**LIVING BY THE SPIRIT**

***16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*** ***17For 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.*** ***18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.***

**Galatians 5:16-18 (NIV)**

Paul begins his response to the internal conflicts noted in 5:15 (‘biting and devouring one another’) by asserting the sufficiency of the Spirit over against the flesh. The prescription against using freedom from Torah as a ‘base of operations’ for the flesh (5:13) is ‘living’ (literally: ‘walking’) by the Spirit. Doing this will stop the believer from gratifying *‘the desires of* (make provision for) *the sinful* *nature.’* The Spirit stands in unrelenting opposition to the flesh. Whatever the flesh wants to do is no longer a viable option for the one who ‘lives’ in the Spirit. The Spirit also empowers love and thereby ‘fulfils’ Torah. The one led by the Spirit is therefore ‘*not under law.’* Paul is presenting the Spirit as God’s response to both the flesh and Torah, because Torah could not counteract the desire of the flesh but the Spirit can and does.

‘*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature’* (5:16). Paul is picking up a primary metaphor for the Law in the Pentateuch. Israel was to be instructed in the Law so that they could be shown ‘*the way in which they are to walk’* (Exodus 18:20 TNIV). They were to ‘*walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you’* (Deuteronomy 5:33). Because the Spirit is God’s sufficiency for ‘obedience’ among His new covenant people, the primary new covenant need is to ‘walk’ (live) by the Spirit. Paul has shifted the emphasis from the arena of obedience (the Law) to the means of obedience (the Spirit). Through the enabling of the Spirit one will fulfil the Law in loving one’s neighbour as oneself (5:14).

Living (walking) in the Spirit empowers us not to carry out the desire of the flesh (here, in context, ‘biting and devouring one another’). The flesh (sinful nature) is always concerned about ‘my’ rights but ‘my’ concern for ‘my’ rights is not God’s way of thinking. God’s way of thinking has been revealed in Christ ‘*who loved* (us) *and gave himself for* (us).’ The way of the flesh is to defend our ‘rights’ but the way of the Spirit is to love one’s neighbour in every circumstance. Only the Spirit can enable fallen people like us to really live.

‘*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’* (5:17). Paul is explaining two matters in the one sentence – the sufficiency and the necessity of the Spirit, so that one ‘*will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature’* (5:16). The Spirit and the sinful nature are antithetical to each other. The Spirit opposes the sinful nature, so that even though Torah is removed, one may not do whatever one wishes. Paul is not describing a Romans 7:13-25 experience. Our imperative is to live in the Spirit, following the Spirit’s purposes, knowing the Spirit’s purposes are opposed to the sinful nature’s purposes. With the Law removed, our desires can still reflect the flesh (our sinful nature). We can still do wrong despite a desire to do right (‘*you do not do what you want’*). In the Galatian church this was reflected in their ‘biting and devouring one another.’ But for the Christian who lives in the Spirit, giving in to the sinful nature is not their pathway. It isn’t how we live.

‘*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law’* (5:18).The ‘*you’* is both times plural. Paul is not addressing the individual believer but the community. The Law had no power to stop the kinds of desires and behaviours causing havoc in the Galatian church. On the other hand, the Spirit could because of who He is: the Spirit of the Son (4:6). The Spirit can bring about what the Law cannot – right ‘desires’ toward others in the believing community. The Law, which included aspects of religious observance on which so many in Israel had come to rely for their relationship with God, was powerless to effect real change – attitudes and behaviour that would cause God’s people to bear His image in their interpersonal relationships; only the Spirit could do this.

At issue here is not an internal tension in the life of the individual believer, but the sufficiency of the Spirit for life without Torah – a sufficiency that would enable God’s people to live God’s way and not revert to their former life as pagans (in the flesh). This was available to all who were willing to be ‘*led by the Spirit*.’

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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