

Special Message I for Fall Semester, 2010

LIVE BY THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-26

Key Verse 5:16

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

The gospel means Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead. By faith in Jesus we received salvation. We have freedom from law. Does this mean that we may do whatever we like? No. Because of the sinful nature of our bodies, we are in danger of squandering the precious freedom we received through the gospel of Christ Jesus. Today's passage teaches us how to use our freedom and lead victorious lives. May God help us to learn the way to live by the Spirit and powerfully serve God's work in this fall semester.

Look at verse 16. "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." The Galatian believers were called by God. For what were they called? To be free from sin! This freedom was not cheap. For their freedom, God gave up his only Son on the cross! So they had to use their precious freedom to serve one another in love. How about us in the past? When we did not have freedom from sin, we had no option. We just lived a selfish life, because we were slaves to sin. But as we now have freedom, we can reject the demand of sin. We can reject the desires of our body, and can serve God and other people. Yet it is true that the sinful desires are still there. They put pressure on us. As a result, at times, it is difficult to resist the constant pressure of the sinful nature within us.

I know one shepherd who really struggled hard to overcome his sinful nature. In order to overcome, he even cut the tiny edge of his finger and wrote with his blood. He said, "I will never give in my sinful desire." However, he confessed that it was impossible. This problem is the same with us. How can we overcome our sinful nature? Verse 16 says that we should live by the Spirit. "Live by the Spirit." This sounds simple. Yet what does it really mean? What does it practically mean?

Firstly, as some people may mistakenly think it does not mean to receive the gift of the Spirit and speak tongues, prophesy or interpret. Rather, it means to closely follow the leading of the Spirit. It means rather than paying attention to the law and being careful not to violate it, we accept the Spirit as our king. We surrender our wills to him. It's like handing your steering wheel of life over to him. Many years ago I had a chance to cross the Pacific Ocean on a big cargo ship. In the middle of the ocean, you do not know where you are and where you should head. Only the experienced captain knows the way and steers the ship in the right direction. So the best thing to do was to give him the handle and simply follow his instructions. After 12 days of difficult sailing we safely arrived in San

Francisco.

Living by the Spirit means a new way of life. Specifically, it means as John 15:5 says to remain in Jesus. It means to have spiritual fellowship with him and bear much fruit. Practically, it means to live according to the word of God. All Scripture is inspired by the Spirit. The Spirit is the author of the Scripture. The Spirit's will is clearly revealed in the Bible. To correctly understand and obey the word of God is the way to live by the Spirit. Secondly, to live by the Spirit means to listen to the leading of the Spirit. This is possible when we train ourselves and remain sensitive to the voice of the Spirit. The Spirit not only leads each one of us through the word, but also speaks to us by prompting our hearts. When we carefully discern the Spirit's leading and obey, we can live by the Spirit. If we do so we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Look at verse 17. "For 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." Before we met Jesus, we didn't have any internal conflict. We simply lived according to our sinful desires. The fruit we bore then were shameful deeds leading to death (Ro 6:21). But after we met Jesus, we received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit coexists with our sinful desire, and these two continually come into conflict.

A few days ago, I was flying to Chicago. There was an advert in the flight magazine. It says "Your holiday- just a click away! Just click in then your will be in a fantastic holiday place!" Nowadays, "Just a click" is an easy way to temptations. As we spend much time using internet, temptation is just a click away. One shepherd in Korea under my care had to study hard to pass the bar exam to qualify as a lawyer. He is bright and could have passed it long ago. But his problem was "a click" into a computer game. He knew that he had to study hard. Yet whenever he sat down before his PC, he was clicked into PC games. Basically his sinful nature overpowered his will to study and he always ended up playing the game. He could not overcome this to the point that one day he found himself crying while playing the game. By the grace of God he was helped with the word and he overcame it. He passed the exam and as a lawyer is helping other students who have the same problem like him.

A click opens up immoral pictures before our eyes. To some people, the desires to see these things and the Spirit come into conflict everyday. Yet the good news is that even though sinful nature and the Spirit coexist, they are not equal. The Spirit is stronger and far more powerful. This is because when Christ Jesus was crucified, our sinful nature with its passions and desires were also crucified with him (24). Because of this, the strength of our sinful nature is like that of a maimed snake wriggling on the ground. When we stand on the side of the Holy Spirit, we can win against our sinful nature. What is the specific sinful nature which causes a conflict within you? Let us think about it. Let us also remember that if we take a clear stance on the side of the Spirit we will surely win the battle.

Look at verse 18. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." The Spirit leads. It means he does not force us to follow him. Our voluntary and willing obedience is necessary to follow the Spirit's leading (Lk 4:1; 2Ti 3:16). When we willingly obey and follow the Spirit, we are no longer under law, but under grace.

Then what are the things that prevent us from following the Spirit? Look at verses 19-21. "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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." These sins can be divided into 3 groups.

First, sins of the body. Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, orgies, and drunkenness. Today, morality has eroded and sexual immorality is rampant. Our societies have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet the sins of the body are quite obvious. Second, sins of the soul or religious sin. Idolatry is simply anything we substitute for God: career, money, reputation, success, and even morality. Third, sins against the community. Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. I could explain these but they are quite obvious.

In verse 21, Paul finishes the list with the words "and the like." This means that there are other sins than the fifteen he mentioned. They are such as, gambling, watching lewd pictures on the internet, greed for money or food, enjoying lustful thoughts, vanity, thinking highly himself than others, laziness, indifference, heartlessness, slander, and so on. These things prevent us from being led by the Spirit. With such sins we can not bear any fruit. They make us powerless.

When we believed and were born again (Jn 3:5), we received the Holy Spirit. At that time, we became connected to God through the Spirit. It is like a pipe. Through this Spirit-pipe, we began living lives led by the Spirit. But as time passes by, our lives become habitual and hypocritical. We become too busy teaching to students to teach ourselves. We neglect personally studying the Bible and living repentant lives (Ro 2:21). So our Spirit-pipes become clogged up and blocked. Some people's pipes become completely blocked. Some people's pipes become unblocked just during the Sunday service. For some, the pipe is only unblocked a tiny amount. Although they appear to be disciples of Jesus, they have no power.

What warning does Paul give to those people who live according to their sinful desires? Look at verse 21b. "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." They cannot inherit the kingdom of God. So what must we do? Above all else, we must repent daily. When we read passages like the Ten Commandments, Romans chapter 1, Galatians chapter 5, it

is impossible not to repent.

When we live faithfully by the Spirit, what fruit do we come to bear? Look at verses 22-23. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." These are the internal fruit we bear. Among these nine qualities, the very first is love. This is not human love but God's love. In the past, it was impossible for us to produce such love. However, the Holy Spirit who dwells in us produces this great love. After this come joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I could explain each but they are self-explanatory. The nine fruits of the Spirit are ultimately the character of Jesus Christ. We cannot bear such fruit with our own strength. But when we live by the Spirit, the Spirit bears these fruits in us.

There are also external fruit we bear if we live by the Spirit. The Spirit gives power (Ac 1:8). For example, the Spirit enables young men to see visions and old men to dream dreams (Ac 2:17). The Spirit gives us the power to preach the word powerfully (Ac 2:41).

Look at verse 25. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Paul tells us to keep in step with the Spirit. This means to walk, step by step, continually with the Spirit. In order to keep in step with the Spirit, we must heed the word of God and devote ourselves to prayer.

What final caution does Paul give? "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (26). Human glory is short-lived and meaningless. When we pursue such meaningless glory, we become divided against our co-workers and we anger and quarrel with each other. Human glory is the source of much conflict, sorrow, and unhappiness. Let us not seek such meaningless glory and anger each other. Let us pray to seek the true reward and glory that is from God, and love, encourage, and serve one other.

I would like to take this opportunity to testify to the work of the Spirit in England. I went to England in 1993 as a lay missionary. My family (my wife and two daughters) were the only congregation at our Sunday worship services. My initial prayer topic was to raise one Abraham of faith in UCL (University College London) within 2 years. Yet for the first two years, I did not have any chance to study the Bible with an English student. British intellectuals have a very high self-regard. And indeed, they are very creative, critical and sharp. They are extremely talented, but they are secular and hedonistic. Most of all, since the time of the Empire, they are proud and do not like to be told or preached to by others, especially by a foreigner. The religious climate in the UK is extremely anti-Christian. I understand that in the U.S.A., one must be a Christian to be elected as a president. In the UK, it is the opposite. If you are a Christian, there is hardly any chance for you to be elected as prime minister. Not only this, UCL also comes within the top 10 universities in the world. Humanly, it seems

impossible for a short, Konglish-speaking man like me to raise Jesus' disciples in UCL.

A few days after I arrived in England, Dr. Samuel C. Lee wrote me. "If you study the Bible with all your heart, you and all those who follow you will be happy and prosperous. But if not, you will not prosper and there will be many problems among the co-workers in your ministry." His word became my spiritual direction of missionary life. When I committed myself to Bible study through Sunday message and daily bread, the Holy Spirit led me in this way.

First, the Spirit led me do what I could do in my given situation. For the first two years in the UK, I had no English students, but one Indian boy and a Sri-Lankan woman of 40 years old. The Spirit helped me to faithfully serve them for 2 years, and as a result, I grew in my personal faith and English to be ready to teach national students. Also as I worked full time for a company, I thought I had no time to visit the university. As my wife could not speak good English, and Daniel, the Indian boy, had little faith, we thought we had nothing to offer to God. But Mark 6:33 "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" changed my perspective. We decided to offer to God what we had. My wife and Daniel went fishing to invite a student for me to study with in the evening. God blessed this small offering and brought us Ian, who became the ancestor of faith.

Second, the Spirit led me to raise one person as a disciple. As an art student, Ian was very sharp and intellectual. One-to-one Bible study with him normally took 3-4 hours into the early hours of the following day. In spite of this, we studied twice a week. I spent most of my free time helping Ian with the word of God, through a great deal of talking, discussion, and constructive arguments. In three years, John 15:5 struck him and gave him the mission to feed sheep. He began to attend our house church worship service. Through the help of the Spirit, he sincerely taught the word and raised Paul, Darren, James, and some other growing students.

Third, the Spirit led us to form a loving spiritual community among the co-workers. In the early stage at London UBF, when the first missionary co-workers arrived, my family received them to stay with us at our two-bedroom apartment. UK missionary co-workers sacrificially served the work of God because of their faith in Jesus. National leaders saw how we lived together serving each other and they also grew in the same spirit.

And from my side, by God's grace, this is how I strived to follow the Spirit. In our testimony sharing meetings with our missionary co-workers and national leaders, normally I shared my testimony first. This helped me to sincerely struggle each week with the word of God. Even though I do not reside in London, still today national leaders come to the centre early morning, pray in twos and share daily bread everyday. This becomes a foundation of the ministry. At the moment, in London UBF there are five married national shepherds and tens of

growing students. Abraham Ian is the director in charge of London UBF.

About 5 years ago, when Dr John Jun left for the USA, I was given the responsibility to oversee Chongro chapter in Korea. As some of you may know I was a practical man from a business background. All I had done was work for a shipping company, travelling around the world for business meetings. I did not receive any full-time shepherd training and did not have any charisma. I was worried whether the ministry would sustain and grow. Yet when I decided to commit myself to deep Bible study, the Spirit of God sustained the ministry and made it fruitful. The Spirit helped me to bear the fruit of love for my wife and she is now completely well. God blessed my two daughters by bringing them to Korea to study at a university. I believe that even though we may be in a difficult situation, if we strive to live by the Spirit through the word and prayer, God will surely make us fruitful internally and externally.

In conclusion, the secret of receiving the Spirit's power is to unblock our Spirit-pipes through repentant lives. Also through committing ourselves to the word of God and prayer, we can live by the Spirit. May God help us to live by the Spirit and produce much fruit to powerfully serve God's work in this Fall Semester! May God bless each of us to live a victorious and successful life this Fall Semester! Amen!