

Walking by the Spirit
Galatians 5:13-26
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LET FREEDOM RING

Freedom is a wonderful privilege! It is what people earnestly strive for, passionately plea for, and even willing die for at times. Our country was founded on principles for freedom, and was even outlined in historic documents explaining the types of freedoms citizens of this country can enjoy. Freedom can be won, lost, revoked, and restored. Freedom can be challenged and tested, especially during periods of conflict and disunity. Freedom is never free; it always comes at a cost.

As the gears of World War II grinded the world and the United States had not yet joined, President Franklin Roosevelt famously enunciated four freedoms he hoped for in 1941, namely, *“the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom to worship God in his own way, freedom from want and freedom from fear.”*¹

People either want freedom *from* something or *for* something. Those who have like-minded ideas of what types of freedom they want will join together to pursue it. But often time people have differing ideas of what freedom means for them. Christians and non-Christians could pursue similar freedoms, but have completely different motives. Freedom needs to be defined and understood within its context. People may say the same things, but mean something completely different. When a believer uses terms such as “freedom” he needs to be clear with his definition, its meaning and how it applies.

CHRIST AND FREEDOM

The apostle Paul clearly sounded the bell of freedom to the Galatian Christians. But what he was fighting for wasn't political, social or economic. The freedom he spoke about was our position in Jesus Christ and our process of becoming like Jesus Christ. It was the freedom worth fighting for because it was a fight for the integrity of the gospel. He was fighting for how the gospel of grace not only applies to your salvation experience, but how it continues to fuel your sanctification process. The Galatians had forsaken living by grace in the power of the Holy Spirit for methods that only enslaved them back into sin.

Our series this summer has been on the ***Worthy Walk***, and this morning I'd like to address Paul's charge to us in Galatians 5 to *“walk by the Spirit.”* I believe this is often a forgotten, confusing or limp less effort in understanding how your Christian maturity is dependent upon the powerful dynamic of walking by the Spirit. There are two questions I want to clarify: *What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”?* *How does it actually happen?*

¹ <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/franklin-d-roosevelt-speaks-of-four-freedoms>

GALATIANS 5:13-26 *“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. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ 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. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 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. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

I. CALL TO FREEDOM

Galatians 5:1, 13-15 ¹ *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

LAW / LEGALISM

In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul goes all out to let them know how crucial it is to understand that a person is justified by FAITH and not by keeping the LAW (2:16). The Holy Spirit can only be received by faith, never by completing the works of the Law (3:2). Since a person is saved by faith alone through grace alone, the means by which you grow spiritually is not by keeping more of the Law but only by the Holy Spirit (5:1-25).

Paul knew first-hand how marvelous it is that Jesus Christ not only set us free from the eternal punishment of sin, but further from the burden and guilt of trying to achieve your own righteousness through law-keeping standards. Paul vehemently fights for the freedom realized in the gospel of grace and the Spirit’s continuing work of sanctification by that same grace.

It’s interesting to note how both Jesus and Paul confronted the difficult issue of LEGALISM in their day. The fight against LEGALISM is necessary because it is in direct contradiction to the gospel of grace and still plagues religion and churches today. LEGALISM is essentially the belief that on the basis of my performance, I can gain more with God. You may not totally identify with a Jewish mindset in terms of the Law, but consider our use of the **Ten Commandments**. We memorize them, quote them, use them evangelistically, display them proudly, and to some degree judge others based upon their following them. You might even use them as a sort of barometer on how you’re doing as a

Christian. But thankfully God doesn't measure you against the Ten Commandments (actually, the *whole Law*). Instead, He evaluates you according to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So what was God's purpose in giving the Law? It was simply to identify sin and act as God's instrument administer blessings or curses to the national Israel. The Law served its purpose until God fulfilled it through a better means which is the new covenant of Jesus Christ applied by grace. To help you understand what the Law is like and how it functioned, think about child-proofing your home. You use devices and tools to protect and act as safety restraints for your children while they are young and immature. These devices can be burdensome and tricky at times, but they serve a purpose in protecting and training your child.

Then there comes a day when those devices are removed, and your child experiences a new freedom which you pray they use wisely. This is what GRACE is like. Grace removed the old restraining devices, took off the training wheels of the Law and established a better way to live before God. It wasn't that the Law was bad, it was only temporary and couldn't produce authentic spirituality. The Law can only *reform* a person's behavior and actions; but it is the grace of the gospel that *transforms* your hearts condition.

LICENSE

The freedom introduced by grace is more fulfilling and better than the Law. But just like handing the keys of the car to your teenager who just got his license, *With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility!* The temptation for many while living under grace is to wrongly think you can live "unrestrained" without anything/one governing your morals, freedom or lifestyle by indulging in your fleshly desires without feeling guilty or ashamed. The flesh will often show itself in two ways, LEGALISM and LICENSE. "*Turning liberty into license is an evil ingrained in sinful human nature.*"²

*"Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. It is an unrestricted liberty of approach to God as His children, not an unrestricted liberty to wallow in our own selfishness."*³

Knowing this, Paul sternly warns you not to think this way about your freedom, nor underestimate the powerful influence of your sinful nature. Abusing your freedom of grace can lead to indulging your sinful flesh, "*an opportunity for the flesh.*" The idea Paul has in mind is not allowing your sinful flesh a stronghold, or an established base from which it can conduct its operation. The flesh is ultimately a defeated enemy, but it is an enemy surviving within you that does not quit fighting. *So how do you not give your flesh the opportunity to be indulged?*

LOVE

Paul gives three direct commands to fight against your flesh: *Be Serving* (vs.13), *Be Watching* (vs.15), *Be Walking* (vs.16)

² William Hendriksen, *Baker New Testament Commentary: Galatians*, p.210

³ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p.141

The first command, “*serve one another*” can be translated to mean “*be serving.*” Serving one another through love fulfills what legalism can’t solve. God defined LOVE is the governing authority over your freedom. Paul plays on the idea of freedom and slavery by explaining how you have been freed from legalism’s yoke of slavery, only to start voluntarily becoming a slave (serving) to your Christian sibling because you love them. “*We are free in relation to God, but slaves in relation to each other.*”⁴ To rescue yourself from indulging in selfish sinfulness, submit yourself to the selfless service of others because you love God and His people.

The second command is to “*watch out*”, or *be watching*, beware that you don’t allow fleshly desires to destroy relationships. Outside of God’s love, disunity can quickly deteriorate into raging, vicious attacks; like wild beasts rushing at each other to gulp each other down. Don’t underestimate the powerful influence of the sinful flesh.

II. COMMAND TO WALK

Galatians 5:16, 18 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

“BE WALKING”

The command to help sharpen your focus in your fight against the flesh is, “*walk by the Spirit.*” The SPIRIT is mentioned 7x in ten verses. The command to “*walk by the Spirit*” means to be currently, actively continuing to live a lifestyle that is consistent with the Spirit of God. The habitual pattern of your life should be marked by a step-by-step progressive pace with the Spirit that is free from legalistic measurement. This is not a magical or fantasy experience that happens to a believer. Nor is it reserved for a select few saints, or something achieved through mystical meditation. Walking by the Spirit is a spiritual reality for every believer in Jesus Christ. It is the privileged result of being freed from slavery to sin and Law keeping, and it is the hope you have in overcoming sin and temptation.

“True, it is Christ who sets us free. But without the continuing, directing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit our liberty is bound to degenerate into license.”⁵

BEING LED

There is both a walking by and following in the footsteps of the Spirit. You are commanded to be walking by the Spirit, and you are expected to willingly allow yourself to be submissively LED by the Spirit. Since it is the Spirit who energizes your obedience, this is how you are able to not gratify the sinful pleasures of your natural desires. “*It is that constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts of God’s children whereby they are being directed and enabled more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God’s commandments, freely and cheerfully.*”⁶

⁴ Stott, p.142

⁵ Stott, p.146

⁶ Hendriksen, p.216-17

Is the Holy Spirit is the CONTROLLING INFLUENCE of your life?

III. CONFLICT WITHIN

Galatians 17, 19-21 *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...¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ 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.*

FLESH vs. THE SPIRIT

The flesh is personified as a formidable foe. In your sinful flesh, Paul says, nothing good dwells.⁷ Your flesh is formidable because it's powerful, always present and easily activated. For every true believer, there is a very real, internal conflict of your remaining sinful nature waging war against your new spiritual nature. There is a struggle for power and controlling influence over your life. The tension is often who will "win out" in the battle for your desires. That is why you might feel like a ping pong ball batted back and forth between your desire to live spiritually, only to be battered by the flesh to give into its indulgences. This tension isn't felt by an unbeliever because they are still slaves to one nature. They might struggle in their conscience but it is only a fight within their own flesh. But for you, this is where the battleground for your heart is fought.

FLESHLY PRODUCE

Paul likes to point out the obvious and he does so by listing the "*works of the flesh.*" The list here is not exhaustive, but merely representative of the particular sins plaguing the Galatian churches. They simply identify the outward manifestations of the sinful heart.

- SEXUAL SINS: *sexual immorality (porneia), impurity (unclean, filthy), sensuality (debauchery, no shame)*
- IDOLATROUS SINS: *idolatry (worshiping anything other than the one, true God), sorcery (pharmakeia, hallucinations, witchcraft, magic)*
- RELATIONAL SINS: *enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy (degenerative progression of disunity among the Galatians)*
- EXCESSIVE SINS: *drunkenness, orgies (carousing, excessive partying)*

Those whose habit and lifestyle is characterized by these type of sins will result in not receiving the inheritance of God's promised kingdom. A Christian might fall from grace⁸ and back into one of these sins, but they should not remain there. As obvious as these sins are, there are others not listed which wield their power against the desires of the Spirit.

⁷ Romans 7:14-25

⁸ Galatians 5:4

Yet how often do you try to curb fleshly desires through legalism? Do you try to set up regulations, restraints, or devices to try and keep you from giving into temptation? Some of those restraints might work for a time, but they cannot kill the flesh. Trying to conquer the flesh through natural resources and legalistic means will never result in ultimate freedom from these sinful products.

IV. CHARACTER PRODUCED

Galatians 5:22-25 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 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.*

SPIRITUAL PRODUCE

How is the powerful influence of your sinful flesh overcome? By the more powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Walking by the Spirit means the fruit of the Spirit is replacing the dying habits of sin with the fresh produce of the Spirit. It is this organic, spontaneous production by the Spirit to conquer fleshly desires and maturing you in SANCTIFICATION. There is one Spirit who produces His fruit from within, inward qualities which ripen through the process of practice, testing and time.

So if you are struggling with anger, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to practice patience. You don't need to get patience, or *gain more of* patience, but start practicing the patience already supplied to you by the Spirit. The more you practice patience the more you will see the fuse of your anger lengthened, resulting in less outbursts of anger.

Paul qualifies that against the Spirit's work "*there is no law.*" In other words, you cannot regulate, mandate or legislate the fruit of the Spirit. If you try to do so, then you've only succeeded in enacting MORALISM. Trying to produce something spiritual through natural means will only lead to moralistic, therapeutic deism.

CRUCIFIED DESIRES

The flesh produces powerful desires. Any sin, especially deep-rooted or long habitual sins have their influential tentacles wrapped around the recesses of your heart's desires. So when you are going toe-to-toe with your flesh, remember what has already happened to sin's influence.

By receiving the gift of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, you consented to have these sins crucified to the cross on Jesus Christ. As a result, they lost their enslaving stranglehold on you. The word "*passions*" means *strong, suffering desires*, often linked with sexual sins and their stronghold on a person. No matter how strong you think the desire and passion is, the power of Jesus Christ is greater and the Spirit of God is more powerful in overcoming these desires. The war has already been won, but battles will still need to be fought.

CONCLUSION

In your journey of the **Worthy Walk**, it is necessary to fall in line with the Holy Spirit. Just as your life in Christ began by the work of the Spirit, so your life in Christ can only continue by the energizing power of the Spirit. *“So to ‘walk by the Spirit’ is deliberately to walk along the path or according to the line which the Holy Spirit lays down. The Spirit ‘leads’ us; but we are to ‘walk by’ Him or according to His rule.”*⁹

You cannot expect anything spiritual to be produced in your life if you are not walking by the Spirit in the means of His grace: the **Scripture, prayerful communion** and **fellowship/worship with the church**. These are the consistent means by which you learn the Spirit’s desires and through which He produces in you His eternal quality of life.

*“This will be seen in our whole way of life – in the leisure occupations we pursue, the books we read and the friendships we make. Above all in what older authors called ‘a diligent use of the means of grace’, that is, in a disciplined practice of prayer and Scripture meditation, in fellowship with believers who provoke us to love and good works, in keeping the Lord’s day as the Lord’s day, and in attending public worship and the Lord’s Supper. In all these ways we occupy ourselves in spiritual things. It is not enough to yield passively to the Spirit’s control; we must also walk actively in the Spirit’s way. Only so will the fruit of the Spirit appear.”*¹⁰

⁹ Stott, p.153

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 154