

FIGHT FOR THE FAITH | Freedom Misunderstood: Paul's Urgent Call to Live by the Spirit

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“Paul,” Tertius said, his voice cutting through the stillness of the late afternoon, “only two pieces left! You’re almost there!”

The sun, beginning its descent, cast long shadows across the table, illuminating the nearly completed jar. The once-shattered vessel stood tall, its wildflower motifs and fractured body pieced together with care and intention. Two crucial shards remained, each bearing words Paul had etched into them weeks earlier.

Paul paused, reached for the second-to-last fragment, and ran a hand through his graying hair. The weariness of the long day was evident, but a glint of purpose still shone in his eyes. He smiled at Tertius’ enthusiasm but remained contemplative.

Tertius’s gaze lingered on the jar, the metaphor becoming clearer with every piece. “The most intricate shards are at the top,” he observed quietly. “They pull it all together.”

Paul’s hands remained steady as he held the fragment, despite the long hours behind them.

“That’s right, Tertius. The final parts are extremely important. We’ve covered a lot of ground today, but we can’t let up now. These last pieces...they’re not just the top—they’re the crown. Everything has been building toward this.”

Tertius watched Paul's face, sensing the depth of his words—he was speaking about much more than the jar.

Paul met his gaze. "Stay sharp. I know we're tired, but this is the part that matters most. I've saved the best for last." He turned the shard over, as if recalling the moment he had first inscribed it. He paused, then read the words of the heading aloud: "Walk by the Spirit." After a moment, he set it down again.

"Tertius, before we move on, I want to hear what you've taken from all this. What have you heard me say about the gospel versus the law so far?"

Tertius cleared his throat before responding. "You've taught that we are no longer under the burden of the law. The gospel frees us because Christ fulfilled the law for us. Circumcision, festivals, dietary restrictions—none of these can make us righteous. Only faith in Christ justifies us."

Paul nodded. "Go on."

Tertius continued, "And you've said that the law enslaves while the gospel brings freedom. The law shows us our sin, but it can't save us. It only condemns. The gospel, on the other hand, offers salvation by grace, through faith—not by works."

Paul smiled, clearly pleased with Tertius' understanding. "Yes, you've heard correctly. That is all true." He paused, then leaned forward slightly, locking eyes with Tertius. "But there's something more—something crucial that you've missed."

Tertius frowned, uncertain of what he had overlooked.

"You've described the freedom from the law accurately, but you're forgetting a key part of this freedom. It's not just freedom *from* the law; it's freedom *for* something. The gospel doesn't release us from the law's demands and leave us wandering without direction. It replaces the external rules of

the law with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.”

Tertius brought his hand to his forehead. “Of course! The Spirit! How could I forget?” He shook his head, frustrated with himself.

Paul chuckled softly. “Don’t forget that, Tertius. It’s not irrelevant. Without the Spirit, none of this works! Remember when we talked about the way Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost?”

Tertius nodded, recalling the vivid description Paul had shared.

“The outpouring of the Spirit wasn’t just some afterthought—it was the very promise of God, the fulfillment of everything the prophets longed for. The Holy Spirit is the heart of it all. Without Him, we’re left with dead rituals, powerless to change us from the inside. But with Him, we’re transformed. The Galatians need to grasp this too. We’re free from the law, yes, but not free to do whatever we want. We’re free to walk in step with the Spirit, to live by His power, and that changes everything.”

Tertius stared at Paul, a look of amazement crossing his face. Everything Paul had said, as disjointed as it may have felt previously, was now connecting like pieces in an elaborate puzzle.

“Yes! The Spirit brings everything together. It’s wonderful,” Tertius said, his eyes shifting to the jar on the table under the window.

Paul saw the recognition in the scribe’s eyes.

“I’m glad you’re seeing it, Tertius. Without the Spirit, freedom would just be lawlessness. Some people twist my words to suggest that I’m encouraging chaos. But that’s far from the truth. The Spirit enables us to obey God from the heart,

driven by love, not fear of punishment. This freedom we have in Christ empowers us to live a life of obedience, not rebellion.”

Tertius sat in silence, reflecting on Paul’s words.

Paul continued. “This is the heart of the gospel: We are no longer slaves to the law, but neither are we slaves to sin. We are led by the Spirit, and it’s the Spirit who produces in us the kind of life the law was always pointing to.

“Write this,” Paul said, his voice firm. “For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your [flesh]. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another” (5:13–15).

Tertius dipped his reed pen into the ink pot and began writing, the sharp scratch of the pen cutting through the still air. When he finished, he glanced up.

“This is excellent, sir. I think this gets to the heart of the Judaizers’ concern. They fear that without the law, everything will unravel—that people will fall into sin, division, and disorder.”

Paul’s eyes flashed as he leaned in, resting his hands on the table.

“That’s the very misunderstanding I’ve been warning against, Tertius,” he said, shaking his head. “They think it’s the law that keeps people in line.”

Paul began pacing as he gathered his thoughts.

“But here’s the irony—the ones warning of chaos are the ones causing it! And they’re using the law to do it! They stir up

division, suspicion, and control—all in the name of righteousness. But true righteousness doesn't come from the flesh, and it never will. It only comes when people walk in the Spirit."

Tertius furrowed his brow. "Sir, you keep referring to 'the flesh.' Are you talking about circumcision—the cutting of flesh?"

Paul gave a dry chuckle, shaking his head. "Well, foreskin is certainly flesh, and the Judaizers insist that cutting it away makes a man righteous—so in a sense, yes, they have a literal flesh-based righteousness. But I mean something much deeper than that. I'm using wordplay to show that trusting in human effort for righteousness is, in the broader sense, also 'walking in the flesh.' Flesh is temporary, corruptible, dying. The Spirit is eternal, life-giving. To walk by the flesh is to rely on human strength—on effort, on externals. And that's why being under the law is walking according to the flesh.

"The law itself is good and spiritual—but trusting in it for righteousness is still trusting in the flesh. Because at the end of the day, it's human effort. It's something external. And it's powerless to bring life. The flesh can never produce what only the Spirit can."

Paul tapped the table for emphasis. "And like the literal flesh on your body, the flesh is self-focused. It's self-reliant. That's why a life driven by the flesh always leads to division—because the flesh is always about self. Sooner or later, people start striving against each other. They compete. They dominate. They tear each other down. That's why wherever people walk in the flesh, you see jealousy, envy, strife.

"But the Spirit?" Paul lifted a hand slightly, as if grasping at something unseen. "The Spirit produces love, joy, peace—the very things the flesh could never produce. That's why walking

by the Spirit isn't just another way to please God—it's the only way."

Paul straightened, his voice soft now but still charged with conviction.

"And here's the irony the Judaizers will never understand: The ones trying the hardest to fulfill the law are the very ones breaking it. Why? Because love is the fulfillment of the law. And only the Spirit can produce love. Even some of our own sages teach that love is the totality of the law. If we live in love for one another, we will never break the law. And the Spirit of God is the Spirit of love. If we are filled with the Spirit, we will walk in love."

Paul exhaled, shaking his head. "If only they could see it."

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