



Lessons By: Rev. Dr. Johnny R. Freeman

8 Week Bible Study Series

Wednesdays | 6:50pm

United Institutional Baptist Church

802 E. Market Street, Greensboro, N.C. 27401

'THE SPIRIT-LED LIFE!'

Week 8 | Text: Galatians 5:22-25

There has always been a concern in the church about standards in terms of what is acceptable and appropriate behavior and conduct. There has long been this struggle over everything from what is acceptable in terms of worship to what the church's mission and ministry should focus on. I remember the worship music of my childhood. We sang hymns and anthems, such as long and short meter. It was only when our church relocated, and changed its name, from Fayetteville Street Baptist Church, to First Cosmopolitan Baptist Church that our first gospel choir was formed as well as a Children's and Men's Choir. A new era in worship was born. I still remember, as a teenager seeing the disapproval on the faces of some of our seniors as the W. B. Lewis Gospel Choir came swaying and two stepping down the aisle marching to the choir stand.

I also remember the day that I asked a group of children to perform the dance during the 11am worship service they had presented during a children's Black History Month program in Sunday School. One of the most senior members stood up after she saw the children dance during the morning worship service and told the congregation, quote 'we can't be something we're not!' She was letting the congregation know, that in her opinion dancing in the church was inappropriate. I remember seeing a partition

around the pulpit that signaled to everyone that only pastors and preachers were allowed in the pulpit. Everyone else came to the podium down on the floor; a signal that the pulpit area was sacred and only a few should set foot on it.

Still others, including some pastors have discouraged the church from social and political engagement. They believe that the church should stick to quote 'saving souls.' Although we revere Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. today, during the Civil Rights Movement he was seen as a revolutionary and a radical far removed from what the church's primary mission ought to be. These church leaders have often limited the focus of their mission and ministry within the church's four walls where everything takes place within the church building. They have good worship, Christian education and fellowship but the impact of the church in the community was often lacking. In such instances, the church and its members may prosper but their lack of engagement in the community has limited the overall impact of the church's mission in the lives of those beyond their doors. The view for this limited mission focus has often been adherence to the separation of church and state. The reality often creates an image of us and them.

Last, but certainly not least is the struggle in the church over what is acceptable, in terms of appropriate church attire, church protocol and tradition. I'm learning that what is acceptable isn't always clearly defined or understood. I was talking to a fellow pastor recently who talked about a church situation that occurred over flowers in the pulpit area during

the Christmas holidays. One of the members decided to purchase some poinsettias in memory of a deceased loved one. She bought the poinsettias and placed them on the pulpit flower stands for the sanctuary. Some of the members were outraged because such an act had breached church protocol. As it turns out, the member who purchased and placed the poinsettias on the pulpit flower stands had moved the flower arrangements that weren't ever supposed to be moved. Some years earlier, the church had voted that certain decorations and furniture in the sanctuary was permanent and should 'never' be moved. As we do in church, whenever protocol has been breached action had to be taken. The guilty member had to be reprimanded and the poinsettias removed immediately. Well you can imagine how that issue went. The lady who placed the poinsettias left the church!

I could go on and on, with stories in the church like the previously mentioned but the point is there have always been disagreements in the church over standards of conduct and appropriate practices. The problem has always been what guides the way we live out our faith in community with other believers and in our public witness to the world.

Context

At the time of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians, the early church dealt with similar challenges. Just as there are denominational differences that exist in the body of Christ today, over issues of church protocol and practice the early

churches had similar issues. One of the major challenges that the Apostle Paul had to deal with was the differences between the Jewish and Gentile churches. There were some Jewish Christians that had trouble breaking with their early Jewish faith roots. Since some Jewish Christians had grown up being taught a strict adherence to the law of Moses, with its dietary and religious traditions they simply incorporated a blend of the old with the new. They would accept salvation through Jesus Christ and keep some of their old Jewish beliefs and practices. Among the beliefs and practices the Jewish Christians held onto was the requirement of circumcision and strict adherence to Old Testament law. The only problem was, the message of salvation by grace alone was problematic for the Jewish Christians. They struggled with a 'works based' code of do's and don'ts that allowed them to measure their being acceptable before God. What these Jewish Christians believed and practiced is not that different from what some Christians adhere to today. While some believe that when you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior the Holy Spirit comes into your life equipping you with everything you need for the Christian life immediately. On the other hand, some believe that new believers must go through a sanctifying and preparing process for the fullness of the Holy Spirit's indwelling and empowering. This is called 'tarrying for the Holy Ghost' that is given with evidence of the Holy Spirit's equipping which usually comes with speaking in tongues.

Going a step further, this line of reasoning assumes that outward displays of religious faith are just as important as

the inward working of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul wanted to make clear that the Christian life is about something more than legalist dos and don'ts.

God also uses Paul to make clear that once you check the salvation box you are not free to do and live as you please. The message of 'salvation by grace alone' does not give the Christian license to live any kind of way. Although we cannot earn salvation every believer in Jesus Christ is required to show some signs of genuine Christian experience. Again, Paul is addressing one church that happens to have believers with different views. How can church folk, with strong beliefs that are different dwell together? That is the question that Paul addresses here in the book of Galatians. Some in the church believed they should uphold the standards of a strict interpretation of scripture while others in the church believed they were free to create a new reality. The problem was their differences were dividing the church and impacting the church's witness in the community. The world was watching church folk arguing and fighting and saying to themselves I don't want to be a part of the confusion.

God uses Paul to explain the principles and practices of the **SPIRIT-LED LIFE...**

POINTS TO CONSIDER...

1) The Christian life is not a set of legalistic rules and church traditions to follow... We don't get 'brownie points' with God for practicing a lot of do's and don'ts...**Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes because "they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of the fingers."** (Matthew 23:4)

2) You can never earn the grace and goodness of God on your own merit alone. Although being able to say what you do and don't do, may make you feel good trying to measure up to God's standard on your own is a set up for failure. The problem is the more you do to qualify yourself the harder you have to work. It's like a hamster on the wheel in a cage that runs and runs but doesn't really go anywhere. The problem is that trying to live up to a lot of do's and don'ts aren't enough to make someone acceptable with God. No matter how hard you work at being accepted before God you can never measure up to God's standard by yourself. **Your attempts to qualify for God's acceptance will cause you to keep coming up short. No matter what you do your goodness will never be good enough to earn you salvation or God's favor. Paul writes in Galatians 'for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God...'**

(Galatians 3:10-11) The point is even though you may do well in some areas you can still be guilty and disqualified if you don't live according to the standard in all areas. **One way of understanding the point is, if you don't drink, smoke and commit adultery, if you lie on your taxes and assassinate someone else's character with your lies you're just as guilty as the person you call a sinner because of what they do that you don't do. You're in a no-win situation because 'every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law...' (Galatians 5:4)**

3) Measuring your righteousness by comparing yourself with others is sinful and only creates division in the church. On another occasion Paul wrote 'for one believes he may eat all things; another, who is weak eats herbs. Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him which eats not judge him that eats; for God has received him. Who are you that judges another man's servant?' (Romans 14:2-4) Paul also writes 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' (Galatians 5:9) Once you open the door of endless comparisons a little vain pride can lead to a haughty, puffed up spirit just as a little moral laxity can lead to reprobate mind. (Proverbs 16:18, Romans 1: 18-28) If you really want to make comparisons the proper One to compare yourself with is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made

Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant; and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’ (Philippians 2:6-8)

4) Checking the salvation box is not license to do and live as you please. Paul writes ‘for, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh...’ **(Galatians 5:13)** The point is when Jesus is real in your life you will show some signs. In other words, my public witness for Christ is an essential part of how I live out my personal relationship with God. How we represent Jesus is an important dimension of demonstrating that Jesus is real in your life.

5) A true believer in Jesus Christ will balance their personal relationship with God and the public accountability for Christ. When God confronted Cain after he killed Abel, Cain asked the question ‘am I my brother’s keeper?’ God said to Cain, “if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” **(Genesis 4:7)** In other words God does hold us accountable for what we say and do in terms of how we live out our relationship with Him. **Paul writes ‘for all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy**

neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.’ (Galatians 5:14-15)

STEPS TO THE SPIRIT-LED LIFE

1) TOTAL SUBMISSION TO GOD IS NON NEGOTIABLE FOR THE SPIRIT-LED LIFE TO BE POSSIBLE - One of the tenets in taking the first step toward recovery, in alcohol anonymous is the confession that ‘I am powerless over alcohol.’ Some think this confession is about weakness but owning your own truth is really the first step toward healing and strength. As born again believers in Jesus Christ the first step toward the Spirit-led life is acknowledging that we need God’s help. We acknowledge the reality that as children of two natures there’s a battle going on within us constantly. **According to Paul’s words to the Galatians, ‘for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.’ (Galatians 5:17)** Total submission is the intentional act of yielding yourself completely to Holy Spirit, by asking and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in you and direct you.

2) CHOOSE TO SACRIFICE YOUR WILL SO THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN HAVE HIS WAY IN YOU. Jesus said “if any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) God is not going to force His will on

you but will give you freewill to give up your rights in order to do His will. You must choose to give up what you want in order for God to have free rule and reign in you. **Jesus said on another occasion, “for whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.” (Matthew 16:25)**

3) WILLING TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER BY KEEPING YOUR PERSONAL INTERESTS IN CHECK FOR THE GREATER GOOD. The bible makes mention of how we can know if our hearts and motives are in the right place. We know when what we do is all about us and when it’s for God’s glory. For example, what you do to please God will never be just about you or at the expense of the fellowship. **Paul exposes self-serving attitudes and motives and distinguishes such from the virtues of the Spirit-led life. (Galatians 5:19-25)** The Holy Spirit will live and move and have His way in your life as long as you stay focused on serving God as you serve one another.