

The Governor

One of the sure signs that someone is walking closely with God is the degree in which self-control is evident in his or her life. In fact, one of the major fruits of the Holy Spirit is self-control. Why does God think we need self-control, unless, of course, there is something naturally unruly about our lives. In Western culture today, people love to talk about finding the right "balance" in their lives - amongst the many competing activities and interests in their lives. But, according to the Bible, we will never be able to find the right "balance" in our lives apart from the presence of Christ in our souls. We need God's Spirit to help govern and guide us towards being more temperate, hospitable and peaceful. Ultimately, no government, laws, or rulers can accomplish what God's Spirit alone can do, tame our wild spirits and make us whole.

The Apostle Paul in the first century had incredibly Good News to tell people - that there was a way to love your neighbor as yourself, and love God with all your heart, mind and soul. But, no one had ever heard of such a way of life described or explained before. At the time, governments and kings alone were responsible for keeping people in good order; the many different gods were there to help, too. These authorities had never imagined a Holy Spirit, which could live in people's hearts and do the governing for them. The Apostle Paul was an inspired preacher and writer, used by God to help explain how accepting Christ into your life also invites the presence of the Holy Spirit to advocate, counsel and comfort you as well - in other words, to be a governor. Listen to these words Paul wrote to the people of Galatia; "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.... But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things." (Galatians 5:24-26, 22-23)



Paul the Apostle

My heart has been breaking for the past three weeks over the kidnapping in northern Nigeria of the 13 year-old girls by the radical, militant, fundamentalist Muslim group known as Boko Haram. Despite help from the intelligence communities of Britain, France and the United States, the Nigerian government has yet to locate the Boko Haram militants and the nearly 200 innocent girls being held

in captivity. Boko Haram is opposed to young girls receiving any kind of education, much in the same way the Taliban has tried to prevent young women from being educated in Afghanistan. Boko Haram believes that God directed them to kidnap these girls and murder many other people in northern Nigeria as well. Boko Haram believes that the best way to rule people is through control, fear and if necessary, slaughter. Please pray these girls are found, brought safely back to their families, and that the followers of Boko Haram are brought to justice. Pray also that these militant Muslims would have their eyes opened to the Good News of God - that hatred, fear, and violence are no substitutes for gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are love, temperance, peace and self-control through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.



Last week, I went to the Imax theatre at Navy Pier in Chicago with my Bosnian Muslim friends and church friends and watched a world premier movie on the life of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Imam living in exile in the United States because of his radically progressive views on Islam. The movie is called, "Love is a Verb." Gulen is a Muslim spiritual leader followed by millions of more moderate Muslims around the world. He heads a group called the Niagara Foundation, which promotes excellence in education and interfaith understanding, among many other worthy causes. Gulen is one of the most articulate spokespeople for why, in his opinion, the Quran supports women's equality and education, serving the poor, interfaith dialogue, health care, and disaster assistance. Gulen is a great admirer of Jesus and his Gospels. In fact, you see in the film how much Gulen's interpretation of Islam resembles Christianity in many ways. He is in exile from the Turkish government because of his progressive views. Gulen is a Sufi Muslim and as such urges his followers to seek the presence of God in their lives and overcome the evils of ego. His teachings are very different from the more rigid views of many Muslims who espouse more fundamentalist principles. If Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban are on one end of the spectrum within Islam, Fethullah Gulen and the Niagara Foundation are on the other. Gulen vehemently opposes fundamentalist Islam. Nevertheless, Sufi Muslims, such as Gulen, are as much in need of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross as anyone else. In my opinion, they are in earnest search of the Holy Spirit without knowing it. For this reason, my Christian friends and I are present with them, always humbly ready to help them discover the full divinity, wonder and beauty of Jesus Christ.



Fethullah Gulen

There is only one Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God for those who place their trust in Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Spirit is everywhere doing amazing things among people all over the world. However, he becomes our mighty counselor, comfort and governor the moment we decide to follow Jesus with our heart, mind and soul.



The laws of our land, or the laws of the Bible, are there to help us know when we transgress them. We need to know where the boundaries are located. We need to know when we make God's heart grieve; when we make our own lives more difficult, troublesome, and even dire. But, laws in themselves do not motivate or change us. It is God's Spirit who changes us, gives us new hearts, desires and motivations in order to live at peace with our neighbors, the universe, and ourselves.

We need to stop looking for ultimate "balance" in our lives apart from God's Spirit working in our hearts. We will always be disappointed if we do this kind of work on our own, at times feeling so close to finding this so-called balance, only to have it suddenly disappear once again. Shalom or peace from God, something even greater than balance itself, is a gift from God for those who believe. Once we are at peace with God and ourselves, we can resist the temptation of trying to control others like Boko Haram is tragically doing in northern Nigeria today. Our great Governor is not in Washington DC, Cape Town, London or Moscow. He is seated at the right hand of God, ready to quiet, temper and govern our souls the moment we invite him into our hearts.