

November 21, 2021

## **The Crux of the Matter**

### **To the Galatians**

*"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love...You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

*"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. For the acts of the sinful nature are obvious...But the fruit of the Spirit is..."*

*"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires..." Galatians 5:6-25*

As the Apostle explains in his letter to the believers in Rome, we each have within us two warring natures. The one which Paul calls the **"flesh"** or **"sinful nature"** is the one we were all born with and it is composed of all of those drives and desires that are common to all life forms. Ultimately this is the inherent drive to survive which is always self-serving and is the source of sin in our lives.

Our other nature is the Spirit-produced selflessness that grows through our grace-based relationship with Jesus. It is important to understand that these two natures are in constant conflict and cannot coexist in the heart of the believer. Paul writes, *"So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 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..."*

So, for the believer, life is a constant conflict between the two natures at war within us. Our **"flesh"** constantly demands to be gratified. Our Spirit-led being constantly seeks to selflessly serve others fulfilling **"Love your neighbor as yourself."**

All of us have probably heard or read the old First People's teaching about the two wolves that live within each of us. When the teacher is asked which one will eventually win, the answer is always, "The one you feed." This old parable teaches the same lesson Paul teaches. Nearly every choice we make feeds one wolf or the other; one nature or the other.

It is key, I think, to remember that even as we are dealing with the demands of our sinful natures we still have the power of choice. That power of choice is ultimately what separates us from all other life forms. Those life forms always live by their own survival-driven natures. They don't really choose. We, on the other hand, can always choose to live by the Spirit which, more often than not, will demand that we choose to surrender our survival to our loving Father or we can choose to live by the **"flesh."** We can not choose both.

That power of choice is also what makes us accountable to the God of heaven for the choices that we do make. In every situation and circumstance you and I have the power to make that choice between the **"flesh"** and the Spirit even when we feel like we don't. Because we can and do make those choices God can and will hold us accountable for the choices we make.

That same power of choice is also what nullifies our tendency to blame and justify the choices we do make. Even though I may be influenced in my choices no one and nothing is making those choices for me. It is not someone else's fault and my poor choices are never justified. God will always hold me accountable for which I choose. So, Paul will conclude, "...*live by the Spirit*" making it clear that we can, in fact, choose.

