you are obviously thinking only of

A. Self (Narcissism)

I am not saying not to love yourself, because that is the measure we are to use for loving others. But when self-love comes at the exclusion of loving others, that is not of the Spirit.

In many areas of our culture self-love has crossed over the line and is played out in what Paul calls “works of the sinful nature.” That is the problem that was seen in the life of the Prodigal (**Luke 15**). He did not see anyone but himself.

“When I forget that voice of the first unconditional love, then these innocent suggestions can easily start dominating my life and pull me into the ‘distant country’” (Henri Nouwen). When we love ourselves only, we end up doing things we would never have done if only we would have loved God more than ourselves.

***Whom do you love?* We need to take the example of Jesus and make it our mission to love:**

B. God and others

Paul had said earlier:

Galatians 5:13 (NIV) ¹³You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

For those who walk by the Spirit, the law is distilled into a call to action by Jesus.

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV) ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

John 13:1 (NIV) ¹It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

Loving God and others is easy to say. Jesus did it once with a basin and a towel. Later, Jesus spoke the loudest, and his most eloquent teaching, from the cross.

Decisions are made everyday as to how we will invest our resources and lives. Do we spend our schedules and assets on ourselves or do we look outside to other’s needs - and what God needs from us?

Q. Why is it that we should do our best to live holy lives?

A. We do it out of reverence for God (II Cor. 7:1).

II Corinthians 6:17-18 - 7:1 (NIV) ¹⁷“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” ¹Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

If I want to follow in Jesus’ example:

III. What Must I Do as a Christian?

A. Crucify the sinful nature (flesh).

There needs to be an understanding as to how what is said in [verse 24](#) is different from [Galatians 2:20](#).

[Galatians 2:20 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul is most definitely talking about his own conversion. This is what Christ has already done for us when we decided to be a disciple of His and were baptized.

[Galatians 5:24 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

For “those who belong to Christ” this is what we are to do daily. This is “the crucifixion of the former self-centered ego, that it may be replaced by the new Christ-centered mind.” - Bruce, NIGTC, p. 256

Christ’s crucifixion makes our salvation possible. Our crucifixion is needed to help maintain a healthy relationship with Christ. We dare not return to our old master. “What has been effected once for all by the cross of Christ must be worked out in practice.” - Bruce, NIGTC, p. 256

If we truly have been converted/saved by the blood of Jesus “the old person - the old nature - the old self has been put to death - it has been put off in principle; yet believers are exhorted to do in practice what has already been done in principle. Paul does not say that sin is dead but that the believer has died to sin. He does not say that the flesh is done away, but that we no longer live in the flesh and therefore are not to walk according to the flesh. He never says, ‘Do not sin,’ but rather, ‘Do not let sin reign over you.’” - Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 536

[Galatians 5:16 \(NIV\)](#) ¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

As Christians we need to:

B. Keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25).

Q. Why would Paul give a command like this?

A. Paul knew apostasy was a possibility.

“Luther writes that Christ’s people nail their flesh to the cross, ‘so that although the flesh be yet alive, yet can it not perform that which it would do, forasmuch as it is bound both hand and foot, and fast nailed to the cross.’” - Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 349

“The essence of apostasy is ‘changing sides from that of the Crucified to that of the crucifiers.’” - Stott quoting Moule, p. 349. It is the difference between Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

Only the Spirit of God can help you as daily you take up your cross and follow the Savior. Only the Spirit can help you as you war against the flesh and walk in God’s will.

We need to be careful with the flesh’s influence. It stands against life in the Spirit. The flesh is “humanity’s vulnerability to sin.” - *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 538

We carelessly think sometimes “oh, a little exposure to sin won’t hurt us.” If anything can be learned from living in the flesh, it is that life is fragile.

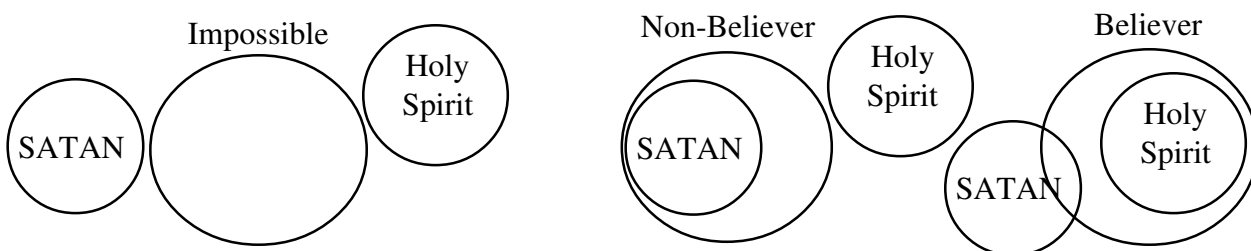
Illus. Natasha Richardson who died this last week as a result of a minor fall at the Mont Tremblant ski resort joked and laughed about the fall - just hours before it took her life. We do that with what we call “little” sins. Spiritually we need to guard against falling.

If we continually walk in the Spirit we may get hurt, but we will not die as a result of a fall.

Conclusion: The spiritual decisions we make in life: to whom we belong, whom we love, and what we will do for God: these choices will decide our *eternal* location.

Those who belong to Jesus are holy (saints, *hagios*), but you need to know that holiness is also a process.

Hebrews 10:11-14 (NIV) ¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.



Hebrews 12:14 (NIV) ¹⁴Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.