

<b>Series:</b> Galatians	<b>Reference:</b> Galatians 5:6; 16-26; 6:14-15	<b>Title:</b> Walk in the Spirit	<b>Date:</b> 05.14.23
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
What would it look like this week not to participate in the struggle for approval & success in any way? How would that make you different? What would it do to your emotional health & well-being? To your relationships? The answer comes in walking in the Spirit!			

### **Color Changes in text indicate slide changes**

The temptation in society is to find worth in our actions: whether moral in the church, or success in the world. When we're not residing under the righteousness of Christ we devolve into legalistic morality, or licentiousness in hidden sin. Between those extremes lies the sweet point of grace; of life in the Spirit. Christians living by the Spirit know they're loved & approved because of Jesus. Having an innate security in Christ with nothing to prove to God or others.

What would it look like not to participate in the struggle for approval & success in any way? How would that make you different? What would it do to your emotional health & well-being? Conversely, what does a person look like who lives for the approval of God or others? Always seeking to be recognized, be right & validated with words of affirmation? And finally, in either scenario, what would that do to your relationship with others? Paul will address these questions today in Galatians 5.

The problem is, when we start talking about being saved by faith & not the law, people worry it means you can do whatever you want & still be saved. Technically, sure, God will forgive our sin. That's what it means to be saved by faith & not by works.

However, as we'll see today, when you're saved, the power of the Spirit comes upon you. Your heart's changed & your whole life's transformed. Desires change. You want to live a different life, not because it'll save you, but because you're no longer the same person you were before you knew Christ. When someone says they're saved, but their life looks exactly the same as an unbeliever, it raises concerns about whether they actually know Jesus. Notice, I did not say they have to be perfect, but are being transformed.

Like the older brother of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 who feared grace, like him we think it will lead to recklessness. That too raises some concerns about whether we really know Jesus. Remember, the younger brother went off squandering his fathers wealth in debauchery. Returning home, he didn't expect the reception he received. He thought he'd have to work as a slave in his fathers home earning back his place in his fathers family. But the father loves him, embraces him, and throws a big party to celebrate his sons return. But the older brother, who's never left home & been obedient all this time, stands in judgement of his brother, and even of the father.

It says...*"The older brother became angry & refused to go in. So his father went out & pleaded with him. 29But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving*

*for you & never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!*

*31“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we had to celebrate & be glad, because this brother of yours was dead & is alive again; he was lost & is found.”*

We get here our first glimpse of what life without the Father looks like. Firstly in licentiousness. The younger brother becomes destitute without his father & returns home - living for personal pleasure was a dead end. Then in legalism through the older brother, who while living in the fathers house, is always trying to prove himself, which makes him mean-spirited & judgmental. The father reacts in love, which the older brother cannot bring himself to do. Instead he reacts in judgment not recognizing he's always lived under the grace of the father - even living in his house, the older brother does not know the father's heart. The younger brother has learned, the only thing he needs is the father and receives love & grace from him openly as a result - he's been broken.

There's a story of a married woman with two small children who struggled with proving herself. She was certain God was disappointed with her because she wasn't *'doing anything'* for Him. She felt called to a soup kitchen ministry but struggled with leaving her children in someone else's care. She was shocked when her pastor told her the call was not from God but from her own ingrained legalism. Being a good mother wasn't enough for her; in her mind, neither was it good enough for God.”<sup>1</sup>

We all have false perceptions of the disapproval of God or others. Which is where our working theology of the Gospel becomes extremely practical to emotional health & fulfillment. Legalism & licentiousness make us insincere insecure needy victims at worse, and angry recluses at best.

Toward the beginning of chapter 5, Paul says something which addresses this mindset in v6...*“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”*

Circumcision was used as both a literal & symbolic act of making the decision to obey the law in order to seek salvation. Paul's saying it doesn't matter if you follow the law or not if your faith isn't *working through love*. Jesus says the only work we need to do is believe in Him in John 6:29. Which is to trust or have faith in Him - simply because He is the loving father of the prodigal story.

So if you believe in Jesus, the question is, do you believe Him? And if so, is that belief expressing itself through love? Love of God, which translates to love of others. Remember, the younger brother in pursuit of pleasure did not exhibit love, until he was

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* [New York: Random House Inc., 2005], 40

broken by the weight of sin, and was changed by the fathers love. The older brother did all the right things, but did not live in love of others, he couldn't even celebrate his own brothers return - he was plagued with jealousy & judgment!

Looking at Paul's words in v6, it seems strange to speak of circumcision in our day & age, but it stands as a symbol of anything which we add to the Gospel to earn salvation, or create identity outside of Christ. Remember, in the first-century, Judaizers had invented their own edition of the gospel by combining grace & legalism. Spiritual chaos ensued since they weren't on the same page with God. By combining grace with Old Testament law, the Judaizers were producing a dangerous hybrid of Christianity which was a false gospel. It was leading people away from relationship with God, instead of into it, since it kept the focus on the self to earn righteousness.

So, turn with me to p797 to hear Paul explain life in the Spirit in Galatians 5:16-26. He begins...*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Stop for a moment & meditate on that line...brilliantly worded, it neatly sums up our spiritual formation! If we could get this one thing right, life would fall into place & become full of wonder & peace! Notice what it does not say! It does not say...'Don't gratify the desires of the flesh, and then you will be walking in the Spirit.' It says the exact opposite, pursue the Spirit & the desires of the flesh will fall away! A matter of focus, sin or Jesus?

Let this glass represent your body, and the water in it your life. It was pure & clean until the fall into sin, now it's filled with dirt. If you tried to just spoon it all out you'd be removing the essence of life from within it; the water. You can't strain it out since the glass is the vessel of your soul & can't pour yourself out through a strainer into another body. Not to mention, continuous effort on our part will never clean it out. That's a picture of legalism, constantly trying harder. A frustrating way to live which makes us mean & judgmental of others who don't seem to try as hard as us.

The licentious person does the opposite, they just give into desire & dress up the outside hoping you won't notice the interior.

But if you took a pitcher of pure water & began filling it, all the impurities eventually get pushed out by the flow of water. That dirty water exits replaced by new clean living water. That's life in the Spirit. The life of Christ pouring in - focus always on Him, not on the dirt. The power which the Scriptures declare we have now - that the Spirit resides within, transforming us - our only job is to keep focus by faith.

And the reason being is in v17...*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 whatever you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

Not under the law, no longer controlled by it, released from the grip of it. But notice, grace understood doesn't mean I get to do what I want, it means my desires change; pursuits are now different than before.

And now Paul describes what those desires were before in v19...<sup>19</sup>*The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity & debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry & witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>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.*

Imagine what kind of person this is. You've met them, have been one yourself to some greater or lesser degree. But...don't focus on the extremes in that list, I doubt many of us have been to a drunken orgy, or involve ourselves in witchcraft! But we've all been envious, hateful, battle selfish ambition, or are overindulgent in some way.

But imagine how a person governed only by sinful desire gets along with others. They don't really, they use people, manipulate, since they view others as only another step to fulfilling desire, whether false validation or some pleasure. Paul's clear, the Gospel isn't a license to sin, it's the transformational power to pursue holiness in Christ. As Dallas Willard said, God is not against effort, only against earning. We cannot earn our place with Him, since Christ does that. But we can make effort into pursuing Him in loving relationship which translates into loving relationships with others.

So Paul contrasts this person with someone bearing the fruit of the Gospel...<sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness & self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

No law against these things since they bring life instead of destroying it. The things of the former list destroy life & relationship. But these are all healthy things adding to & building up the person & community.

He continues in v24 describing more fully how this occurs...<sup>24</sup>*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions & desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, provoking & envying each other.*

Crucified flesh has no power, it's dead. So the point is, don't give power to the flesh by engaging with it either through license or by legalism - take it to the cross in pursuit of Jesus! Don't give it power, by looking to Jesus! This is the picture of immersion baptism, that we died to the flesh, and are raised up clean by the washing of the Living Word.

Whatever that thing is that you put in place of Christ to earn identity or value outside of Him has no power unless you give it attention; it's a dead end leading nowhere. What counts only is that by the power of the Gospel, you have been made new!

Our culture gives false hope & answers to people who don't feel they have worth. We've gone to extremes thinking these will answer problems. People often focus on the outside, not the heart. They experience dysphoria because they're spiritually lost. In the current trend of sexual reassignment surgery, for instance, the suicide rates don't decrease after transition, and in scouring the internet we find interview after interview with people regretting their choices after the fact & lamenting the people around them who pushed them in that direction. Many are simply not satisfied with who God made them to be. Blinded to the love of their heavenly father, they seek solace in the absurd.

Many might say they *'believe in God'*, but they don't *'believe God'* as He's communicated Himself, and His life-giving directives concerning us.

Since the early 2000s, many reality shows have featured some version of a makeover. A contestant or a home gets fixed up. All of these shows operate under the assumption that outward appearance really matters, that it'll fix you internally - inadvertently communicating outward appearance is the most important thing about us.

One show, *The Swan*, involved providing extensive plastic surgery to contestants. Lorrie Arias, lost 120 pounds on her own & was featured on the show receiving over \$300,000 of plastic surgery. But ten years later in an interview with the *Huffington Post*, she shared she suffers from depression, bipolar disorder, agoraphobia & body dysmorphic disorder.<sup>2</sup> She'd gained back her weight & will only leave her house if absolutely necessary. Body dysmorphic disorder...exactly why she received \$300,000 worth of surgery in the first place & she's worse now! It doesn't work.

What people need is internal change which sparks change in external behavior. How we appear on the outside doesn't matter, it's the condition of the heart. The acceptance of what we were created to be in Christ. The Gospel assures us of our worth in Christ, not giving us what we do deserve, but giving us what we do not given we're worthy of God's love simply because we are His cherished children who've returned from self-exile.

Faith working through love is an example of heart-change at work. In Christ, our entire value system changes. The pursuit of heart & life changes. What we care about changes. This is Paul's point. Our old way of living, outside of the Spirit before we were saved, is opposed (v17) to this new way of life. Like oil & water, they can't mix, and to try to say you believe in Jesus while living another way invites disaster & inner turmoil.

We're a new creation. God's work in this new creation is all that matters. As Paul writes toward the conclusion, *"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation"* (6:14-15).

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<sup>2</sup> Lauren Duca, "What It's Really Like to Get Extreme Plastic Surgery, from a Former 'Swan, Contestant," *HuffPost*, December 6, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/extreme-plastic-surgery\\_n\\_6036110](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/extreme-plastic-surgery_n_6036110)

Again, Paul uses the language of circumcision, or law, to point out that in the end, we are a new creation in Christ, and adherence to these rules & regulations doesn't justify our existence, give identity, or make us any more or less valuable. Rules & regulations either from God's law, or expectations for success, beauty & acceptance the world places upon us.

Our old selves have been crucified by faith in Christ. Now our new selves live in Christ driven to live out the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-24). Exhibiting the good works God prepared in advance for us to do as a result of His grace upon our lives (Eph 2:10).

Galatians is as radical today as it was when Paul wrote it, because it's as much a struggle for us today as it was back then to live by faith alone. If we aren't following rules, how do we know if we're doing a good job of being a Christian? We have to understand, on our own we'll never do a good job of being a Christian, whether we live in His house or outside it.

Remember, at their worst, both brothers of the Prodigal Story were equally far from the fathers heart. That's why the good news of Jesus is so good! Once we recognize the bad news of our true selves, we can turn to Jesus & receive the good news that because of His death, we can trust Him & everything's all right. When the older brother can repent of his pride & self-justification, and the younger of his pride & licentiousness and come to enjoy intimacy with the fathers heart for the first time!

Walk in the Spirit, pursue Jesus, be filled, and all else will fall into place, and soon you will find you're fulfilling the greatest two commandments of which Jesus spoke; to love God, and love others! Two commandments which sum up all of God's law! Augustine once said, "Love God & do as you please." Sounds wrong, but if you're loving God, you will be following & reflecting His ways in all you do.