

Holy Spirit

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18 ESV)*

Walk By The Spirit

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Galatians 5:16-26

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians 5.

Over the course of this series, we have been scouring the Bible for passages that will help us to better understand the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Today, we are turning our attention to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians.

At the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians is the central argument that the law – helpful as it was under the Old Covenant – was inherently *limited*. The law was like a guardian, slapping our wrists when we tried to sin. It was effective in that we couldn't sin as much as we would have liked, but it was *limited* in that it couldn't deal with the *heart* of our problem – or perhaps it's more accurate to say – it couldn't deal with the *problem* of our heart.

The law could *restrain* us, but it couldn't *change* us. Which is why God promised that something – or rather, *Someone* – greater than the law was coming. God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel and made this promise:

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. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV)

When Christ fulfilled the law with his perfect obedience, satisfied the law with his substitutionary death, and then inaugurated the new covenant by sending the Holy Spirit, the promise of Ezekiel

36 was unlocked! We are now indwelt by the Spirit of God! And if we are led by the Spirit then we are not *under* the law! Paul says exactly that in this passage:

But if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the law.** (Galatians 5:18 ESV)

Let me ask you a question: Is there a small part of you that bristles at this verse? Is there a part of you that feels some legitimate concern that – while the Holy Spirit is GREAT – we can't say things like 'you are not under the law' and expect people to live holy lives?

If you feel that concern, you are not alone. There was a group in Galatia called the *Judaizers* who felt uneasy about this teaching. Their fear sounded something like this: 'If people are *free* from the law, then they will most certainly run headlong into sin! We NEED fences and restraints – we need LAW – or else people will simply follow all of their fleshly desires!'

That was their objection. In our text for this morning, we find part of Paul's answer. Look with me to Galatians 5. We're going to read verses 16-26. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:16-26 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In this passage, Paul uses the illustrative language of 'walking by the Spirit'. We see it in verse 16:

But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16 ESV)

And he picks up the imagery again in verse 25:

If we live by the Spirit, let us also **keep in step with the Spirit**. (Galatians 5:25 ESV)

So, before we go any further, let's ask the simple question: What does that look like?

Is 'walking by the Spirit' the Christian equivalent of 'listening to your gut'? Is Paul envisioning a world where Christians say: 'I know the Bible says we must forgive, but the *Spirit has revealed* to me that I get to live in this resentment.' Or, 'I know the Bible says that we are not supposed to have sex until we're married, but *the Spirit has revealed* to me that I am free from those shackles!' Does walking by the Spirit simply mean doing whatever feels right?

Certainly not! As we saw a few weeks ago, Jesus told us:

When the Spirit of truth comes, **he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority**, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13 ESV)

The Spirit came to lead us into the TRUTH. And we find the truth in God's word. Every word in this book has been inspired by the Holy Spirit! In 1 Peter 1, we read:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**. (1 Peter 1:20-21 ESV)

The Holy Spirit was given, not to lead us *away* from God's word, but to invite us FURTHER IN. He opens our eyes so that we can *understand*; He softens our heart so that we can *believe*; and then He transforms our affections so that we can *live it out*.

A person who walks by the Spirit then is a person who has surrendered to Jesus as Lord and Saviour, who has received the promised Holy Spirit, and who is now supernaturally empowered to

live a life of love and obedience. Paul paints a picture for us here of what that looks like, but first, he begins by explaining:

What 'Walking By The Spirit' Does NOT Look Like

The Judaizers thought that 'walking by the Spirit' meant 'following my desires, wherever they might lead me'. Paul attacks that misunderstanding head on. Look again at verse 16:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and **you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** (Galatians 5:16 ESV)

Now, when Paul uses this language of 'flesh' he's not referring to our body – as if the physical realm is inherently immoral. No, he uses this word 'flesh' as a shorthand for our rebellious nature. The 'flesh' then, is that sinful, selfish part of us that doesn't want to live life God's way. It is the part of me that RESISTS the work of the Spirit. That's what Paul goes on to say in verse 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. (Galatians 5:17 ESV)

The Holy Spirit, then, is like a champion FIGHTING WITHIN US against our old, sinful desires! The law was a *fence* that was *external* – it was GOOD! But the Holy Spirit is a *Friend* who is *internal* – He is BETTER!

Therefore, if a person is TRULY walking by the Spirit, then they will not live a life that is led by the works of the flesh. They CAN'T! Because there is a CHAMPION inside of them who is waging war against sin! Thus, their life will not be marked by the sin that Paul describes in verses 19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 ESV)

Now, Paul is not naming *every* possible sin in this list. That's not his intention. What he's doing here is giving us a snapshot of a way of living that is the OPPOSITE of walking by the Spirit. Paul's opponents feared that – without the law – THIS LIST is what we would all become. They were convinced that – without a proper fence – people will go on to sleep with whoever they want, worship whatever they want, drink as much as they want, and throw tantrums whenever they want. THAT is what they envisioned when they heard the term 'walk by the Spirit'.

But they had it all wrong! That is the OPPOSITE of what the Spirit-led life looks like! Paul explains in verse 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. (Galatians 5:17 ESV)

People who are led by the Spirit CAN'T go on indulging the sins of the flesh because the Holy Spirit inside of them is literally FIGHTING AGAINST that sin!

Now, that isn't to say that Spirit-filled people never wrestle with the temptations the flesh. If that were true, then NONE of us would have any reason to believe that the Spirit is in us! No, as one commentator explains:

The passions and desires of the flesh are not absent, **but they no longer rule and reign.**¹

I think that's a helpful way to frame it. For as long as I live, I will see glimpses of these works of the flesh in my life. But those glimpses should be progressively diminishing. Because that is not who I am anymore! My sin died with Jesus on that cross! That's what Paul says in verse 24:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24 ESV)

That old version of me is DEAD! Though it still calls out and tempts me – sin is no longer my master. The Holy Spirit lives in me, and He WILL CHANGE ME. He will progressively give me victory in this fight for holiness. God's word promises:

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament - Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 351.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For **this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.** (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Therefore, walking by the Spirit does NOT look like a life that is driven along by every desire of the flesh. It doesn't look like selfishness. What, then, does it look like?

What 'Walking By The Spirit' DOES Look Like

Remember, at the heart of the Judaizer's concern was a suspicion that – if you tell people that they are no longer under the law – if you *remove the fence* – then people will give full vent to their sinful desires. And if Jesus hadn't sent the Holy Spirit, then those critics would have been right!

But Jesus DID send the Spirit. God Himself now dwells within each and every one of His people. The fence HAS come down – but it was not so that we can run headlong into rebellion! No, the fence came down because the Holy Spirit has transformed our hearts such that we no longer WANT what's on the other side! As one commentator explains:

The Spirit, then, produces fruit that the law cannot create.²

A few weeks ago, we used the analogy that the Holy Spirit is like a navigation system that has been installed into our hearts. When we take a wrong turn towards our old sinful ways, He beeps at us and tells us to take the next left so that we can get back on track.

I think we can expand on that analogy to wrap our minds around this passage. If you're zoomed in close, a navigation system tells you where your next turn is. But if you zoom out – if you expand that map – the navigation system shows you exactly where you are going.

In this passage, Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit is not simply leading us blindly. He is bringing us to a DESTINATION. As the Spirit guides and directs us, He is bringing us further into the roadmap that we find in verses 22-23. Look there with me:

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament - Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 350.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV)

If you are truly being led by the Spirit, then THIS is your destination. THIS is who you are progressively becoming. You can't say that you are walking by the Spirit if you are moving in the opposite direction of the person described here.

Now, to be clear, none of us will ever resemble this perfectly in this life. We're WALKING by the Spirit – not ARRIVING by the Spirit. Growth in holiness is a slow and steady process. But, Paul says, if the Holy Spirit is in us then THIS is the fruit that will inevitably grow.

Apple trees grow apples. Orange trees grow oranges. And the Holy Spirit grows His own particular fruit. We're going to move through these quickly and, as we do, I want to invite you to take an honest look at the fruit that is currently growing in your life.

First and foremost, if you are walking by the Spirit, then your life will be marked by love. In fact, Paul tells us that love stands at the heart of the life that God has called us to live. Look back at verse 14:

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14 ESV)

We talked about this extensively a few weeks ago when we studied 1 Corinthians 13, but God's word is clear that this is CENTRAL to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. So, let's take this opportunity to do one more heart check. Christian, is your life marked by love? As God assesses what's happening in your heart – the thoughts that no one else can see – what is he seeing? We spent this last week teaching the kids at camp from John 15 where Jesus said:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (John 15:12 ESV)

None of us has ever loved as perfectly as Jesus loves, but the Holy Spirit was sent to move us closer and closer to the example that he set for us. As the Holy Spirit moves *in*, selfishness and resentment will be forced to move *out*. I'm going to move much quicker now through the rest of these.

The Holy Spirit also produces the fruit of joy! How great is this? People in the world – and some people in the church – have believed the lie that to surrender to Jesus is to avow yourself to a life

of boring grumpiness. That couldn't be farther from the truth! Is your life marked by JOY, Christian? It ought to be! As Jonathan Edwards once said:

God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but *by its being rejoiced in*.³

The Holy Spirit enables us to REJOICE! He opens our eyes to see and to DELIGHT in the glory of God! It was the Holy Spirit that enabled Paul – even as he was imprisoned – to write:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4 ESV)

If you are walking by the Spirit, then slowly and surely He is going to put to death that grumbling instinct in your heart. The Spirit grows joy in us!

And He grows peace. When you look at that list of the works of the flesh, one thing is clear: When we follow our sinful impulses we become community *destroyers*. But people who walk by the Spirit are transformed into community *healers*. The Spirit helps us to apologize and to forgive. He directs us to pursue restoration and to push back against our tendencies to quarrel. If you are walking by the Spirit, then you are becoming a peacemaker.

And, if the Spirit is in you, then you will see the fruit of *patience*. God is sooo patient with me! And He is so patient with you! We can be hardheaded and obstinate. We can be slow to learn and even slower to change.

Think about this: God had a front row seat for your worst day. And yet, He didn't leave you! Because that's not who He is. David wrote:

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Psalm 86:15 ESV)

God is patient. And He has made us to be His image bearers – to reflect him to the watching world. Therefore, one of the clearest evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in you is when you can extend that same mercy to the difficult people around you. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit.

So too is kindness. The Holy Spirit helps us to treat others the way that God has treated us in Christ. He helps us to desire and pursue the best for others and to overlook awkwardness and offense. He slowly and surely roots out the 'mean' that comes so easily to us.

³ Jonathan Edwards as quoted in John Piper, *Expository Exultation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 208.

And the Holy Spirit grows the fruit of goodness in us. The other side of the fence – the life lived in disobedience to God – begins to lose its appeal. Now, even when we sin in secret – even when we ‘get away with it’ by human standards – our hearts are grieved. The Holy Spirit has changed what we want. Now we WANT to live God’s way. We used to long for everything that was forbidden, but not we WANT goodness. That is a sure fruit of the Spirit.

And so too is faithfulness. The Holy Spirit is making us honest and reliable – lovers of the truth who are worthy of trust. He’s put ballast in our ship, such that we can stay on the right course even when life throws storms at us. We’re not fair-weather followers of Jesus – here today but gone at the first sign of trouble. The Spirit is making us faithful.

And He is making us gentle. Now, gentleness is not to be confused with weakness. There was nothing weak about Jesus. Gentleness is not indicative of a lack of strength – it is indicative of the right use of strength.

In our flesh, we would use strength to domineer and control. ‘Might is right’ is the rule of the world. But in God’s kingdom, true strength stoops down to carefully protect and preserve those who are weak.

And, finally, the Holy Spirit makes us self-controlled. The law provided *external* guardrails, but the Holy Spirit has come into the driver seat and taken hold of the steering wheel. He has given us a new heart with a new capacity to say ‘no’ to sin. The sin that used to have a hold on us has lost its grip. We CAN say no to that lust, and to that greed, and to that over-indulgence, and to that biting tongue.

As was the case when Paul listed the works of the flesh, his point here isn’t to give us a *comprehensive* list of the evidence of the Spirit in our lives. No, his point is to give us a snapshot of what it looks like to walk by the Spirit. People who are led by the Spirit are people who look less and less like the world and more and more like Jesus.

As we come to a close, I want to ask one final question:

How Do We Walk By The Spirit?

One thing that struck me this week in my preparation was that the fruit of the Spirit – this evidence – is not so much about *what you do*. It’s about *who you are*. Meaning – if you decide that

you want to walk by the Spirit, you can't simply go home and draft a plan to modify your behaviour. This list isn't shining a light on your behaviour. It's shining a light on your HEART.

And you and I can't change our own hearts.

Which is why, the first thing that you need to do if you would walk by the Spirit is you need to:

1. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus as your Saviour

You can't be led by the Spirit unless you have received the Spirit.

God is holy, but we are not. Because of our sin and rebellion, we are separated from Him.

Therefore, before God can dwell in us by His Spirit something needs to be done to make unholy people ready to live in the presence of a holy God.

God's answer to that problem was to send His own Son – Jesus – to make us right. Jesus lived the perfect life – satisfying the requirements of God's law, and then he died on the cross as a substitute for our sin. If we confess our sin to God and renounce them – if we repent – and if we believe that Jesus died to save us – then we will be cleansed from all of our sin.

As that happens – as the sin is taken away – the Spirit of God enters in. That's the first step in walking by the Spirit.

But then the second, third, fourth, and hundredth step is to:

2. Yield to His leading

Look again at verse 25:

If we live by the Spirit, let us also **keep in step with the Spirit.** (Galatians 5:25 ESV)

Paul has shown us where the Spirit is leading us. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... That's where we're meant to be walking. So keep in step!

When you feel yourself moving away from that fruit – when you feel yourself pulled back towards sin and selfishness – YIELD to the Spirit. Keep in step with Him.

We've been using car illustrations, so let's have another. Cars these days are FILLED with sermon illustrations! Have you ever driven a car with the lane assist feature? The way it works is that – if you start to veer a bit out of your lane – it will gently pull your steering wheel back into the centre.

We got a new car last year, and the first time I felt this lane assist feature kick in, I didn't trust it. I'll steer my own car thank you very much! But over time, I began to give in to the gentle, unseen corrections, and now it's a tool that I'm very thankful for. I feel much safer on the road.

Well, in a similar way, walking by the Spirit requires us to YIELD to those gentle, unseen corrections. When you read your Bible or you hear a sermon and God identifies something in you that needs to be surrendered, you lay it down. When you become aware of sin that has been lingering in your life, you turn away from it. When that new heart that the Holy Spirit placed inside of you starts signalling that something is out of order in your affections, you stop, and you listen.

If you want to become the person that God has made you and saved you to be, then THIS is how! He's not asking you to fix yourself. He's not asking you to press forward in your own strength. He's calling upon you to YIELD to His prompting and to walk by His Spirit.

The roadmap has been laid out before you. The navigation system has been installed. The lane assist is active. The resources of heaven are at your disposal. Therefore, Christian, walk by the Spirit. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.