

Galatians 5: 24; “The Crucifixion of the Flesh, Message # 51 in the series – “Christ has Set us Free”, a Bible Study conducted on March 30th, 2016, by Pastor Paul Rendall at his home.

The last phrase of verse 23 says: “Against such there is no law.” I think that the way that this phrase should be understood, if I can personify the law of God in regard to this statement, is this: It is, that the law of God can find nothing wrong with the fruit of the Spirit displayed by the believer; indeed it finds everything that is right in the Christian’s bringing forth these graces and good attitudes in their words and actions. The bringing forth of the fruit of the Spirit by the believer is pleasing to God Himself in every way, in relation to the believer’s going about to do and keep the commandments of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. You will find that it is by these graces of the Spirit that every Christian is led into a greater obedience to the two greatest commandments – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”, and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” I like what William Perkins says on this verse – “There is no law to compel them to obey, because they freely obey God as if there were no law.”

Now, this evening we want to proceed on to verse 24 – “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” What does this mean? Well, you can see from the way that the verse is worded, that this “crucifying” of the flesh is 1st of all something that a person deliberately does at the time of their conversion to Christ. It is the deliberate act of a believer which is related to their faith in Christ, and their intention to fully repent of all of their sins. But 2nd – The crucifixion of the flesh is something that the Christian should be engaging in, every day by the Spirit’s power. Let’s think about these truths and realities for a few minutes and attempt to come to terms with them.

1st of all – The crucifixion of the flesh is something that we deliberately do at the time of our conversion to Christ.

“Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.” Notice that this is something that is worded in the past tense. Those who belong to Christ have done this; all those who are Christ’s have made the commitment to see sin as sin, and to put it to death in their lives. If you have believed in Christ, you belong to Christ. And when you belong to Christ, this is what you have done and will do. This crucifying of the flesh is the deliberate act of a believer, at the time of their conversion, which is related to their faith in Christ; and their declared intention is, to fully repent of all of their sins. In their own heart and mind, they crucify the flesh. It is something that they are led to do, because they have been effectually called by God to place their faith in Christ, and they have been given a New Heart to want to crucify their flesh. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 6, verses 1-7. “What shall we say then?” “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” “For he who has died has been freed from sin.”

Now, we need to understand that our crucifying the flesh is not something that we do on our own, apart from the grace of Christ. The baptism that is being talked about here is not water baptism in the first place. Rather it is the Spirit’s working, baptizing us spiritually into Christ’s death. His death to sin is made effectual to our death to sin, in our hearts and minds. The Spirit unites us with Christ, baptizing us into His death, so that each and every true Christian

experiences a real death to sin in their nature. Not that sin is eradicated from their being, but the heart of the believer in Christ is changed, whereby the dominion of sin is taken away, the Old Man is then crucified with Christ, in conversion, in order that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

This act of the Holy Spirit is also called “the circumcision of the flesh” in Colossians chapter 2, verses 11-13 – “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.” “And He has taken it out of the way; having nailed it to the cross.” You can see here that before the Holy Spirit comes and does this sovereign work of circumcising the flesh that the believer is dead in their trespasses. But by this circumcision of the heart, the dominion of the sin which dwells in us as a ruling reigning principle, is broken. The power of sin to rule over the life of the one believing in Jesus, the one in whom the Spirit is working, is taken away. The body of the sins of the flesh is put off, and the person believing in Jesus is raised from the dead spiritually, to newness of life.

What is the flesh then? It is that corruption of nature which is in every person because of our relationship to our first forefather Adam. When Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, sin entered and became a part of his very nature. And because he was the first man, and the representative head of our whole race, we all fell with him. That is, sin in the very nature of man is transmitted to all of his posterity; to all of his descendants. Our sinful hearts put forth motions to think things and to do things which are contrary to God’s holy word and His commandments. We are then led astray from the truth of God’s word and from righteousness when we entertain these feelings and thoughts of our corrupt nature. And we then go on to act upon what we think about, in word and deed in the commission of sin.

When a person first comes to Christ it is because they have come to see that they have need of Him, to save them from all of their sins. They have come to see, by grace, that they cannot save themselves from their sins; that they must have what Christ has done on the cross for them, to be applied to their legal state, and to their heart, to change it. And so, a sinful person receives Christ by believing in the gospel; that Christ died for their sins, and was raised on the third day, for their justification. They are thereby forgiven of all of their sins, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to their legal account. But they also come to experience a real spiritual circumcision of their heart. Their flesh, this principle of sin which has all their life dominated them, comes to be circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. And now they have the power to repent of all of their sins. They then, in their heart and mind, deliberately align themselves with the purpose and intent of Christ’s death and resurrection, and crucify their flesh with its passions and desires. That is, they deliberately act to turn away from the pursuit of all known sin and worldliness, and they are now considering what they should do to repent in relation to all past actions and present toleration of sin in their lives.

I like what Charles Simeon says in his commentary on these things: “Crucifixion, it must be remembered is a lingering death.” “The thieves who were crucified with Christ poured forth them venom against Him, even whilst they were suspended on the cross.” “Thus also, the old man in believers is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth they should not serve sin: nevertheless it is not utterly extinct: it still lives; and still rages and rebels against Christ; and would if suffered to come down from the cross, regain its former ascendancy.” “But there it is fixed: and thence it never shall come down, till the body itself shall cease to live.” “All its affections and all its desires, though still possessed of considerable

strength, are checked in their operation, and restrained in their exercise; the Spirit now reigns: the new affections now put forth a vigor, which the flesh can no longer withstand.” “The warfare is indeed continued: but victory declares itself on the side of the better principle; so that whereas the believer formerly walked after the flesh, he now in his daily life and conversation walks after the Spirit, and progressively advances in his heavenly course as long as he continues in the world.”

2nd – The crucifixion of the flesh is something that the Christian should be engaging in, every day, by the Spirit’s power.

We should also understand that this phrase is also intimating a process of mortification of sin which will follow conversion, in order that this crucifixion of indwelling remaining corruption will become an integral part of our sanctification in an on-going sense. We are now considering not the birth and conversion of the Christian, but rather the life of a Christian. Their crucifying the flesh is seen in their desire to be baptized with water baptism; signifying their desire for communion with Christ in His death. The Christian shows forth, in the ordinance of baptism their identification, by faith, with the work of their Lord Jesus Christ on their behalf, in His dying to sin, on their behalf, once for all. It also shows forth their union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and out of that union comes the desire to be made over into Christ’s image and likeness; to become a good person like Christ was. Turn with me over to Matthew 12, verses 33 and 35. “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.” “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

You can see that Jesus is inculcating a responsibility which is taken up by the Christian believer: “Make the tree good and its fruit good.” To make the tree good is first of all to have faith in Christ for salvation, and then to be decided and decisive about putting sin to death in your heart and cultivating righteousness in your thoughts and actions. The illustration of men as trees is a good one, for a tree is a living thing. A Christian is pictured here for us as a tree, depending upon the life of Christ within him in order to put sin to death and to live to righteousness in an everyday on-going basis. To crucify the flesh means that you will repeatedly, throughout your life, show a willingness to pursue and life, to die to sin and live to righteousness. Look at 1st Peter 2, verses 21-24 – “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.”

Look at Romans chapter 8, verses 12-14 – “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Paul is telling us that we do not owe our flesh anything any longer, now that we have come to Christ. You do not have to live according to the flesh any longer; you do not need to serve various lusts and pleasures any longer. And here we are told, if a person is living according to the flesh; tolerating the sins of the flesh, not repenting of them, but all the while secretly loving them, and not hating them, they should question whether they are a true Christian at all. Surely that person needs to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. But if, on the other hand, by the Spirit’s power you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. The “deeds of the body” is the physical body carrying out the desires of the flesh which is called the body of sin. The phrase “you will live” means that you will experience the true and lasting pleasures and satisfactions of the life of grace, fellowship with

Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit here and now, and then when you die, the door to eternal life will be set open to you, so that you will have spiritual and holy pleasures forevermore in beholding the glory of God.

Christ died so that the body of sin might be done away with; that is in conversion its dominion is taken away, and then through mortification, the flesh might be weakened and subdued more and more; and sins will actually be put to death as we see them in our hearts and in our actions as Christians. We must, day by day, crucify these passions and desires which are sinful and not right if we would grow in respect to our salvation. How can we engage in this good work and succeed? Well, turn to Colossians 3, verse 1. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

And verses 8-10 – “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.” “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” There you have it, the passions and desires of the flesh. These things are to be put off, and put to death. What can be put in their place? Look at verse 12 – “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” You can see here, that it is by the Holy Spirit’s power working the grace of God into your heart, that you come to crucify the flesh, and put on those wonderful graces whereby you may serve God acceptably. But remember, it is also your responsibility.