

## **“Keeping In Step With the Spirit”**

Galatians 5:16-26

One of the more difficult things that we grapple with in life is something known as ‘burnout.’ Whether it is related to our job, or a combination of factors, burnout happens when we’ve been burning the candles at both ends, living under the assumption that we’re too strong, too capable, or too important to stop for rest. While trying to be Superman, at some point, the realization of our frail humanity hits us right between the eyes and we hit a wall. Several years ago, I read a book by Pastor Wayne Cordeiro, entitled, “Leading On Empty.” In fact, it was so helpful to me that I took our pastoral staff through it. He had been in ministry for 30 years, and 10 years after founding what is now the largest church in Hawaii, he found himself depleted. So he had to take a season out of his growing ministry to recharge and refocus on the truly important. He was able to get back in touch with his life, get things back in proper balance, and re-energize his spirit through Christ in a way that propelled him forward to greater levels of service. Cordeiro tells his story of hitting a wall and experiencing spiritual burnout in the hopes that other pastors or ministry leaders who find themselves in a similar position can find help before they crash and burn. Far too many are leading on empty. And if we were to apply this broadly to the church, I’m of the belief that far too many Christians are living on empty. Which is a tragic thing for people who are to be filled with the Spirit.

This morning, I want you to turn with me to the fifth chapter of Galatians. We’re now looking at the practicalities of life in the Spirit, having explored the person of the Spirit, the purpose of the Spirit, the presence of the Spirit. Last time, we considered what it means to ‘be filled’ with the Spirit. It is consciously living under His control and influence. When we walk by the Spirit, when we are filled with the Spirit, and when we keep in step with the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is produced within our hearts and lives. The Spirit’s goal is to reproduce the character of Jesus in me, not simply me striving.

The churches in Galatia were made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul’s purpose in writing to the churches was to establish them in the faith, especially as it related to justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law. The Galatian

believers were facing a theological crisis as the basic truth of justification by faith rather than by human works was being denied by the Judaizers—legalistic Jews who insisted that Christians must keep the Mosaic Law. In particular, these Judaizers insisted on circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who desired to be saved. In other words, convert to Judaism first, and then you are eligible to become a Christian. So when Paul learned that this heresy was being taught to the Galatian churches, he wrote this epistle to emphasize our liberty in Christ and to counter the false gospel being promoted by false teachers. Galatians emphasizes that righteousness comes through Christ, not the works of the law (Gal. 2:21). You and I are free in Christ, and yet our freedom isn't an excuse to gratify our sinful nature, rather is an opportunity for us to love and serve one another. The Christian life is to be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, not the flesh. My 'flesh' has been crucified with Christ, and as a consequence, the Holy Spirit now produces His 'fruit' in the life of the believer. Fruit is used as a metaphor to describe godly character. And when we walk in the Spirit, and keep in step with the Spirit, He will produce the fruit of Christ-like character within us. (Read)

I probably have thirty or more books on the Holy Spirit right now that are piled up on my desk. And I'm shocked at how many of them give great emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit, while only mentioning the fruit of the Spirit in passing. And it only illustrates what I have suspected, the fact that we're far more interested in giftedness than we are character. It reveals the way we think in our pragmatic culture that looks for a quick fix, for what works. We've bought into the idea that the church needs gifted personalities that we can rally behind, people with charisma and great ability that can lift us out of the mess we've made for ourselves. We're drawn to gifted people, maybe even somewhat envious of them. But it is clear to me that we value doing over being, which is the very opposite of the way we ought to think. That type of thinking leads us to operate in the flesh rather than in the Spirit. Who you and I are becoming in terms of character is a far more important issue than what we are doing. Activity isn't always a sign of productivity. It is men and women of Christ-like character that God is looking for, not charismatic charm. Now don't get me wrong here, doing things for God most certainly has its time and place. He does in fact 'gift' you and me for service in His name. However, it is not

to the exclusion of reproducing the character of Jesus in me first and foremost. And so the fruit of the Spirit must be prioritized over His gifts. Without the fruit of the Spirit to give them proper expression, gifts would be nothing more than flesh on parade. Especially as it relates to natural ability. There are people who are gifted with natural ability, which is something given to them by their Creator. But we do not rely on our natural ability. That's why it is important for a Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit. For when we are filled with the Spirit, we will also be fruitful in the Spirit.

### **1 – The CONFLICT that is described (5:16-18)**

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

Verse 16 says, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” That is both a command and a promise. ‘Walk by the Spirit’ is the command. ‘And you will not gratify the desires of the flesh’ is the promise. When the Bible speaks of the ‘desires of the flesh,’ it is referring to that which is antagonistic toward the things of the Spirit. The ‘flesh’ to which Paul refers is not so much my skin and bones physicality, but the residual part of my fallen nature that is still present within me. To be in Christ means that you have a new nature, but the sin nature is still very much there. I’m no longer enslaved by it, I’m no longer under its dominion, but the ‘flesh’ is still something I contend with.

Notice that Paul describes a conflict that exists in a believer between the flesh and the Spirit. If you’ve been a Christian for any length of time, you know what he is talking about. It is an inward battle that is ongoing between the old and new nature, between the indwelling Spirit and remaining sin. Its described in a little poem I came across:

*Two natures beat within my breast,  
The one is foul, the one is blest.  
The one I love, the one I hate,*

*The one I feed will dominate.*

The one I feed will dominate. Whatever you feed will lead. If I feed the flesh, the flesh will dominate my life. But when I nourish the spiritual man, when I walk in the Spirit, then I am empowered in my Christian life. When verse 16 tells us to ‘walk by the Spirit,’ it means we’re relying on the Spirit in close fellowship, the result of being filled with the Spirit.

**O.S. Hawkins** — *“The Christian life is not intended to be lived on flowery beds of ease. When we are being filled with God’s Spirit, we can expect to meet the devil head-on. In fact, if we are not meeting him head-on, it might be that we are going in the same direction as him.”*

If we are to experience daily victory in this conflict, then you and I need to pay close attention to what Paul explains for us in these verses.

#### Be sure you are walking by the Spirit

Verse 16 says, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” We all know what it means to walk. It involves putting one of your feet in front of the other one and moving in a forward direction. To walk means you are going somewhere. Walking is often used in Scripture as a metaphor of the Christian life. Your ‘walk’ is life from the moment of conversion to the time you step into eternity. Walking implies both direction and a destination. I am walking with Jesus to my future home in heaven. Along the way, I will encounter conflict and challenges.

Well, what does it mean to ‘walk’ by the Spirit? It simply means that you live in daily dependence upon God. It is pursuing unhindered, unbroken fellowship with Jesus. We are relying upon the Holy Spirit to do what He came to do. He is the One who energizes our Christian life and witness. It is not so much a matter of me trying as much as it is about me trusting. Far too many people approach the Christian life as if it were simply a matter of trying harder. They get up in the morning, square their shoulders, tighten their belt, take a few breaths, and determine to live for Jesus by their sheer will power. While that sounds good, it is attempting to live the Christian life in the

energy of the flesh, which is something that cannot be done. There is a vast difference between determining and depending, and between trying and trusting.

We experience defeat when we walk according to the flesh!

### Be prepared for spiritual battle

Verse 17 says, “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.” The enemy of every Christian can be compared to a three-headed monster that consists of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Two of these assail us from without (the world and the devil), while one assails us from within (the flesh). Clinton Arnold has offered a helpful definition of the flesh as “the inner propensity or inclination to do evil. It is the part of our creatureliness tainted by the fall that remains with us until the day we die. The flesh is our continuing connection to this present evil age, which is destined to perish but against which we must struggle now.” Don’t simply think of ‘the flesh’ as your physiology—your body and its component parts. Rather, the term is used in a theological sense to refer to the fallen, sinful, corrupted human nature that every single one of us has inherited from Adam.

And so you can see how this three-headed monster of sorts works against you. The world around us is the fallen atmosphere come under the influence of evil, the flesh is my own sin nature, and the devil is the one who tempts us to in accordance with our sinful nature. The world is like a pool of gasoline, the flesh is like a match, and the devil is the one who entices us to strike the match. Is there any wonder why Paul tells the believers in Ephesians 6 to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power? As Christians, we are locked in a battle. I spoke to our men yesterday about this very thing. And so we must take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. But you and I do not stand in our own strength, but in the strength of the Spirit who has been given!

### Be familiar with all your resources

Notice verse 18 says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

## 2—The CONTRAST that is made (5:19-23)

*“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 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. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

Notice the phrase ‘works of the flesh’ in verse 19, and then ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in verse 22. The works of the flesh are done all by yourself, but the fruit of Christ-like character is produced by the Spirit living in you as a believer. And so there is a contrast being made here between works and fruit. All that comes from the flesh is rotten, while the fruit of the Spirit is descriptive of godly character.

### The sinful works of the flesh

Look at the awful list mentioned there in verses 19, 20, and 21. It is an ugly list of sinful attitudes and actions. We can group them into three categories

- Misplaced desires

Notice Paul mentions things such as sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. These are associated with the lusts of the flesh. Impurity within our thought life which then results in sinful behavior.

- Misdirected devotions

Verse 20 goes on to list things such as idolatry and sorcery. That might sound strange, but the word translated there as sorcery is the same word we get ‘pharmaceutical’ from. It is mind altering substances. Using and abusing substance to get a physical high. Yet the Lord says no other gods!

- Mismanaged dispositions

Notice Paul then mentions enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions. This is someone who has a hostile spirit towards other people.

- Misguided decisions

Then verse 21 also mentions envy, drunkenness, orgies or revelries, and things like these. All of these are associated with the decisions to throw out all restraint. And Paul says, “I warn you, as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Or, those who make a practice of doing such things. In other words, as a way of living. It is opposite of the spiritual virtues that Paul will mention next.

### The bountiful fruit of the Spirit

Evidence of spiritual life within a person will be the fruit of Christ-like character. And it isn't something we muster up or strive to grow on our own, but is produced by the Holy Spirit. Think of it as God's 'produce stand' on display in the Christian's life. Have you ever been to a farmer's market, or a fresh produce stand? As far as your eye can see there is fresh fruit and vegetables. Barrels of juicy apples, or ripe sun kissed oranges, clusters of vine ripened grapes, bushels of blueberries. Or what about a basketful of Tony Little's fresh handpicked strawberries! Man, there's nothing better than fresh fruit.

It is a picture of what God produces in the life of the one who is surrendered to Him. I will come back to these another time, but look at the fruit of the Spirit described now in verses 22-23—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Nine spiritual virtues that burst forth onto the scene in the life of the man or woman who is surrendered to the Spirit of God. Paul says against such things there is no law. In other words, the law doesn't forbid it, neither can the law produce it. The spiritual fruit is produced only by the Spirit when the believer is yielded to His control. And so the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit couldn't be more pronounced.

### **3—The CRUCIFIXION that is required (5:24-26)**

*“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

The conflict that is described, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.” The contrast that is made, the “works of the flesh” versus the “fruit of the Spirit.” And then notice the crucifixion that is required. Verse 24, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” To be a Christian is to be crucified, buried, and raised with Christ. It means I am to recognize through faith that I participated with Christ in His death and resurrection. Positionally, my old self or who I was in Adam died when Christ died. Jesus died for me, and He died as me. That is, I died with Him. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that you and I might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

**L.E. Maxwell** — *“During the Civil War, George Wyatt was drawn by lot to go to the front. He had a wife and six children. A young man named Richard Pratt offered to go in his stead. He was accepted and joined the ranks, bearing the name and number of George Wyatt. Before long Pratt was killed in action. The authorities later sought again to draft George Wyatt into service. He protested, entering the plea that he had died in the person of Pratt. He insisted that the authorities consult their own records as to the fact of his having died in identification with Pratt, his substitute. Wyatt was thereby exempted as beyond the claims of law and further service. He had died in the person of his representative.”*

The Christian life is a crucified life. For I am crucified with Christ, yet not I, but Christ lives in me! The Christian life is dying to live, strength out of weakness, humility leading to exaltation. Don’t think that the cross is merely your through the door into the kingdom of God. The cross is also the way. Jesus said that if you and I want to come after Him, we must first deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. The cross is not just His. The cross is mine, and the cross is yours. It is an unconditional requirement if we would follow Jesus as His disciple. Our whole identity is found in the cross. It was there that God dealt with my sin. And it is in the cross that God intends for us to be so



united with Christ in His death that we forever hate, abhor, and forsake our sin.

Positionally, I died when Christ died. And now practically, I die daily. The flesh must be crucified. There was a cross for Jesus, and there is also a cross of discipleship for me and you. Keeping in step with the Spirit means that I must die to self and bow to King Jesus.

That's the emphasis of Romans 6, 7, and 8. If you want to know how the Christian life is lived, then pour over these chapters. In Romans 5, the apostle Paul explains the truth of our justification through faith in Christ's death for us. In Romans 6, he explains our identification with His death. In chapter 5, it is Christ's death for us. And in chapter 6, it is our death with Christ. So that now we are new creatures in Christ! God's way of victory and deliverance is to cut us right off from the old Adamic tree and to graft us into Christ, joining us to Him in His crucifixion.

And so I am free from sin's penalty, but how am I presently being freed from sin's power? I know that sin is still a very present reality. I feel the tug of the flesh every day, and so did the apostle Paul. He writes about that in Romans 7 as he describes the relationship of the law to the remaining sin in me. He says in verse 18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." And so it is the same conflict described here in Galatians 5:17.

Where does the power come from? That answer is found in Romans 8! I believe Romans 8 is the greatest chapter in all the Bible. It is here that he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Then he says, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." And he goes on to refer to the Holy Spirit 20 times in the chapter!

**Romans 8:13—“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.”**

The King James uses the word 'mortify.' But in our day, a lot of people think it means to be embarrassed. Someone says, "I was just so mortified." Well, that is not at all what

that means in the spiritual sense. It is not what John Owen meant when he wrote *The Mortification of Sin*, which is a book written 350 years ago, and probably the best thing ever written on Romans 8:13. It has that famous line in it, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.” Mortification of sin meant kill it, slay it, put it to death. How do you do that? It is only in the power of walking by the Spirit. Sin cannot be mortified through legalism or any external means. No, the issue is the heart, and the means of mortification are drawn from the simple commands of Scripture that you and I must obey. Let me highlight some of them. If you want to deal with sin in your life, here’s how.

### First, abstain from fleshly lusts

If you’re going to kill sin, you’ve got to stop lust with a preemptive strike. 1 Peter 2:11 says, “I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” What is that saying? Stop lusting. Put it out of your life. There’s no point sitting around waiting for some heavenly power to zap it away. You’ve got to cut it off at the pass.

### Second, make no provision for the flesh

If you want to stop evil desire, then don’t provide anything for it to feed on. Lust has to be halted before it gets started. If you struggle with gluttony, don’t load up on junk food. If you’re tempted with sexual desire, don’t fill your mind with the images that fuel that temptation. Make no provision for the flesh. It is to remove what furnishes the mind with the means to entertain evil thoughts.

### Third, fix the gaze of your heart on Christ

Pursue being like Christ. 1 John 3:3 says, “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Fix your heart on Christ and His likeness, and ask yourself what Christ would do. We always become like the object of our worship. You become like whatever you worship. Christians become like Christ when we make Him the focus of our life, because we are not just becoming like Him on our own but by the work of the Holy Spirit, transforming us from the inside out. And as you fix your

heart on Christ, you will become like Christ and you will not choose those things which make provision for your lust.

#### Fourth, meditate on God's Word

Psalm 119:11 says, "Your Word I have hid in my heart, that I may not sin against You." Joshua 1:8 says the same thing, that we should take the Word and meditate on it day and night. Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." When the Word of God fills your mind and saturates your thinking and your life, that is what leads to a Christ-centered focus. You're transformed into the image of Christ. You will abstain from fleshly lust, you'll kill sin. In fact, you will discover the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, with which you hack sin to pieces. And it is the most effective weapon we have.

#### Fifth, be constantly in prayer

Prayer is a vital component as we ask the Lord for strength. Psalm 19:13 says, "Keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins." Stop me from sinning—a very direct prayer. I think this is in the heart of the writer of Hebrews when he writes in 4:16, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." I think the time of need is the time of temptation, in the battle of the believer against sin. That's when we need grace and mercy and that's when He provides it.

The flesh is subtle and deceptive. It may leave you alone for a little while, make you think you're rid of it, and then come back with a vengeance. Sin is a stalker, it is always lurking. Dying to self in order to live through Christ is the only way of life for every Christian who wants to overcome the sin that so easily entangles them. When Jesus calls us to "take up our cross" He does not mean an inconvenience, rather it means our funeral. That is what a crucified life means. Self is no longer in the driver's seat in my life. Christ is now enthroned in my heart. Self has been deposed as the cruel monarch that he is. A cross-less gospel is a Christ-less gospel. The gospel is not about my self-improvement; it's about self-abandonment. It's not about our wants; it's about God's

will. So we must stop trying to sanitize what the Word of God has plainly told us to crucify.

**Henry Blackaby** — *“When we are finally reconciled to God through our submission to Christ’s lordship, He brings us out of the treacherous kingdom of darkness and into His wonderful kingdom of light. As our soul is delivered into the hands of our Good Shepherd and Savior, His Father immediately begins that transformational process which does not stop until God has completely [transformed] our character, our nature, our worldview, and our fleshly desires and brought them in line with His Son. Christ does not add a new coat of paint over the old person or remodel existing furnishings; He tears the house down and rebuilds it altogether.”*

Coming back to my opening illustration, I wonder just how many Christian men and women unnecessarily face some type of spiritual ‘burnout’ simply because they’ve failed to understand what it means to be united with Christ in His death and resurrection? In the energy of the flesh, they go and go, they strive and strive, then strive some more until they hit a wall. Friend, what we need is the refreshing that comes only through the life-giving Spirit of God.

**David Jeremiah** — *“It’s exciting to walk in the Holy Spirit. It is exhilarating to really sense that you are a ‘work in progress’ and that the Spirit of the living God is reshaping and remolding your life from within. You find that you are becoming more and more sensitive to the Spirit’s voice. You are becoming more and more careful about sin. When you so sin, the ‘interruption’ in that walk with the Spirit feels so miserable that you want to put it behind you right away. Activities that never used to bother you begin to bother you. Attitudes in your heart that you never used to notice begin to seem obvious, and you want to put them away. In short, the Holy Spirit is leaving His mark on your life...and that mark is holiness.”*

One of two things might be true. On the one hand, maybe you’ve never been saved. This is all brand new to you, and you’ve never heard it before. God loves you, Christ died to save you, and He will forgive you of all your sin and make you His very own. By faith, come to trust Him as your only hope of salvation. Believe that He died for you and

that He died as you in your place. He took your place in death so that you can have His place in life.

On the other hand, maybe you are a Christian who has been trying to live in the energy of the flesh. And you can very much identify with the conflict that Paul describes in these verses. I must choose whether or not I am going to continue to be dominated by the ugly monster of self or by Christ. Friends, the key to victory in this fight is walking by the Spirit, something which demands a daily, moment by moment surrender. And surrender is only a decision away. No matter how far you feel like you've gone, no matter how big a mess you feel like you've made, no matter how many times you've tried before and failed. Surrender means you throw up your hands and welcome God's grace. Jesus said:

**John 15:5—“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing.”**

**Philippians 4:13—“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

The power of Christ supplied through the Spirit is what makes all the difference. What you can't do to meet the demands of the Christian life in your flesh, you can do in the power of the Holy Spirit. He will equip and strengthen you again and again as you depend on Him, trust in Him, and walk with Him. This is what it means to keep in step with the Spirit!