

Galatians 5:22-23 in the Navajo Bible

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Nidi Níłch'i Diyinii bineest'a' éí díí: ayóó'ó'ó'ní, il hózhó, hasht'ehodít'é, nízaadgóó ha'ahóní, ajooba', yá'át'éehii, a'ahódlí,²³ a'ohgo é'ét'é, ádaa áháyá; kódaat'éhígíí bee haz'áanii doo bídéet'i' da. (Galatians 5:22-23)¹

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)²

Discussion

The intent of vs. 23 is that no law condemns or opposes things like the fruit of the Spirit. But of course promoting such good things is exactly what the law has in view. God condemns bad behaviors in order to promote good behaviors. This is a spiritual point, not a textual one. The verse is well translated and reads nicely.

The Role of Law

The law does not in itself produce good behaviors. Instead it nips away bad ones. Actually, it can't do that either. But once the law has brought us to an awareness of what bad behaviors are, and has shown us their true nature, the Holy Spirit can use this knowledge to mold and shape our characters. In one place Jesus says,

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (John 15:1-2)

How does He do this? How does He prune our character branches, if I could say it this way? By gently removing the wrong things He finds there. This is not an automatic or arbitrary process. To remove any thing from our characters, He must bring it to our attention and we, then, go to Christ for the power to overcome whatever it is. If this process seems legalistic to you, something's wrong. It is soundly biblical.

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." (Acts 24:24-25)

The topics of "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" have an austere edge to them. They're not fun to deal with, but the one pressing the point was Paul. Apparently righteousness is consistent with his concept of the gospel, so it should be consistent with ours.

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)

Having a good character, of course, does not save any more than the law saves. That is not its function. Christ saves. This is a work of grace, through faith. Salvation is a free gift. But let us not despise holiness – even though it can't save us – for "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

The Role of Holiness

Sanctification is as much a work of the Holy Spirit as is justification. Obedience in itself might not produce holiness, but disobedience can destroy it. Because holiness does not justify, that doesn't mean it is worthless. My wristwatch does not justify, but I wear it because it serves a useful purpose, even though that purpose is unrelated to justification. Eating breakfast does not justify, but none of us would want to go hungry. Not everything has to justify, and that's good because only one thing does. Only Christ justifies. Even faith has value only because it connects us with Christ. Christ justifies.

Refusing to talk about anything other than what brings about salvation can have a perverse downside. A religion that says, "If it doesn't save me, I don't want to hear about it," could become self centered, even in the act of appearing to be Christ centered. God has many blessings for us that in themselves do not save, but He still wants us to receive them. One of these is holiness, which can only develop in the context of obedience.

A religion that says, "I won't obey because obedience can't save me," breathes the same atmosphere as a religion that says, "I *will* obey because obedience *can* save me." In both cases there is a narrow focus on the link between obedience and salvation, even though the link runs in different directions. It is a religion of works even though it gives every appearance of emphasizing grace. Beyond a certain point, a religion which focuses only on being saved can take on selfish overtones. It is possible for the focus to shift from the Source of salvation to the result – from Christ to us.

A religion that is truly Christ centered will accept salvation because He is the One who offers it. It will accept obedience for the same reason – because doing what He asks us to do expresses loyalty to Christ. It will accept service because by serving Him we lift up the name of Jesus. It accepts Christ's yoke because He is the One who holds it out, and because in bearing it we stand side by side with Him in service.

Christ's yoke draws anyone who bears it close to Him. He calls it "my yoke" because it's a yoke He Himself bears. In offering it to us He offers Himself. And in sharing it with Him we find rest.

Conclusion

Anyone who willingly submits to Christ in these and in every other way will develop the succulent fruit of the Spirit in abundance. And this is exactly the reason why God gives us His law, even though in itself it does not have the power to bring about the desired result. The law is God's pruning hook. He uses it to prevent us from doing wrong things and convict us when we have done wrong things, through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.

Is the law concerned with holiness? Certainly! But in an indirect way. It can't produce what is good; it can only condemn what is bad. But who among us can say that its correction, guidance, and reproof are no longer needed?

If all we want from God is His blessing and not His instruction, then what we really want is His, not Him. It could be that we want His blessings and the benefits He can give us, but not the rest of the relationship. But it doesn't work this way. To come to Christ we must come completely, and to accept Christ we must accept the entire package – salvation, blessings, benefits, obligations, service, obedience, all of it. We can't belong to Christ part way.