

Galatians 5:16-18

Walking in the Spirit

The letter to the Galatians is a declaration of independence. It calls us to life and liberty in Jesus Christ. But the life to which we are called must always be protected from two great enemies—legalism and license.

Throughout the first part of this letter the apostle has been warning about the dangers of legalism. And Paul's message against legalism reached its climax in chapter 5 verse 1 with this statement "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

Now, from the extreme of legalism Paul warns us about license. And the idea behind license is this: We are saved by grace alone. There is no work you can do to be saved. So, don't worry about how you live and don't worry about sin." This is why Paul wrote the following.

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
(Galatians 5:13)

The Greek word translated "opportunity" was often used to refer to a camp for military operations. So what Paul was saying is this: Since you are free from the Old Testament law and its curse don't get lazy morally. Do not allow your sinful nature to set up a camp from which it will attack you and cause you to sin. Paul warned about this in his letter to the Romans too. He wrote,

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?
(Romans 6:15, 16)

In this life we have three options for how we should live. First, we can live like a slave to sin. Secondly, we can live like a slave to the Old Testament law.

Or, thirdly, we can walk or live in the power of God's Spirit that is within us. And this third option is how the apostle begins our present section of Scripture.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and
you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
(Galatians 5:16)

Often when God's Word speaks of our flesh it means more than just our physical body. It refers to our sin nature, that part of us that does not want what God wants. But when we walk in the Spirit we overcome temptations to sin and we grow in our faith, hope and love.

The three great Christian virtues are faith, hope and love. Faith appropriates or receives the Word of God, the wisdom of God and the blessings of God. Hope anticipates our future glory and enables us to endure the trials of life. And love serves, it gives, it heals, it meets needs. Love reflects the character of God, for God is love.¹

When we live a life of love God is truly at work in us just as He was at work in Christ.² When we live a life of love we become tender-hearted and gentle with one another. We think in terms of what we can do for others more than what others can do for us. In 1 Corinthians Paul wrote about love.

Though I speak with the tongues of
men and of angels, but have not love,
I have become sounding brass or a
clanging cymbal.
(1 Corinthians 13:1)

Speaking in tongues is just noise unless I am praying in the Spirit for the good of others and the glory of God, because I love God and love others. If I speak in tongues to be edified and strengthened it profits me nothing unless I desire to be built up to love and serve others.

Though I speak with the tongues of
men and of angels, but have not love,
I have become sounding brass or a
clanging cymbal. ² And though I have
the gift of prophecy, and understand
all mysteries and all knowledge,

¹ 1 John 4:8

² Acts 10:38

and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never fails.
(1 Corinthians 13:1-8a)

Love never fails! But the kind of love that we are speaking about is the kind of love that God has. So, how do we get this love of God into our lives? We are told in Romans 5:5 that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit [which] was given to us." Therefore serving one another in love becomes all about the power of the Spirit within us—walking in the Spirit.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
(Galatians 5:16-18)

This is such a tremendous promise! We can demolish the enemy base camp of sin in our flesh by the superior fire power of God's Spirit in us. The love of God rises to prominence in our lives as we walk by the Spirit; as we live by the power of God. Our flesh is strong; our sin nature sneaky. But we can fully believe and trust that the Spirit of God within us is stronger.

So, how do we walk in the Spirit? Walking in the Spirit is the central principle of what it means to be a Christian. And it is not as mystical as it seems. Here is a question for you. How do you remove all of the air out of the inside of a drinking glass? The only way to get all of the air out of a glass is to fill it with something else. In the same way you cannot extract ungodly and worldly

thoughts out of your mind. But you can fill your mind and heart with God's Word. Romans 8 teaches us how to walk in the Spirit.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.
(Romans 8:1, 2)

Being in Christ we are free from all the commandments and punishments of the Old Testament law.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
(Romans 8:3, 4)

Jesus was tempted in all the ways we are, yet he never gave in to sin. Still, God punished all of our sins in Christ at the cross. Why? So that the righteous requirements of the law, namely to love God and love one another, can be fulfilled in us who walk or live not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Now, here is how we do one or the other.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
(Romans 8:5)

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on fleshly things. Their thoughts, attitudes, their emotions and desires, their worldview and morals, what makes them happy or sad are the things they have brought into their minds from the world. But it all leads eventually to ungodliness, nor necessarily always gross ungodliness, but ungodliness none the less.

But we want to live according to the Spirit, so we must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. Therefore, our thoughts and attitudes, our emotions and desires must be fed with the Word of God. We must read the Word of God and

think about what it we are and have and can do. We must fill our minds with the Word of God every day, because the world bombards us every day. And as God's Word saturates our minds and we think biblically, the Spirit of God in us is freed to work in us and we are transformed. We read in Romans 12,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:1, 2)

As we consistently read and meditate upon the Word of God, the Spirit of God within us transforms our thinking and our behavior, enabling us to be more and more like Christ.

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 3:17, 18)

As we read Scripture and allow the Spirit of God to work in us, a continual transformation takes place where we live in godliness and become like our Lord Jesus Christ. The result of walking in the Spirit is a life of thankfulness, loving service and joy.

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.

¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God.
(Ephesians 5:17-21)

Being filled with the Spirit we walk in the Spirit. We do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. And we desire to encourage one another and to sing and be joyful and to give thanks. If you see a Christian who is not joyful, and not thankful it is because he or she is walking according to the flesh and not the Spirit. If he or she repents and turns back to the Lord and fellowship with other believers and walks in the Spirit the burden on their hearts will be lifted.

For freedom Christ has made us free. It is a freedom not to indulge the flesh, but to overcome sin and the world by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. We are set free to love God and to love one another, free to believe God's Word to us. Let us stand firm in that freedom and overcome legalism and license by the Spirit.