

Led By the Spirit – Part 3
Galatians 5:24-26
Series: No Other Gospel #23

Introduction: Take your copy of the Scriptures and join me in Galatians 5 – Galatians chapter 5.

As we have entered into the really practical section of the book of Galatians we have spent the last two weeks trying to carefully and precisely understand this idea of being led by the Spirit of God in our daily lives. We have been commanded in verse 16 to walk by the Spirit of God and then we have seen reasons why we should walk by the Spirit and ways in which we should walk by the Spirit. I have been intrigued by the Lord's use of this metaphor for our life in the Spirit of God – this metaphor of walking. So, we have been freed from sin and from the Law's condemnation in Christ, and we are to live out this freedom by resisting legalism and by avoiding license. And we do this by walking each moment by the Spirit of God. We must be empowered by Him because we only have this new life because of His work to regenerate us by grace through faith. And we must also be directed by Him as he seeks to produce His fruit in us rather than the works of the flesh. So, we take each step empowered by the Spirit and we take each step under the direction of the Spirit. Therefore, we must walk by the Spirit.

I had an interesting episode recently with my own physical walking. On one of those really warm days in early February I was working out in the yard pulling out some old posts that we no longer needed. I tweaked my back on the very first post, and I had more than 10 to do, but being the very smart man that I am, I decided to continue even though my back was screaming at me to stop. Well, I got it all done, and then I was done. I barely got inside the house and crashed on the recliner hoping that the pain would subside with some ice and ibuprofen. Well, by about day 4 of this, I was hardly able to take a step without severe pain, and sometimes I could hardly walk. And so I've spent the last several weeks seeing a chiropractor as he has rather successfully put my spine back into place. What I have learned again through all of this – other than that I am not 16 anymore – is that your spine is pretty important for you to be able to accomplish the mundane tasks we so often take for granted – like taking a step. If your spine is twisted or disabled in some way, then even one step is going to become quite a challenge.

Very similarly, as we come to our verses for this morning, we will see the spine of truth which enables us and directs us in being led by the Spirit of God. We can and we must walk by the Spirit because we have crucified the flesh and because we live by the Spirit. These two core truths form the backbone of our spiritual man and when they are properly aligned with our thinking and our practice, then we are enabled and directed in walking by the Spirit of God.

Let's turn our attention to Galatians 5. I am going to start in verse one and read a few selected verses in the chapter before we come to our passage. Hear the Word of the Lord starting in verse 1. *Read vs. 1, 13, 16, 18, 24-26. Pray*

So, the overarching truth of Galatians is that we have freedom in Christ – freedom from the Law, freedom from our sin, and the freedom of new spiritual and eternal life. This freedom can be dangerous if we allow our flesh to use it for sinful indulgence, but the real purpose of this freedom is so that we can serve one another through love. The guarantee on not using our freedom for fleshly indulgence is that we walk by the Spirit of God. This is the overarching command in this section of verses which has captured our attention over the last 3 weeks. We are commanded to walk by the Spirit. And each step in the Spirit is dependent upon the health of the spine of truth presented in verses 24-26. The two columns of this spine are that we have crucified the flesh and that we live by the Spirit. Or to put it in theological terms – mortification and vivification. Our flesh has been put to death, and we have been given new life. Therefore, we can walk today, one step at a time, according to the Spirit of God.

I. We have Crucified the Flesh – vs. 24

- a. Consider the first column of this spine of truth which allows us to walk by the Spirit. Verse 24 makes clear that we have crucified the flesh. Before we talk about this crucifixion of the flesh, look at who it is that is being talked about here. The group of people who have crucified the flesh are those who belong to Jesus Christ. These are those who have heard the good news of the Gospel and who have turned from all other hopes for salvation and have turned to trust by faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work alone to save them from their sins. If you are not in Christ Jesus by faith, then these verses are not true for you.
- b. But for those who are in Christ, they have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. This is such an important truth for this whole conversation about walking by the Spirit. Remember back in verses 16-17 we were told that the Spirit keeps us from gratifying the desires of the flesh – and we were told that the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. In other words, if you are in Christ there is this spiritual tug of war happening in your soul. Even though you are in Christ, you still have the flesh present in you, and therefore it continues to cry out with its desires and its lusts. But though this war is present in you, it has a conclusive ending. Though the flesh wages war against the Spirit within you, the flesh is captured in Christ and executed by crucifixion. The battle is won in Christ Jesus. This does not mean that the death is final or complete yet, but it is certain. The flesh is hanging on the cross of crucifixion gasping for its final breaths. The death of the flesh with all of its sinful desires and passions is a certainty in Jesus Christ.
- c. By the way, the desires which wage war against the Spirit from back in verse 17 are the desires which are crucified with the flesh. It is also important to know that the idea behind the word “passions” is a deep affection that someone has. This passion becomes so important and valuable that the person who holds it is willing to suffer deeply for it – even to the point of death. A positive example of this is Jesus who was so passionate about obeying His Father and redeeming our souls that he went to the Cross and died for us – so we talk about the passion of Jesus Christ referring to His suffering and death. In verse 24 we have a negative expression of those passions. The flesh is so passionate about its sinful desires

that it is willing to cling to them with every breath – even the last fleeting breaths while it hangs on a cross.

- d. But you do not have to live by those desires of your flesh because you belong to Jesus Christ if you know Him and His salvation by grace through faith. This is one of 4 times that the word “crucify” is used in the book of Galatians. The first time it appears is in 2:20 where Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ. This speaks of our union with Jesus through faith. At the moment of our conversion we are united with Christ and we die with him, are buried with him, and are raised with him. Our sinful flesh loses its power through this co-crucifixion, and we can now live unto God – the one who loves us and gave His Son for us. Paul then uses the word in 3:1 where he clearly refers to Jesus alone being crucified. Then in 6:14 Paul will say that the world is crucified to him – by which he means that the world has also lost its power and influence over him – it is hanging on a cross and dying.
- e. In our passage, the text says that we have crucified the flesh. So, we are crucified with Christ, and the world is crucified to us, and now we have crucified the flesh. We are the ones who have done the work of putting our sinful flesh upon the execution stake so that it might be put to death. This happens at the moment of our conversion. Jesus calls us in the Gospels to take up our cross and follow Him. This text in Galatians 5 is taking that idea to its conclusion. We are not just to walk along with the execution stake on our backs, but we are to take our flesh to the place of execution and see to it that our flesh is crucified there. The metaphor of crucifixion is used here to show you the seriousness and the certainty of your flesh’s condition when you come to faith in Christ. Coming to Christ by faith means that you pick up your cross and crucify your flesh. It loses its influence and its power and its voice in your life because it is hanging upon an execution stake.
- f. This is not how we so often think about our flesh. We think it has so much power and that its desires must be heeded. We don’t treat it with the shame of a crucifixion. We don’t treat it with the severity of being nailed to an execution stake. We don’t view it as though it is hanging on a cross, barely hanging on to life, about to fully and finally die once it can no longer muster the strength to pull itself up for one more breath. Rather, we coddle its desires and we listen to its passions as though they might still be the way to true life. We believe its lies, even though it is gasping them out from the absolute weakness and certain death of being on a cross. We empower its influence and we travel in the well-worn paths of our besetting sins, all the while forgetting that the flesh is crucified.
- g. Romans 8 is helpful here once again:
 - i. “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8:12-13)
 - ii. If we walk and live according to the desires of the flesh we will not find life at all but only death, but if by the Spirit’s power and grace, we put to death the deeds of the body, we will know what it means to have true life.

- h. So, beloved, you can walk by the Spirit, because you have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Though the desire to sin within you seems ever so strong, in reality, if you are in Christ Jesus, those desires have been emptied of their power – just like one hanging upon a cross has lost all power and influence and credibility. Therefore, we ought to treat it as though this is true. Like Romans 6 says – we ought to reckon this to be so, and therefore live in light of this great freedom we have in Christ. This is the mortification of the flesh. But though the flesh is crucified and dying, the Spirit is life. So, the flesh is death, but the Spirit is life. John Calvin said it this way – “The death of the flesh is the life of the Spirit.” The two go together. The flesh being crucified is now met with the glorious reality of life in the Spirit in verses 25-26.
- II. **We Live by the Spirit – vs. 25-26**
- a. We can walk by the Spirit because we live by the Spirit. This is the second column of this healthy spine of truth which enables our spiritual man to take steps in this new life. Our flesh is crucified so its desires and passions have no power over us, and we are now alive by the Spirit of God. He has caused us to be born again by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He has convicted us of sin, enlightened our eyes to understand the truth of the Gospel, shown us the desperation of our sinful condition, caused us to repent and turn to trust in Christ alone, and made us to be brought from spiritual death to spiritual life through the process of spiritual re-birth. Having life by the Spirit we are now able to walk by the Spirit.
 - b. Verse 25 starts with a real condition, not a foregone conclusion – If we live by the Spirit. Not everyone lives by the Spirit – and even the true believer in Christ can choose to still walk by the flesh and not know this true life. But we can and we should walk in this life we have in the Spirit of God – and so this statement of truth is followed by the command of the truth. In other words – because we have new life in Jesus Christ, we should now have a new way of life – a new walk. Things do and should change because we are made spiritually alive by the Spirit of God.
 - c. So, if this is true, if we live by the Spirit, then we are to walk in step with the Spirit. This is a different Greek word for walk here in verse 25 than the one that was used in verse 16. It points to walking in conformity to a standard, or following closely in the example and leading of another. Think of a military regimen who is walking in line together, each following the same order and the same course directed by their leader. If we live by the Spirit, we are to follow the order and the course of the Spirit. He becomes our rule of living and our path upon which we walk. We saw last week that this will produce His fruit in our lives which will keep us from the works of the flesh.
 - d. This keeping in step with the Spirit is further clarified with a negative command in verse 26. So, if you are unsure of what walking in step with the Spirit is, here in verse 26 you can understand it some more by looking at its opposite. So keeping in step with the Spirit means that we will not become conceited, provoking one

another and envying one another. He never leads you there. His path never takes you to conceit, provoking and envying.

- e. Being conceited means that you are full of vanity and groundless self-estimation. You think too much of yourself. The word in the original language is a compound word made up of the word for empty or without substance and the word for glory – kenos and doxa. The conceited person is a person who glories in himself based upon reasons that are empty and without substance. The heart of conceit is not concerned with true glory or true honor, but rather simply with the perception of being more glorious and more honorable than others.
 - i. To tie this into our context, this was at the heart of the problems in Galatia. These false teachers thought highly of themselves. They were conceited in that they thought their teachings on the Law and circumcision were biblically right. They elevated themselves above all others and this self-righteousness competed with the true righteousness of those who were in Christ. They presumed themselves to be righteous and they were conceited enough to think that they were more righteous before God than all others. But in reality, these were baseless claims. There presumed glory and honor of self-righteousness was completely void of any validity. They were conceited.
- f. This conceit in the heart gives way to the provoking and envying. These two phrases are defining what it looks like to be conceited. This is how conceit often comes out of us. It causes us to provoke and to envy. *This verse so helpfully shows us that there is a direct connection between what we think of ourselves and how we treat others.* If you think more highly of yourself than you ought to, then you will provoke others and you will envy others. Your views come out in your actions and your words.
- g. To provoke someone means that you call them out on the carpet in an area where you think you will prevail and you challenge them to prove that they are better than you. Again – you can imagine that this was happening regularly in the churches of Galatia as they struggled against the influence of these false teachers. To provoke someone grows out of the seedbed of conceit. You think too highly of yourself and so you naturally challenge someone else who you presume is lower than you in some area. And all of this is for your own personal gain. Think here of Goliath in the Valley of Elah calling out to the army of Israel up on the hill. He presumed that he was stronger and more capable of defeating their best warrior. Think of his words of provocation. He called them out and challenged them to prove him wrong. Think also of the Pharisees and other religious leaders when they saw Jesus hanging upon the Cross. They spoke words born out of their own conceit. They provoked Him to take himself down from the Cross saying – He saved others, but he cannot save himself?! These were provocative words based in their conceit.
- h. This provoking happens in the church when someone, out of a heart of conceit, appeals to their years of service in the church, or their large financial giving, or their supposed theological knowledge, or some other thing they are proud about

– and they appeal to it in order to end a conversation or to stop someone they disagree with. So, they might say, “Well, I appreciate what brother John has shared, but in my 32 years of teaching Sunday School I can tell you that his ideas simply will not work.” Do you see how subtle that is? His perception of himself as superior came out in words of provocation – trying to pick a fight he was sure he could win.

- i. This is coupled with envy. So, if we are keeping in step with the Spirit we will not provoke as an act of our conceit, and we will not envy as an act of our conceit. Envy is that bitterness of heart which burns against someone else whom you perceive to have some kind of real or imagined advantage over you. This flows out of conceit in that we want glory which we are not currently receiving because this other person is in the position of honor we desire.
- j. So, let me make some practical observations about these commands to not be conceited and therefore to not provoke or envy.
 - i. Walking in step with the Spirit is not just a personal issue. It is not just you who will be affected if you chose to walk in the flesh and continue to give that executed flesh a voice in your life. The whole body of Christ is affected if you are not walking in line with the Spirit. Think of that regimen of army men walking in sync with each other. If one of them trips or misses the step or decides to go their own way and do their own thing, they wreak havoc on the whole regimen. Their actions affect others severely. So too in the church. Conceit which leads to provoking and envy severely damages the body of Christ.
 - ii. Also, notice that provoking and envying are not limited to just our local body as though we just need to be concerned to not be conceited in our view of one another. Remember that this letter is written as a circular letter to a group of churches in the region of Galatia. Very easily one of these churches could have heard of problems at one of the other churches and they could have thought more highly of their own church which would have led to pride-filled statements of provocation. That ought not be us beloved. We ought not think too highly of ourselves as though somehow we have arrived as a church family. We better not look at other bodies of believers in our own town and region and like the Pharisee pray – I am glad Lord that I am not like those people who go to that church. I am glad I am so righteous that I go to Newton Bible. We must not entertain this conceit as we look upon other bodies of believers.
 - iii. Lastly, notice that life in the Spirit is seen by our normal expressions of love for others in the body. Being led by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit is not seen by some private and mystical experience with the Spirit which is ultimately all for us and all about us. No, the immediate result in the text of walking by the Spirit is that we show love to others by humbling ourselves and serving them. This is no surprise since the first part of the fruit of the Spirit is love. In other words beloved, you can know if the Spirit of God is leading you and is working in you and

if you are keeping in step with Him, if you can look at your life and see humble, selfless, sacrificial service for others in the body of Christ. This, by the way, is the same thing you will find in the other NT passage which speaks so clearly of being led by the Spirit. So, in Ephesians 5 – that famous text tells us not to be filled with wine, but rather to be filled with the Spirit. And the immediate result in that text of being filled with the Spirit is church family related. If we are filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5 we will address one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – we will give thanks to God – and we will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This will then look even more practically like wives submitting to their husband, and husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the Church, and children obeying their parents, and parents nurturing their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and slaves obeying their masters with sincere hearts, and masters treating their slaves with kindness and an absence of partiality. Do you see how practical this leading of the Spirit is? He will produce in you a life of love for others!

Conclusion: My friend – maybe you are with us this morning and you do not know this power over sin and death and the flesh because you do not know Christ Jesus by faith. There is hope for you. Jesus is beckoning you this morning by His Spirit to turn to Him in faith. He has completely and perfectly paid for sin and this salvation from sin is offered to you. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved from your sin. Brothers and sisters – are you compelled by these two truths to take steps of walking by the Spirit of God? Do you see that your flesh is mortified, and your soul is vivified by the Spirit? Because of this beloved – walk by the Spirit of God, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. Let's pray.