**KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT**

***24Those 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. 26Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.***

**Galatians 5:25,26 (NIV)**

With an abrupt turn in the argument, Paul begins the application of the argument that began in 5:16 by returning to the work of Christ (which always serves as the foundation of the Galatian believers now being people of the Spirit). This will be the theological basis for 5:16 ‘*live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature*.’ He does this by picking up language he used to describe his own testimony in 2:19,20. Those who have put their trust in Christ have been ‘crucified with Christ,’ so that their current life in the (literal) flesh is not predicated on the state of their (fallen) flesh. Through their association with Christ in His death, they have themselves been crucified with regard to the life in the ‘flesh.’ He now puts this in the active voice, purposely recalling their union with Christ in His death but now with the new metaphor of what they have done with their past way of life: they have nailed the flesh, with its passions and desires, to the cross.

In Paul’s thinking, everything that God has done in the new covenant to create a people for His name, God has done through Christ. This introduces the first reason for Paul’s confidence that those who walk by the Spirit will not fulfil the desires of the flesh. The ‘flesh’ itself, with its passions and desires, has experienced death in Christ’s crucifixion (‘*I have been crucified with Christ’* [2:20]). This means Spirit-people have experienced a more radical way of dealing with the flesh than just subjecting it to Torah (5:23) – which failed anyway. In Christ they have crucified it. So, under the new covenant, living according to the flesh is no more an option than is living under the Law. Christ’s death has brought an effective conclusion to the reign of both.

This is a declaration of eschatological realities and not just wishful thinking. Having been crucified with Christ (being ‘in’ the crucified Christ), the believer lives by faith in Christ who by His own Spirit, has taken up residence within (2:20). This is not triumphalism. Here is the ‘already’ of eschatological salvation. The death of the ‘flesh’ – the former way of life – has ‘already’ taken place through Christ’s death and resurrection. But at the same time, 5:25,26 brings us back to the reality that there still remains a ‘not yet’ to our salvation. In fact, the possibility for obedience regarding following 5:25,26 rests on (a) that the ‘flesh,’ which belongs essentially to the old order, has been crucified with Christ and (b) the present life this side of that crucifixion is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

‘*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit’* (5:25). Paul now appeals to the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. This goes back to 5:16 where he urged that walking by the Spirit was God’s antidote to life in the flesh. Since Christ’s crucifixion has spelt death for the flesh, believers are to behave in keeping with the Spirit, by whom they ‘live’ and whose fruit they are to live-out. And just as 5:16 was Paul’s response to their ‘fleshly’ behaviour of 5:15, so this verse (5:25) is his answer to the kind of community life the Spirit stands so strongly against in 5:26 (‘*conceited, provoking and envying each other’*).

Here is another example of Paul’s understanding of the ‘already/not yet’ in salvation. The imperative (‘*let us keep in step with the Spirit’*) follows immediately after the indicative (‘*Since we live by the Spirit’*). The preceding sentence (5:24) spoke of death to the flesh through Christ. A life empowered by the Spirit issuing from that death (5:25a) is ours but must be acted on (‘*let us keep in step with the Spirit’*). God’s new covenant people have come to life, and so now live, by the Spirit. But this can only happen by our keeping *‘in step with the Spirit.’*

*‘Let us not become* *conceited, provoking and envying each other’* (5:26). This is how people who conform to the Spirit do not behave. Paul’s concern is with certain forms of life in the flesh that need to be counteracted. They comprise attitudes (conceit and envy) and actions (*provoking*) that unchecked, lead to ‘biting and devouring each other’ (5:15). The Galatians ‘life in the Spirit’ will specifically target conflict in community relationships.

In all of this the Spirit, following the work of Christ, is the prime mover. The Spirit is God’s own response to the problem of the flesh, whose reign has been brought to an effectual end through Christ and whose effect in the life of the believer is negated by the empowering of the Spirit. But what Christ and the Spirit have done, and so brought about, the believing community must actively participate in. They must walk by, and behave in keeping with, the Spirit.

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

Galatians (Pentecostal Commentary Series) by Gordon Fee (Deo Publishing, Dorset, UK, 2011)

*Galatians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by R. Alan Cole (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1989)

*Galatians and Thessalonians* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2002)

*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Message of Galatians* (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by John Stott (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1992)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996