

Gospel Driven Character

1. Intro

- [Show 'Charlie Bit My Finger' YouTube clip]

- Over the last two weeks we've seen Paul reminding the Galatian Christians that in Christ they are no longer slaves to the Law, but that Christ has set them free
- That is, they've been set free from having to justify themselves through their legalism, religiosity and morality
- Christ has paid the price to free them from their inability to earn their righteousness with God
- But then in 5:13 he warned them that their freedom in Christ doesn't give them license to do indulge in the sinful nature
- Instead ... the freedom that has been won for them through the cross is rightly expressed in
 - serving one another in love [v13]
 - loving your neighbour as yourself [v14]
 - But the problem is ... we don't naturally do that
 - Our natural disposition is to indulge our sinful nature

- While that video is funny and cute ... it's reveals something about us as a humanity
 - You don't need to teach children how to sin
 - They do instinctively
- Whether its biting your brother's finger
 - Or snatching their toys off them
 - Or giving them a whack when mum's not looking
 - Kids know how to do the wrong thing
 - It's part of their nature
- If you have kids or been around kids ... you'll know that
 - as much as you try and
 - as deliberate and intentional you are and
 - regardless of how many parenting books you read
 - They'll never be perfect > they'll still do the wrong thing
 - It's part of their nature

- And if we're honest, we know that won't change into adulthood
 - Which of course means ... that includes you and I!

- We have this nature about us that's far from perfect ... the Bible calls it our sinful nature
 - And our sinful nature is self-focused and self-interested and not interested in **or** capable of truly loving God or loving others
- So how do you change that?
 - How do you change your underlying human nature to develop the character and the virtue you desire
 - How can you be transformed from someone who is naturally selfish and self-centred ... into a person who truly is able to love others
- In v16-25, Paul goes on to say how it is we can live in a way that serves their neighbour in love and doesn't indulge in the sinful nature
- And it can only be done if ... v16 – we live by the Spirit

2. The Conflict Within (v16-23)

The Battle (v16-18)

- Why is it that
 - Christians are hypocrites?
 - a Christian minister will commit adultery?
 - a Christian parent will regularly blow their stack at their kids?
 - a Christian couple will struggle in marriage?
 - a Christian teenager is having sex before marriage?
 - It's because there's a spiritual battle going on within them
- That is ... the Christian has two natures at work within them
 - One is the Spirit the other is the sinful nature
- Have a look at v17
 - *¹⁷ 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.*
- The sinful nature is not our physical nature but our spiritual nature
 - It's the sin desiring aspect of our being that's opposed to God
 - Before a person becomes a Christian our sinful nature is there working alone, unopposed
- But when a person becomes a Christian / when they're born again ... God sends his HS into their hearts
- And the HS sets about renewing the desires of the heart making them into a new person and turning them back towards God

- As the HS renews the desires of a person's heart ... their character and life is transformed
- But all the while ... there's this battle going on between the sinful nature and the HS which is hampering and slowing down the renewal that God is seeking to do within you
 - Because the sinful nature is the part of a Christian's heart which is not yet renewed by the Holy Spirit
- So there's this internal battle happening
 - Our sinful nature doesn't want to give in to the work of the spirit and the transformation God wants to happen within us
 - And so it continues to generate competing desires which we experience and at times give into ... which is contradictory to the work of the Spirit and our love for Jesus
- And so the person who's been born again ... who has the Holy Spirit ... has this conflict of desires within
- This conflict is shown by the contrast Paul provides between the sinful nature in [v19-21] and the fruit of the Spirit [v22-23]

The Sinful Nature (v19-21)

- This list is by no means exhaustive ... but what it does show is the acts of the sinful nature spread right across the spectrum of human life – sexuality, religion, relationships and lifestyle
- Sexuality
 - Sexual immorality > any sex outside marriage – adultery, sex before marriage etc
 - Impurity > sexual innuendo, indecency, promiscuity
 - Debauchery > unrestrained lust
- Religious
 - Idolatry > looking to inadequate substitutes for God to fulfil your desires and worth
 - Witchcraft > black magic and occult
- Relationships
 - Then Paul lists 8 words to describe how the sinful nature destroys relationships
 - Hatred > Discord (strife or quarrelsomeness) > Jealousy > Fits of rage (unrestrained anger) > Selfish ambition > Dissensions > Factions and Envy

- Finally Lifestyle
 - Drunkenness > drinking for pleasure or drinking for comfort
 - Orgies > not sex orgies but excessive partying
 - Drinking, drugs, carousing, etc
- Now notice these are the **acts** of the sinful nature
 - They're the things we do as we act upon the 'desires of the sinful nature' (v16)
- The word desires = longing, covetousness, NKJ = lust
 - The sinful nature produces these deep desires of the heart that cause us to lust after things or covet things
 - In other words, they cause us to make idols of out things we think need it to be happy and content > to know real security, significance or satisfaction
 - These over-desires are sinful because they cause us to deny that God is who we need
 - When we over-desire things other than God, it leads to these acts of the sinful nature
- **Application**
- For example ... if my sinful nature over-desires sexual pleasure, that tells me that I must have it if I'm to be a really satisfied person
 - Then it will lead me to take a good created thing (sex in marriage) and make it into my idol
 - Since I need it more than anything else. I'll be prepared to
 - Betray my marriage vows
 - Consume pornography
 - Give into temptation before I am married
- If my sinful nature over-desires material wealth, and I am only satisfied if I have my house, car, clothes, gadgets etc
 - I'll become jealous that my friends have those things that I don't
 - I'm driven not by unselfish love of others, but my selfish ambition which means I put others down who have the things I don't
- If my sinful nature over-desires comfort and one way I seek comfort from the stress of life is drinking
 - As a result ... I become quarrelsome in my inebriated state
 - And I fly off the handle in a fit of rage when I'm challenged about it
- And Paul provides us with a warning here

- He says ... those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God
- He's not referring to anyone who has ever done any of these things > if that were the case ... heaven would be very empty
- What he's referring to those who consciously choose to live this way
- Not those who occasionally fall into sin and repent
 - Talking about those who choose to continually indulge the desires of the sinful nature without battling against them
- But when a person has the Holy Spirit ... they have the resources to overcome those desires which cause us to behave in these ways
 - Because the Spirit battles **against** the sinful nature ... transforming the desires of the heart ... leading a person to let go of those desires and desire something better in Christ
- Christian's will often become demoralized when they experience this battle as they find themselves doing what they don't really want to do
 - Or as they feel themselves conflicted and pulled in two directions –
 - sometime sinning, sometimes living God's way
- But Christian be encouraged ...
 - Paul says here ... this is the Christian life!
 - The battle is not a sign that something is wrong, but something is right!
 - The Spirit is at work
 - If you didn't have the Spirit ... you wouldn't have the conflict!
- And the end of verse 17 is full of affirmation
 - The real you ... the eternal you ... is not the sinful nature, but the Spirit led person
 - Even when you're falling into sin, you can say
 - "This is not the real me"
 - "This is not who I really am or what I really want ... I am God's ... and I want him and his will"

The Fruit of the Spirit (v22-23)

- The contrast of course is given in v22-23 where Paul lists off the fruit of Spirit
- Important to note that the word 'fruit' is singular > fruit of the Spirit not 'fruits' of the Spirit
 - What this means is these are **all** characteristics that ought to be evident in the person who has the HS

- Paul's not saying "here's a buffet of Christian virtue ... come and choose what you want"
- Not like you can say
 - "I'm pretty ok with goodness .. but I don't have the gift of self-control"
- When you're born again ... you get the complete package > all the fruit .. not just one or two

- Second thing to note is I think it's helpful Paul refers to these virtues as the 'fruit' of the Spirit rather than the 'acts' of the Spirit
 - That's because fruit is the outward sign of what the thing really is
 - This is because the Spirit is transforming a person's heart and therefore they character ... not just actions
 - The 'fruit' of the Spirit reflects the transformation the Spirit is doing internally in a person
- Think about an apple tree
 - Do the apples on the tree make it alive? No!
 - If you tied apples on to dead tree branches that wouldn't make it alive
 - The apples don't **give** life ... they're a sign that the tree **is** alive
 - It's the tree that produces the fruit not the other way around
- And so is the fruit of Christ-like virtue that's evidence of a deeper reality that's happening ... an internal transformation of the person by the Spirit

- The other thing that referring to them as 'fruit' tells us that this internal transformation is gradual
 - Just like it takes time for an apple or banana to grow so it takes time for a Christian to be transformed by the HS
 - You don't just wake up one morning and all of a sudden you're Mother Theresa

- **Illustration – House Renovation**
- The transformation the Spirit does is a person is like a renovating a old run-down house
- When you renovate
 - Some changes are quick > bring in new furniture
 - Others take more time > painting rooms
 - Others are more drastic > knocking down walls and adding extensions
- When you become a Christian is like you let the HS in the house
 - Then slowly but surely he sets about renewing your life
 - Some changes are quick

- Some take more time
- Some are more drastic and take ages to be renewed

- When we look at the fruit of the Spirit, we see there are nine virtues that are primarily about how we relate to others
 - What you'll see is they stand in complete contrast to the acts of the sinful nature and in many respects are the opposite of them
- Let's take a look at v22-23
- **Love** is the desire to be other person centred > to care for their concern and good for who they are, not for what that person gives you
- **Joy** is the delight in knowing your eternal future and standing before God is utterly secure which frees to you rejoice despite the circumstances you may be facing
- **Peace** is resting in the goodness and care of the Father in heaven who is sovereign and loves his children deeply
 - It replaces anxiety and fear because we're resting in his strength and his wisdom rather than our own

- The rest ... patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control are all about how we treat, care, respect, serve and bear with others

- Whereas the acts of it sinful nature are selfish and me centred ... these aspects of the Spirit's fruit allow us to love one another
 - Spirit grown joy takes enables us to take delight in good things happening to others, rather than being envious of them
 - Spirit grown kindness is a willingness to help and serve others out of genuine love rather than doing it so I can feel good about myself before others or God
 - Spirit grown faithfulness is staying true and firm with God and your friends rather than being fair weather friend who is faithful only if it suits or benefits you

- Who among us wouldn't want to have all those virtues and characteristics?
 - Love, joy, peace ...
 - Whether you're Christian or not ... which of us couldn't do with being more patient, gentle, kind or self controlled?
 - How much better would our life be ... and the life of those around us be ... if we could actually live them out?
 - How radically different would our marriages > family life > culture be?

- These are character traits we all know are good and desirable
- In our hearts ... we know this and as a human race we know it
- The Greek Philosopher Socrates – said 2500 years ago that the death of virtue would spell the death of civilisation. Without truth and virtue, the only possible outcome is barbarianism
- We know we need it
- So how do we get this fruit of the Spirit?

3. The Victory Within (v24-25)

- Paul says two things are necessary
 - Crucifying the sinful nature
 - Walking in step with the Spirit

Crucifying sinful nature (v24)

- We grow this fruit of the Spirit ... these Christ-like virtues ... crucifying the sinful nature
 - v24 – *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*
- Notice this is something that has happened in the past
 - When a person comes to that point of faith in Christ and turns to him as Lord and Saviour ... the sinful nature is crucified
 - Similar to when Jesus says in Mark 8
 - *Mark 8:34 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*
 - It's saying ... I'm following you now Jesus ... I'm willing to deny the desires of my sinful nature and submit to you
 - It's called repentance
- This is where true character transformation starts > repentance > putting to death your old self and selfish desires of the heart and following Christ
- **Illustration– Getting married**
- Like when you get married
- Turn away from your single lifestyle and start to live like you are married
 - No longer seeking out a person of the opposite sex for relationship
 - Move out of the flat with all your mates and you move in with your spouse
 - You include your spouse in your decision making
 - You stop going to the gym and start putting on weight because now you don't need to impress anymore

- You stop spending Saturdays at the footy or the shops and start renovating
- Your actions demonstrate the change of circumstances and mindset that happens the day you make your marriage promises
- So it is for the Christian
 - The day you come to faith in Jesus Christ ... you turn away from your sinful nature ... it's no longer your master

Walking with Holy Spirit (v25)

- Second way grow these fruit of the Spirit ... is to walk in step with the Spirit – refer v25
 - *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*
- Here the Christian who's received the Spirit and therefore lives by the Spirit ... they're to walk with the Spirit
 - That is, they are to follow the Spirit and his prompting and leading
- The Spirit leads like a shepherd leads his flock
 - He shows the way to go to avoid the sinful nature and bear the fruit in our lives that is pleasing to God
- However, the Christian is not merely towed along by the Spirit playing no role in the conduct of their life and leaving it all up to the Spirit to bear fruit
 - The Christian is not passive ... they're to walk actively and purposefully in the way the Spirit is leading
- As you do, the Spirit works to bring about the internal transformation of the heart ...
 - And out the transformed heart the fruit of the Spirit grows
- **Application**
- How do you keep in step with the Spirit? What's that mean
- Firstly ...
 - The role of the Spirit is to glorify the Son > to point people to Jesus
 - How? By opening our eyes to the truth of the gospel and seeing the implications of the gospel for our lives
 - So if that's going to happen ... we need to
 - be reading God's word
 - soaking in the gospel
 - hearing afresh about the grace and mercy of God

- To ignore God's word is to starve ourselves of the means and power for God to grow the fruit in your life
- **Illustration – black dog, white dog**
- Story of a man who owned black and white dog used for dog fights
- Sometimes black dog win, sometimes white dog would win
- When it came to betting ... the man would always know which dog would win
- Eventually it became apparent ... the reason the man knew which dog would win ... was because he would starve one dog and feed up the other
- The dog that he fed would always win ... because it was stronger than the other

- If you're going to crucify the sinful nature and grow the fruit of the Spirit, you need to feed on word of God
 - The things you feed your heart and soul with will affect which dog wins the fight

- Secondly ... its related to the first ...
 - You need to meditate on and rejoice in the gospel of grace
 - Because it's the grace of God ... demonstrated to us in Christ crucified ... that gives us the power to keep in step with the Spirit
 - Real transformation of character will only take place as you take on and apply the gospel to your heart

- You see ... as you feed on the word of God ... the Spirit will apply that word to your heart and convict of those things you need to crucify and those things you need to grow in
 - But only the gospel is going to give you the power and desire to want to keep in step with the Spirit's prompting and be led by him

- For example
- The only way I will develop real love
 - is knowing that God has loved me, despite there being nothing unlovable about me
 - it's knowing that even though you are more sinful that you know ... you are more deeply loved than you can ever imagine
 - As you grasp hold of the wonder of God's love for a sinner like you ... it gives you the power to love others around you

- The only reason you will develop real joy ...
 - is knowing that in Christ I have everything I need ...
 - I'm a child of God who's my Father in heaven
 - I have an eternal inheritance which I can never lose
 - Which means I'm secure in his love
 - And even if I lose things in this world ...
 - I can still have this deep joy that will not be shaken or destroyed
 - because it rests on who I am to God and what I have in him
 - And not on what others think of me or what I have in the world

- The only way you will develop real patience with your spouse or your kids...
 - is because you know God has shown infinite patience with you
 - both before coming to Christ when in your sinful nature you rejected him and his ways
 - and every day since coming to Christ while your remaining sinful nature continues to fail to love him and love others as you should
 - As God's enduring patience with you melts your heart ... it empowers you to live by the Spirit and be patient with others

- You want to grow in kindness ... reflect on God's kindness to you even when you turned you back on him
- You want to grow in goodness ... rejoice in God's goodness to you
- You want to grow in faithfulness ... remember how faithful God was to you despite your unfaithfulness to him

4. Conclusion

- So friends ... we all want to be better people
 - We all have aspects about our character we know are deeply flawed
 - And we those flaws will reveal themselves in ways that hurt others around us
 - That's because we all have this sinful nature

- But God gives us the power to transform our character
 - He gives us the Spirit who battles against that sinful nature
 - Transforming our hearts and therefore transforming our character

- If you want to see real character transformation take place ... then you need the gospel of grace
 - The gospel that going to move you to repent and crucify the sinful nature

- The gospel that the Spirit will then apply to your heart that will transform you
- Out of that gospel driven transformation ... the fruit of the Spirit will flow

PRAY