

Eyes on the Spirit

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Growing up, I watched Saturday morning television cartoons in which a character was making a decision. On one shoulder an angel hovered, saying, "Do the right thing!" But on the other shoulder perched a devil urging the character to do the wrong thing. You already know what happened: as the angel looked increasingly anxious, the cartoon character chose to do the wrong thing.

Paul's Galatians didn't watch TV cartoons, but they probably had a similar model of decision making. The teachers whom Paul opposes in his letter would have warned them that in every person a powerful evil impulse strives with the impulse for good. Without the law, which the Galatians were to accept by getting circumcised, they would be powerless to resist the evil impulse within them.

By contrast, Paul assures the Galatians that Christ has set them free from the curse which the law pronounces (3:13) by teaching the doctrine of the two ways (right and wrong) and creating anxiety about whether it was possible to choose the right path without the law's guidance.

Paul agrees with his opponents that freedom in Christ does not imply self-indulgence, gratifying fleshly desires that distract Christians from doing what we really want to do: to love our neighbors as ourselves. Everyone knows "the works of the flesh," says Paul. (Though he lists some of them, just in case.)

Instead, he urges the Galatians to focus on God's Holy Spirit and the fruit (note the singular) of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." He suggests they trade in the devil or angel "cartoon"

model of decision making for another one: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."

The verb he uses suggests "lining up in a column with" the Spirit, as in a brass band moving down the street. To keep the rank and file in perfect form, band members keep their eyes on the person in front of them and to their right. Keep your eye on God's Holy Spirit, says Paul. This is the Spirit of the crucified one, Jesus Christ, who is transforming our human way of thinking into the way of obedience to God. Keep your eye on the Spirit of Jesus Christ, says Paul, and you'll be just fine.