

Transforming the fleshly heart

The context of verses 19-26 of Galatians chapter five has to do with the sub-Christian interpersonal relations in the Galatian churches. The severity of the situation is indicated in verse 15: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." Paul describes the means of taming the beast within sinful man as walking in the Spirit, (vss. 16, 18, 25). It is of the greatest importance to see that the cure for interpersonal conflict does not come from the behavioral sciences but from the sanctifying work of God's Spirit within the believer.

"Walking in the Spirit" is an expression that conveys the nature of this remedy. It is not once and for all; it is not a thirty-second cure that can be gulped down with a few swallows of spiritual resolve; it is not even a celestial spa that can be visited periodically to give some tone to the sagging spirit. It is a lifelong process that will require exercising spiritual muscles on a daily basis.⁵

The process is one of clearly identifying and preventing the exercise of the bad, and consciously planning to put into practice the good. The lists Paul has given serve to define and identify the two classes of thought and behavior.

⁵In 1 Tim. 4:7, Paul admonishes, "Train yourself to be godly," and also in 2 Tim. 3:16, ". . . training in righteousness." The word Paul uses in 1 Tim. 4:7 is *γυμναζω* "to exercise." See also Heb. 5:14; 12:11.