

Walk by the Spirit

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[0 : 00] So, how do we walk by the Spirit, verse 16? It's the central point of Paul's argument. So how do we go on to decipher how to live the way that Paul is compelling us?

The entire book of Galatians is a fuller exposition of him dealing with how to live in the light of the freedom we have in Christ. Paul wrote many letters, of which Galatians is one, all written in a real time, in a real place, with real people and real problems. In this letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul is contending for the true gospel. There are those among the body of believers in that region saying, you must follow the entire law of Moses to be a Christian.

He would argue, you cannot be a proper Christian if you're not circumcised. After all, circumcision was the outward marking of the Israelite nation being separate, apart for God as holy. It represents the covenants. It represents the whole law of Moses, the intermediary work of the priests, the ethics of the Ten Commandments, just to name a few examples. But Paul tells all Christians that because of Christ's sacrifice, there is no need for us to follow the ceremonial aspects of the Israelite law.

Whether we fall into the camp of thinking these Christians that are saying this thing, known as the Judaizers, are just trying to honor Christ piously or trying to gather their own following, that doesn't matter. What does matter is the result. The problem that the true gospel of faith in Christ being the sole mode of salvation is being undermined. But we can imagine their argument, can we not? Paul has told us to imitate him as he imitates Christ. Is there a better way of honoring Christ than becoming a Jew? After all, Jesus was a Jew. Christ himself would have been circumcised. This is a very practical way we can make ourselves more like Christ. However, that was and is a flawed interpretation. Paul, in response, does not say weakly, well, here's another possibility if you'd like.

No, he's sternly disciplining the churches. Chapter 1 of Galatians in verse 6 says, I am astonished that you're doing what you're doing. Chapter 3, verse 1.

[3 : 02] O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Imagine hearing that directed to ourselves. For Paul, there is no greater problem anywhere in the church than the truth of the gospel of Christ being altered. He has expertly in the previous chapters condemned any truth of Christ being changed. But at this point in letter, he is urging them not to submit to the law, but rather to walk in the Spirit. But what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Answering that question will impact how we deal with the truth of being saved, yet still struggling with sin, and how we interrelate as a community of believers. This evening, we want to grow in our understanding of what it means to walk by the Spirit, and how we interrelate as a community of Christ. We're going to walk by the Spirit. We're going to our inner battle, verses 16 through 21. Then second, our inner change, verses 13 to 14 and 22 through 24.

And then finally, there is no turning back, verses 25 and 26. Let's pray once more before we continue looking at God's Word together.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Spirit. We thank you that we've been told to walk by your Spirit. As we look at your Word tonight, we pray that your Spirit is our helper and our teacher. We pray that we are malleable to your will. And we pray that everything we do tonight is for honoring your glory. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen. Okay, our first point, our inner battle. Verses 16 and 17 again.

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 flesh. For these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing what you want to do.

Unless this is your first day in church, or even online, and if it is, you're welcome, and we are so glad that you're here with us. You will know that we Christians are called to pursue holiness.

[5 : 43] The Apostle Peter states this explicitly in 1 Peter 1, 15 through 16. He says, He who has called you is holy. You also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And he's quoting in there a passage from Leviticus 11:44, where God is speaking through Moses, which says, Be holy, for I am holy.

We read that expectation, and we're likely to become one of my favorite words, discombobulated. If you've never heard that word, it means confused and distressed, discombobulated.

When we look at our lives in the mirror, they seem so far from holy. Our actions, they're so far from perfect, from being holy. It can send us into a tailspin where we end up questioning our very own salvation. But even in 1 Peter, where we looked at, the context is being believers in God, He is the one who has purified your souls. This holiness we have is something done for us, not something that we have done. The Bible is very clear. Our lives and our actions as Christians become more holy and less sinful by the work of the Holy Spirit in us progressively, which changes the believer in a lifetime to become more like Christ. All this to say, because you still sin, do not read verses like this in 1 Peter in isolation and think,

I have no hope, I have no faith. We are holy because Christ is holy, and he has given us his righteousness. We are a people set apart as holy because we are in Christ. However, there's still that call for living in holiness or to use Paul's language to walk by the Spirit. But pursuing holiness is not an easy task. The Gentiles Paul is communicating with are being asked to live a very different way from what they used to live prior to being made alive in the Spirit. Life in the Spirit is very different from what Paul calls life in the flesh. And then this inevitably involves conflict. We find verses in our passage that contain phrases like, are against, opposed to each other, to keep you from. This is all in our battle language. Saint Augustine. He is a fifth century theologian, and he said something that was helpful for us to understand why we have this inner struggle within. He spoke of four states of man. There should be a slide just so you can follow along. The first state in the Garden of Eden, God creates, he creates man, he says that it is good. We are made holy. We are made perfect, but we still in that state have the choice to either sin or the choice not to sin. But if you know the story of the Bible, Adam and Eve fall and they do sin. And then we move into the second state of man. After a fall, we can only sin.

Yes, there's common grace and we can do good things. But apart from Christ, everything is tainted with sin. Then there's the third stage. If we are saved by Christ, we are free from the dominion of sin, and we're able to walk in the Spirit. But because of our flesh, we can still sin. And then there's that what we're waiting for, that fourth state in glory, when Christ comes back and everything is restored, and we are made perfect once again. We cannot sin. So what stage are we in here today? If you're a Christian, you're currently in stage three. You're free not to sin, but you also still can sin.

[10 : 28] Paul sums up this state and the inner battle profoundly elsewhere in his letter to the Romans. He says, For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.

We know this, right? How traumatic is this in our experience as Christians? Take heart, because this inner battle, this inner struggle is the sign that the Holy Spirit is residing within someone. Be encouraged. It is walking by the Spirit that can enable us to pursue God's intention for our lives and not to pursue the desires of the flesh. When Paul says to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh, he's telling us to contend in this inner battle, not to avoid it. In verse 13, he says, Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. So we are free from the law for our righteousness, but by the Spirit, we are free to live an entirely new way, one after Christ's own example. Paul is being exceptionally clear. I'm telling you about the freedom from the law that you have in Christ, but that does not give you liberty to walk according to the flesh. We are all in an inner battle, but what happens during battles? There are casualties. This is also at the very heart of Paul's message here about how we, as Christians, live out our faith together in community. Paul is often twofold. First, how do we understand what Christ has done for us and how does that affect us? And then second, how does that affect how we live out in relation to one another as Christians? If we are not waging war on sin, we will, through that laxity, wage war on one another. Verse 13 again, but through love serve one another. It's clear, it's stating if we are sinning to our flesh's content and not contending in this inner battle against sinfulness, then the reality is we're not just sinning against God, which is serious enough, but we will be sinning against one another. We can cause harm to one another, and sometimes as we know it from our own experience, we can cause eternal harm.

Verse 15, but if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another. Let us here in Partic be a community that is walking by the Spirit. Let us wage war together against the flesh so that we might serve one another and love one another. And let's not be categorized as one in which we bite and we devour and we consume one another. The inner battle, the inner change, our second point, the inner change. So we are not to live lives marked by the desires of the flesh. The list that Paul gives is also graphic. Sexual impurity, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envies, drunkenness, orgies. Yet where there is a risen Christ, a Spirit residing within, there is hope. Paul shows us not only our past reality, but our future reality as well. What is walking by the Spirit? It's a lifelong transformation to be more like Jesus who saved us. And what does it look like to become more like Jesus? Just the kind of living that Paul describes. Reading verses 13 and 14 and 22 through 24, Paul states,

Love one another, serve one another, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And he continues, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. We have numerous examples in Jesus' ministry. So let's look at him now, where the Spirit produces these good fruits. And look 10, Jesus sends out his 72 followers to go and preach and to go and heal.

[15:48] They return. And what does the text say in Luke 10, verse 21? In that same hour, he, Jesus, rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. What do we see here?

Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of true humanity, rejoicing. We see his joy, we see his love, and we see his faithfulness. All marks of one who walks by the Spirit. He said of himself in Matthew 11, when calling the weary to come and find rest in him, for I am gentle and lowly in spirit.

Again, Jesus is gentle and loving. He is walking by the Spirit. Jesus also on countless occasions was patient with his disciples when they fell short of the mark, with James and John in their frustrations, with Peter in his restoration, with Thomas in his doubting. Jesus time and time again is patient, another of Paul's marks of one who walks by the Spirit. In fact, I would always encourage people to, if you're going through the Gospels in your daily readings, it's useful to actually read these words in the light of the fruit of the Spirit. Look at what Christ does and see it against that. It will fill you with awe for the Christ who saves us. And that, that is who we are being transformed into.

How does this change, this inner change affect our community life though? For example, think of this. If we water a shriveled plant in a garden, it's dry, it's brown, it's dead. But when it's watered, and there's time for it to grow, that we don't only change the plant which grows and blooms again, we change the entire garden that that plant is residing in. It affects, the new life affects everything. This plant with its beautiful flowers has an impact on the whole area. That's like us when we walk by the Spirit. It has a similar effect on our church community. We are changed as individuals.

The Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying us in Christ. But this individual effect affects our entire community, the very church that we're part of. This was Christ's posture towards those he came into contact with. Then the challenge of Paul remains. Will this be our posture towards others in our church community? Verse 14 of today's passage. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It's a call to have this posture as Christ had towards those in our family relationships, in our church relationships, those outside both our church and our family.

[19:05] All relationships present a challenge in loving one another, do they not? But we are called to walk in the Spirit bearing fruit. Both in the ease and in the battle, we must walk by the Spirit, relying on the Holy Spirit's influence in our day-to-day interactions, pursuing these things that Christ so exemplified. But what gets in our way? Remember St. Augustine's state of man? We are still in stage three. We sin. And when we sin, let us repent to one another and ask forgiveness. But not only that, let's go on to grant that forgiveness that is asked for. Let us be a community that walks by the Spirit, binding up the wounded, not causing more harm to one another. Then Paul, after showing this heavenly kingdom order of how we should interact with one another, goes on to state, against these things there is no... Paul knows the Gentile believers here in our passage. They did not live by the Jewish codes, the Jewish law system. They had a very different moral code before they became Christians.

The battle was that they didn't use their newfound justification as a license to go on and sin to the heart's content. But Paul juxtaposes this problem beautifully by saying there is no law against the outworkings of walking in the Spirit. And this is true for all of us. Jew or Gentile, therefore we should show Christian love in excess. Be joyful in excess. Be patient continually. Be peaceful constantly. Be filled with goodness and gentleness. Let your faithfulness and your self-control be visible, coming from our gratitude towards Christ. There is no law against these things. Paul's compelling the people to go and do it. Be these things. Walk by the Spirit. We should praise God that we're not alone in contending in the inner battle, as the Holy Spirit is with us. We should also praise God for the rest of our days that in this stage three of man, the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us to be more like Christ.

The inner change. There's no turning back. Our third point. There's no turning back. Reading the last two verses of our passage.

They almost seem out of place in our passage. He's just gone on to speak about the fruits of the Spirit.

[22 : 19] Would these two verses not sit more alongside verse 15? There's no mistake here. Paul knows about our human nature. He knows that we are imbalanced. Remember, the concern here is verse 25.

If we live by the Spirit. Do the Galatian churches need reminding that it is by the Spirit that has given them life? Following on from what you read before in Galatians chapter 3.

Are you so foolish? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, you are now perfected by the flesh. Paul, he is seriously reaffirming the primacy of the true gospel of Christ.

And ensuring that they do not have a Christ plus works salvation plan. They should be so in awe of Christ that all their interactions and actions flow from walking by the Spirit.

Also, let's reflect on the words Paul uses. Conceited, provoking, and envying. Paul gives us a grit about almost like how to assess our lives reflecting the Christ we claim to follow.

[23 : 38] Verses 22 and 23 over and against verses 17 and 21. And we cannot deny that walking by the Spirit requires effort from us.

Again, not to gain salvation, which is only done by Christ, which is what Paul is contending for. But our response to Christ's love requires effort from us.

John Calvin comments, If we obey the Spirit, we must labor and fight and apply our utmost energy. And we must begin with self-denial.

We must labor and fight. We must apply our utmost energy. The life of the flesh and the Spirit are utterly opposed to each other.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is given by Christ to us. We are to walk in step with the Spirit. Jesus sends the Spirit to help us and to be with us forever.

[24 : 46] The Spirit reminds us about Christ and teaches us that Christ is the only way. So if, from this passage, this is the challenge to us all.

In this list of sins that are in conflict with the Spirit, if the Holy Spirit here and now is convicting any of us of a sin, we must be submissive to His instruction.

Let us repent. Let us pray to God for help. Dealing with that sin that still lingers. But not only that, let us be diligent in our efforts to pursue holiness.

Then Paul is being careful. He knows this church's bend towards legalism. He also wants to ensure that their good works, their outworking of love in response to Jesus, does not then become a new self-imposed law.

He doesn't want them to scale themselves, envying one another on how loving they are, entirely missing the point. He doesn't want these grids to become a spiritual bingo for their own pride.

[25 : 59] Because again, that is relying on their own works and not Christ's. That's a Christ plus works false gospel once again. The true gospel of Christ is for freedom and for joy, not more pain.

Let us not rely on our processes, but rely on the Christ who met all of our needs. Remembering, one of Paul's key concerns is the community of believers and their true fellowship.

Envy and being full of conceit will only lead us to provoking, harm and hurting. The opposite of Paul's teaching in Philippians 2.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

This selflessness is another aspect of walking by the Spirit. To walk in that kind of posture towards others. Are we in our fellowship here today in Partick, are we walking by the Spirit?

[27 : 12] Are we, as in verse 13 of our passage, looking for every opportunity to love and to serve one another? It was fantastic that we had a church lunch today because there was an opportunity to love and serve one another, and we are all grateful for it.

We know there's a certain future when Christ returns and all sin will be wiped away, and we will move into that fourth state of man where we cannot sin, and we will finally live in true harmony with one another.

But until then, Paul's exhortation is for us to apply effort, walking in the Spirit and loving each other well. And yes, that will come with a lot of repentance towards one another, and a lot of forgiveness towards one another.

There's no turning back. So, there's a real spiritual inner battle within you. That is a sign you're a Christian, not otherwise.

We are in that third state of man. We are being sanctified by the Spirit while still battling the flesh. There will be a time where we move into that fourth state of man where we sin no more, and we look forward to that being our true, lived-out reality.

[28 : 31] Truly walking by the Spirit, Christ restoring us to true humanity, what we were always meant to be. Until then, we rely on the true gospel of Christ.

Never a Christ-plus-works gospel. Remember, there is no turning back, and we thank God for this, and we continue to rely on Christ for our salvation, because Christ has saved us, brothers and sisters.

In love for this fact, we are to diligently walk by the Spirit, pursuing holiness, through His strength, and not our own, for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of Christ's church.

We are called to walk by the Spirit. Amen. Let us pray to our God and King. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this exhortation of Paul to walk by the Spirit.

If you never sent Christ, none of us would be saved, and we would all still be living in moral confusion, and we'd all be on direction for hell.

[29 : 47] But yet, you did send Christ, and you did then send your Spirit. And it is your Spirit who is sanctifying us and changing us. And we look forward, Lord, to when you come again, when you restore this world.

And we pray that until then, you give us the strength and wisdom to apply effort in doing the things that you compel us to do.

And reaction to our love for you. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Amen.