

MBC – 7/24/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson  
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM  
**“Keep in Step with the Spirit”**  
 Galatians 5:16-26

Paul draws a hard and fast line between living under law and living under grace. One is about rules, the other is about a relationship. One is living by your flesh, the other is living in the Holy Spirit. And maybe that has sounded kinda mystical or vague, but this morning, Paul is going to tell us exactly what it means and what it looks like to live in the Spirit—

- Galatians 5:16–25 <sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Paul mentions the Holy Spirit by name 7 times in these verses. He talks about walking by the Spirit (v.1), being led by the Spirit (v.18), living by the Spirit (v.25), and keeping in step with the Spirit (v.25). Our lives are to be saturated with the Person of the Holy Spirit. We sang earlier—

*“All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One come down,*

In Zechariah 4:6 God said the same thing—

*“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of Hosts.”*

Do you believe that? Do you believe that praying, serving, witnessing, teaching your children, trying to resist temptation, trusting God through trials, and pursuing holiness—are all in vain apart from the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? And do you believe that only the Holy Spirit can produce anything eternal and pleasing to God from your life?

- Would you say this morning that your words, your decisions, your attitudes, your delights and desires—are controlled by the Holy Spirit? Do people see the fruit of the Holy Spirit coming through your life? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control?

*Does it make any difference?* It makes all the difference in the world, because all *is* vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down! Wood, hay, and stubble. We can be busy in ministry, sacrificing time and energy to the point of burning out, but it is *vain*—empty of God’s power and God’s blessing--unless it is the fruit of the Spirit’s presence in our lives.

*Apart* from the Spirit, what we say and do will be no different than our unsaved friends. *Apart* from the Spirit, our singing and worship is no different than karaoke night at the casino. And apart from the Spirit of God, my preaching will be no different than a speech at the Rotary Club. We must be convinced and committed to doing nothing apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

So let's talk about the Holy Spirit, this—

### **I. The Person within.**

If you are a Christian: the most important truth for you this morning is the precious truth that the Holy Spirit is God, and is a Person, and this Divine Person lives in you and has a deep, personal relationship with you. Christians slip into thinking that the HS is just some divine force or power – like electricity or something. But beloved, He is a Person! In the NT the Holy Spirit speaks, guides, convicts, intercedes, calls, He sends – only a Person can do these things.

\*Catch yourself if you ever refer to the Holy Spirit as “it,” Jesus called the Spirit “He,” masculine pronoun, because He is a Person, just like the Father and the Son.

- And only a Person can be grieved – in Eph.4:30, Paul warned us not to grieve the Holy Spirit who is in us. You can sadden the Holy Spirit in you when you ignore His leading. He is a Person – God, living in you.

Beloved, the Spirit is given at the moment of salvation to every child of God to draw us into a deeper relationship with God. He leads us into deeper truths, He leads us into deeper obedience, and deeper love and worship—

- Galatians 4:6 <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”
- The Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote much about the Holy Spirit. He said this: “God communicates Himself to us by His Spirit, and we communicate with God by His Spirit. God does all in us by His Spirit, and we do all back again to God by His Spirit.”

\*So what is the condition of your relationship with the Holy Spirit? Do you ever think about that? Imagine Him as a person living in your house. Do you acknowledge His presence? Do you have any communication with Him? Do you respond to Him when He is leading and guiding? Or do you walk right past Him, out the door, off to work. . . day in, day out? You say, “What am I supposed to do, talk to the Holy Spirit?” Yes. We call that prayer. And yes, you can pray to the Holy Spirit. I pray almost every day, as soon as I wake up, and then driving in to work, while I am studying, and before every sermon: “Holy Spirit, fill me, control my thoughts, my actions, and my tongue.”

- And communication between two persons is a two-way deal, right? The Spirit speaks to you through His Word – are you reading His Word to hear Him? And then, are you responding to what He shows you? It's amazing to think that the God of this universe lives in you, as close as your breath and wants to have a deep relationship with you!

And in the context of all we have been learning in Galatians, there are only two ways to live: in the flesh, or in the Spirit; under law or under grace – and living in a constant relationship with the Holy Spirit is the only way we can work and serve and love out of gratitude instead of bribing God with our works—

- Sibbes: Whatsoever we do, if it be not stirred by the Spirit, apprehending the love of God in Christ, it is but *morality* (and a synonym for morality is legalism – keeping rules for the sake of appearance and ego) ...What are all our performances if they be not out of love to God? And how shall we love God except we be persuaded that He loves us first? ...The gospel breeds love in us to God...working a blessed frame of sanctification, whereby we are disposed to every good duty.

How we need to be close to the Holy Spirit! – and communicating with the HS, especially because of the constant spiritual battle we are in—

## II. The Christian's conflict.

- <sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

### **A. It's flesh against Spirit.**

What is “the flesh?” It's what is left of the old you; the old unsaved person you used to be. The unredeemed part of you, which includes your body, but it also includes your old thoughts and habits and patterns. So your flesh is what you are by your natural birth, but the Spirit is the Person in you because of your new birth—

- It's like the inner you is already saved, but the outer you is not! You are a new creature in Christ – trapped in your old flesh that will get its makeover at the resurrection. When that happens, the outside will finally match the inside!

### **B. It's relentless.**

But until then, your old flesh will *always* try to assert itself and sinfully gratify its own desires. So you will always be in a tug-of-war between the new you and the old you, between your flesh and the Holy Spirit in you! It's what Paul talks about in Romans 7, and it is a moment-by-moment, relentless battle. He states as a fact: “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin!” I wish I had better news for you this morning, but forewarned is forearmed!

### **C. It's unique to Christians.**

And this struggle is unique to Christians! Your unbelieving friends don't struggle like you do, because they don't have the Holy Spirit – they *only* have the flesh to control them. They have problems! But they don't have the tug of war that Christians have—

- Galatians 5:17 <sup>17</sup>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.

Don't you see that?? Your flesh always wants to satisfy and gratify itself. The Spirit always wants to glorify Christ – so if your flesh is in control, you won't do what the Spirit wants but if the Spirit is in control, you won't do what your flesh wants—

- Galatians 5:16 <sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

That is one of the most powerful statements in all of Scripture! It is a promise that as long as you walk by the Spirit, you will not sin. You cannot sin, when you are walking by the Spirit. Which also means that whenever you and I do sin, we have stopped walking by the Spirit – we will come back to that. One more principle to draw out here, and it is really important—

***D. All of our problems are ultimately spiritual struggles.***

What do I mean? Well what are you struggling with right now? You're sick. You are out of money. Your car's broken down. Problems at work. Problems at home. Those all boil down to one spiritual issue: Will you continue to trust God through this or will you cave in to your flesh? You can be happy as a clam with car troubles and kid troubles and money troubles – if you keep trusting and loving God. But if you fall back into your flesh – these things can crush you – am I right? Whatever is keeping you up at night is ultimately an issue of whether or not you will respond in the Spirit, or according to your flesh.

And Paul says that it's one or the other: v.18: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Remember, those are two different ways to live – if you are under the law, you are living by your flesh. So how do you know which one is in control in your life? It is easy to tell!—

***E. The works of the flesh—***

Galatians 5:19 <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are evident (on display for the world to see):

***1.) Sexual sins—***

- *sexual immorality*, (porneia) that is all sexual sin, and it certainly includes pornography which is a spiritual pandemic today due to our cell phones. And it gets really quiet here. This is a scourge in our churches – I have seen it destroy many marriages and families. And how many men are passive and sidelined in our churches due to guilt over this sin. It is a sin that can be forgiven, and it is a sin that can be defeated by the Holy Spirit, but you will never defeat it in the flesh.

David Platt wrote this: "Any and every time we indulge in pornography, we deny the precious gospel truth that every man and woman possesses inherent dignity, not to be solicited and sold for sex, but to be valued and treasured as excellent in the eyes of God. People are not inferior objects to be used and abused for selfish, sexual, sensual pleasure; they are equal image bearers of the God who loves and cares for them. We may scoff at how pre-Civil War churchgoers justified slaves in their backyards, but aren't we dangerously like them when we participate in pornography (and promote the sex slavery to which it is inextricably tied) in our own homes?"

- *Impurity* means uncleanness, dirty stuff, dirty jokes.
- *Sensuality* – lack of restraint, people just indulging their sensual desires.

***2.) Religious sins—***

- *Idolatry* – this is giving your best and most precious time, and affection and money that belongs to God, to something else: sports, some video game, or internet distractions: youtube, tik-toks,

shopping, gambling, TV – Christian: you don't have to bow down to a statue to be guilty of idolatry

- *Sorcery* – Gk. *pharmakeia* – drugs. Ancient people used drugs to go into trances to worship their pagan gods. But getting high is still a sin of the flesh. And don't give me any excuses or baloney on this.

### 3.) *Social sins*—

- *Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, dissensions, divisions, envy* – this is all the fruit of the flesh, and it's what a church looks like when people are not filled with the Spirit. And it's what a legalist church looks like, because aren't filled with the Spirit either. People are quick to judge, quick to argue, find fault, gossip, put others down.

### 4.) *Party sins*.

- *drunkenness, orgies* – Again, this stuff happened in pagan, Gentile worship. The Holy Spirit is *absent* where you see this stuff. Beloved, drunkenness – getting buzzed is utterly unacceptable for Christians. Paul specifically contrasts drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit in Eph.5:18 because if you are drunk, you are not filled with the Spirit. Better to completely abstain than to go over the line with your wine

And look at v.21: “and things like these, “i.e., this is just a sample of what life in the flesh looks like.” And what he says next should sober us up right away: “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things Gk. *passontes* = “make a practice of doing, as a habit – not an isolated lapse” will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- He means what he says! If these things are the fruit of your life then you don't have the Holy Spirit. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, then you have never come to know Jesus.

### **F. The fruit of the Holy Spirit—**

But if you have been justified by trusting in Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit. And the fruit He produces will be evident. You breathe a sigh of relief just hearing these—

- 1.) Love – Isn't this the quality that best describes God? Love is *giving yourself* for the highest good of another.
- 2.) Joy – is the deep, unshakable happiness that comes from knowing God.
- 3.) Peace – is the contentment of knowing you have been reconciled with God
- 4.) Patience – accepting God's sovereign timing in your life, and the lives of others.
- 5.) Kindness – concern, compassion, and sensitivity expressed toward others.
- 6.) Goodness – undeserved gracious, helpful actions toward others.
- 7.) Faithfulness – dependability, reliability and trustworthiness because you keep your word.
- 8.) Gentleness –humility and lowliness of mind that encourages and strengthens others.
- 9.) Self-control – is just what it says, but it is really surrendering yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit.

- against such things there is no law.

You don't need to fear the law if you live like this, but he also means that the law doesn't produce this fruit. This kind of a life isn't lived by staring at a list of rules – it's living from the inside out, it's the overflow of your life when you are filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit.

Paul gives only two ways to live – that produce two very different kinds of fruit – that comes from two different sources. And they represent two different eternal destinies. So which list looks more like your life? How about your home, and your family?

\*I said that all of our problems are ultimately spiritual problems – if you find that your life or your marriage or your home looks more like the fruit of the flesh: jealousy, fits of anger – then you have a *spiritual* problem, and the Holy Spirit is the spiritual solution. And no counseling or therapy or medications will make a dent until you begin to walk by the Spirit, because if you walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh!

- Look again at the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 wouldn't that solve every problem in your home?

So Paul doesn't leave us hanging here, he tells us how to live by the Spirit instead of the flesh—

### III. The Christian's victory.

Two ways we overcome the flesh and walk by the Spirit—

#### ***A. We must crucify the flesh.***

- Galatians 5:24 <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Look at this carefully: this is not something that was done *to* us, it is something that is done *by* us. Back in Gal.2:20 Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ." He said in Romans 6:6 "We know that our old self was crucified with him." When God saved you and joined you to His Son – the old you was crucified with Him, and a new you has risen to life, with Him. That's what we call a positional truth.

But what Paul is dealing with here is an ongoing crucifixion of "*the flesh with its passions and desires.*" This is something you and I must do. We take the action here, and we must do it over and over—

- Romans 8:13 <sup>13</sup>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.

"Put to death the deeds of the body," means to kill sin. And to do that, you must—

#### ***1.) Be ruthless.***

Don't coddle your sins. Don't make excuses for them, don't rationalize, don't minimize what you have done. Don't paint yourself as the poor victim of something outside of yourself. You did this, so confess it for what it is: "This was hatred – murder in the heart. This was lying and hypocrisy – use the words that Paul uses in vv.19-21: sexual immorality – adultery in the heart, a fit of anger, envy, drunkenness."

Don't pity yourself or your sin. Be ruthless and kill it. Or as John Owen said, "It will be killing you!"

## **2.) Be decisive.**

Crucifixion was a slow, lingering death, but it was certain. Soldiers were placed at the scene of execution to guarantee that the victim died. No one came down from the cross alive – including Jesus! So even though you and I face a lifelong battle against our flesh, we have to be decisive about every sin we face: we will not be overcome by our flesh, but we will kill it, sin by sin until we draw our last breath. I read this quote several times this week. It's by John Stott—

- The first great secret of holiness lies in the degree and the decisiveness of our repentance. If besetting sins persistently plague us, it is either because we have never truly repented, or because, having repented, we have not maintained our repentance. It is as if, having nailed our old nature to the cross, we keep wistfully returning to the scene of its execution. We begin to fondle it, to caress it, to long for its release, even to try to take it down again from the cross. We need to learn to leave it there. When some jealous, or proud, or malicious, or impure thought invades our mind we must kick it out at once. It is fatal to begin to examine it and consider whether we are going to give in to it or not. We have declared war on it; we are not going to resume negotiations. We have settled the issue for good; we are not going to re-open it. We have crucified the flesh; and we are never going to pry out the nails.

### **B. We must walk by the Spirit.**

- Galatians 5:25 <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit – (he means since we have eternal life by the Holy Spirit), let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

This is another way of saying "*walk by the Spirit.*" I love this picture: it means following His lead, yielding to His control, giving the reins in guiding your heart, and your words, and your actions — and it's the very same as being filled with the Spirit in Eph.5:18.

- And this is a moment-by-moment thing, right? This is why Paul calls it a "walk," because it is step-by-step: You look where He is stepping, and you put your feet in His footsteps. You say, "How do I know where He is going?" Good question! The Scriptures are clear as to where the Spirit is going in the lives of God's children. So if you want to keep in step with the Spirit, this is where He is headed—

### **1. He wants to glorify Jesus Christ.**

This is His #1 priority – to point to Jesus, to make much of Jesus—

- JOH 15:26 Jesus said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me."
- JOH 16:14 "He shall glorify Me."

The Holy Spirit doesn't draw attention to Himself, He *always* shines the spotlight on Jesus. He is the Christ-exalter, the Christ-proclaimer, the Christ-revealer. So if you want to be in step with where the Spirit is going, your life needs to be about *making much of Jesus*: worshiping Him, obeying Him, getting

to know Him in His Word – and talking about Him to others. When you are in step with the Holy Spirit, people should say, “You must be one of those Christ-followers!”

## 2. He wants to kill sin in you.

Turn with me to the passage I mentioned earlier—

- Romans 8:13–14 <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh you will die (spiritual death), but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (notice what comes next) <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

So in the context, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit? To be killing off sin, by the Spirit. This is what the Spirit wants to do in the lives of God’s children—kill off remaining sin. That’s where He is walking, are you in step? One way to kill off sin is simply to starve it—

- In Romans 13:14 Paul writes, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” In other words, don’t feed your sin. Don’t give it any ammo. If you are trying to lose weight you don’t buy junk food and then hope you don’t eat it! No! You don’t keep it around. So whatever sin tempts you, cut off the supply – keep it out of reach. Don’t go to that store, or that neighborhood, or that website.

Someone said, *If you don’t want to fall, don’t walk where it is slippery!* To kill sin, don’t feed it. Pinch the oxygen hose. Kill it off before it breeds. Do that and you are walking in step with the Spirit.

## 3. He wants you in fellowship with other believers.

2 Cor.13:14 You have been brought into “*the fellowship of the HS.*” That’s not just you and the HS, it’s you and all those who also have the HS—

- 1CO 3:16 Do you (pl.) not know that you (pl.) are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (pl.)?
- EPH 2:21,22 the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you (pl.) also are being built *together* into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

The fullness of the Spirit can only come into your life in the fellowship of other Spirit-indwelt believers. And when you think about it: You can’t possibly live out the fruit of the Spirit in isolation: Love? Patience? Kindness? Goodness? This fruit only comes when you are around other people. If you are not in regular fellowship with other believers, you are not in step with the Spirit. Where is the Spirit going?

## 4. He wants to bear witness of Jesus through you.

I’ve always been struck by what Jesus said in—

- John 15:26–27 “But when the Helper comes . . . He will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness. . .



How would the HS bear witness of Jesus? Through His disciples – beloved, we are His mouth! The HS doesn't witness apart from us. But when we are in step with the Spirit, we will open our mouths to share the Gospel—

- ACT 1:8 Jesus said this to His Disciples before He ascended to His Father: “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My *witnesses*.”

If you want to be where the Spirit is moving, if you want to experience His power flowing through you, open your mouth and tell others about Jesus.

### **5. He wants you to be in His Word.**

Do you want to cut to the chase and hear the Spirit speak personally to you? Read His Word. Hear His Word. The Bible is the Holy Spirit's communication to God's people. The more you read it and apply it the more you will be in step with His Spirit.

### **6. He wants you to be in prayer.**

Before Jesus returned to the Father, He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit who was coming. They were not to go anywhere until the Spirit came upon them. So what did they do? They gathered together in an upper room,

- ACT 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to *prayer*. . .

They needed to choose an Apostle to take Judas' place—

- ACT 1:24 And they *prayed*, and said, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen.

God was bringing 1000's of men and women to salvation in Christ, how did they handle it?

- ACT 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to *prayer*.

And notice the connection between their prayer and the Spirit's filling—

- Acts 4:31 "After they *prayed*, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

If you want the Spirit's power and presence and boldness in your life, you need to be His Word to know what He wants you to do, and then you need to be in prayer to cry out for His power to do it.

And I remind you of that amazing passage, that tells us how the Holy Spirit involves Himself in our prayers—

- Romans 8:26–27 . . . the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. . . because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Wow! If you want to experience the personal ministry of the HS, connecting you to the Father, pray! Where God's people are praying, that's where the Spirit is.

A Holy Spirit-led life is a prayerful life. Does that describe your life? Is prayer a priority for you and for your family?

I would ask you again – what is relationship with the Holy Spirit like? I've just given you 6 ways to deepen that relationship. Will you commit to doing something about that this morning?

And when you walk in step with the Holy Spirit, two earth-shaking things will happen in your life—

- 1.) You will *not* gratify the sinful desires of your flesh. You will defeat sin. And—
- 2.) Your life will be bursting with the fruit of Spirit!