

**"Life in the Holy Spirit"
(Galatians 5:13-26)
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May 28, 2017**

(Galatians 5:13-26)

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh¹; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."² ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever³ you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Core Issue: To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit – to walk by Him, to be led by Him, and to bear His fruit

Opposing Value: We desire to turn to the gratification of our flesh (taking sin lightly) and try to do things apart from the Holy Spirit

¹ In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit; also in verses 16, 17, 19 and 24; and in 6:8.

² Lev. 19:18

³ Or *you do not do what*

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. Glad you're here. We'll take a break from our Psalm 119 sermon series and turn to Galatians 5:13-26. So if you have your Bibles, please turn with me and follow along as I read the passage.

This passage begins with an idea that immediately grabs our attention – **this call to be free**. It draws us because we all want to be free – we don't want to be bound by rules. It feels good to do whatever we want. And maybe this is why many of us are drawn to and are pursuing after success, status, prestige, strength, and money because we believe that these things will give us power to do anything and everything we want. We want that control. We don't like anyone telling us what to do because it feels restrictive. But when we look at this passage again, we realize that this is not how Paul defines freedom.

Verse 13 says, "*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*" Think about this for a moment. **Christian freedom is not the ability to do whatever we wish but the ability to love God and others. Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.** You might say, "How is that true freedom?" Well, what if I told you that freedom isn't to do whatever we want, but it's being able to do what we were created to do? For example, Pastor Tim Keller once talked about how a fish is designed for water, not for land. Now, this is a restriction on the fish. So if it's in the wrong environment, it dies. But if it's in the right place and restriction, it is free to do all it was designed to do. Therefore, he says, "Real freedom is finding the right restrictions." Then what are we made for? **Brothers and sisters, true Christian freedom is being made possible to do what we were created to do, which is to worship and glorify God with our thoughts, words, and actions in all contexts of our lives.**

But, let's be honest, the reality is that we know how sinful and selfish we are – some days we feel like obeying God, but some days we find sin so attractive. How can anyone, then, really live this way? And the answer, according to Paul, is, **by the Holy Spirit**. He alone can keep us truly free to do what we were made to do. The Bible teaches that **God planned and orchestrated our salvation plan, Jesus established and completed it, and the Holy Spirit enables us to experience it in our lives**. Then it would be absolutely crucial for us to understand what it means to do life in the Holy Spirit.

Now, this could be a problem for many of us because we have many misconceptions about the Holy Spirit. Some of us think that having the Holy Spirit means speaking in tongues, falling on the ground, or barking like an animal. For some, having the Holy Spirit means there must be an emotional rush – an intense feeling that makes you cry or laugh. Many of us don't know what to make of Him. Most Christians know He's there, but they are unclear about exactly what He does or how to interact with Him. If someone asked you, "How is the Holy Spirit working in your life or at your church," how would you answer them? **Many misconceptions about the Holy Spirit have led to confusion and uncertainty; and as a result, so many of us have chosen to ignore and neglect Him.**

Yet something was so important about the Holy Spirit that Jesus told His disciples it was to their advantage that He goes away and the Holy Spirit comes. Jesus literally said that the Spirit's presence inside of us would be better than for Jesus Himself to be with them. In fact, they needed the Spirit's presence so much that Jesus told them not to do anything until that Spirit had arrived except to pray for Him. If this is true, do you consider your connection to the Holy Spirit so strong and real that you regard His presence in you to be a better advantage than even Jesus Himself beside you? If we are to experience and live out the gospel, we will have to clearly and rightly understand who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does.

Then before we get to our main passage, I want to share one foundational truth that we must consider if we are to appreciate this message: **the Holy Spirit is a Person**. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” as if it’s some kind of energy but is a “He.” He is a person in the Trinity. The Bible tells us that we can actually grieve or outrage the Holy Spirit; it also tells us that He loves. He is a person. Now why is this important? **Because it will clarify what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit**. Some people misread Acts 2 to think that there must be an electric charge that goes through us when the Holy Spirit comes. These people misunderstood the Holy Spirit to be a force we can get if we do the right things: say the right prayer, do certain things, refrain from certain things, repent of certain things, or put yourself in the right environment for God to zap you. This of course is not right. **The Holy Spirit is a person and to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to enter into a relationship with Him**. This is what we’ll be talking about today more in detail. Obviously we only have time to scratch the surface because what the Holy Spirit does is so much deeper and wider than we can ever imagine. But I pray that it will cause you to study more on your own. So, what does this mean to do life in the Holy Spirit?

Three things:

- WE WALK BY THE SPIRIT (V. 16)
- WE ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT (V. 18)
- WE BEAR THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (V. 22)

1) WE WALK BY THE SPIRIT (V. 16-17) – CRUCIFY OUR FLESH

Let’s turn to verse 16. *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.”* One of the things that we clearly notice from this verse is that there are two natures at work in every Christian: **the Spirit and the flesh**. By “the flesh” Paul means what we are by nature – our sinful and fallen condition. In contrast, by “the Spirit” he is referring to the Holy Spirit Himself who renews and regenerates us by giving us a new nature and dwelling in us. This truth reminds us that, in our pursuit of holiness, **there will be this constant battle that exists within us**. We are at war. Romans 7 (NLT) describes this experience in depth: *“I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?”* Isn’t this the kind of frustration that we all go through? No Christian wants to sin but we find ourselves in sin. This is the Christian conflict. But Paul tells us that there is a way for us to be victorious and be free – and that is to “walk by the Spirit.”

Then, what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Simply put, **it means that we must crucify the flesh**. Verse 24 says, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* We must notice that the “crucifixion” of the flesh described here is something that is done not to us but by us. Let’s think about this. In the context of our Christian life, some of you may be *passively* waiting for God to do something – to change you; transform you; make you into a whole new person – but frustrated because nothing’s happening. But this is not how Paul describes our Christian life; rather it’s to *actively, violently, and intentionally* put our flesh and sin to death through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the phrase *crucifying the flesh* is not exactly friendly or appealing. But I think Paul used this phrase because he wanted to be clear on what we are getting into. **First, he wants us to know that the gift of the Holy Spirit is really not for our own pleasure or purposes.** The Spirit is meant to lead us toward holiness. The Spirit is here with us to accomplish God's purposes, not ours. **Secondly, it tells us is that it will be painful.** The truth is that we don't want to give up our sins. We like our old self. We want to run back to our old habits, old life – doing whatever we want; living for our comfort and security; having no one to tell us what to do. Holiness seems too hard. Following Jesus in this world seems almost impossible. So we compromise thinking that God will understand, but this is not right. It's as if we're trying to bring down the sin that we crucified on the cross before it dies.

In C.S. Lewis's book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, we read about Eustace, a boy who becomes a dragon because of his greed. In order to become a little boy again, this mysterious lion instructs him to "undress" by taking off his dragon skin. Eustace managed to peel off a layer, but found that he was still a dragon underneath. He tried repeatedly but made no progress. The lion finally said: "You will have to let Me undress you." During the process, Eustace said, "The very first tear He made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when He began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. But He peeled the beastly stuff right off." **Sometimes our sin becomes such a part of us that it requires this same kind of ripping and tearing to free us – and it's going to be painful.** But we must remember that the Holy Spirit does not seek to hurt us, but desires to make us Christ-like.

If all you want is Jesus to make you a little more spiritual, you are missing out on the fullness of life you were created for. Not only this, you don't need the Holy Spirit. You don't need the Holy Spirit if you are merely seeking to be a little nicer and attend church regularly. You can honestly do that without the Holy Spirit. You only need the Holy Spirit's guidance and help if you truly want to follow Jesus Christ. You only need Him if you desire to "*obey everything*" He commanded and to teach others to do the same. Friends, I'm not going to lie: **saying no to our sinful nature and sin is difficult, but it's rewarding – life-giving.**

Have you been stuck in a cycle of sin for a long time? Have you given up on the Holy Spirit and think that He doesn't "work" or doesn't have the power to bring freedom, at least not in your life? If this is you, then maybe you have not internalized the reality that walking in the Spirit requires action on your part. John Owen said, "**Be killing sin or it will be killing you.**" Pastor Tim Keller said this: "**The sin that is killing you the most right now is the one you are most defensive about.**" Which sin are you defensive about – your lies, lust, anger, or pride? Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit promises that He will help us but we still have work to do. Walk by the Spirit by crucifying your sinful nature and sins daily.

2) WE ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT (V. 18) – DESIRING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Let's turn to verse 18. "*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*" Although walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit are very closely related, they reveal two aspects of our relationship with the Holy Spirit. The verb, "being led" is used often to describe a shepherd leading a flock of sheep or a captain leading his army. Then it means that as our leader, the Holy Spirit takes the initiative. He inspires us to have holy desires. He puts this gentle pressure upon us, and we begin to yield to His direction and control. **If walking by the Spirit is to deliberately say no to our sins, then to be led by the Spirit is to deliberately say yes to the Holy Spirit.** These are two important aspects of living a life in the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you an example. When I was university, I watched a message given by Pastor John Piper on how to deal with our lust for pornography. He shared that it's valuable for us to say no to this sin and resist with the Word of God whenever we're tempted. But he said that if we only rely on this, we will continue to fail. **What will help us overcome and destroy this sin at the root is to find this deep joy and pleasure in God.** You won't and you don't want to click that mouse to a porn site because you find more joy turning to God and His Word. The battle can be won. And this goes not only against the sin of lust but with any sin that you're struggling with today. **We need to learn to literally push our sinful desire out of our hearts and minds by filling it with this longing and hunger for God so that there is no space for sin.** Pastor John Stott says, "If it is vital to be ruthless in turning away from the things of the flesh, it is equally vital to be disciplined in turning towards the things of the Spirit."

Now, what does it mean to say yes to the Holy Spirit? In order to answer this, let's first point out what He does. The Bible tells us that one of the Holy Spirit's main jobs is **to show us Christ and conform us to Christ.** Now how does He do this practically? **Through the Scripture.** The Spirit makes the living Word come alive in us. He reminds us of the truth when we need it. He explains it to us. He gives us spiritual eyes to see God's love. He empowers us to obey it. He shows us specific ways we are to apply it. The Spirit of God consumes our hearts with it, so that the beauty of Christ will saturate our hearts as we overflow with it. Let the Scripture dwell in your heart richly. Take it in and reflect on it. I've never met a Christian who, after reading the Bible, said, "I knew it. It really is all about me." You'll never come to this conclusion because it's all about Christ. **Then as you read the Bible, let the Spirit lead you as He magnifies Christ in your life.**

Some of you may be discouraged because you really tried but you still find yourself in sin. But listen to what Pastor Greg Laurie says, "**Certainly the Bible does not teach that we will be *sinless* in this physical body we now live in. On the other hand, we can *sin less*, not by our own abilities, but by the power of the Spirit.**" The truth is that we *cannot not* sin in this world because we're all broken. But as we grow in holiness, we will sin less and less as we progressively become more and more like Christ. Brothers and sisters, don't be discouraged but continue to be devoted and faithful in your walk with Him. The Holy Spirit will help, shape, move, and cause us to desire what God wants. Simply keep in steps with Him.

3) WE BEAR THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (V. 19-25) – THE RESULT OF LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this section, I want to address one question: **How do we know if we're really growing in relationship with the Holy Spirit? What if I don't *feel* anything?** According to Paul in verse 19, it's obvious when someone is not walking in the Spirit. What you'll see from these people are things like rage, selfishness, dissension, bitterness, and envy. However, **when you habitually and actively submit to the Spirit, what comes out of your life will be the fruit of the Spirit – character transformation.** This is the promised result of us walking and being led by the Spirit. So if we look to verse 22, in contrast to the acts of the flesh, we see Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit. **If this is evident in your life, you are growing in relationship with the Holy Spirit.** Now, we don't have time to get through each one as far as the definitions go, but I want to point out just *one* thing regarding the image of fruit, which I learned from Pastor Tim Challies' blog.

The metaphor of fruit reminds us that **Christian growth is gradual yet inevitable**. When it comes to plants, it's almost impossible to actually witness its growth unless you video record it or just sit there for days. Isn't it true? You never see it happening – you can only measure it after time. It was like that with our jade plants. It started with two small plants that Alicia and I had, and after re-planting several times, we have a lot of jade plants growing all over our house. I don't know how they grew that fast but it happened without us realizing it. All we did was water it, put it under the sun, supply them with good soil, and go on with our lives.

This really is how it is with the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. **If we are in the Spirit, we cannot not bear fruit**. It might be slow but it will certainly grow. You might already be sensing this to be true. You didn't see it before but you realize that you're living differently – you're not angry with your kids so quickly; you're thinking of how you can use extra money you have for God; you're enjoy reading the Bible; you're not worrying as you face troubles of this life; and many other things that you can identify. **Brothers and sisters, when we continue to be in the Spirit, you may not notice right away, but we will bear fruit because it's not us but the Holy Spirit Himself working in us to make this possible**. Look at the "fruit" of your own life and see how connected you are to the Spirit. Are you growing? Do you see the fruit impacting your life? I pray that the fruit of the Spirit will be evident and will dominate your life.

But, more practically, there is an easy way to answer the question – **how do we know if we're growing in relationship with the Holy Spirit?** It's by remembering the role of the Holy Spirit, which I shared before that **it's to show us Christ and conform us to Christ**. In other words, the Spirit's message to us is never, "Look at Me; listen to Me; come to Me; get to know Me," but always, "Look at *Him*, and see *His* glory; listen to *Him*, and hear *His* Word; go to *Him*, and have life; get to know *Him*, and taste *His* gift of joy and peace." **So, whenever the Holy Spirit is present, you are not thinking about Him; you're thinking about Jesus**. In other words, when someone claims to be filled with the Spirit and yet spends most of his time talking about his experiences with the Spirit, you have reason to doubt whether he really is filled with the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit speaks through someone, you tend to forget about the person speaking. You don't even really think about the Holy Spirit. **You find yourself thinking about Jesus. The more the Spirit comes into us, the more we turn to Jesus**. So, if you find yourself desiring Jesus more and talking about Jesus more, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is working in your life.

Another thing that will affirm your growth in relationship with the Holy Spirit is not only in the way you love Jesus but **it's also in the way you love others**. This is what we see in verse 13. Paul says, "*Serve one another humbly in love*." As we walk with the Spirit, we cannot bear to see others struggling in their spiritual journey; rather you long to see other brothers and sisters deepening their relationship with God. So instead of being conceited or provoking others out of envy, you begin to show love and care for each other. Think with me for a moment. **What if our church, City on a Hill, began to experience this because we are all individually walking and being led by the Spirit?** What if we don't compare and complain saying, "How come I'm doing so much and she's not? How come the church doesn't do this and that?" Instead, we joyfully sacrifice, serve with all our might, and pray. What if we don't gossip and judge saying, "Look at them. They're so awkward. He's so selfish. She's so weird"? Instead, we forgive and lift one another up with encouragements. What if we don't become jealous and envious of seeing other people's success? Instead, we celebrate with them because you're genuinely happy for what they have. What if we don't ignore people when they're in pain? Instead, we go out of our ways to help them in any way possible. What if we don't pride in the fact that we're spiritually more mature than others? Instead, we pray with burning desire for them to grow in Christ and we do everything in our power to help. **Brothers and sisters, imagine if this is the kind of church we become**. We must pray for this.

These two things (loving God and loving others) are, then, how we can confirm if we are truly being filled with the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION (V. 26)

In light of the truth you heard, I only have one application that I want to share with you today – and that is this: **spend unhurried and uninterrupted time with God.** The truth is that the Holy Spirit wants to commune with us – to have a relationship with us. But unfortunately we're too busy and distracted to spend time with God – **technology honestly has become our worst enemy.** Unfortunately, we even do this with other people. Think about it. When was the last time you had an uninterrupted conversation with anyone? No phones, text messages, or to-do lists running through your mind. It's so rare nowadays to be able to look someone in the eye without interruption or distraction. In our desire to accomplish so much, we don't know how to focus on one person.

Of course, Jesus didn't have to deal with emails, calls, or texts, but He had multitudes of people pursuing Him at once. At any given moment of the day, people were looking for Jesus. But because of the priority of His relationship with His Father, He *found* ways to remove Himself from people's reach in order to pray and commune with God. He took the time to focus and be quiet so that He can be filled with the Holy Spirit. If Jesus needed to do this, how much more do we need the Holy Spirit? **In the craziness of our world, it will take tremendous effort to find a quiet place.** It means turning off the music, the TV, or your cell phone. It might mean that you go into a small room or go to a quiet park. I don't know how exactly this will look like in your context. But I do know that no matter what, it will require an intentional effort to be still and listen. It is only as we practice this stillness, this waiting, that we can experience deep intimacy and relationship with the Holy Spirit. The wonderful news is that the Holy Spirit *wants* to commune with us in every day. So I challenge you to turn to Him today.

CONCLUSION

J.I. Packer said, "Living by the Spirit implies a habitual, continual, and active interaction with the Holy Spirit." **Then let us continue to put to death our flesh while allowing the Holy Spirit to work and guide us so that we will bear much fruit and that Christ will be magnified *in us and through us.***

Let's pray.