

**COMMANDS OF THE SPIRIT:  
(1) WALK BY THE SPIRIT**

Galatians 5:16

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**PROLOGUE**

Over the next few weeks we will be talking about the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3b). But some Christians are like the teenage boy who participated in Campus Life's online discussion on relationships. The topic question was, "Is it appropriate for girls to ask guys out for dates?" He replied, "It would be OK for a girl to ask me out. It would surprise the heck out of me but it would be OK." There are some Christians who are surprised to learn that every Christian has the Holy Spirit but that's OK.

**SCRIPTURE**

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16 TNIV).

**INTRODUCTION**

Pentecost was originally an Old Testament festival that celebrated God's gracious provision during the spring harvest. But on the Pentecost immediately following Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus in a powerful way. Ever since then, Christians have associated Pentecost with the Holy Spirit - God's gracious, enabling presence actively at work *among* his people, calling and enabling them to live out in dynamic ways the witness of *being* his people.

Next Sunday (May 31) is Pentecost. In keeping with the season we are going to take a few weeks to look at the four commands related to the believer's relationship to the Holy Spirit found in the New Testament: WALK BY THE SPIRIT, DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, and DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT.

Today we shall look at the first command: WALK BY THE SPIRIT. The image of walking is a metaphor for how a person lives. The "Christian walk" is another way of saying the Christian life. A person who walks by the Spirit is a person who lives by the Spirit of God.

The command to "walk by the Spirit" is found in the context of a major discussion of freedom in Paul's letter to the Galatians. He writes:

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (5:1 TNIV).

The person who walks by the Spirit is the person who lives out the freedom gained for us by Jesus Christ. But the concept of Christian liberty is so difficult to grasp that we will need to

look at what it does not mean before we can appreciate what it does mean.

## **1. FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION**

To walk by the Spirit is to be free from condemnation.

The ancient Romans forced the condemned prisoner to walk to the place of execution carrying the horizontal cross-piece that would later be used to crucify him. The beam was so heavy that the edges would cut deeply into the flesh of the one carrying it, so heavy that the prisoner frequently fell crashing to the rocky ground, so heavy that it was often impossible to complete the journey without the aid of another person conscripted for this purpose.

The Apostle Paul argues, in effect, that this is the image of someone trying to prove they are worthy of God. Not only is it an impossible burden, the inevitable outcome is condemnation. Paul says:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (3:10 NIV).

Paul had established a number of congregations in the province of Galatia. But after he left the region, others came in with a different message for the new Christians. They told them that just believing in Jesus as the Messiah was not enough. They also had to keep the Law of Moses and all the rules and traditions of the elders in order to be accepted by God.

When Paul heard about this he was furious. This was a gross distortion of the Gospel. Yes, the Law is good but because of sin we are not able to keep the Law. If you need to keep the Law in order to earn your way into heaven then no one would make it.

Little Billy was causing trouble all day long. Finally, his mother could stand it no longer and sent him to bed. But after a while little Billy emerged from his bedroom looking somewhat reflective. He said he had been talking things over with God. "That is wonderful," his mother said, "If you pray to God, he can help you stop misbehaving." "Oh," said Billy, "I didn't ask God to help me stop misbehaving. I asked God to help *you* put up with me!"

God does more than put up with us. Through Jesus Christ he accepts us in spite of ourselves. This is the message that Paul gave the Galatians and they believed. Salvation is a gift from God to be received by faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are delivered from condemnation. We are set free from sin and death. We are free to live the life God has given to us. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin

and of death (Rom 8:1-2 NRSV).

## **2. FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY**

To walk by the Spirit is to be free from condemnation. To walk by the Spirit also means to be free from moral and spiritual slavery.

The yoke has been used in agriculture for millennia to control beasts of burden such as oxen. Somewhere along the way conquering armies learned they could also use yokes on people in order to control them and turn them into slaves. Subsequently, the image of a person walking under a yoke is a metaphor for those who have been taken into captivity. The Apostle is convinced that if we use our freedom as an excuse to indulge our sinful nature we lose our freedom.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want (Gal 5:16-17).

It is ironic that the Christians from Galatia, who were seduced by a message of rule-keeping, fell into behavior that so blatantly contradicted their faith. But many of Paul's first readers had lived their lives under a multiplicity of ceremonial laws and regulations, including a great many regarding food and drink. Under the Gospel of Jesus Christ all the ceremonial laws were abolished. So the danger was that a new Christian might be intoxicated by this newfound freedom and interpret it as license to do whatever he or she liked.

Paul lists fifteen vices in Chapter 5 that represent a kind of life that is in opposition to the Spirit. At first the list seem as random and chaotic as the vices themselves — drunkenness, rage, promiscuity. But behind them is the loss of self control. And without self control there is no freedom, only slavery. Paul continues:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires (5:22-24 NIV).

The life of the Spirit is one where we gain control of ourselves and yield the fruit of the Spirit. For freedom is not the absence of all restraints but the ability to live according to our purpose.

## **3. FREEDOM FOR LOVE**

To walk by the Spirit is to be free from condemnation. To walk by the Spirit is to be free from moral and spiritual slavery. Most of all, to walk by the Spirit is to be free to love each

other as God intended.

In the ancient near east, when a slave was set free, their posture changed. When they walked down the street they no longer had to keep their head down and avoid eye contact. They were free to look into the face of each and every person they met. No surprisingly, many used this newfound freedom to express scorn for the society that had oppressed them.

The image of a newly freed slave also represents the Christian life. We are free to walk down the street and look upon each and every person. But in thankfulness for what Christ has done for us, we look at each person not with contempt but love. For each person we meet is a person for whom Christ gave his life. Paul reminds us:

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love (5:13 TNIV).

### **CONCLUSION**

What an amazing turn about! The Spirit has freed us from a great burden and yet to walk by the Spirit is to voluntarily bear one another's burdens (6:2). The Spirit has freed us from slavery and yet to walk by the Spirit is to voluntarily serve one another in love (5:13). Are you walking by the Spirit?