

## Sermon Series: *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*

### Walk By The Spirit

#### Galatians 5:16-18 (ESV)

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.



### The Problem

Paul tells the Galatians, “Walk by the Spirit.” This is a command, but what prompts him to write this? If we go back a couple of verses we discover that there was a problem in the church. Let’s read verses 13-15 to provide a fuller context of what is going on, what the problem was, and what the solution is.

#### Galatians 5:13-15

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Paul reminds the Galatians that the fundamental reason Christ came to earth to live and die and rise from the dead was for freedom. He writes, “*You were called to freedom.*” Apart from a personal relationship with Jesus there is no freedom. We are born into this world in a state of slavery. From the very first moment of our lives, from our very first breath, we are slaves of sin and we are completely unable to set ourselves free from the dominion of sin.

### We’re All Born Slaves of Sin

We are born into a condition of spiritual slavery to sin. However, through the gospel of Jesus, God calls us out of the dark dungeon of spiritual slavery and into the freedom of His glorious kingdom of light. Everyone in this world<sup>1</sup> is born under this kind of slavery whether we were born under the physical liberties we enjoy in the United States or under the oppressive dictatorial governments (i.e. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, and Kuwait) whose citizens are today crying out for freedom.

It is only through faith in Jesus that we can experience true, spiritual freedom. “*If the Son sets you free, then you will be free in deed*” (John 8:36). This freedom comes to us as a free, gracious gift by **faith** in Jesus and not by any **working** to earn it. This has been the theme of chapters 3 and 4.

### Freed To Serve, Not To Sin

As Iain mentioned last week, then Paul cautions that freedom can be misused. Jesus does not grant us freedom so that we can indulge our sinful desires. God sets us free so that we might lovingly serve one another. We are not set free to sin, but to serve. And Paul states the plain truth—lovingly and willingly serving one another **is** the fulfillment of the law. The law is not completely done away with. It is done away with as a *means* of righteousness, but not as a *model* of conduct.

“*For the whole law is fulfilled in one command: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*” If we could obey this one command, then all the others would be fulfilled. If we truly loved and cared for one another to the same degree that we love and care for ourselves, then we would never dishonor mom & dad, or lie to each other, or steal from one another, or murder, or commit adultery or even covet—desire what belongs to some one else.

But of course, this command is not always obeyed, which brings us to the problem (v.15). The Galatians were “biting and devouring” one another. Evidently in all the conflict surrounding the false teachers and their teaching, the Galatians were at each other’s throats in disagreements. The words were flying like swords. Paul compares them to a pack of wild animals “biting and devouring” one another. This is not the picture of a loving family.

So what is the solution? Paul says, “*Walk by the Spirit.*”

Is this a message that we need to hear today? Or is this simply an irrelevant suggestion written to an ancient group of immature Christians? Have you in the past two weeks been hurt by someone’s biting words? Have you hurt someone with your own quick-tongued thoughtless words? Have you gotten into a theological debate with someone you thought was a brother or sister in the Lord and gone away doubting their salvation? Have you been involved in an argument over some teaching in the Bible and gone away wounded? Have you offended a brother or a sister by your understanding of Christian freedom (liberty)? Have you been hurt recently by something you saw or heard another Christian brother or sister say or do?

---

<sup>1</sup> See Romans 3:9, 19.

What is the solution? How can we avoid becoming so angry with one another that our words could be compared to “biting and devouring?” The answer, Paul says, is by “*walking by the Spirit.*” Naturally, this brings a couple of questions to mind. First, what does this mean? Second, why is this important? And, third, how do we do this?

### What Does This Mean?

When Paul writes, “*walk by the Spirit*” what does he mean? On Friday I walked by the lake, looked at it for while and eventually walked on passed it. Is that what he means by “walking by the Spirit?” Of course it isn’t. However, I might also say that when I was walking, I was walking by my legs. In other words, it was my legs that were enabling me to move and go forward. They provided the power and the means for my ambulation (i.e. my walking).

The Greek word translated “walk” is *peripateo* and it means “to live or behave in a customary manner, with focus upon continuity of action—‘to live, to behave, to go about doing.’”<sup>2</sup> Literally we could translate this “walk about,” or “keep on walking.” In this context, it refers to the way in which one ought to conduct “one’s self, or ordering one’s manner of life or behavior.”<sup>3</sup>

The verb is an imperative. It is a command. Therefore Paul is calling upon his readers to make a decision to live in this way. He is instructing believers to order life *in this way*, that is, by the Spirit. To conduct ourselves in this way. There is a choice here that one is expected to make. We must *decide* to live in this way. Ordering the conduct of one’s life in this manner does not happen automatically. Furthermore, the verb is in the present tense, which means that this kind of conduct is to be a continual state of being.

So by saying “walk by the Spirit” Paul is saying that the continual, daily, manner by which your life is to be ordered and governed is “by the Spirit.” The choices we make everyday are to be made “by the Spirit.” The Spirit, of course, is God’s Holy Spirit who is the ever-present and personal manifestation of God within the heart of the regenerate person. We are to decide to allow our lives to be directed by the Spirit.

### Led By the Spirit

In fact, another way of saying this found in verse 18.

#### Galatians 5:18

*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

“Walking by the Spirit” is synonymous with being “led by the Spirit.” Paul uses these phrases interchangeably. In the Greek, in both of these verses the word “Spirit” precedes the verb. The emphasis is upon what comes first. Verse 16 literally says, “*But I say, by the Spirit, walk about...*” And verse 18 says, “*But if, by the Spirit you are led...*” The emphasis is clearly upon the priority of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is to be the primary actor in daily lives of His children. Both the “walking” and the “leading” are to happen by the Spirit.

---

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ga 5:16.

The emphasis and priority of our habitual daily lives is to be informed and directed “by the Spirit.” It is the the Spirit of God who is to lead and direct the daily conduct of our lives. As we “walk about” through the daily routine of life, we are to be led by the Spirit.

### Empowered By the Spirit

Not only are we are to be *lead* by the Spirit, but we are also to walk *by* the power of the Spirit. It is the Spirit of God Himself who gives us the power to walk the way should walk. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to cultivate the kind lifestyle that God desires for us. We cannot do this on our own or in our own strength. Jesus Himself is our example here. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus to live the life that He did. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism (Mk 1:11) and remained on Him (Jn 1:32) in an abiding and powerful way.

#### Acts 10:38

*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

Jesus was human like you and me, yet how was He able to do all He did? Because “God was with Him.” Which means that Jesus was *continually led by the Spirit* and He constantly submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Jesus always obeyed the Father and never once disobeyed the Father (see John 6:38; 8:28-29). At Jesus’ baptism He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

#### Luke 4:1-2a

*1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil.*

#### Luke 4:14

*And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.*

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit before He went into the wilderness. It was the Holy Spirit Himself who led Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus remained in submission to the Holy Spirit the entire 40 days of His tempting and then He returned to Galilee, still in the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

How did Jesus resist the Devil and not give in to temptation? He did it through the power of the Holy Spirit. How did He overcome the power of the sin? He did it by a greater power within. How did He return and do all manner of good and live a life that was pleasing and obedient to God the Father? He did it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How will we have power to resist the devil and overcome temptation? The same why that Jesus did—through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He did it by being completely yielded and surrendered to the Holy Spirit. How will we be able to lives that are pleasing and obedient to God? The same way Jesus did—through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Remember what Jesus told His disciples in those final days before His ascension? He said, and I’m summarizing,

“You guys are going to be witness for Me around the world. I’m will send you to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in My name to all nations. But you cannot do this in your own strength. So do not start on this mission until you are clothed with **power** from on high. You will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and then you will be ready to be My witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and then on to the end of the earth” (Lk 24:47-49; Acts 1:8).

And so we find many verses which direct us to depend upon the power and strength of God through the presence of His Spirit in us and not to depend upon our own power or strength.

#### **1 Peter 4:11**

*... whoever serves, [let him serve] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

#### **1 Thess 1:5**

*...our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

Paul says in **2 Cor 1:8-9** that God pushed him to the point of death so that he would learn to “not trust in himself but in God.”

Recall the words of **Proverbs 3:5**, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

To summarize: walking by the Spirit means two things. First, it means being led by the Spirit. It means that the daily habits and routines of our lives are informed and directed by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, it means that we depend upon and trust in the Holy Spirit to then give us the power to do those things that He is directing us to do. The Holy Spirit is to become the legs by which we walk. He is to be to us the power to walk the path into which He is leading us. Walking by the Spirit means obediently following the leadership of the Spirit AND then moving forward in the power of the Spirit. He is both *path* and *power*. He is the *way* in which we walk and He is the *means* by which we walk.

### **Why Is Walking By the Spirit Important?**

This brings us to the second question. Why is walking by the Spirit important? Why do we need to know that walking by the Spirit is how we ought to live? Why is Paul writing this? There are two reasons. First, so that we will not be shocked by the fact that living the life that Christ calls us to live is a struggle. Second, so that we will live in reality of the victory that is promised.

### **Reason 1:: The Christian Life Is A Struggle**

The first reason why this is important is so that we will rightly understand the Christian life. Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle, not one of trouble-free bliss. Look at how he describes the Christian life.

#### **Galatians 5:17**

*17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian does not automatically remove all propensity to be inclined toward sin. It is possible for a Christian (one who has been given the Holy Spirit i.e. regenerated by the Spirit) to yield to sin. Paul says, “*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other.*” Both desires are present and they are opposed to each other. The result is a struggle.

This means that within the heart of the Christian there are both spiritual desires to do what is good and right and true existing along side, what Paul calls, “fleshly” desires which are the opposite of desires of the Spirit. Becoming a Christian does not mean you never again will struggle against sin. Receiving the Holy Spirit does not automatically catapult you into a life of unbroken holiness and perfect obedience. There remains a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit.

So if you find yourself struggling and fighting against sin, that does not necessarily mean you are not a Christian. In fact, it probably means just the opposite. The very fact that you hate the sin that yet remains within you, is a very good indicator that you do indeed have the Spirit of God within you. One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin (John 16:8). What should make you tremble is if you never struggle with sin. No true believer can ever make peace with sin. If you are living in sin and you are content never to struggle against it, then I would seriously doubt that the Spirit of God is dwelling within your heart.

### The Flesh Vs. The Spirit

Flesh and Spirit are the two words that Paul uses to contrast this tension. The Greek word translated “flesh” is *sarx* (σάρξ). This word most often refers to the physical human body or the material part of a person. But this is not what Paul is referring to here. Paul does not consider the physical body to be evil. Neither does he understand natural physical desires evil. It is not evil to be hungry and desire to eat food in order to fulfill that desire. Paul is referring to the moral aspect of fallen humanity. He means sinful desires.

In the context of this passage, the word “flesh” means “all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace in his life.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the NIV translates this word as “sinful nature” (in the 1984 edition, however in the 2010 edition they changed this and simply used “flesh”).

The “flesh” is that sinful, innate tendency within every human heart to satisfy all desires of the soul by its own strength and on its own terms apart from any provision offered by God. This tendency is not eradicated when we put our faith in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit enters our lives He gives us new desires but the tendency to be inclined toward the old is not completely removed. The reality of the presence of two conflicting and opposing desires within results in an intense struggle. The desires of the sinful nature are against the desires of the Spirit.

This struggle in the life of the Christian is what Paul wrote about in Romans 7.

#### **Romans 7:15, 18-19**

15 *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, Everett F. Harrison, W. Harold Mare et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans Through Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 494.



18 *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*

19 *For I do not do the good I want [to do], but the evil I do not want [to do] is what I keep on doing.*

But who will win the struggle? Where is the hope? Are we doomed to live under the banner of defeat? No. There is a second reason why it is important to walk in the Spirit and this is because the Spirit is mightier than the flesh.

### **Reason 2:: The Promise: You Will Not Gratify the Desires of the Flesh**

The second reason walking by the Spirit is important is so that we will know that it is possible to live your life free from the dominion of the sinful desires of the flesh. Still will still be present in the life of the Christian, but it will not have dominion! Verse 16 is a promise.

#### **Galatians 5:16**

*But I say, walk by the Spirit and you **will not** gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Victory is certain and the way to walk in victory is to walk by the Spirit. If you walk by the Spirit, if you live your life in willing submission to the Spirit (i.e. being led by the Spirit v.18) and in humble dependence upon the power of the Spirit, not trusting in your own strength, then you **will not** gratify the desires of the flesh. This is the promise of verse 16. You do not have to live your life being dominated by your own sinful desires. It is possible to live life in the power of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that there will not be a battle, but it does mean that victory is certain. How do I know? Look at verse 24.

#### **Galatians 5:24**

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Now, no one has been physically crucified, so Paul is not saying you must pierce your physical flesh. He is speaking of that sinful tendency of the soul to seek its own satisfaction rather than being satisfied in Christ. That tendency he says has been crucified. Paul speaks of this crucifixion in the past tense. It's already happened. But when and where? It happened at Calvary.

#### **Galatians 2:20**

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

It is a fact, an objective, true fact, that those who belong to Christ have had the dominion of the power of sin decisively broken. Satan will tell you again and again that you are not strong enough to resist that temptation into which you so frequently fall. And he's right IF you are walking by your own strength. However, it is a lie if you are walking by the Spirit.

#### **Romans 8:11**

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

The Spirit of God is more powerful than death. There is NO temptation more powerful than death. Therefore, if the Spirit of God, who is more powerful than death, dwells within our hearts, then there is no sinful desire that by the power of the Spirit we cannot overcome!

If you walk by the Spirit, then you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. This brings us to the last question—How do we do this? What does “walking by the Spirit” actually look like?

## How Do We Walk By the Spirit?

1. **Identify, Admit, and Ask.** We first need to identify the arena of the battle—the heart! The struggle takes place in the arena of desire. Desire are the yearnings after the things we treasure in our hearts. Walking by the Spirit means being led by Spirit. Being led by the Spirit means that our desires for things of God are stronger than our desires for the things of the flesh (i.e. sinful desires). Walking by the Spirit means that our preference is for the way of the Lord rather than the way of the world. The battleground for this struggle is in the seat of our affections, which is the heart. We always do what we most want to do. Therefore, in order our lives to be directed by the Spirit, we must have a heart like His—a heart that loves the things that He loves. We do not naturally have that kind of heart. So the first step in walking by the Spirit is asking God for a new heart.
  - **Ezekiel 36:26-27** *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*
  - **Admit** our need. We need to admit that we can not do this on our own. It is impossible for us to walk in God’s ways apart from His gracious enablement. “Apart from Him we can do nothing.” We can sin perfectly well on our own, but we cannot walk in His ways without Him first giving us His Spirit and then HE will cause us to walk in His ways. But we must **admit** our need.
  - The we must **Ask** God for a new heart. Ask Him to put His Spirit within you and He will begin to change your desires.
2. **Set Your Mind on Spiritual Things.** After we have the right kind of heart, we need to make up our minds that we will, by the power and the help of the Spirit who dwells within us, make our decisions and choices in the daily conduct of our lives based upon the way God wants us to live rather than upon the way the world or anyone else wants us to live.
  - **Romans 8:5** *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the thing of the Spirit.*
  - The phrase “live according to the Spirit” is synonymous with “walking according to the Spirit” (See Rom 8:4) and the same as “walking by the Spirit.” It simply means your life is led and directed by the will of the Spirit.



- So when you read things in the Bible like, “Never be conceited” (Rom 12:16) you set your mind to live like that. You pray, “Lord, I struggle with pride. Please, by the power of your Spirit, enable me to live my life never being conceited. Glve me the strength never to praise myself with my own lips.” You determine in your mind that you will live like God wants you to live.
  - And when you read “Repay no one evil for evil...” (Rom 12:17), you set your mind to obey that. And you pray, “Lord, at work today, I know Freddie’s foul mouth is going to start running and the insults and cuts and digs are going to fly. Please give me the strength not join in the banal bantering. Or when he flicks his cigarette ashes in my coffee cup, I will not do the same.”
3. **Submit Your Will to God’s Will.** In the agonizing garden of decision Jesus said, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Jesus set His mind to obey His Father and then He **submitted** His own will to God’s will.
- **Romans 8:7** *The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God’s law, indeed, it cannot.*
  - Walking by the Spirit means that we are daily confessing, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” This is a part of the model prayer that Jesus instructed us to pray, “Let Your will be done on earth just like it is in heaven.” All of heaven is submitted to the will of God and if we would walk by His Spirit, then we too must submit our will to His.
4. **Believe His Way Is Better.** We must have faith in God’s wisdom. We must believe that His will and His way are better than our will and our way. If you don’t think that what God has planned for you is ultimately better for you, then you will never be led by His Spirit.
- **Hebrews 11:6** *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*
  - The only way to walk by the Spirit is to be absolutely convinced that walking in the way He leads is far better than any path you could ever find. If you think for a minute that alcohol, which you can see, will soothe your pain better and quicker than some God you can’t see, then you’ll get drunk every day. The only way to overcome the perceived power of sin is by being convinced that the rewards of the Holy Spirit is far, far better.
  - Moses laughed at the wealth of Egypt because he consider Christ greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt (Heb 11:24).
  - The only way Abraham could be content with living in a tent in the dessert for a hundred years was because his eyes of faith were looking forward to one far better than this this earth had to offer. He was looking forward his heavenly home built for him by God (Heb 11:10, 16).
  - Jesus was able to deny the temporal joys this world had to offer and submit to the cruel death on the cross because He was looking forward to the far better eternal joy of heaven (Heb 12:2).
  - If will ever walk by the Spirit, we must first believe that His way is better than any way we could ever come up with.

5. **Put to Death the Deeds of the Flesh.** After you have 1) examined your heart, admitted your need of God's enablement, asked Him to give you a new heart, 2) set your mind on spiritual things, 3) submitted your will to His will, and 4) by faith believe that His ways are better ways, then you can start putting to death the sinful deeds in your life that you know are wrong.

- **Romans 8:13** *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
- If we fail to put to death the sinful deeds of the flesh, then we will die. But if by the great power of the Spirit be begin putting to death the sinful deeds of our sinful natures, then we will live.
- John Owen wrote, "Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you."<sup>5</sup>

So which will win the battle; the desires of the flesh or the desires of the Spirit. The simple answer is whichever is the stronger. Whichever desires you feed more will be stronger. If you feed the flesh and starve the Spirit, then the desires of the flesh will win. However, if you feed the desires of the Spirit and starve the desires of the flesh, then your life will be dominated by the Spirit.

If you have two cars—one with gas and one without—which will go farther? The car with the fuel will go farther. Whichever desires you fuel, will burn most intently. Starve the desires of the flesh.

Walk by the Spirit and you WILL NOT gratify the desires of the flesh!!!

---

<sup>5</sup> John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, Chapter II (1656) available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/mort.i.v.html> accessed 19 Feb 2011.