MESSAGE FOR NOVEMBER 15, 2026, FROM GALATIANS 5:24-26

We continue this week in our series of messages from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Up to this point in chapter five, Paul has been explaining **how God has provided for believers to walk in Christian liberty by faith and not under the enslavement of the law**. We've seen that **the gospel alternative to living under the law is living or walking by the Spirit**.

As believers yield to the desires of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we will not gratify the sinful desires of the fallen, unredeemed part of us that Paul calls the flesh. We've seen **that the desires of our sinful flesh and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to each other.** That means that the Christian life, in this period of salvation history before Jesus returns, is marked by this **ongoing opposition between the desires of our flesh and the desires of the indwelling Holy Spirit** and believers must *by God's grace*, hourly, moment-by-moment choose to follow the desires of the Spirit if we are to keep our sinful desires in check.

When a believer wrongly follows the desires of the flesh, that manifests in what Paul in verse 19 calls "the works of the flesh." We saw from verse 22 that a believer living under the influence of the Holy Spirit produces "the fruit of the Spirit." In the past two weeks, we've looked at **Paul's representative lists of vices and virtues** here in chapter five. Some of you may have noticed that we've slowed our pace in this section of the letter—taking only a couple of verses each week. The reason for this is because **this section on living in Christian liberty by the Spirit is so intensely practical. These truths are ones that believers must apply every day if they're to experience any level of the conquest over sin that Christ provided for us at the cross**. That's why we've lingered over these texts.

This morning, we look at verses 24-25 which immediately follow Paul's list of the nine fruit of the Spirit and his declaration that **a life lived by the Spirit is a life against which there is no law**. Paul is very much continuing his line of thinking when he writes in verse 24, "**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." How does this connect with what precedes it? Paul claims back in verse 16 that the believer can triumph over the desires of the flesh as we walk by the Spirit. Here in verse 24 Paul explains **another reason** WHY **believers can triumph over the sinful desires of their flesh is because they have crucified the flesh's sinful desires.**

Now, it's important for us to know that, when Paul speaks about the *crucifixion* of the sinful flesh, **he's not talking about the complete destruction or obliteration of the flesh.** That should be clear from what we've said about **the opposition that still exists** between a believer's now-crucified sinful flesh and the Spirit. **When the New Testament teaches that the flesh or the old self has been crucified, it simply means that**, **through the cross of Christ, it has been defeated and its power to control or enslave the believer has been decisively broken**.[1]

What that means on a practical level is this. The **only time the sinful flesh can overpower a believer is when we allow it to. *Do we believe that?* That is a *radical change* from the reality we experienced before our conversion.** Before a believer is saved and is given the Holy Spirit, **the flesh, as it manifested itself in our old self, was ruthlessly in control and enslaving us to the**

[1] Moo, Douglas, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, electronic edition on Galatians 5:24.

power of sin. Even if they wanted to, unbelievers cannot possibly defeat the power of sin because **their sinful flesh has NOT been crucified, neither do they have the Holy Spirit.**

This truth of the believer being crucified is seen in two other places in Galatians. In a few weeks, Lord willing, we'll look at 6:14 where Paul says, "**14** But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which *the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*." This is the believer being crucified (and therefore able to overcome) the pull of **the temptation of the things of this present, sinful world**. Another verse in Galatians, however, holds the key to understanding both today's reference where we saw that the believer has "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" and the one we'll see later in chapter six. This verse is back in chapter two that we looked at in June. We want to spend some time reviewing that truth because it will help us understand our text for today AND because **it is so crucial in helping us understand how the gospel liberates believers from the controlling power of sin**.

If you remember from chapter two, the context of this verse is Paul relating the story of the apostle Peter's sin in Antioch where **Paul confronted Peter for not acting in line with the gospel.** You may recall that Peter, through his own hypocrisy regarding Jewish food laws, was pressuring Gentiles to live under those laws. In these verses in chapter two Paul is explaining why that was such a foolish thing for Peter to do.

His explanation is that in this new era of salvation history after the death and resurrection of Jesus, **God calls people to live by faith in Christ, not Old Testament laws.** Paul explains **what is near the heart of what it is for a believer to live by faith** when he says in verse 20, "**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." This verse speaks **of the believer's union with Christ.** When a believer is born again by the Holy Spirit, **the Spirit creates new spiritual life in the believer by "establishing a living union between the believer and Christ."**[2] **The formerly spiritually dead sinner is made alive when the Spirit places us into union with the living Christ.**

The believer's union with Christ is a BIG topic in the New Testament. The phrase that highlights that we are united with Christ is the phrase generally translated "in Christ" and it is used 76 times in the New Testament. **It's probably impossible to overstate how important it is for believers to have this truth of the reality of their union with Christ firmly and deeply impressed into their minds and hearts. If this truth is not clearly understood and believed, the gospel cannot do its transforming work to cause the believer to grow deeply in holiness.** As it relates to the believer's new relationship to sin, Paul says this about the reality of our **union with Christ** in Romans 6:6, "**6** We know that *our old self was **crucified with him*** in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." Paul directly connects the believer's freedom from our former enslavement to sin to our union with Christ—being crucified with him.

Being crucified with Christ means that when believers are brought into union with Christ by faith at their conversion, because they have become one with Christ—because **Christ's life is now their life**, **they spiritually share in the *sin-defeating works* of his death and resurrection**. Christ was

[2] John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2009), 32. Found through AI in my Logos software.

crucified and defeated sin. I am united with Christ. Therefore, ***I*** was crucified spiritually with him and **share in his sin-defeating work**. Likewise, Christ was **raised** from the dead and therefore confirmed his defeat of sin. I am united with Christ. Therefore, ***I*** was raised spiritually with him and **confirmed that I share in his sin-defeating work.**

That's what Paul means when he says that he was "crucified with Christ." To help us understand this more clearly, it helps us to remember what happens to a believer when he is converted. When fallen humans come into this world, we are fallen and **our spiritual father is Adam**. We are members of the ***Adamic*** human race. As a result, we inherit Adam's sin, his self-obsession, and his absolute spiritual deadness to God and the things of God. Our spiritual hearts are like stones—dead to God with no sincere desire for him. This is because **that's who fallen Adam is** and we are his offspring in this world.

However, when believers are born again, **when we are born spiritually and given new spiritual life in Christ, we are, spiritually speaking, taken "out of" Adam and placed in *a new race of humanity* in union with Jesus Christ**. We are no longer spiritually "in Adam" but are now ***in Christ***. In our first, physical birth, we were born into a fallen human race that is united with *Adam* and we shared his fallen, spiritually dead nature. But when a believer is born AGAIN spiritually, he is united with *Christ.* He shares his perfect nature and is made spiritually alive in him.

Paul's explanation for *how this transfer from our old Adamic nature to our new Christ-like nature happens* is in verse 20 when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ…" What he's saying is that, by virtue of my union with Christ where I shared in his crucifixion, the old "I," the person that I was in Adam—my "old self" with its sinful flesh… was crucified. That "old self" with the Adamic nature and sinful flesh **that was enslaved to sin and spiritually dead to God**, **by virtue of our union with Christ, *has been crucified***. That means it no longer has the power to enslave us to do what it wants to do.

Paul continues his argument with "It is no longer ***I*** who live, but Christ who lives in me." The "I' who no longer lives is **who I was in Adam**. That "old self I" is dead—defeated, disempowered by its crucifixion with Christ. Now, **in place of Adam living in me through my old, Adamic nature**, "Christ lives in me." But one question is, **if the old self in Adam is dead and Christ lives in me—WHO is the new me?** I surely have not been *totally* replaced by Christ because **if that were the case, I would never sin**. The New Testament teaches that in place of the old self, there is now a new self—a new person united to Christ that is distinct from our old, crucified self.

Paul says, "And the life ***I*** *now live* in the flesh ***I*** *live* by faith in the Son of God." So, Paul says here that there IS a new "I." This is NOT a replacement of my human personality by Jesus. This is NOT saying that **Christ now lives *in my place as if he has completely replaced me*.** This new "I" or "new self" that lives in this same body as the old self did—is a dramatically different "I" than the old Adamic one that was crucified. And this new "I," (very much ***unlike*** the old "I") doesn't live depending only on his willpower and strength.

This new "I" is purposed by God to live in a radically new way. That is "*by faith* in the Son of God." In this new chapter in salvation history that God opened 2000 years ago, God's people live by faith in Jesus, not trusting in our works or our capacity to obey God's law. **This new life in union with Christ is a faith-driven life, not a works-dependent life**. After saying that believers live by faith in the Son of God, Paul adds something ***he only rarely says in his letters.***

That is, he describes the Son of God as the one "who loved me and gave himself for me." This is a powerful declaration by Paul that **he knows that Jesus loves him because he died for him**—he "gave himself for me." Notice that Paul doesn't say that God loves "*us*" [though he obviously does love *all* believers]. Paul uses **the personal pronoun** because he wants us to feel how *personal and individual this love is* that Jesus has for each and every believer. The Son of God loves ***ME***. Notice that **the *faith* in Christ by which we live is grounded in his *love*.**

The reason Paul could trust God for his salvation and so many other things is because **his faith was grounded in *the knowledge that Jesus loved him and showed that love by dying for him***. ***Faith in Christ must always be rooted in the certainty that he loves you***. One commentator says, "*Faith in Christ can be sustained only where one is confident of God's love. Love, in this sense, is the fuel of faith. This love finds its roots in the cross, where Christ gave his life "for" Paul."*[3] Too often, believers struggle with not having the faith to believe Christ for something that is perfectly appropriate for them claim by faith.

Things like trusting in God to **protect us**. Its trusting in God to **quiet our anxious hearts**. Its trusting God to **provide for our needs**. Its trusting in God to **gradually conform us to the image of Christ** and 1000 other Bible promises in which we can legitimately trust. Too often, the reason believers struggle with faith in believing God for those things is because **they have real doubts about whether God loves them**. Well**, if you're struggling with doubts about God's love for you, you're going to struggle with trusting Christ to do anything for you.** Without a strong assurance of God's love for you, your faith in him is going to be weak and spotty.

That helps us see **what it is for a believer to be crucified with Christ and live by faith in him,** but it leaves one question unanswered about our text for this morning that you may have wondered about. You may have noticed something different about the believer's co-crucifixion with Christ here in chapter five from the those mentioned in both chapter two and chapter six. **The difference is the voice of the verb.** That is, in chapters two and six, the verb is passive. "I *have been crucified* with Christ." That is, someone crucified me—I was acted on by someone else—I was passive. But here in chapter five, Paul says, "**24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus *have crucified* the flesh with its passions and desires."

That form of the verb "crucified" is in the active voice. That makes it sound as if I was the active participant in crucifying my own flesh. ***Why does Paul put this verb in the passive voice in chapters two and six but the active voice here?*** The most helpful explanation is that because, on the one hand, believers *were crucified* with Christ, we did not technically perform the crucifixion—we were passive.

But on the other hand, in this section of the letter, Paul's emphasis is on walking in the Spirit ***by faith.*** And our co-crucifixion with Christ ***is enacted*** or ***plugged into our lives*** or ***made a living reality*** by ***our faith.*** It's as we **BELIEVE that we share in Christ's crucifixion *that we can experience the reality* that the power of sin has been defeated. This is because it's as we *believe* that we share in Christ's crucifixion and are dead to the power of sin, that we are enabled by the Spirit to walk in victory over the power of sin.** You'll remember that **it is faith that opens the door or unleashes the Spirit's power** to say "no" to sin and **its as we *believe* that we have been co-crucified with Christ and are dead to the controlling power of sin,** that we will experience the

[3] Schreiner, *Galatians,* ECNT, electronic edition, 2010.

Spirit's power to say "no" to sin. It's our God-given faith that triggers the Spirit into empowering us to say "no" to sin.

This is what Paul means when he says in Romans 6:11, "**11** So you also must *consider yourselves* dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." It's not enough that we have been crucified with Christ. To see this power over sin released in our lives we must also believe it. **This is just the way the Christian life works in this period of salvation history**. There are spiritual realities that have been accomplished for us. Jesus died to free us from both the penalty and power of sin. FINISHED! But if we do not live by faith, ***believing*** what he has done for us, then we will not be able to enjoy the benefits of all of his sin-slaying work.

Likewise, the work required for salvation, **which includes making us holy**, has been accomplished. FINISHED! But **that work that gradually transforms us into increasingly holy people** is enacted, made real, brought into our lives, by God's grace, as we ***believe*** the truth and **our faith unleashes the Spirit's power over the pull of sin in our lives. The sin-overcoming, fruit-producing power of the Spirit is manifest in our lives ONLY as we BELIEVE the truth that our sinful flesh, with its passions and desires, has been crucified with Christ.** It's our faith in the truth of the gospel that is the catalyst that enables us, by God's grace, to walk in the liberty of the Holy Spirit.

So, let's see how this applies to us in the midst of a world filled with sin and temptation to our flesh. I'm standing in the grocery check-out lane and am surrounded by the filth of rotten magazine covers. Every manner of gossip and slander and immorality is within a few feet of my eyes. **There are multiple things provided for in the gospel that I can do to not be pulled into sin.** I can focus my eyes like a laser beam on the candy section and begin to commit to memory the varieties of candy bars stocked in lane seven. As long as I am not coveting the chocolate there (a very real possibility for me), this avoidance of the temptation could be called, in Paul's language, "not presenting your members as instruments of unrighteousness." [Rom. 6:12] I ignore—I take the focus off the temptation.

But if I'm going to be standing there for a while, the temptation to my sin-loving flesh to indulge in all the gossip and slander and lies and immorality will be stronger. As the pull of the flesh increases in intensity, in light of Galatians 5:24 **I can preach this gospel truth to myself** that would sound something like this, *"Thank you God that I know that my flesh--my old self--that part of me that is feeling the pull of temptation-- was crucified in Christ—its defeated, dead."*

"Thank you, Lord that because I am united with Christ in his crucifixion and his defeat of sin at the cross, I have also defeated its controlling power. By your grace, ***I choose to believe*** *that truth and I thank you that I have a choice not to sin here. I choose to walk in that liberty and by faith in the work of Christ. By the power of your Spirit, I will not look at these offerings of the fallen world."* **That's obviously a fairly detailed version of preaching the gospel to myself for the purposes of instruction**. But that's an expression of the fight of faith we must wage every day.

Because it is rooted in gospel truths about what God has done for us in Christ, this is NOT *the power of positive thinking*. This is not what some believers might call *positive confession* because **I am not trying to create a new reality by my thoughts or words.** I don't need to create a new reality—the new reality in Christ already exists—the reality is the truth of the gospel. **Walking by the Spirit is fundamentally about believing the gospel and acting on that faith in the Spirit's power!** It's not about just *knowing* these truths as if our victory hinges on knowing theological facts. That's

necessary—you must know WHAT to believe, but *knowing the truth in your head* is not sufficient. Victory over the power and pull of the flesh and sin comes as, by God's grace, we choose to actively trust in the truth of the gospel.

And this is what Paul is implicitly calling us to do in verse 25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." If we *have* the Holy Spirit as our source of power, then ***believe and act on* the gospel to unleash the Spirit's power to be manifest in our life**. The phrase "keep in step with the Spirit" originally had the sense of to "*be drawn up in line"* or something like the military command, "fall into line." The ESV has it "keep in step with the Spirit."

We saw in verse 17 that the Spirit has desires. "…the *desires* of the Spirit are against the flesh." Here in verse 25, Paul is saying, **"whatever the Spirit desires, keep in step with him."** And we know from the revelation of God's Spirit-inspired word ***what* the Spirit desires** in relation to this battle against the flesh. When I'm standing in the grocery check-out line, I don't need to listen for an inner voice to tell me not to look at the filth. The Word of God tells me that.

Most of the time, the Spirit's desires are well known to us in those contexts of battling against the flesh. In the vast majority of cases, **our problem is NOT that we don't know the desires of the Spirit.** Our problem is that in our sin, **we choose to engage in the battle of faith only half-heartedly—with very little conviction or perseverance, or not at all.** Instead of being blood earnest in our fight against sin, instead of by the Spirit *killing* our sin [Rom 8:13], we instead tolerate or even flirt with it. God's call on our lives is to "keep in step with the Spirit" by energetically believing and applying the truth of the gospel so that we that we will not gratify the desires of the flesh but instead show the fruit of the Spirit.

The more we "keep in step with the Spirit,"—the more we fight the fight of faith **by applying Jesus' defeat of sin's power in the gospel to every area of our lives**—the more it becomes a habit. Knowing and BELIEVING **what God has done for us by Christ through the gospel** is crucial if we are to walk above the pull of the controlling power of sin. The new age of the Spirit has come! It has replaced the law and made possible a life increasingly free from the control of the sinful flesh. We must BELIEVE that—that must be the ocean of truth in which we swim—that must be the food we eat and the water we drink.

As you think about how the gospel is lived out by faith—as you think about your union with Christ and what that means, ***are you fighting the fight of faith against sin?*** Are you by faith consciously **applying the work of Christ through the gospel**, **the power of the Spirit and the new person you are in Christ** to the sinful temptations of life? If not, you can begin doing that today! **Start living out who you are and what you've been given through the gospel.**

Perhaps you hear this and think, *"this all sounds like a foreign language to me."* Maybe you haven't even been aware there is a fight of faith to be fought. If that's you, come to Christ. He died on Calvary's cross so that sinners like you and me could come to him, **admit that we can in no way live up to God's standard of perfection and look to Christ in faith**. Faith that he will **forgive you of your sin and cleanse you** of the corruption sin brings. Faith that you can **come into an intimate relationship** with the Lord of the universe. Faith that **you don't have to live as a slave to sin**. And faith that, when you die **you can go be with Jesus** forever and enjoy eternal pleasures at his right hand.

If you want those incredible blessings, believe on Jesus Christ and God will unite you with him. He will give you a new nature and the Holy Spirit to indwell you. May God give all of us the grace to trust in Christ **so that we might much more consistently live in victory over sin's power** for his glory and our joy.