

Sermon preached by Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral  
Sydney on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2006. Reading Galatians 5:13-26  
Topic: Two Ways to Walk

**God can promote his purposes through our problems.**

Paul had been a visitor in the region of Galatia. While there he preached the gospel and taught the people about the love of God. Later he heard that they were having trouble and he writes this letter recalling what it was like when he was there with them. He reminds them of how close they were. He retells the story of their conversion to Christ and their affection for one another. And then he lets them know his sorrow at hearing about their drift into law keeping rather than grace, as the basis of their confidence before God.

In that process of recall and re-affirmation of their starting point, Paul gives us an insight into his physical struggles while he was with them. This provides us with some important guidance. Paul went to Galatia in "less than perfect health." But even so, that ailment did not mean that he stopped being concerned for people's eternal salvation or preaching the gospel. He called upon people to turn away from their sin and come to Jesus in repentance and faith, in order that they would be forgiven and incorporated into the family of faith, the people of God. Paul reminds his readers that he was suffering when he was with them, and yet he kept preaching the gospel. He did not wait until he was completely healed. That should be a great encouragement to us. Don't wait until everything is perfect in your life before you seek to serve God and reach out to other people in love. We should accept our current situation, recognize our limits, and get on with bringing honour to our God and Father. Sometimes, there are people who are more impressed by the way that Christians manage their struggles with grace and patience and trust, than they would be in the midst of all the fun and activity that seems to distract most people from the important issues of life. Through Paul's experience we can see that God can promote his purposes through our problems.

**The false teachers and the true gospel are incompatible.**

So much has changed since Paul was visiting them. The people had become Christians, based on God's grace. Now the false teachers were coming in with their works based salvation. Paul had told them, you cannot keep the law. We all break God's laws. We all face God's judgement and need God's forgiveness. That's why Jesus lived and died and rose again, so that all who trust in him can be forgiven. While he was there with them, they had taken that on board. Now that he is away from them, other teachers have come and misled them into thinking that they can keep the Jewish Old Testament laws

**3 The flesh and the Spirit are at odds with each other.**

Part of Paul's argument is that one test of Christian theology is the effect it has on people. If they truly followed the gospel of grace they would be loving to one another. But what is the report that he has been getting? 5:14-15 and 5:25-26. If you are truly converted you will be truly changed. It is quite clear in Paul's mind that the flesh and the Spirit are working in opposite directions. Law keeping does not do enough to subdue the desires of the flesh. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit in every Christian to bring about godly living. vv16-18. This is the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises, God's law written on our hearts, directing us in God's ways. There are really two ways to live, according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. Are we being led and directed by our passions, emotions, lusts and desires or are we being led by the Holy Spirit? Notice that this is not just a matter of life and death. It has to do with eternal judgement. See 5:21.

**The way of the flesh is trouble and conflict.**

Galatians 5:19-21 The first three relate to sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage. In Paul's day and ours, the Christian ideal of marriage or chastity is very remote from the thinking of the world. Our society is suffering in so many ways, because of that lack of true love expressed in the right way. We have more sexual sin, than ever before and more broken relationships and broken people. One of the newest expressions of this modern struggle with sexual sin and temptation would have to be the growth of pornography. We will want to pray for people to be healed from the damage these sins have brought. "*idolatry, sorcery*" in the ancient world these two methods of controlling the future were very much in vogue. Today there are people who think that it is fun to choose from any religion, including witchcraft and Satan worship and they allow themselves to be caught up in so many evil activities, and come under the power of the Devil. We must be careful of even being

superstitious about lucky charms, or religious icons. *“enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy”* This is people living for themselves, distancing themselves from each other. This is family breakdown and isolation, people living alone, because they can't manage with what other people say or do to them. This is a church that is disintegrating. This is a society that is falling apart. If people have been living like this, they will need help to learn to live with and love other people. And at the heart of the healing process will be learning to forgive and receive forgiveness, as a way of life. *“drunkenness, orgies, and things like these”* Drunkenness pervades our society as a feature of the Australian culture. It is something that we should be ashamed of. Anyone with that background will need the healing power of Jesus and the support of Christian friends to keep managing a sober lifestyle. The way of the flesh is the way of the non-Christian. If we are Christians, it should not be our lifestyle. We need to acknowledge that we need to hear this part of scripture, because even though we are Christians, temptations come our way every day. They come from the world around us and from within. We need to keep on seeking God's help and guidance to know how to live for him.

**The way of the Spirit is health and friendship.**

Galatians 5:22-24 What a difference the Spirit makes in the life of a believer. He makes us more and more like Jesus. This is the sort of character change that we should be praying for and looking for in our own lives and praying for and encouraging in one another's lives. *love, joy, peace*, being other person centred, having a level of happiness that is deep and not dependent on our temporary circumstances, but based on our knowledge of God's unfailing love and his presence with us day by day we are no longer struggling for God's acceptance. We have it. No longer fighting with God. We have God's peace within us. *patience, kindness, goodness* changing things for the better is not just up to us, in God's perfect timing, good things will happen we can be kind and generous with our time and energy because we know that we do not have to grasping. God cares for me. We can trust in God's ways for me to be best. His goodness directs my decisions because he knows how I function best. I do not need to grasp for short term happiness. He guides in right paths for his names sake. *faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* If you have self control, you are able to be faithful when others might walk out. You can be gentle and restrained, because you are under control. Whenever people come to Christ and receive his forgiveness and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit we can expect to see change and growth. How is God's Holy Spirit at work in our lives? To be under the influence of the Holy Spirit is to be identified with Jesus Christ. When he died on the cross for us, it is as though we died there with him. The life we now live, we live in His strength, by the power of the Holy Spirit. On that basis we should regard our desires, our passions as no longer controlling our behaviour. Yes, we will still be tempted. But the fruit of the Spirit should be evident more and more in our lives. Sometimes, it will be a gradual change. Every now and again it may be a bigger change as a result of praying for God to help us through a time of struggle with illness or addiction or a period of ongoing temptation. We need to repent of all our sins of the flesh, to give up fulfilling the law of God by our own efforts. If we are to be God's people, forgiven through his grace, we need to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, filled by the Spirit ongoing daily. Let us walk by the Spirit in every moment of our lives. That will mean praying for and working for the fruit of the Spirit to be more and more evident in our lives. That will mean we are much more involved in loving one another, serving one another, building the Christian community of love and acceptance. **The way of the Spirit is health and friendship.** May we all see the hand of God at work in our lives and the lives of those around us. To him be the praise and the glory. Amen