

**Led By the Spirit – Part 2**  
**Galatians 5:16-24**  
**Series: No Other Gospel #22**

**Introduction:** Take your copy of the Scriptures and join me in Galatians 5 – Galatians chapter 5. My prayer as we head into this text is and has been that God would graciously teach us how we ought to now live in light of His great grace and the new life we know in Jesus Christ. So much truth about the Gospel and the depth of the freedom we have in Christ proceeds the verses we are considering this morning. So, I have been praying and continue to pray, that God would help us to remember these glorious gospel truths as we come to this very practical section of Scripture. Would you pray with me as we begin?

Galatians 5 and verse 16 says this . . .

As we examined this text last week we saw some compelling reasons for walking by the Spirit. We are given one command in these 9 verses. The command is that we walk by the Spirit. This command is rooted in the truth found in verse 1 – that we are free in Christ therefore we must stand firm in this freedom. This command to walk by the Spirit is also in contrast to those who would use their freedom in Christ as an opportunity to indulge their fleshly lusts. Instead of indulging our flesh in sinful things and not caring because we are forgiven in Christ – we are to walk by the Spirit of God. This one command in the text is extremely practical – this is the doctrine of Galatians 1-4 now fleshed out in the life of the one who is in Christ by grace through faith. We are to walk by the Spirit because then we will be protected from the deadly works of the flesh, and we will be free from the condemnation of the Law, and we will produce His good fruit instead of the works of the flesh, and we must walk by the Spirit because we belong to Christ. That, as we saw last week, is the compelling message of this text – the command followed by the reasons we should do this. But we can also tease out of the text the how of this command. So, we are to walk by the Spirit, but how?

This is so important because we know how to walk according to the flesh, but walking according to the Spirit of God is a part of this new life and new nature we have been given in Jesus Christ. Let me point your attention to three ways we are to walk by the Spirit of God. First of all we walk by the Spirit by stepping consistently.

**I. By Stepping Consistently – 16a**

- a. The main verb in this text – the command of verse 16 is in the present tense – which simply means that we are to continuously and consistently do this. And the simple word – to walk – carries the idea of taking one step at a time. So, how will you walk to your car after the service today? By taking one step after another. This verb is often used in contexts like this in the Scriptures where the obvious

idea is a lifestyle or a pattern of life. This is how you walk by, or according to, the Spirit. You take one step at a time. This is what life is, isn't it? Life is a series of small decisions – one step at a time we form a pattern and a character develops and a reputation follows. This does not happen overnight and we are not known for our one step here or one step there – but rather, the whole of our life forms a pattern.

- b. This is the opportunity the follower of Jesus has with the Spirit. If you have entered into Christ by grace through faith, the Bible is clear that this itself is a product of the Spirit's work upon your soul. He has caused you to be born again to a new and living hope through the proclamation of the Gospel truth. The Bible also makes clear that this Spirit who regenerates you and gives you this new life, adopts you into the family of God, and seals you for the future full salvation of God. And this Spirit is sent by God to dwell within you as the down payment of the future and full inheritance of all the spiritual blessings of being in the family of God. You could not save yourself, so the Spirit came and regenerated you. You could not guarantee this salvation through your own good works so the Spirit of God came to you to seal you as a forever child of God. And, beloved, you cannot make yourself more and more holy in this life by your own effort so the Spirit of God has taken up residence within you to move you along one step at a time in your growth in Christ. The Bible uses the analogy of a baby developing and growing into maturity and eventually into full manhood as the Spirit of God takes the glory of Christ as presented in the Word of God and changes us from one image of glory to another.
- c. Because of the Holy Spirit's residence in you, you can now walk by his power and you can walk in His direction. This happens one step at a time, one thought at a time, one word at a time, one moment of life at a time. So, you walk by the Spirit by taking continuous steps in the right direction as you are empowered by His grace and directed by His guidance. You do not need a new work of the Spirit in you. You do not need the Spirit to baptize you again or to come upon you in a fresh way. If you are truly born again, the Spirit of God has not left and does not need to redo any of the work He has already done to make you a child of God. What you need to do is willingly and consistently pursue spiritual steps which are empowered by His grace and follow after His direction.

## II. By Stepping Cautiously – 17-18

- a. The next way that you walk by the Spirit of God is that you step cautiously. Verse 17 literally says that the flesh desires or lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. There is no common ground between the two. There are 100% opposed all of the time. If your sinful flesh inside of you wants something, you can be sure that the Spirit wants the opposite. They are constantly opposed to each other, and for the believer this warfare is taking place with every choice you make. The last phrase in verse 17 is the purpose statement of this warfare. It says – “to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” This is an overarching purpose statement of this warfare between the Spirit and the flesh. The flesh opposes the Spirit because the flesh does not want to give you over to the

purposes and desires of the Spirit. And the Spirit opposes the flesh because the Spirit has been sent by God to make you holy as God himself is holy. God has saved you by His grace, and he is intent on making you holy by His grace, and so His Spirit resides within you to war against the desires of the flesh.

- b. This is all coupled with the responsibility and the will of the believer. So the Spirit of God empowers you to walk in ways contrary to the flesh, and the Spirit of God directs you in this way, but God does not zap you with this. He does not make you a spiritual robot who must obey Him at every turn. This war between the flesh and the Spirit is at the crux of that spiritual paradox. The sovereign grace of God is at work in you to accomplish what you cannot on your own, but yet, you must yield and submit to the Spirit's work within you so that this work is advanced. That is why you are called in this text to walk by the Spirit. In other words – you cannot simply let go and let God here. You cannot be passive in your sanctification. God is not going to make you holy through radical changes that you do not desire or pursue, and he is not going to overpower you with His work which you do not want. Instead – and here is the amazing thing about God and His work in you – He has given you a new nature – a new heart – a new spiritual man. You have been born again. Old things have passed away, and behold, all things have become new. It is indeed a paradox and somewhat of a mystery how God's will to make you holy intersects with your will and effort to become holy – but in part this paradox is solved by understanding that God has changed your will by His grace. He has put within you the desire to be holy as He is holy, and then He has commanded you to walk by His Spirit so that you can learn what this looks like in every situation of life. In other words, God enables in you what He commands from you, and He commands from you that which His grace enables within you. You must walk by the Spirit because you can walk by the Spirit.
- c. So, this means that you must be cautious about every step. Is this thought, this desire, this word, this action, this use of time – is this sourced in the desires of the flesh or in the desires of the Spirit? If they are at war constantly, then it can only be one or the other. This means that part of walking by the Spirit means being cautious and thoughtful about these choices.
- d. This is reiterated and amplified in verse 18. This walking by the Spirit is given a synonym here in the text – to be led by the Spirit. We talked extensively last week about what it means to be freed from the Law if you are led by the Spirit, so let me focus this week on what this means to be led by the Spirit. In the flow of thought in this text it means that the Spirit has desires for you. These desires are against the flesh's desires for you. Both the Spirit and the flesh are seeking to shepherd your soul all day every day. They are out in front of you calling you to follow their lead. We know how to follow the flesh. It comes as naturally as breathing for us. It requires no effort. We know this path well, and fall into its ruts with the greatest of ease.
- e. But beloved, you don't have to live in those ruts anymore. You don't have to go down that path which produces the works of the flesh and destroys your life and

your relationships. You now, through the empowering grace of the Spirit of God, have the choice to be led by the Spirit. He is seeking to shepherd you to follow Him. This is an amazing work of His grace in you and me. It is not an inconspicuous leading which is super specialized to you as though the Spirit gives you some secret knowledge for your life's path. I think we are prone to that thought as Christians. We want the Spirit of God to be our personal and mysterious guide who leads us on this treasure hunt through life as we endlessly chase the specifics of God's providential will in our every choice, but especially in our big choices. We are prone to make the Spirit of God kind of like an internal GPS system who barks out orders about which turns to make and which decisions to avoid.

- f. When R J and I were in LA this past week for a pastor's conference we rented a car and became very dependent upon our phone's GPS to get us from one point to another. Google Maps had knowledge we didn't have. It knew the layout of the roads, it knew the location of the places we needed to go. It knew where the Subway store was and where the gas station was. It knew real time traffic to help us avoid delays, and it knew different routes when we missed our turn or thought we knew a better way. And so, we learned pretty quickly to tell Google Maps where we needed to go and let it guide our every choice of turns along the way. It is easy to fall into that way of thinking with the Spirit of God. To think that God has put a spiritual GPS system in each of us that has knowledge we don't have to guide us in making choices one at a time which will lead us from point A to point B. We want to mindlessly follow the Spirit as He barks out spiritual directions – Say this now! Don't say that! Go over there right now and help that person! Don't turn on that channel on the TV!
- g. Now, those might be legitimate things that the Spirit desires to lead us along in as we grow in holiness, but He is not simply a spiritual GPS who barks out orders for us to follow. Rather, the Spirit of God dwells within you to bring the grace of God to you to apply it to your soul and remake you into the image of Christ. You do not just have a knowledge problem when it comes to the works of the flesh – you have a nature problem – a heart problem. You don't simply need the database of maps and locations and streets, but you need a car that works with fuel that never runs out. You need the map too, but you need more than knowledge – you need grace – the grace of the Spirit of Christ. If He lives within you then you have the car that works with the gas that doesn't run out along with the right map and real-time updates about traffic jams. The Spirit desires to lead you, therefore you must walk cautiously, seeking to be led by Him.

### III. By Stepping Critically – vs. 19-23

- a. I think this will make even more sense as we look at the next chunk of verses. We walk by the Spirit by stepping cautiously, and then in verses 19-23 we see that we also walk by the Spirit by stepping critically. God gives us a list of vices of the flesh and virtues of the Spirit. He tells us in verse 19 that this is evidence for us. So, remember, the overarching command in the text is to walk by the Spirit of God. Now in verses 19-21 God puts on eternal paper a list of things which make

known to us if we are walking by the flesh. Then in verses 23-24 he gives us another list to help us discern if we are walking by the Spirit. Do you see what is happening here? God is giving you a way to test your life to see if you are walking by the Spirit or by the flesh. In other words, you can know which one is leading in your life by investigating their fruit. So, the text invites you to look back and critically examine your life. Do you see the works of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit?

- b. We saw last time that these two lists present the different natures and the different outcomes of the flesh and the Spirit. So the listing of the works of the flesh is kind of a chaotic thrown together list of 15 possible works of the flesh in a life. It is not an exhaustive list, but a beginner list which points to the limitless possibilities of the flesh to produce all kinds of evil. The fruit of the Spirit however is a singular expression of the Spirit's work. When He works in the garden of the soul and brings about Christ-like holiness, it will look like these 9 things. It is an orderly list of inner qualities which is also not an exhaustive list, but rather an essential list. These things are always present as the fruit of the Spirit's work in a soul. So, as we examine these 2 lists – remember that they are given here in the text as evidence which proves you are following one or the other. So, if you are to walk by the Spirit, you must take steps critically as you look back at past steps to see if you were following the flesh or the Spirit, and then either adjust your course, or stay on course.
- c. The works of the flesh are made obvious by these 15 things listed in verses 19-21. These works of the flesh come naturally out of our hearts. We do not need heart change to produce these – we know this path well, and left to ourselves this is what our lives will look like. Everything in this list is a fleshing out of our rejection of God as God. We have refused to honor Him as God – this was the issue in the Garden with our first parents, and this is the issue in your heart and mine. We want to worship the creature rather than the Creator, and when we do, these are things which come out of us. We exchange God for a lie, and these things come out of us. It is a terribly ugly list of some of the most heinous sins mankind has known in every age, in every generation, and in every place. These are universal works of the flesh.
  - i. The list of vices starts with a pairing of three deviancies which are sexual in nature. These are some of the most core desires of the human body and they are quickly seized upon by our flesh as an expression of our rebellion against God. It is kind of our way of sticking it to God as clearly as we can. We are liberated from His rule in our life through our rebellion, and we will show Him by doing whatever we please with our sexual desires and our physical bodies.
    1. The first is sexual immorality – or the Greek word – porneia. It is a broad term referring to any sexual deviancy from God's command. Any and all illicit sexual activity – both of the mind and of the body. So, it is out of this word that our word “pornography” comes. But it is not limited by that in the Greek. It is referring to

any and all rebellion against the clear ways of God in the sexual relationship.

2. The second is impurity, or uncleanness. This is the word used throughout the Old Testament law to refer to someone who was unclean and therefore unfit for gathering with God's people to worship God. In other words, this is the uncleanness, the oozing wound, which is the result of our overall sexual immorality. We are unfit and unclean to be before God because of the work of the flesh.
  3. The third is sensuality. This is referring to unrestrained behavior. A total abandon to do and live however you please, especially in the area of pursuing the fulfillment of sexual desire. This is the uninhibited indulgence by mankind into any kind of sexual experience without any concern for how one's self or others may be affected – or infected as the case may be. These are core and primary works of the flesh. Where men and women have given themselves to follow the lead of the desires of the flesh, these works of the flesh in sexual deviancy will be present.
- ii. The next two vices in the list are paired together as religious expressions of our sinful rebellion against God. These are man-made religious expressions which replace God. And they are as much a work of the flesh as the sexual deviancy we just looked at.
1. Idolatry is the obvious exchange of the one True God for any and every false god of your own imagination. Sin is sourced in idolatry in that we give God up for a lie – and therefore, the flesh is a constant producer of idols for us to worship so as to keep us from the one True God. An idol is anything that we value in the place of God and look to for guidance and salvation in the place of God. An idol can be something as subtle as a desire of your heart which takes over your life and becomes the end all for all of your decisions, or as obvious as a statue of Buddha sitting on your shelf.
  2. This is coupled with sorcery – which translates the Greek word “pharmakeia” from which we get our word “pharmacy.” The idolatrous false religions of the First Century would often use mind and mood altering drugs to communicate with deities – and really to get in touch with occultic realities. So witchcraft and black magic fall into this camp – even today. But also, some false religions practiced the use of drugs to bring about abortions of unwanted babies in the First Century as well. This has expanded in our modern world to not only the killing of babies in the womb but also to the killing of sick and older people whom mankind deems no longer worthy to live. So, both abortion and euthanasia are included in this idea of sorcery. In essence, the word speaks to looking for another guide besides God. We don't like what God

has to say so we turn to another god for a different answer. This is a work of the flesh as evil as the sexual deviancy already described. These also are universally present where mankind has rejected God.

iii. The third group is probably the most alarming of all because the things listed are so commonplace in our lives – even as believers. Don't miss this brothers and sisters – God has them in the same list for a reason. The next 8 vices are linked together by their detriment to human relationships. They are relational sins which destroy the fabric of life.

1. The first – enmity – is actually in the plural form in the Greek to insinuate the many ways this comes out. This is a synonymous word in English and Greek with the word for “enemy.” So, enmity is the heart condition which creates enemies. There is endless possibility and opportunity for the sinful human heart to hate someone else and make them an enemy. This is a work of the flesh.
2. This is coupled with strife because what is an enemy without strife. If you are going to hate someone you might as well fight with them. This is a word unique to Paul in the NT and it is frequently used to describe Paul's concern about what is happening in the churches. This is a work of the flesh.
3. Next is jealousy which is simply a form of anger which is birthed in one's coveting what someone else has.
4. This bleeds over into and produces the fits of anger which is next in the list. These are the uncontrolled and unbridled expressions of anger which brew in the heart and then burst out into the context of life like an exploding volcano. This is always a work of the flesh. This is never holy – to just unload in anger on someone. Now, I know with your Mennonite heritage some of you don't know what this is, but for those of us who grew up in different traditions – believe me – these fits of anger never have a good excuse or reason. They are always sinful works of the flesh.
5. The next one is rivalries. This is a term often used of politicians who are seeking office. They are narcissistically making everything positive for themselves and negative for their opponents. It is the self-promotion and self-exaltation which constantly calls others to see your greatness. This is a heinous work of the flesh which so subtly works in all of us.
6. This is followed by dissensions. This is the party spirit which is a cancer to true unity in the body of Christ. It is used in Romans 16:17 where we are instructed to avoid those who cause such a party spirit within the body.
7. Divisions follows closely with that one. This Greek word is the one we get our English word “heresy” out of. It is an intentionally chosen position which is at odds with the rule of faith. Specifically

in body life it would be an intentionally chosen path which contradicts walking by the Spirit. This then causes great division within the church family. In other words – where there is division in the body it can be traced to works of the flesh.

8. Envy is the last one in these relationship killing works of the flesh. This is closely associated with jealousies, and it hints at the heart of hatred toward someone whom you perceive to have an advantage over you. Because of this you envy them, and this is often the seedbed of the other works of the flesh in this list.
- iv. The 15 vices are rounded out with two sins which speak to the all-out abandonment of any restraint. This is the crowning achievement of the flesh in the works of mankind. If the flesh can get us to abandon all restraint and just go all out in our fleshly desires, then this will look like drunkenness – or any other substance which controls us and we lose the power of our faculties – which is then coupled with all kinds of crazy partying. It is no mistake that alcohol, and other controlling substances like street drugs, are present as the foundational element of all crazy parties. This word translated “orgies” speaks not just of sexual craziness, but of all kinds of carousing and reckless abandon. Have you ever noticed that those mystery shows where they are trying to solve unsolved murders or they are looking for someone who has mysteriously disappeared – have you noticed how many of them have the common element of a controlling substances and crazy parties? They go hand in hand.
- v. The list ends by saying – “and things like these.” The flesh has endless possibilities by which it evidences its rebellion against God. This is what the flesh wants your life to look like. And you can know if you are following its lead by seeing if these things turn up as part of your normal course.
- d. Now, having stepped into the muck and the mire of the works of the flesh – let us come and be washed by the purity of the work of the Spirit of God. Remember – if you are in Christ – you have a choice here. You are called to walk by the Spirit – so critically think through your life. Do you see the signs of His work? Do you see this fruit in your life?
  - i. The list starts with love. This is the agape love we know so well in the New Testament. It is the willful and selfless sacrificing of ourselves and our own interests to help someone else. This is seen preeminently in God – who himself is love. 1 John 4:9 says – “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” This one essential quality of the fruit of the Spirit is the direct antithesis to all of the works of the flesh. Every one of those works is stopped in their tracks by a true expression of love for God and for others. Romans 5:5 makes known to us that it is the Spirit of God who has been sent to us to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God for us. Then in 1 John 4:19 we are told that we now love – both God and others –



only because we have first been loved by God. Our love – this fruit of the Spirit’s work in us – is a result of the love of God being shown to us and being known by us.

- ii. Joy is next. This word has the same Greek root as the word for grace. Joy follows love and is the result of grace. We have been shown grace in that we know and experience the love of God, and this gives us unshakable, unending, unyielding joy. Even in the worst of life circumstances, we can count it all joy, because we are recipients of God’s grace and saved by God’s love. This is the direct opposite of seeking after joy in the desires of the flesh only to find that they have pleasure which fades and falters and is quickly drown out by the tears and the remorse of sinful actions.
- iii. Peace – This is the whole-life shalom of the Old Testament. This is the settled confidence in God as the Prince of Peace which can face any trial or difficulty in life with unshakeable peace because of the character and promises and ultimate salvation of God. We don’t have to be anxious about anything, but can know the peace of God which surpasses our limited understanding of all things. This is a fruit of the Spirit’s work in us.
- iv. Patience – this is the quality which endures difficult things while it waits for the right timing and a different outcome. So, God is slow to anger and is full of patience so as to lead many to repentance and faith. It is an act of his patience which is not wishing for any to perish, but desires for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9) Paul says in 1 Timothy 1 that Jesus Christ exercised perfect patience towards him even though he was the foremost of all sinners so that he could be an example to those who would believe. This is the kind of patience which comes out in the life of the believer who is walking by the Spirit of God.
- v. Kindness – This is the overarching concern to show tender concern for others in all situations. This is the character quality which compels us to consider others and go out of our way to help them. This is seen in the contrast between Jesus and his disciples in the Gospels when the little children were brought to see Jesus and the disciples were trying to shoo them away. But Jesus responded in kindness of heart and made a big deal of helping them and honoring them.
- vi. Goodness – is used only 4 times in the New Testament and only by Paul. It has the idea of going the extra mile as you seek to be especially benevolent to someone who has a need. It is the good that we are called to do to all men in Galatians 6:10, but especially to those of the household of faith. It is the goodness of God described in Psalm 23:6 which will follow us all the days of our lives. This goodness should flow out of us as a conduit to others who need the goodness of God.
- vii. Faithfulness – simply describes a fidelity to what is true. This is a person who is trustworthy and reliable in their dealings with others. They especially hold to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and they not

only hold to doctrinal truth, but to the transformed and redeemed life which accompanies it. The faithfulness of Christ is our example here. He endured the cross and despised the shame and walked faithfully in the path he was given. This is the kind of man that Timothy is instructed to find in 2 Timothy 2 so that he can pass on the truth of God to them and through them to other faithful men also.

- viii. Gentleness is not weakness, but strength which is harnessed by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit to do good to others in a pleasing and helpful and gentle way. MacArthur says the word speaks to submissiveness to the will of God, teachableness, and consideration of others.<sup>1</sup> Again this is lived out perfectly by our Lord who is self-described as gentle and humble in heart.
- ix. And lastly – self-control. This is especially pertinent to the grace-abusing antinomians in Galatia. The ones who were saying, or who were tempted to believe, that since we are already forgiven we might as well get our money's worth and live however we want to. This is not an attitude or worldview which is a fruit of the Spirit's work in us. That is all flesh. The Spirit produces self-control in us. This is what Paul described in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 when he said that he doesn't run the race in an undisciplined way and he doesn't fight as one beating the air. Rather, he brings his body under submission to the purpose and plan of God. He is self-controlled so that he can be a good steward of the grace of God given to him.
- e. Did you notice that all 9 of these qualities which make up the fruit of the Spirit are qualities of God Himself as seen preeminently in the God-man Jesus Christ? In other words, the Spirit of God resides within you to lead you more and more toward Christ-likeness. And this will not look simply like right choices coming out of you, but this will look like a change of character. God is not simply interested in producing robotic like right choices in your life, but he is intent on empowering you and directing you to live out the new life and new character given you by God as you produce fruit that looks more and more like God.

Conclusion: So, as you step into the coming week, you must walk by the Spirit of God because you have been given new life by the Spirit of God. God commands what He has enabled in you, and He has enabled in you what He now commands from you. You must walk by the Spirit by stepping consistently, cautiously, and critically. May the Lord help us to produce His fruit!

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Galatians*, pg. 169