Keeping in Step with the Spirit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 July 2022

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0:00] Father God, we look to you this day for your grace, which we know is sufficient. Your mercies are new every morning. And we look to you, Father God, to be strengthened by you.

We look to be blessed because you are the one who blesses. We ask, seek, and knock because you have told us to. And we do so full of expectation because you are a generous God.
We thank you, Father God, that there is nothing too big that we could ask you for or nothing too small. There is nothing that escapes you. And we recognize that as we live our life before you, we are to do so for your glory. But Father God, as we will read in a moment, we cannot do this in our own strength. We cannot do this on our own. We need to be equipped. And we thank you, Father God, that you are one who gives us everything that we need to do everything you want us to do.
So we ask, Father God, this morning that you would bless us as a church and you would bless those who cannot be with us. You would bless those who are at home. You would bless those who haven't been here for a while, but desire to be. And then, Father God, for those who perhaps are not walking by the Spirit and are pursuing the desires of the flesh because they're not walking and keeping in step.
That, Father God, that the strength of your desire and the work of your Spirit in their lives would bring them back into the assembly of your people. We ask, Father God, that recognizing that you're the one who builds your church, you're the only one who can protect it and keep it safe. We would ask, Father, that as we sit here this morning, that we would recognize that we are engaged in a spiritual work and of a high calling indeed. We ask, Father, then that as we seek to understand your word, that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.
[2:07] Amen. Well, please, if you would, turn to Galatians 5. So Galatians 5, and we'll be picking it up in verse 16.

So Galatians 5, beginning at verse 16. 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 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. Now the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalry, 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. 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.
[4:08] If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Well, as you fix your eyes on these few words, it wouldn't be too difficult to say, less difficult to admit, that the Church would be radically different if those in the Church kept in step with the Spirit. We would live a radically different life if we were walking by the Spirit constantly, consistently. In fact, even to keep in step with the Spirit, which seems to give this extra additional idea of pace. Not just direction, but pace. Especially for Christians who have a different pace to their Christian walk. Those who define Christianity as a journey, which seems to be quite a common idea, not sure where it comes from.
But it's not so much a journey at all. It's more of a case of moving away from unholiness into the holiness of God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24

[5:33] But it would be fair to say, and I think even easier to admit, that the Church would be different, very different, if Christians knew, no, not knew, because they know, but if Christians did walk by the Spirit.

Now, there are a whole host of desires of the flesh that are not mentioned, and Paul illustrates, and things like these.
But there are many things that keep us away from God, which Paul illustrates as simply being the desires of the flesh. And so, as you would expect, all the previous messages that I have done on our shared life with God involve God the Holy Spirit, because that is who we share our life with. Being in relationship with God means that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. That gives you assurance that you can never be separated from God. You need to understand that, and then you need to live by it, that you're never going to be separated from God. It means that because you cannot be separated from the Spirit, that you now share your life with God, that your life is not your own. And therefore, such things as how I make a decision and what decision I make are now shaped by your understanding of the Gospel, and, of course, your understanding of how God involves himself in your life.
[7:07] And like all relationships, it's possible to grieve the one that you're in relationship with. It's therefore possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. We tend to think that if God is God, that we cannot simply ride roughshod over God because he is all-powerful and all-knowing.

Well, that's true. But it does tell us that God the Holy Spirit can be grieved. And this gives us an idea of just how not fragile our relationship with God is.
It's not fragile at all, but perhaps how delicate we ought to treat our relationship with God. The fact that a person can be grieved.
The Holy Spirit is a person. And therefore, the fact that you can grieve a person that you're in relationship with is something that we can understand. And, of course, something that we are not meant to do.
The imperative here, or the command, that is, is that we are to walk by the Spirit, and then it's re-emphasized later on, a few verses down, that we are to keep in step with the Spirit.
[8:20] To walk with the Spirit seems to give this impression of side by side, hand in hand, at least going in the same direction, being of the same agreement.

But to keep in step seems to give an extra piece of information that we, this is more to do with pace. This is more to do with actually following the leader and not falling behind with the one that you are following.
Now, I know what this is like, because whenever I am walking with my family, I'm always the furthest one behind. It must have something to do with walking and the fact that I don't like it that much.
But I manage to keep up, but I'm a long way behind. I'm not keeping pace. And then, of course, I arrive back at the house a good few minutes later than what they do.
And that's nothing, that's not to do with direction. That's simply to do with pace. And so there seems to be this idea in the text that when we are to keep in step with the Spirit, there's something to do with the pace of the Christian life.
[9:30] Last time we saw what it meant to be led by the Spirit. This idea of seeking God's will, of should I go this way or that way, is somewhat redundant. Because if we belong to God, we are led by God.

We don't ask God to follow us and ask God to bless our decisions, but rather we ask for the ability to make good decisions that already have the blessing of God with them.
We are led by God. We don't lead God. And so the final outcome of being led by God in Romans 8 is exactly the same as it is here in Galatians 5, that we are being led away from unholiness, the desires of the flesh, and being led into godliness, into the presence of God.
And of course, you then have to ask the question, or at least I have to ask the question for you, is that, well, what is the point to being led out of unholiness into holiness?
Right? Because God doesn't do something for no reason. He must have a reason behind leading us into holiness. Now, the natural answer would be because he wants us to be like him, of course.
[10:49] But in 2 Timothy, it's quite clear that holiness is the precondition to being useful to God. Personal holiness is the precondition to being useful to God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24

I just want that to settle in for you. That's found in 2 Timothy 2, 21. Now, of course, I'm bringing out the implication of the text, but that's what it means.
So what does God do? Well, God, before the foundation of the world, decides to make us holy. So if you read Ephesians 1, even before Christ came to die on the cross, before the foundation of the world, God chose us to be holy and blameless, Ephesians 1, 4.
And it also says that Christ died to make us holy, Ephesians 5, verse 25. So prior to creation, the aim of salvation, that is what Christ does for you, is to make you holy and blameless.
Why? Because the precondition to being useful to God is holiness. So God has good reason for leading you the way that he does.
[12:10] And so we should understand this passage in Galatians 5, not going through all the do's and the don'ts, as perhaps we have done before.

And we've covered this passage at least two or three times over the years. But just have a look at it from its main goal. And its main goal is to lead us away from the desires of the flesh into the fruit of the Spirit because, 2 Timothy 2, holiness is a precondition to being useful to God.
Or to put it in the words that Hebrews uses, holiness without which no one will see the Lord. You will not see God if you are not holy.
Seeing God is simply another way of saying entering into his eternal presence. So let's summarize these few verses. You'll notice...
Excuse me. You'll notice that Paul explains here why we should walk by the Spirit, but he doesn't explain how. The why is quite self-evident.
[13:21] If you walk by the Spirit, if you keep in step with the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. So he gives us the why, but he doesn't tell us how.

He then gives us the idea that there is an internal opposition, that the desires of the flesh are opposed to the desires of the Spirit, and therefore there is a natural conflict within the life of a Christian.
We naturally do not want to obey God. We naturally, sinful naturally that is, want to pursue the desires of the flesh, and God gives us his Spirit to combat these desires.
And so the desires of the flesh are then opposed by the desires of the Spirit to keep us from doing, notice, what we want to do.
That's in verse 17. The desires of the Spirit are given to keep us from doing what we want to do.
Now the reason why it doesn't mention how is because everything leading up to Galatians 5 explains how.
[14:35] How we keep in step with the Spirit. Now, he's simply moving on to why we are to keep in step. How we stay close and clean with God should be fairly obvious, but not so obvious that perhaps you remember.

So let me just remind you. The Galatian church, you'll remember, have decided to listen to things contrary to the gospel as though they were the gospel itself.
They are departing from the gospel to another gospel, not that what they're listening to is another gospel. It is a distortion, but it is a distortion that they consider to be equivalent or at least on par with the gospel.
So it's gospel plus all these other things are compatible. Paul has to come along and says, no, the gospel alone, not any of these other things because they are not compatible.
And the distortion means that these people begin to live a life contrary to the one that God has actually given them in Christ Jesus. that the grace of God given to these people causes these people to live for God fully and freely, no longer bound to rituals, no longer bound to superstitious ideas of how we can get right with God, no longer bound to vain imaginations, but actually set free by the grace of God in Christ Jesus to follow him purely.
[16:10] But this has been distorted. And it's interesting that when you actually begin to speak with people, Christians this is, and you say, can you explain to me the gospel?

And then you can, can you explain to me the practice of the gospel? How do you practice this? And then you begin to notice that in the explanation of the practice, you begin to recognize whether or not it has any foundation in the gospel at all.
So we're being told to walk with the Spirit, by the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit. Why? Because if we don't, there is no way we will change.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24

We will continue to pursue the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh cause us to wander away from God gradually, slowly, distorting what we have actually received.
and so the answer to how we keep in step with the gospel, with the Spirit, is by keeping close to the true gospel.
[17:37] Not to depart from the gospel. And this is where it really comes down to how well you know the gospel. You've got to remember that Paul is telling Christians off, those who are meant to know the gospel for departing from it.

He even calls them O foolish Galatians, who has deceived you. So these Christians are now living their life according to a gospel that is not actually the gospel.
And that distortion then causes them to fulfill the desires of the flesh rather than walk by the Spirit.
So the how is answered.
How do I walk by the Spirit? I walk by the Spirit by not departing from the true gospel. Therefore, I must know the true gospel.
So then in verses 16 and 17 here, we recognize that the whole work of the Spirit is to keep us from doing that which we want to do. The problem is of course that sinfully we want to do the opposite of what God wants.
[18:52] And so the Spirit is given to us, the desire of the Spirit is given to us so that we are not run over by our own desires. You ever held a child's hand as you walk across the road?

Have you ever had that experience where you are leading them across the road safely, but they are rebelling against you holding their hand? They either want to walk on their own or they want to walk at a different speed or they want to cross at a different point.
And you realize that none of that can happen without their life being put into some kind of danger with a passing car. And how quickly and easily it could be that they could be run over by simply fulfilling their own desires.
Well, in the same way, by not keeping in step with the Spirit, the same potential end could happen to us, that we are run over by our own sinful desires.
And so the works of the flesh are evident. Verses 19 through to 21, we've read them, there's no need to go through them again, but the conclusion is drawn that those who practice such things will not enter the kingdom of God.
[20:05] So if you do this, it's telling you two things. Firstly, they do not, they are not the identity of the Spirit.

They're the identity of the flesh. And therefore, if you live a life that looks like you belong to this world and not to God, you're going to find out that actually you do.
Because, Paul says, these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now, I've not really spoken about the perseverance of the saints too much, but this is where such a doctrine would come in.
That how do we know, where does their assurance come from? That we can be assured by God that everything that God says about Christians is said about me.
And the answer is found in, am I keeping in step with the Spirit? Am I pursuing? Am I persevering in the grace of God?
[21:12] Or am I practicing the things that I should not be practicing? And so, notice that the fruit of the Spirit are indeed the fruit of the Spirit.

They're not yours, naturally. They are His, just like the gifts of the Spirit are not yours. they are His. They are mediated through us.
They are in us by virtue of our union, but they're not ours. And that means that only by a relationship with the Spirit do our lives produce these virtues.
I want you to understand that, that by our own, I need to put my glasses on for this, that by our own, our life cannot produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control.
We can produce imitations of those qualities. We can produce worldly copies of them, but we cannot produce what the Spirit can only give.
[22:20] If we could, we wouldn't need the Spirit, but we need the Spirit to produce these qualities in us. How? By keeping in step with the Spirit.

In other words, not falling behind. And this seems to have something to do, I think, with the leader's pace, the one that is leading and the pace.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24

Let me put it a slightly different way, perhaps in a way that will resonate more. If a Christian lived according to their own satisfaction levels, that is once your levels of satisfaction has been met, and that becomes the standard of your Christianity, that may have nothing to do with or look anything like keeping in step with the Spirit.
That now that I am satisfied, I have reached a limit of satisfaction in almost every area. This is my pace. this is how I walk.
And so when your own satisfaction level becomes the standard of your Christianity, rather than the glory of God, we're not really witnessing what God is like or what God has done.
[23:47] All we are witnessing is what we are like. So there are two things to consider, and only two, and here they are, pace and pressure.

When you consider this passage, in light of everything else that we have seen in our relationship with the Holy Spirit, it follows that we must keep pace with God. Now, freedom in God or freedom in Christ is always free from before it is free to.
You must be free from something before you are free to do another thing. What are we free from? Well, we're free from the bondage of sin.
We are free from that which holds us back, that keeps us saying no to God. We are no longer bound by those things. We are free to live for Christ.
We are free to live within the tennis lines. As I frequently say. If you imagine it this way, that your life, your new life with God, is like a tennis court.
[24:57] And on the tennis court there are lines. And those lines are there for your enjoyment. They are also there to tell you what cannot be crossed. The umpire is Christ.

He determines where the lines go. He determines what is in and what is out. And so our new life with Christ is one where we are free, but that's not free as though there are no lines, there are no boundary lines for our protection.
It would be like the foolishness of saying, well, you can run around on this cliff top. You're free to go wherever you like. It's not truly, you're not truly free to go wherever you like without consequence.
And so as I've said before, the reason we put fences at the top of cliffs is to avoid the ambulance at the bottom. Okay?
We do one thing to avoid another. If you keep in step with the spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. That one thing happens to stop another thing from happening.
[26:05] And this is how God works within the life of the Christian. And so the pressure now comes from these opposing desires.

The pressure of your old life, your old desires, and now the pressure of the new life in Christ, the desires of the spirit, waging war, opposing one another, to stop you from fulfilling the desires of the flesh.
Now, how important is this to understand? Let me explain to you. Imagine two circles. In this circle is your old life, the little stick man, there you are. And in this circle is your new life, or rather the life of the spirit, your new life in God.
And what you have is that these circles in Christ now overlap. And so you get this Venn diagram, you know, where one circle overlaps the other circle, and you get this sort of like egg shape in the middle.
and your life is now in the overlap. And there's where you feel the tension between having the pressure of the old life and having the pressure of the new.
[27:19] You're not yet fully holy, but no longer are you completely sinful and bound in sin. You have a new life in Christ, but this new life is in the overlap.

And the pressure of opposition of the desires of the old and the desires of the new are waging war so that you do not turn your back on God, but continue your life and walk in the spirit.
This is what Paul is describing here. As he said in Romans 8, that if you by the spirit put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
That the strength you need to deal with your sinful desires is and only comes from the spirit of God. So without the spirit, recognize that you have no desire to be any different than an unsaved person. without the spirit, you have no desire to be any different than someone who is pursuing satisfaction in this world. No desire whatsoever.
[28:33] The desire to be different does not come from you. The desire to be holy does not come from you. The desire to pursue great things comes from God, the Holy Spirit, and God, the Holy

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24

Spirit, God.

Why? Because our satisfaction is not the standard by which we should live our Christian life. It is rather the glory of God. But too often, our Christian life is measured by our own satisfaction levels rather than God's glory.
And that's where we go wrong. That's where we are going wrong. So here's the exhortation as we close. Holiness is the precondition to usefulness to God.
Holiness is the precondition to being useful to God. Do you recognize that you are the only people in the world who can say Jesus is Lord?
Christians, do you realize that you're the only people in the world who can be God's witness on earth? You're the only people who can do it. No one else in the world wants to.
[29:45] No one in the world can. You're the only one who can proclaim Jesus is Lord. You're the only ones who can evangelize. And so holiness is the precondition to being useful.

How strong is your desire to be useful to God in this way? And how strong is your desire to live according to your own satisfaction levels?
God's God's God's God's life. We can all pursue a different life, it would seem, on the surface. We can all decide that we're not going to pray.
We can all decide that we're not going to meditate on God's word day and night. We can all decide that we're not going to turn up at church that often or at all. These things can be decided. These things can be acted upon.
And we could do those things till our heart is content. And we could have the life that we have carved out for ourselves. But that is not what it means to be useful to God.
[30:56] So understand that holiness is the precondition to usefulness to God. That before the foundation of the world, Christ chose you to be holy and blameless.

That Christ died so that you could be holy and blameless. And the way that you become that person is by walking and keeping in step with the Spirit.
And so understand that God supplies everything you need to be everything God wants you to be. And God supplies everything you need to do what God wants you to do.
God supplies everything. everything. What is being questioned here is your willingness to pursue the desires of the Spirit rather than the desires of the flesh.
And then following that is the pace at which you do that. We are the only ones, remember, in the world, in the world, who can say Jesus is Lord.
[32:06] the only ones who can be a witness for Christ. The only ones who can explain and apply the gospel. The only ones.

Amen. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-11 01:07:24