

WALK(!) BY THE SPIRIT Galatians 5:16-26

As we know and have studied, Paul wrote this letter that we call the book of Galatians to a group of churches in Galatia, otherwise known as modern day Turkey. These churches had been infiltrated by false teachers known as Judaizers who wanted to bring Judaism into Christianity, telling the believers that if they really wanted to be saved and if they really wanted to grow and progress spiritually, they needed to observe the works of the Law of Moses. They were especially claiming that unless a man be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, he cannot have eternal life (Acts 15:1) and that in order to regulate their spiritual lives, they were to be directed to observe the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5). And with the Galatians believers having gutted this bad theological hook of works-based teaching, Paul has been trying to remove it both by yanking it out with serious verbal warnings and surgically with precise doctrinal teaching. He defended his apostleship in chapters 1 & 2, giving precise instructional arguments on grace and law teachings in chapters 3 & 4, and now he is telling us what the practical application or outworking of those teachings look like in our lives. He has made it clear we are not under the works of the Law, but under grace, and now he's explaining what that should look like in our lives. We are at the portion of the book where things get very practical and it's time to apply the knowledge of the doctrines Paul has set forth.

And so far what we have seen in chapter five is two big **NEGATIVES** concerning what it looks like to grow in the Christian life and to progress in sanctification. **Negative #1** in verse 1-12 was that Christians are **NOT** to live under any sort of **legalism**. It was for freedom that Christ sets us free so stand firm in that freedom and **do not renounce that freedom**. If you want to try to be justified by any works or the works of Law, then hear the Law (4:21): you must keep it perfectly. You have to be perfect, and only Christ was perfect, which is why only His sacrifice could pay for your sin completely and forever – all of your past, present and future sins. If you want to live under Law, then you're **severing yourself from Christ** – you're not depending on Him in the way you were created to live, but living by your own self-effort to attain a righteousness of your own instead of accepting His. On top of that, you have **fallen from grace** – you're not earning more grace by your works because grace, by definition, can't be earned – the more you work for grace, the more you fall from it. You're not more spiritual, you're less spiritual. You've gone off track in your relationship with God and have got stuck in the ditch of works. You're putting the pedal to the metal and exerting a lot of energy, but just you're spinning your wheels and not going anywhere. Because of these teachings of Paul that we're free in grace and not justified by works of any kind, specifically with the works of the Law in the context, many people today and in Paul's day and age would ask, "If we're not under Law but under grace, and if we can't earn heaven by our works or by being "good enough," then does that mean we can now just live how we want? Can we now live in sin so that grace will increase (Rom. 6:15)?" The answer Paul gave to this question is an emphatic NO! So we have **Negative #2** in verses 13-15 where Paul makes it clear that Christian liberty is **NOT** a **license** to sin. We should neither renounce freedom **nor abuse our freedom**. We are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but rather, use it to serve others like Christ. I mean God is working to carry out a holistic salvation experience where we're saved from sin's **penalty** (salvation) and **power** (sanctification) and eventually, sin's **presence** (glorification). He is currently purifying a people for Himself and to live in sin is to contradict His purposes for you. And it is that 2nd stage of sanctification we're mainly discussing today where we're being freed from the power of sin now. **We have been freed** from the slavish grip of the sin nature positionally in Christ, where as once had total domination over us, and now conditionally we are to exercise that freedom and refuse to let the sin nature control us, but how?

That's the underlying question being answered: "If Christian progress (growing spiritually, sanctification), is NOT by legalism and our freedom is NOT to passively accept license (accept our sinful state), then what is it? What is this victorious freedom? Where do we need to look to regulate our lives and win victory over the fleshly sin nature? By what fundamental principle should we order our steps? If it's not to an external law of commands and it's not passively forfeiting to the law of sin, then how should we live our lives?" **The answer Paul gives us is one big POSITIVE statement of direction: Walk by the Spirit.** That's what he states in verse 16. **Walk by the Spirit.** Verse 25 says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." It was by the Spirit of God that we were made alive in Christ, being born again spiritually for our faith in Christ and it is by the Spirit of God, through faith in Christ, that we now walk. He's saying the same thing in verse 25 as he did in chapter 3:2, "did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" So just like us, these Galatian believers' spiritual lives had begun when they trusted in Christ and the Spirit of God came and took up residence within them and now, they were to continue walking in faith by the Spirit.

I. CHRISTIAN PROGRESS OCCURS WHEN WE WALK BY THE SPIRIT. (VV. 16-18)

As we discussed a couple weeks ago, when Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the God's abiding Spirit in them and the sinful nature of man ensued as a result. They are all of our parents – everyone has descended here from Adam and Eve and everyone has inherited this sin nature, being born in sin. We were born as slaves to the sin nature. But now that we've trusted in Christ and have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, like 2 Peter 1:4 says, we have been made partakers of the divine nature. So now we have two distinct natures within us – a sinful nature and a divine nature. We're kind of like a twist cone in that we have two flavors – chocolate or vanilla. But those flavors don't mix. You can either have the chocolate or the vanilla, one at a time. The two natures do not mix. Paul says in verse 17 that these two natures have two totally different desires and they oppose one another. So though I use a somewhat light-hearted illustration like an ice cream cone, it's really not that friendly or light-hearted because there is an absolute war going on inside of us and we're being pulled in opposite directions by both natures and will be until the day we die. The sin nature sticks with us until death or rapture, so as one Bible teacher said, you don't want to pray that God will take your lust issue away because to totally do that, you'll have to be taken out of this world!¹ Rather, you should pray that you walk by the Spirit. Paul says there's only one nature we are to habitually walk by and that's by the Spirit, the divine nature.

A. We are commanded to habitually walk by the Spirit. (v. 16a)

The word "walk" (peripateo) is a present tense imperative. The present tense tells us that this is something that involves a continuous, moment by moment action. It could be translated as "keep on walking". The imperative mood also tells us this is a command. Romans 8:12-17 (which I consider to be the sister-passage to this one – even all of Romans 6-8) states that we are **debtors under obligation** to live, not according to the flesh, but by the Spirit. The idea of a moment by moment walk with God was a common expression to the Jew who was to walk according to the Law of Moses (Ex. 18:20; Dt. 10:12) and something we're familiar with as well, someone talking about their spiritual journey. Notice I keep using **BY** the Spirit like the NASB translates it. I like that because when you walk with someone, you walk alongside them, beside them – you're by them. We are to walk **BY** the Spirit, some translation reading "keep in step with the Spirit" (ESV v.25). You don't want to get ahead or lag behind. Like Ezekiel 1's living creatures in our Heaven study – wherever the Spirit goes they go. Walking with God, keeping in step the Spirit of God, is a moment by moment thing. We are constantly faced with the decision to either walk by the Spirit (the divine nature) or walk by the flesh (the sinful nature). If we walk

according to the flesh, we can **grieve** the Spirit of God by sinful living or we can **quench** the Spirit of God by not submitting to Him and letting Him live through us. How many times do we quench the Spirit when it comes to witnessing?

But here's one thing we need to remember: **Because Paul commands us to walk by the Spirit, so we have no excuse for not walking by the Spirit.** We have a choice as to whether we will walk according to the flesh or the Spirit. We've been set free from the slavish grip of the sin nature and can choose now. **Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh (v. 24).** I like to think of the old man, the old life, the flesh – whatever you want to call it, hypothetically, as an old boss that I used to work for: a mean guy, a guy who was always demanding, rude, inconsiderate. He's always barking orders and it's always his way or the highway. But guess what? I left that job. I don't work for him anymore so I don't have to serve him anymore. Even if he were to walk in here right now and bark orders at me, I wouldn't listen because I'm no longer under his authority. He can scream at me and try to get me to do his bidding all day long but I wouldn't even give it a second thought. Why? I died to that job. I have a new job. A new boss. A new Captain. I'm not the captain and neither is the flesh my captain. Christ is my captain. And He is more powerful than my old boss. I died with Him and was raised with Him. I am in union with Him and His sacrifice and serve Him now. I have been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ lives in Me (2:20). I live by faith in my new Captain because apart from Him, I can do nothing and He supplies me with what I need to serve Him and then rewards me for it! What matchless grace is that! We're saved by faith and we walk by faith and it's all a giant work of God's manifold grace.

And check this out: this command comes with a promise.

B. Walking by the Spirit promises victory over the flesh. (vv. 16 – 17)

If you walk by the Spirit, you will not (*ou me*) carry out the desire of the flesh. You could translate that, “Walk by the Spirit, and you shall absolutely, positively, not fulfill the desires of the flesh.” Why is that? Because we are either walking by the Spirit or by the flesh and not both at the same time. If you walk according to the Spirit, you won't be fulfilling the desire of the flesh and if you're fulfilling the desire of the flesh, you won't be walking according to the Spirit. It's either one or the other. And this is something the Law couldn't do – it couldn't give victory over the flesh. Romans 8:2-4 “For **the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.** For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Paul even goes so far as to say that if you're led by the Spirit, you're not under the Law. The condition for not being under Law is having the Spirit – being a Christian (Rom. 8:9) – and he equates the Law with the flesh because they both operate in the external realm. The Law was the main outward restriction for controlling the flesh but now we are to look inward to the Spirit who writes the Law on our hearts. I think what Paul said in Galatians 3:13-14 does a good job of getting near bottom of this point: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us... **in order that** in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” We have to remember that God's plan from the beginning with Abraham was to bless the nations with His Spirit and the Law was the tutor to lead us to Christ to

receive the Spirit through faith in Him. The Law has a dual-natured purpose: one for Israel as a national governing system and one for all mankind as a tutor to point us to Christ, doing so when we realize we're sinners who don't measure up. If you've put your faith in Christ, the Law has done its primary purpose and led you to Him, where you've received the Spirit who is now your primary governing factor. You're no longer under the pedagogue. You're an heir and a son and have received the Spirit, who is crying, "Abba! Father!" and who wants to do the will of God and keep His commands, but we couldn't do it on our own. We couldn't save ourselves and can't sanctify ourselves in our own power. It's only by an intimate relationship with the God who lives in us. So I also have this as a sub-point:

C. It is the Spirit of God that sanctifies us. (v. 18)

The Father planned our salvation, the Son made it possible by His atoning work on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applies it to our lives. He is the primary member of the Trinity responsible for sanctifying us. We can't just sanctify ourselves or crucify ourselves; it requires the Spirit of God to baptize us into Christ and **we depend upon Him for anything we do in service to God**. It also seems necessary to ask the question, how do we know exactly what the Spirit desires? Where does the Spirit lead us to know what He desires? To the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), which is the Word of God. We are more privileged than the Galatians to have the completed Scriptures that the Spirit Himself wrote through the apostles and prophets, and the Spirit illumines for us to understand. Part of walking by the Spirit is to take in and live by what He has written, as we're doing right now.

II. CHRISTIAN PROGRESS IS EVIDENT. (VV. 19-23)

If you want to know whether you're walking in the flesh or by the Spirit, here's the evidence. It's obvious. He gives two lists. First he lists the works of the flesh.

A. The flesh produces sinful works. (v. 19 -20)

And this list is typically broken up into 3 or 4 categories:

1. **Sexual Sins** – Immorality, Impurity, Sensuality
2. **Religious Sins** – Idolatry, Sorcery
3. **Relational Sins** – Enmity, Strife, Jealousy, Outbursts of anger, Disputes, Dissensions, Factions, Envy, Drunkenness, Carousing, "Things like these" – reveals that this is not an exhaustive list of the fleshly works. He also points out in verse 26 how when we're living by the flesh we become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. You're always in competition with people.

Paul then gives us a stern warning in verse 21:

❖ **Those who habitually practice the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

He says "I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." And there's a lot of debate over what he means by this. I have three major views. The **first** is one you can throw out the window because it's the view that Paul is saying they could lose their salvation if they don't straighten up. He is not referring to a loss of salvation.

The **second major view** is that Paul is saying that those who practice the works of the flesh habitually give evidence of the fact that they're not saved at all, and not heirs. That is the majority view. That is the only view I used to hold to. Paul said basically the same thing in 1 Cor. 6:9 trying to stir the Corinthians **out of their moral laxity**. Jesus, referring to entrance into the Eternal Heavenly abode called the New Jerusalem, said in Rev. 21:8, 27, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and

brimstone, which is the second death... nothing unclean, and no one who **practices** abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." John the Baptist and Jesus said, "Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire" (Mt. 3:10; 7:19). You can't see everything God is doing in peoples' lives, especially their private lives, but to an extent Jesus said we can know people by their fruits (Mt. 7:20). If you say you believe in Jesus there should be some evidence there because the Spirit of the Living God dwells in you. I mean if there's no war in you – **if you just go on sinning and carry out these desires of the flesh willingly and habitually and you don't feel anything, you have reason to question whether you've got the Spirit of God in you to begin with.** One of the first signs that you've been saved and have God's Spirit is that you begin to be grieved by the sinful things you used to do with no grievance. And this doesn't mean that you have to be perfect or that we won't sometimes lapse back into sin – and if we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 1:9) – but the key word is the word "practice". 1 John 3:9 says, "No one who is born of God **practices** sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not **practice** righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." So we need to ask ourselves: What is the habitual practice of my life? Do I continually exhibit the flesh or the Spirit? Am I continually sowing to the flesh or the Spirit? We need to properly examine ourselves. But that is the second view.

The **third view**, which fits the context just fine and is certainly biblical, is that Paul is saying that those **believers who persist in living according to the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God in the sense of rewards.** All believers go to heaven but not everyone has the same rewards. Some will be given more honorable positions from which to serve in regards to the Millennial Kingdom reign and some greater rewards than others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:13 that when we come before the judgment seat of Christ, where He determines our rewards, some people's works are going to burn up because they were done in the flesh (self-effort) or not biblical so they'll suffer loss. He himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Some carnal believers are going to gain entrance by the skin of their teeth. They believed, but they lived carnal and shameful lives and will shrink away in shame at His coming.

Notice the absence of proper love for one another in that list. And notice that these are things coming from our own sinful nature. You can't blame these on Satan or on the world. They get too much credit sometimes. Even when Satan is bound during the Millennial Kingdom, people still rebel. Even when you try to escape from the world by living in a monastery somewhere, you can't stop the flow of bad thoughts that sneak up on you. You could live in a cave in the middle of nowhere and still, the sin nature is right there with you. We've got to learn to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the spirit. I'll be honest with you, it's a hard thing to teach someone how to do that. You can tell them, but you can't do it for them. It's just like a child learning to walk, you have learn it on your own through trial and error. You can't make anyone walk either – they have to want to walk with God. You can't force anyone to walk with God who doesn't want to. Next week, I plan on revisiting this same passage and studying the works and the fruit in greater detail and giving some key, more formulated ways we can walk by the Spirit. But how do we know that we're walking by the Spirit? That's evident too. While the flesh produces works or deeds...

B. The Spirit produces fruit. (vv. 22-23)

Paul lists the singular form of the "fruit" of the Spirit next. Not fruits, but fruit. I think they should be looked at like a cluster of grapes on the same vine branch that can't be separated. And we don't produce it, the Spirit does. The Spirit produces **fruit**: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control, and "Such things" – which also reveals that this isn't an exhaustive list either but there's no laws against these things, not even in the world's government systems. And what's neat about the fruit of the Spirit is that they all of these were found in Christ at all times. He walked by the Spirit

continually, always doing the things that please Him. He always kept in step with the Spirit. And when we're exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, that is what people see – they see Christ. They should see Christ in us!

III. CHRISTIAN PROGRESS IS AVAILABLE. (VV. 24-26)

I've already touched on this a bit earlier in the sermon, but we have no excuse. **The fruit of the Spirit is available to us.** We CAN walk by the Spirit because we have freed from the slavish grip of the sin nature and can choose now. When Paul says, "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," I think **he's balancing, through the one statement, that which is true of us in our identity in Christ (standing/position) and that which is supposed to be evident in our lives (state/condition).** I think it has a dual-natured emphasis that is no strange thing in Paul's writings and probably why it has created a lot of confusion. You see, whenever Paul is about to make that change from doctrine to application in his writings, he uses the word "therefore". Like Romans 12:1-2 – "Therefore," in light of everything just covered on the doctrines of the gospel and who you are in Christ, "I **urge** you to offer yourselves as living sacrifices." Like Ephesians 4:1 – "Therefore," in light of how you've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, "I **implore** you to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." This is Paul's pattern: **Commands based upon spiritual realities.** And it's so important that I made it a bullet point:

❖ **Imperatives/commands rest on the foundations of indicatives/realities.**

Don't be scared of those big words – some of the believers here want that kind of meat to chew on to better understand their Bibles. Imperative and indicative is simply referring to the mood of the word, which refers to relationship between the verb and reality. An **imperative verb is a command**, like Paul telling us to "walk!" by the Spirit. In English, we use exclamation points to signify a command like "Stop!" or "Keep going!" An **indicative verb is used to describe the state of something or something that is**, as opposed to something that *may* be or *might* be.² And so commands are made upon the believer based on what God has done for the believer. We are to **walk! (imperative)** by the Spirit because we **live (indicative)** by the Spirit. Every other religion other than Christianity turns those around: you have to do in order to be. Christianity say we've become in order to do. We've become saints to do what saints do. Take Colossians 3:1-5, which says, "Therefore if you have been **raised [indicative reality]** up with Christ, keep **seeking [imp. command]** the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have **died [ind.]** and your life is **hidden [ind.]** with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. **Therefore, consider [reckon, acknowledge, appropriate - imperative]** the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed..." We have **indicatively**, as a past tense reality, **died** and have been **raised** up with Christ and **therefore**, are to **imperatively**, reckon or appropriate that truth in our lives **as the basis from which to live.** Our union with Christ is crucial to our living for Christ. The first place to go when you are tempted is to your identity in Christ. Verse 24 is just the little sprout of the doctrinal plant that is developed in Romans 6. This is why it's a walk of faith. It requires pure, unadulterated faith. We've been co-crucified with Christ. When Christ died, we died. When Christ was raised, we were raised. We are *that* in union with Him and water baptism is a picture of that spiritual baptism of dying with Christ and being raised to new life. We were baptized into Christ by the Spirit.

What I believe Paul is saying is that because we've been crucified with Christ, we are to crucify the deeds of the flesh by walking by the Spirit. Romans 6:3 says, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore **we have been buried with Him through baptism into death**, so that as Christ was raised from the dead

though the glory of the Father, **so we too might walk in the newness of life**. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away**, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for **he who has died is freed from sin...** [v. 12] Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God** in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God **as those alive from the dead**, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Paul is basically saying, “Become what you are because those who have become this, are to become what they should be.” – in other words – “Walk by the Spirit because the Spirit set you free to live by the Spirit!” This isn’t a “let go and let God” mentality but it also isn’t a self-effort mentality of “pull yourself up by your bootstraps”. It’s a stepping out in faith mentality, a “trust God and get going” mentality – “Depend totally on God and get going”. There’s a healthy balance, a healthy tension that has to remain in authentic Christianity between divine power to live the Christian life and man’s responsibility **to walk totally dependent on that divine power**. Philippians 2:12-13: the **command**, “**Work** out your salvation with fear and trembling” and the **reality**: “For it **is** God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Paul said, “I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” He acted, but the whole time was depending upon His God to do the work. Romans 8:13 says, “For if you’re living according to the flesh, **you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**” I think that verse sort of puts the finishing touches on what it means to balance those doctrines and what is first required to walk by the Spirit.

If you’re going to walk(!) by the Spirit:

1. You have to die to self.

First, stop trying to work your out your spirituality on your own and trust Christ. Stop trying to do things your way all the time. Stop living according to the flesh. Stop the pride. If you’re going to follow Jesus you have to deny yourself and take up your cross **daily** and follow Him. Die to yourself and submit to God. Submit to the Holy Spirit’s promptings. Christianity is so much more and so much deeper than just trying to get to heaven through your own efforts to be a good person or performing religious works, and until the Spirit of God quickens you to realize the depths of your **sin** and your **unrighteousness** and the **judgment** you deserve, and put your trust in Christ, you’ll be dead spiritually. You have to die to self in order to live. You die and trust Christ and from there you keep trusting – salvation trust and sanctification trust. A total trust relationship with God.

2. Don’t make provision for the flesh.

Don’t create an unnecessary opportunities for the flesh to rise up and cause chaos. We’ll talk about that more next week, Lord willing. Replace sinful or tempting times with Christian disciplines like reading your Bible, praying, meeting with a friend for fellowship or accountability. Get a fellow Christian soldier you trust to help you battle it out.

3. If the flesh has a victory, confess it to God.

Don’t mess around with it. Don’t try and hide it or hide from God. Be honest. Get right with God.

4. Keep on continually walking by the Spirit again.

¹ David Thompson, sermon notes on Galatians 5:16-18, accessed 21 June 2019, www.texascornersbiblechurch.org

² William D. Mounce, Greek for the Rest of Us: The Essential of Biblical Greek, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 26-27.