

Basic Necessities -

In many ways life is a struggle, a battle! I think of the millions that have to fight for the mere necessities of life, looking for: sufficient food, clothing, shelter, a safe place to live and to have one's children receive an adequate education.

There's a great struggle also for Christians, even for those whose lives are directed by the Lord Jesus and who desire to live according to his Word. Someone has called that struggle, "*The battle of faith in the arena of life*". That battle pits one's sinful human nature, also called the "flesh" in some translations of the bible, against the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

That Holy Spirit is truly God, together with the Father and the Son. He's powerful and can change the lives of sin-burdened, arrogant, selfish and jealous people into people who delight in God's great gifts of love and joy and peace.

In his letter to the Galatians, Christian people living in what today is Turkey, the apostle Paul laboured to counter some sinister teachings which were making inroads in the churches in that part of what was then the Roman Empire.

Evidently they taught that Gentiles might believe in Jesus but then must also accept circumcision as well as other Jewish ceremonial laws.

But that teaching was totally contrary to the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ which Paul and his associates had proclaimed. That free grace, or unmerited favor, is the joyful work of the Holy Spirit, dedicated to leading people in the way of God's Word. Freed from ceremonial laws and restrictions Christians were to "stand" as Paul writes at the beginning of ch. 5, without submitting to what Paul called "a yoke of slavery."

The truth is that abandoning the way of the Spirit often leads to all kinds of 'hard pricklies' of sin and immorality such as : impurity, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy envy and drunkenness, as Paul notes in ch. 5: 21. Warned Paul, "*Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

But the Holy Spirit would bring forth fruits of faith in the lives of God's people. He's like a river full of life-giving waters of joy. In v. 22 and 23 of Galatians 5 Paul portrays what amounts to a well-filled basket of wonderful fruits. The first three are *love, joy and peace.*

It has been said, (rightly I think) that these three refer to the most basic spiritual qualities and necessities.¹ Even the entertainment world, which doesn't put much stock in spiritual matters wants everyone to know "*Love is a many Splendored Thing*" as a group called The Four Aces crooned a generation ago.

The scriptural meaning of love, however is a far more meaningful jewel than mere physical attraction and sexual pleasure with which many identify love today. Not that the bible is down on *eros*, the love that seeks sensual expression. Just read that wonderful love poem called the Song of Songs in the bible.

Yet the love that Paul was speaking about in Galatians five is *agape* which is a self-giving love, call it *gift love*, a personal commitment to the other that is fed by the love of Christ Jesus Himself. Love is the supervisor in that essential spiritual construction project called faith! Without this wonderful ingredient of love in a person's life people quickly revert back to selfishness, envy as well as hatred and immorality.

It is especially love for the brotherhood that the apostle stresses in this letter. Were there those who insisted on their preferences, circumcision, and other legalistic laws? Says Paul, "That only leads to

¹ William Hendriksen in his commentary of Galatians, p. 223

wrangling which completely obscures Christ's rule of love. The whole law of God is summed up in a single command, "Love your neighbor as yourself", said Paul (ch. 5:14) Immediately he issued a warning, "*If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*" (v. 15)

It's a danger for families, communities, even churches. It is for that reason that Paul coupled this essential requirement called love to *peace and patience*. When love is present, joy can't be far behind. Elsewhere the bible says that love is the law's fulfilment and the doing of God's law brings delight! (Ps. 119: 16, 24, 35 etc.)

Christians know of God's sure promise that they can rejoice even in distressing circumstances. Paul experienced beatings, imprisonment storms and shipwreck. Yet even in the midst of what we would call disasters, we find him giving thanks to God for food, which he shared with others, and saying, among other things, " *Dying and yet we live on, beaten and yet not killed; sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor yet making many rich...*" (2 Corinthians 6: 9).

His gladness was, and is, shared by other true Christians. It is not some superficial, " just keep on smiling" kind of medicine which most often fails to satisfy the deepest need of a person's life. It is, instead,

that “ *inexpressible and glorious joy*” that another apostle, Peter speaks about in his first letter (ch. 1: 8)

That joy too, is a gift of God. It is anchored in the knowledge that by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ believers receive forgiveness of sins and salvation. Though they they may live in the midst of death and persecution, with evil spirits all trying to make a grab for them they, like Job, a faithful person living in ancient times confess, “ *I know that my Redeemer lives*”. (Job 19: 25a)

They know God the Holy Spirit was poured out on his people (Acts 2). That Spirit leads them to live lives of thankfulness and holiness. Shunning those hard, destructive spirits of jealousy and hatred, arrogance and self-sufficiency they embrace patience . That together with love and joy they might have a three-fold cord that is not easily broken .²

Peace belongs to those who love God’s Law just as much as joy. That peace is not just an absence of war and of brawling or an argumentative approach to one’s relationships. It’s not some temporary moratorium on letting one’s tongue run away unbridled, with poisonous results.

² Ecclesiastes 4: 12b

It is a serenity of heart which is God's own treasure. It is therefore called "*The peace of God, which transcends all understanding*". (Philippians 4:7) It is very closely associated with grace, which is God's gift and on which peace is based. It's really a conviction with which we need to go to work. This conviction,- that God did not spare his own Son so that by his saving work on Calvary's cross we might have life. Therefore this peace has been called "*the heart's calm after Calvary's storm*." With our weak, sinful human nature we really can't grasp the fulness of meaning of this precious peace.

Nevertheless it is real and it is powerful for Paul says, "*It will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:7b) What did that mean for those churches in Galatia, so tempted to throw caution to the wind? And this in order to burden fellow Christians with man-made laws of which Paul said they are really a "*yoke of slavery*" (ch. 5:1)

It certainly meant that they would have to come back to the basics of Christian living. They would have to be once more, *brought back to Christ*. So, to "*Live by the Spirit, not gratifying the desires of the flesh*," one's sinful human nature.

That's what we need to do. That would bring real changes in family and personal life. That would effect a reformation of sorts in one's

neighbourhood which may be a breeding ground for discontent, for drug abuse and for gang warfare. Only Jesus Christ is the answer. Only God, Father Son and Holy Spirit can bring about an era of love and joy and peace.

The apostle Paul even went so far as to speak of reaping a harvest, a harvest of doing good, if we ourselves do not become weary of doing good.

Dear listeners, heed God's call. Turn to him in prayer and in faith proceeding. Cherish the great and sincere love of God and the present power of the Holy Spirit, ready and able to come to your aid when you call on him and confess his authority, power and comfort! Cherish his precious "fruits" and live! Amen, and thanks so much for listening.