

# Keep in Step with the Spirit

## Galatians 5.22-26

### Introduction

At the beginning of the chapter, Paul has declared the work of Christ, who set us free, 5.1. Freedom, however, does not come without responsibility. In this chapter he calls upon Christians to defend their freedom by standing for the true gospel they had received, 5.2-12. Christians stand firm by *servicing others through love*, 5.13-14, and they demonstrate their commitment by *walking with the Spirit*, 5.16-18.

As we studied previously, Paul contrasts what it means to walk with the Spirit by describing what it means to walk by the flesh. Christians are different. The things Paul mentions in 5.19-21 are no longer part of our present identity. Now we have a new attitude toward those things. Because of the Spirit's help, we have the power to resist these things as they have no more place in our life. If we do allow them to creep back in, we fight back, get back up after we get knocked down, confess our sin to God, and trust in His promise: *He is just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*, 1 John 1.8-9. Because of the influence of the Spirit, instead we produce the fruit of the Spirit. As repulsive as the deeds of the flesh should become, so the attractiveness of the fruit of the Spirit should cause us to yield to the Spirit.

When we follow the imperative of 5.16: *walk by the Spirit*, this accomplishes two things in our life; one negative and one positive:

We will not gratify the desires of the flesh, 5.16.

We will produce the fruit of the Spirit, 5.22.

See how the fruit of verse 22 is singular. This stands in contrast to the *works* of the flesh, which is plural. So, we have multiple works and singular fruit. What does this mean. There are multiple ways to carry out the desires of the flesh as one, two, or more of these things may be manifested in a person's life. On the other hand, the Spirit produces a single fruit. When you walk by the Spirit you will see *all of them*. In other words, we don't go around trying to generate love and then joy and then the next, etc. You simply need to walk by the Spirit and allow God to work in your life.

Galatians 5.22-23 is the characterization of the Christian. The things described here are the natural result of a yielded or surrendered heart. This is the life pattern that should be seen in every Christian. These things are our habitual character. They reveal the heart that has submitted itself to the productivity of the Spirit. The fruit is commanded of us, yet it can never be produced except by the Spirit. So, we **rest** in the Lord, Psalm 37.7. Our human effort does not produce these things, He does as we **yield** to Him, Romans 6.13, 19. This is what it means to **walk** in the Spirit – a life surrendered – following His lead, Galatians 5.18, and living in cooperation with His plan. When we begin with this attitude, the actions will naturally follow.

## 5.22-23: The Fruit of the Spirit

### Love

This is the love of self-sacrifice, not warm feelings. This type of love is described this way in other passages:

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another, John 13.34-35.”

This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth, 1 John 3.16-18.

Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God, Ephesians 5.1-2.

This is a love of choice. A love that is void of selfish motives and gain. It is to love others with the love of Christ. Paul has already spoken a great deal about love in this chapter:

- love is the expression of faith, 5.6
- serve one another in love, 5.13
- love fulfills the law, 5.14

All the remaining moral qualities that come after this naturally flow from love.

### Joy

This is heavenly joy. It is something inside us. It is deep founded and never based on our circumstances. It is the joy Paul describes in Philippians 4.4-5. *We rejoice... in the Lord.*

### Peace

This is tranquility of mind based on a relationship with God. Like joy, this has nothing to do with our circumstances. The verb form of this word means “to bind together.” It describes an inner, calm confidence that no matter what happens, everything between you and God is right.

### Patience

This is long-suffering or tolerance. It describes the person who is slow to wrath. It is the exact opposite of impatience. This is something only the Spirit can produce:

being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience,..., Colossians 1.11.

### Kindness

This is also known as *gentleness* or *tenderness*. James 3.17 says it comes from a divine source:

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense.

#### Galatians 5:22-23

**22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

**23** gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.

## Goodness

This is moral excellence. It can be described as spiritual excellence. One dictionary links it to the concept of sweetness.

## Faithfulness

This is the practice of being trustworthy. It involves being loyal and steadfast. Someone has described this as “a long obedience in the same direction.”

## Gentleness

This is the quality of meekness, submissiveness, teachableness, and being considerate. Gentleness is not weakness; it is great strength under control.

## Self-Control

This is the opposite of self-indulgence. A good way to define this is the ability to keep yourself in check. See 1 Corinthians 9.27.

## *The Law is not Against Such Things*

At the end of verse 23 Paul says there is no law against these things. In other words, in the case of a Christian, the Spirit is producing things that do not need to be restrained. (That is the purpose of law: to restrain sin.)

So, which will we choose in the great battle that Paul describes in Galatians 5.17? Will we walk by the Spirit or gratify the desires of the flesh?

## Galatians 5.24-26 – How We Win

### Verse 24:

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

#### Galatians 5:24

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

### Understanding the crucifixion in this verse:

This crucifixion in verse 24 involves **present action**. It is not something done to us, it is something done by us. We, *individually*, are the agents of this crucifixion. This is describing the daily activity of winning the battle against the flesh via personal self-discipline. It is the fulfillment of Luke 9.23:

take up your cross daily and follow me.

Here, Paul is saying we must not only take up our cross and walk with it, but *we must see that the execution actually takes place*. This verse is describing the **absolute, irreversible, renunciation of our past life**.

The war with the flesh is continuous and lifelong. There are no shortcuts to spiritual victory. No spiritual quick fixes. Paul is calling for consistent, obedient, and vigilant renunciation of this world and our flesh.

Consistency. Obedience. Vigilance.

Obedience is not a bad thing. It comes naturally from the surrendered heart. We need to conscientiously obey God's expectations.

We win by:

### Limiting opportunities

Will we take seriously David's words:

I will not let anything worthless guide me. I hate the practice of transgression; it will not cling to me. A devious heart will be far from me; I will not be involved with evil, Psalm 101.3-4.

### Exercising self-control

See what was written earlier in the lesson. We must keep ourselves in check. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9.27

Paul is calling for ongoing **decisive** action, daily **dying** to the flesh, and **vivid**, continuous growth in God's grace. The goal of the war against the flesh mentioned in 5.17 is not a negotiated peace but final execution, 5.24.

### Verse 25

Here Paul says:

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

This is how we actively demonstrate the new life generated by the Spirit. Note how Paul combines a statement of fact or status (we live) and an imperative command (let us keep in step). This is also the same way he constructed his words in verses 1 and 13. The status highlights the gracious gift of God: our freedom in Christ and the life bestowed by the Spirit. In contrast, the imperative stresses our responsibility, which has been outlined previously:

- We defend our freedom from the clutches of legalism.
- We use our freedom to serve one another in love.
- We maintain alignment with the Spirit's guidance.

#### Galatians 5:25

**25** If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

The command "keep in step" is a military term. It references a straight line or marching in orderly rows. The Spirit assumes the role of setting both the direction and pace for us to follow. Staying in sync with the Spirit necessitates continuous focus and discipline, engaging our entire being. In a world filled with differing paths and distractions, we must intentionally reject these distractions to adhere to the Spirit's guidance. This discipline requires our active and unwavering commitment.

### How to Keep Pace

## Be decisive

We must make a decisive commitment to move forward. The example of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21 highlights the importance of prompt and complete decision-making. Despite his comfortable life, Elisha's unwavering response to God's call demonstrated his decisiveness. His actions, such as informing his parents without delay and sacrificing everything, symbolized his unshakable faith. Just as Elisha's commitment was unwavering, we, too, must embrace our new life with decisiveness. Paul's own transformative experience in Philippians 3:3-7 underscores the importance of walking away from the past and looking ahead with hope.

## Forgive Yourself When You Fail

Many individuals define themselves by their past mistakes, allowing these errors to hinder their self-confidence and progress. However, Scripture reminds us of our human condition, acknowledging our tendency to sin, Romans 3.23, 1 John 1.8. It is crucial to confront our sins honestly, seeking God's complete forgiveness, as He readily forgives, Psalm 103.12, Hebrews 7.25. Trusting God and His promises allows us to release self-condemnation and forgive ourselves. In Colossians 2.13-14, we are reminded that God has forgiven all our trespasses, and all our sins have been paid for. Embracing God's forgiveness enables us to move forward without being defined by our past.

## Depend on God

This is done by:

- ❑ Emptying yourself of self-reliance: Recognize that the old self is dead, and victory over the flesh relies on God's strength, Ephesians 6.10-13, Ephesians 1.19, 2 Corinthians 12.9-10.
- ❑ Seeking God in Prayer: A consistent prayer life aids in overcoming recurring sins of the flesh, as God provides escape from temptations, Philippians 4.6, 1 Corinthians 10.13.
- ❑ Remembering God's Forgiveness: By living within His forgiveness, we allow God to define us by the blood of His Son, not our past sins, Romans 8.1-2, Romans 8.29, Philippians 1.6).
- ❑ Move Forward in Humble Obedience: Dependence on God involves obediently following His guidance through the Holy Spirit and His Word, Galatians 5.18, Colossians 3.16. Trusting God's ways and submitting to His will demonstrate our reliance on Him for strength and guidance, 1 Corinthians 10.13.

## Verse 26

What does this look like in practical terms? Paul offers a concise yet applicable directive to the Galatian churches:

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

This verse, coupled with verse 15, clearly illustrates that the unity within the Galatian churches had been severely disrupted by the corrosive influence of pride, resulting in contention and jealousy. Their relentless focus on adherence to the law had turned the Galatian believers opposing forces in competition with each other.

### Galatians 5:26

**26** Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

To "provoke" in this context implies challenging one another to a spiritual contest. Some individuals were so certain of their spiritual superiority that they sought to flaunt it. On the other hand, those who felt spiritually inferior harbored resentment towards those who contributed to their feelings of inadequacy. Both attitudes originated from a pride that could not tolerate any form of competition.

What C. S. Lewis once wrote is appropriate here: He (the devil) is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride—just as he would be quite content to see your infections cured if he was allowed, in return, to give you cancer. For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense" (Lewis 1943:45).

The sole remedy for the cancerous ailment of pride lies in radical intervention: we must crucify the pride emanating from our flesh and yield to the Spirit, who possesses the exclusive power to dismantle the dominion of pride.

## **What's In This for Us?**

### ***Limit Opportunities for the Flesh***

Be proactive in removing yourself from situations that may lead to sin or unhealthy behaviors.

### ***Maintain Spiritual Discipline***

Make a habit of daily spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and reading scripture to grow in your walk with the Spirit.

### ***Keep in Step with the Spirit***

Actively pursue a lifestyle that reflects God's work in you, making conscious choices to follow His lead rather than the patterns of the world.

### ***Avoid Conceit and Envy***

Work on humility, recognizing the value of others, and celebrate their successes without jealousy.

### ***Practice Confession and Forgiveness***

Regularly confess your sins to God and seek forgiveness, and extend that same forgiveness to others.

## For Class Interaction and Discussion

### *Lesson Outline*

1. Freedom in Christ: Its responsibilities and our response, 5.1
  - Standing firm: defending the gospel, 5.2-12
  - Serving others through love, 5.13-14
  - Keeping in step with the Spirit, 5.25
2. Walking by the Spirit vs. Flesh: The contrasts and commitments, 5.16-18, 19-21
3. Fruit of the Spirit: The singular fruit as a natural result of a surrendered heart, 5.22-23
4. Daily Crucifixion of Flesh: The continuous war and spiritual discipline, 5.24-26
  - Renunciation of our past life, 5.24
  - Allowing the Spirit to set the direction and pace, 5.25
  - Fight back against pride, 5.26

### *Thought Questions for Discussion*

1. What does it mean to "stand firm" in the context of our Christian freedom?
2. How can serving others be a form of standing firm in our faith?
3. Why is walking by the Spirit contrasted with fulfilling the desires of the flesh?
4. Discuss how the "fruit of the Spirit" is different from the "works of the flesh".
5. Why do you think the Spirit's fruit is singular, and how does this influence your spiritual walk?
6. What are some daily practices that can help us "crucify the flesh"?
7. How does "keeping in step with the Spirit" translate into our everyday actions and decisions?
8. Discuss the role of self-control in walking by the Spirit and the battle against the flesh.

## ***Group Activities***

**Discussion:** Divide into small groups. Assign each group a "fruit of the Spirit" and have them come up with practical ways to demonstrate this fruit in their daily lives.

**Spiritual Discipline Plan:** Collaboratively create a weekly plan that includes daily readings, prayer, and activities focused on cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.

**Sharing:** Share personal stories of struggle with pride and encourage each other with ways to cultivate humility.

## ***Final Encouraging Word***

Our walk with the Lord is one of continuous transformation. In Galatians 5, we are reminded that in Christ, we have the power to overcome the desires of the flesh. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, we bear fruit that reflects the heart of Jesus—love, joy, peace, and so much more. Take courage in knowing that your efforts are not in vain. The Spirit is working from within to accomplish God's will. *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain,* 1 Corinthians 15:58.

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