

GALATIANS: IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING LEGALISM

Part VIII: Discerning Apostasy's Compromising Unity From Legalism's Sinful Divisiveness (Galatians 5:13-26)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the difficult challenges to handle in any Christian group is the question of taking a stand versus divisiveness. On the one hand, we are not to compromise the truth, but take a stand though others cannot agree, Rev. 18:4. On the other hand, we must be loving and non-divisive with God's people, Jn. 13:35.
- B. This brings up two questions: (a) How can we tell if we are sinning by compromising in sticking with an ungodly unity, and (b) How can we tell if we are sinning by being needlessly divisive?
- C. Legalism always errs in relationships, and Paul offers the following answer in Galatians 5:13-26:

II. Discerning Apostasy's Compromising Unity From Legalism's Sinful Divisiveness, Galatians 5:13-26.

- A. The Galatian believers had come to be very divisive in the church as the legalists had done their work in pushing self-help ideas of salvation, Gal. 5:13 with 5:15, 26.
- B. Yet, Paul himself had clearly stood **against** the legalists himself, declaring an excommunication oath on anyone who taught that salvation came by faith plus circumcision, Gal. 1:8-9 with 5:2.
- C. The element that defines a correct stand against apostasy from sinful divisiveness, and which defines a correct brotherly love from apostate compromise in false unity is the **spiritual modus operandi**, or the spiritual **method** of operation: do we operate by means of the sinful nature or by the Holy Spirit, 5:13, 16?
- D. In order to **discern** the sinful nature from the godly nature on these issues, Paul takes time out to display the qualities of both natures in the believer as follows (Gal. 5:17-23):
 1. It is a fact that at any given moment, the believer is either **completely** controlled by the sin nature or he is **completely** controlled by the Holy Spirit. These two natures are so **OPPOSITE** one from the other that the believer is never living by a **combination** of them both, Gal. 5:17-18!
 2. Accordingly, we can tell **which** nature we as Christians use at any moment as follows:
 - a. The sinful nature exhibits the following characteristics (the various characteristics are brought from the Greek New Testament as defined by Arndt & Gingrich's, A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.: (1) immorality in general, (2) impurity in general, (3) debauchery (sensual excesses), (4) idolatry, (5) magical arts, (6) hostility as an attitude, (7) quarreling, (8) jealousy, (9) rage outbursts, (10) quarrelsome outbreaks, (11) dissensions (partisan discord within a group of people), (12) division (parting from the group), (13) competitive, destructive envy (see also Trench, Syn. of the N.T., p. 86ff on *phthonoi*), (14) drunkenness (applied to substance abuse in general), (15) wild, carousing, revelous partying, and (16) the such like, Galatians 5:19-21.
 - b. The Holy Spirit's control of the believer exhibits the following characteristics: (a) love, (b) joy, (c) peace, (d) patience, (e) kindness, (f) goodness, wholesomeness, (g) faithfulness, (h) gentleness, and (i) self-control, Gal. 5: 22-23 NIV.

Lesson: (1) *On the one hand, sinful efforts exist with efforts to unite or divide with immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, magical arts, hostility in attitude, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of rage, quarrelsome outbreaks, partisan discord within a group followed by division from a group, substance abuse, wild sensual parties and the such like.*

(2) *On the other hand, godly believers tend to (a) take godly stands against apostasy through the presence of expressions of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (b) They also exhibit these same characteristics in properly remaining loyal to other believers when Scripture commands them accordingly.*

When wondering if a decision to live peacefully with a party or to divide from a party is right, test the "fruit," or the quality of the life or demeanor of the one making the decision, and you will be able to tell a lot! Mtt. 7:16 says: "Ye shall know them by their fruits."