

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 20 – “Pitfalls for the Spiritual”
Galatians 5:25-26

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TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:25-26 ESV).

In our last message we saw the key to living the spiritual life was walking in the Holy Spirit. Today we go a bit further in this understanding. Until we reach the gates of heaven and cross the threshold to meet our redeemer, we will not be out of danger. The path to heaven is directly through enemy territory! He places traps along every pathway. Even for those who sincerely seek to walk in the ways of the Lord, to walk in the Spirit, they must beware of these traps. It is an awareness of this truth that prompts this admonition from the Apostle Paul.

The character of these warnings reminds us that spiritual people rarely fall into the snares of sensuality and open carnality. These kinds of traps are for those who have been less than complete in their commitment to the Lord. The pitfalls the enemy has designed for the spiritual involve the sins of the spirit. While they may not be considered as scandalous by the world, they are just as damaging to the work of the Lord. **There are three specific dangers Paul lists:**

The First Pitfall Is that of Conceit.

The Apostle Paul writes, *Let us not become conceited.* A more literal rendering would be, *let us not become vainglorious.* The danger is that this will become a pattern of life for those who have been seeking to walk in the Spirit. The word vain-glory involves the combination of two words to make a word. One of the words means empty or vain, while the other means glory. So it means “to be conceited,” or “boastful.” There is a place for glory to be on the lips of men, but it cannot be a glory that is empty or vain. The glory of man is empty when he is glorifying the wrong things. The spiritual are often tempted to glory in the wrong things.

1. **Sometimes they are tempted to glory in their sacrifices and commitments.** These people are very easy to spot. They will often be overheard telling others how much they have given up, or how much they have suffered for the cause of Christ. They will be boasting of how much more they are seeking to do even now for the Lord. All such glorying is empty, meaningless glory. Regardless of how much we may have given up for the cause of Christ, it is no more than we should have done.
2. **The spiritual are also tempted to glory in their work or achievements in their work for the Lord.** With a repulsive conceit they will brag about how much they do and what those results have been. In their recounting of their achievements they will have often been known to exaggerate a bit. The numbers and deeds grow in size as they continue to retell the story. This is vain-glory.
3. **The spiritual are sometimes tempted to glory in their experiences.** They will recount their experiences in such a way that it seems that they are totally responsible for their spiritual growth and experience. They may have seen a vision, or experienced healing. Or some

other gracious work of God. Such people will usually talk more of their experiences than they do of the Lord. Paul's experience at this point might be helpful. Evidently he was tempted to flaunt some of his experiences over the head of other believers in order to bolster his position among them. He had been the participant in some experiences that would surely lend themselves to such boasting. He reminds the Corinthians that in one experience he was actually lifted right up into the third heaven. He saw things unspeakable, yet God put a restraint upon him, and would not allow him to share it with others lest he be lifted up in conceit.

In the Scripture there are only two things a Christian may legitimately glory in. One of them is found in the Galatian letter:

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14 ESV).

Christians can glory in the work of Christ on their behalf through the Cross. In fact, they SHOULD glory in the cross! That kind of glory brings honor to the only One who deserves honor and glory. There is another reference, however; it is found in the Corinthian letter:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV).

The Christian can glory in the things that make him weak. These are the things that make us lean more fully on the Lord.

It should be noted that churches can fall into the same pitfall as individuals. We must beware unless we go out bragging about the wrong things. We can brag about being the biggest and the best in such a way that we take glory away from the Lord who is responsible for all things good. God will not allow anyone to glory in anything or anyone other than Him for long. His patience is not endless. He is jealous for his glory. The very nature of the spiritual life is that there are countless opportunities for us to be tempted to vain-glory.

The Second Pitfall Is the Irritation of Others.

Many students of the Galatian letter see this as being the outcome of the conceit and pride we have just considered. It is surely true that it is very closely related. Anyone who falls into one of them will probably find himself in all three. This one simply says, *provoking one another*. "Provoking" means to call against, to challenge, to irritate. There is a kind of provoking that is legitimate and right for the Christian. In fact, we are urged to provoke one another to good works. But, Paul is talking about the dangers of the way we provoke one another. It's not hard to tell the difference. Yet, it is such a hidden pitfall that many slip into it before they know it.

There are many ways this takes place in our lives. When the spiritual Christian seeks to challenge someone with an air of superiority we find ourselves falling for the trap Satan has set before us. I've seen this happen so many times in churches. The end result is always the same. It irritates others to the point that spirituality becomes repulsive rather than attractive.

As we walk with the Spirit, he will lead us to do some unusual things at times. He will call on us to obedience in many different areas of our life. However, we must not fall into the temptation of thinking that our experience is for everyone. Can you imagine Jacob trying to impose on everyone the same experience of wrestling with the Lord that he had? He walked away from that night with at Penuel with a very distinct limp. He had been touched in a crippling way in his hip. Wouldn't it have been ridiculous for him to have insisted that everyone who wanted to truly be spiritual had to have had such an experience? God relates himself to us personally in such a way that he meets our needs individually. What he must do with me is not necessarily what he must with others.

If your spirituality has become a barrier to good relations with others, you should check yourself. Jesus should be our model for the spiritual life. He was never someone who imposed his will on others. **THE KEY QUESTION FOR US BECOMES:** *Are we acting as someone else's conscience, or are we allowing the Holy Spirit to do his work?*

Third, Jealousy Is a Pitfall of the Spiritual.

Spirituality usually gives way to spiritual ambition. The spiritual become ambitious to do big things for the Lord. Envy is a danger to people who have such ambition. Obviously this can be closely related to vain-glory.

The worldly minded Christian may be envious of material things and focus attention in these areas. But, the spiritually minded are tempted to become envious of other things. They become envious of opportunities of Christian service. I am not envious of a Christian brother who has a new truck, but I am tempted to be envious of some brother who has received a special opportunity to serve the Lord. If I fall into that pitfall my envy will prevent me from really rejoicing in the privilege that has come to him. If I hear them preach at a conference I may miss the blessing God intends for me to have through their ministry because I was too busy being concerned with why it wasn't me preaching!

You've seen this before. We are tempted to ask the questions like: "Why do they never call on me to pray?" "Why don't I get to sing the special music?" "Why do I never get to serve on a committee?" "Why do I never get to teach a class?" "Why does Brother Jones get all the recognition?" All of these questions are indications that we have fallen for the trap set before us to become jealous of the service of others. We have become envious.

One of the most dangerous positions any of us could find ourselves is to think we have reached the point in our journey that we are so spiritual that we do not face temptation. Satan will never quit trying to defeat us. No man is more vulnerable than the man who thinks he has it made spiritually. Beware of becoming that kind of Christian!