

# Big Idea - Walking in the Spirit is a life oriented upward towards God.

## Opening Illustration

For the next three weeks, we are going to slow down and focus on this passage and the fruit of the Spirit. The greatest challenge in doing a study like this one is forgetting that this is Paul's application to a larger letter and not a stand alone text. We never want to be content with simply moralizing a passage to make us look visibly like better Christians without actually becoming more like Christ. Up to this point, we have been studying Paul's warning to not return to the law, yet in the modern church, we risk creating a new legalism every Sunday when we look at Scripture as a moral handbook or a daily how-to-book.

We must not forget that Paul arrived at this imperative as the culmination of his previous arguments. Paul is further

unpacking his previous instruction is verses 13-15

### **Galatians 5:13–15 ESV**

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. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

And this is Paul’s further clarification of what he meant by “faith working through love.” Faith is the root, love is the fruit. A life rightly ordered is a life that bears good fruit, while a life improperly ordered bears bad fruit or no fruit. No fruit is inherently bad fruit because that’s a worthless fruit tree, isn’t it.

So, we continue our reflection on what it means to abide in Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches. And we are promised that if we abide in Christ, He will abide in us, and we will bear much fruit.

## Walking by the Spirit

### **Galatians 5:16–18 ESV**

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

As we begin this study on the fruit of the Spirit, it is important that we understand the tension being raised by Paul in this passage. On the one hand, Paul is giving us an option to choose between two options: either walk by the Spirit or by the flesh. On the other hand, Paul is clear that without the empowering of the Spirit, we are incapable of walking by the Spirit and are in bondage to the flesh.

Let's look at the phrase walk by the Spirit. It's one of the most difficult phrases to identify the grammatical function of something called the dative case that exists in the New Testament. The dative case is generally seen as an indirect object in English. I gave the ball to my son. It can also be seen as an instrument. I hit the nail with a hammer. Or as a reference, a rule, or accompaniment.

In this case, the debate generally falls onto whether this is a dative of means/instrument, a dative of rule, or a dative of agency. The dative of rule would result in the Spirit being the standards and rules by which one would walk, but this interpretation is unlikely as it is theologically incorrect. We do not walk in our own strength according to the rules of the Spirit. If this were the case, then Paul's letter to the Galatians discouraging them from subservience to the law

would be self-contradictory. The dative of agency sounds good theologically on the grounds that it is the person of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to walk in a manner not of the flesh. Unfortunately, the grammatical rules of this example are not met and so it is highly unlikely to be a dative of agency.

Most likely, this is a dative of means. We accomplish walking rightly in the sight of God by means of the Spirit at work in our lives. It is the means of the Spirit to equip us for right walking.

## Orthopedic Shoes Illustration

Much like an orthopedic shoe positions the foot to walk with the support necessary for correct posture, the Holy Spirit positions the believer to walk according to the will of God. Without the orthopedic shoe, you can probably still walk, but it'll be with pain, discomfort, and strain on the body.

## Compass Illustration

Walking by the Spirit is also like walking with a compass. The compass is an instrument that directs your path and leads you. Paul states Galatians 5:18 “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The Spirit is the instrument that guides ones steps to walk the right path in

the right manner. The law, however, was like a map without a compass or your coordinates. The law shows where you want to go, but provides no means to make your way there.

## Looking upward

This week, we are going begin our study unpacking what it means to walk by the Spirit versus walking by the flesh. Over the next three weeks, we will look at what it means to walk by the Spirit through relation to God (upward), relation to neighbor (outward), and relation to self (inward). The natural starting point is to look upward to the one who saves and has sent his Spirit to equip us for our walking.

## The Vice List (works of the flesh)

### **Galatians 5:19–21** ESV

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 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.

As these relate to looking upward, of course we know that all sin is against God, so we could take our time today to unpack each of these sins as they relate to our walk with

God, but instead of that I want to focus in on how they contrast with the fruit of the Spirit.

## The Virtue List (Fruit of the Spirit)

### **Galatians 5:22-23** ESV

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

While many scholars point out that there is no clear organization to these virtues, I find it helpful to categorize them into three sections: upward (love, joy, peace), outward (patience, kindness, goodness), and inward (faithfulness, gentleness, self-control).

This week, we are going to focus in on love, joy, and peace in contrast to enmity, envy, and strife.

Yet before we focus on what I am categorizing as the upward virtues of the fruit of the Spirit, let us not forget the context of Paul's letter — Paul is writing to the Galatians to not place their assurance of salvation in themselves or the works of the flesh, but he is encouraging them to put their faith fully in Jesus Christ to live in freedom and walk by the spirit which is accomplished by faith working through love. The concern of Paul is that the churches of Galatia are misunderstanding their role and function in the Christian

walk, and Paul is trying to aid them in reordering their desires and mindset.

## Love

The first virtue is the crown jewel of the Christian triad (faith, hope, and love): Love. The law is summarized by Jesus as love of God and love of neighbor. Love is given its greatest example in the person of Jesus Christ who said John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,” and then proceeded to lay down his life on the cross for his friends. Love sees its clearest definition in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

### **1 Corinthians 13:4–8** ESV

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

And we are told that God is love in 1 John 4:8 “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” So, it’s obvious why this is the first virtue in the list. No one who is bearing the fruit of walking in the Spirit will fail to love. Love is key! Love is the fulfillment of the law (Gal 5:14).

Yet we must not fall into the trap of misidentifying what love

truly is. Love is not love that does not identify with the words of God. Love does not promote or approve of sinfulness and destruction. Love is not selfish or insist on its own way, but love endures with joy and peace and each of the other virtues that Paul highlights in the fruit of the Spirit.

The contrast to love in Galatians is enmity. Throughout the old testament, this word is embodies the enemy. Enmity is hatred and opposition. It is being an enemy of God and of his people. James highlights that friendship with the world, that is friendship with the flesh, is enmity toward God. Of course hatred could be unpacked at the societal and personal level, but it most accurately describes a stance towards God.

We are called to love God and love neighbor. We love God ultimately through glorifying Him and through loving our neighbor, but we cannot love well if we are tolerant of rebellion and sin. Now, please hear me correctly, we must not hate sinners, since we are all sinners. But we ought to love our fellow sinner through pointing them towards the God of creation who sent His son for us while we were still enemies! Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but it endures all things.

Hatred on the other hand, rejoices in suffering, wrongdoing, and destruction. Many popularly say that the opposite of love is not hate but apathy, but that is only partially true.

The opposite of love is hatred of God, which bears the fruit of hate for his image and his image-bearers.

Love, for the Christian, is firstly lived out in the recognition of being called by God. I recall learning in my study of Greek that this idea of Agape love being a special, unique to Christianity kind of word and phileo was a worldly, friendship kind of love had no support in Scripture. They are synonomous, but one thing that is true about agape in the Old Testament is that it reflects God's love to choose his people. Love in the Old Testament is parallel and identical to election — to God's choosing and setting aside his own people.

One Greek scholar explains:

**New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, Volumes 1-5 ἀγαπάω**

The OT makes clear that we can never ascend to God; rather, all human thought, feeling, action, and worship are a response to a previous movement by God

Which this point is clearly laid out in Scripture. 1 John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.” The desires of the flesh are to have our own way, to love ourselves and hate anything and everything that forces us to deny ourselves. But the love of God made the first move. John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal

life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

God moved first, and we are called to respond by walking in step with the Spirit to love God and other because he first loved us. It all begins with an upward action in response to God’s move down to us.

## **Joy**

Joy in Paul’s writings is found in the assurance of our salvation. Joy is found in the hope of righteousness in Christ, that no matter our circumstances in this life, whether persecution, sadness, or whatever, we have joy in the Lord. Joy is not identical to happiness. Happiness exists in ourselves, while joy exists outside of ourselves. By the fact that joy is found outside of ourselves, we see it directly contrasted by envy, which is desire to have what others have.

Envy is seen in description of the motivation of the Jewish leaders to hand over Jesus Christ to the Roman officials. In a moment when they should have had joy in the presence of God incarnate, they experience enmity with God and envy that Jesus was receiving glory and recognition, while they weren’t. F.F. Bruce defines envy:

“It is the grudging spirit that cannot bear to contemplate someone else’s prosperity”

Joy on the other hand is the ability to rejoice in all circumstances knowing that Jesus Christ is our reward and prosperity (1 Thes 5:16). Joy is a spiritual gift, because there will be suffering in this life, but even in the midst of hardship, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may experience the grace of God as joy even in our deepest pain.

## **Peace**

And like joy, we may experience supernatural peace in all circumstances. Peace is the image of wellbeing, prosperity, and the absence of war or division. True peace is being unfractured and whole. Beyond that, peace also reflects our assurance of salvation as well as our unity in Christ. Peace is far more than an absence of conflict as the peace of the God as a spiritual fruit is experienced even in the midst of turmoil.

In contrast to peace, we have strife and division. And I don’t just mean with one another, although it could be understood that way. This week, we are focusing on the upward perspective, so let’s think about strife and division with that in mind. When we refuse to accept God’s will and sovereignty in various situations and circumstances, we can

find ourselves in strife with God. This goes back to the vice of enmity as well.

When we hate our circumstances and start to blame God for allowing it, we are rejecting the peace of God and choosing to strive against God in our lives. This must not be confused with lament, which is not only acceptable but important in the Christian life. There is nothing wrong with crying out to God in the midst of pain and suffering that you hate the effects of sin in this life. An unexpected diagnosis, the loss of a loved one, the betrayal of a friend. Life can be unbearable. It's okay to lament and weep over these things. What we do not want to do is grow bitter and try to argue with God.

By walking in the Spirit we have peace with God, and we are not divided from God or His Church but are united as one in Christ. We experience peace with God by keeping our eyes upward on Him, being led by the Spirit and not being distracted and overtaken by the works of the flesh.

## The greatest upward vices

Idolatry and Sorcery are two more vices that need to be addressed when speaking of our upward perspective. When we walk by the means of the Spirit, we trust God as God. We love God as Creator and sustainer of our lives, and find joy in his provision and peace in our place in God's will.

Idolatry says that God is not the greatest good and needs to be replaced by another good. Idolatry attempts to put something else in the place of God, and sorcery attempts to accomplish our desires in our strength.

One of my favorite comedians converted to Catholicism from satanism. One thing that led him to his conversion was seeing the power of magic in the lives of his friends: things like cutting off one's nose in a ritual for wealth and power and crazy stuff like that.

To be honest, I don't know anything about witchcraft and sorcery, but I have heard of multiple bands that claimed to have made deals with the devil before that made it. This is the sort of idea that Paul is referencing. Choosing enmity with God in order to chase your idols. It contradicts love, joy, and peace, by choosing to be an enemy of God and a slave to your desires and passions.

## Freed from the selfishness of the flesh

### **Galatians 5:24–26** *ESV*

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become

conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

We have been crucified with Christ, buried with him in our baptism, and risen to life by grace through faith. We must wear the orthopedic shoes of the Spirit so that we may walk by the Spirit. We must take up our compasses of the Holy Spirit to be led by the Spirit.

We walk by the Spirit by the power of the Spirit in our lives. He is the means by which we may succeed and bear fruit. Today we looked at the first three fruit of love, joy, and peace. The vices each reflect a desire to take control of life and to become our own greatest good or place something other than God in that place of greatest good. As we reflect on what it means to bear forth love, joy, and peace, we must not divorce these virtues from God's position as God. True love comes from the God who is love, who created this world, and who is sovereign over it. We know love because God first loved us. But when we fail to love God, we will not be able to experience His joy or His peace, because we will be at enmity with God, divided from Him and striving against him, envious of others.

My desire for each of you is to live in the freedom of Jesus Christ. To experience the love of God, the joy of God, and the peace of God in your life today. These are not eschatological ideas, but fruit that the Spirit brings about in the lives of his children today!

For me, that's acknowledging and repenting of insecurity, which is a form of pride, and seeking to live in the humility that should come from God's call on my life. Seeking God's Word brought alive by the Spirit to give me my voice according to His will and not seeking the approval of others through relying too much on works of the flesh.

As we meditate on God's Word in this passage of Galatians, I want to encourage each of you to reorient your lives upward and ask yourself, have I been seeing love, joy, and peace in my life lately? And if not, pray that God will prune your life that you may bear this fruit!