

I FEEL FREE

Walking by the Spirit

What, Why, and How

GALATIANS 5:13-26

Pastor J.D. Hatfield

13- *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

14- *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

15- *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

16- *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

17- *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.*

18- *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

19- *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,*

20- *idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,*

21- *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.*

22- *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

23- *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

24- *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

25- *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

26- *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

All scripture verses are from the English Standard version (ESV) unless otherwise noted

In this passage Paul describes three ways of living, and explains to us what they look like, and what the wrong ways are and the right way is, as far as living the Christian life. He speaks of *legalism, license, and liberty*, which he calls the way of walking by the Spirit. He is leading us to be truly, biblically free.

Before we directly address what walking by the Spirit is, why we should do it, and how it is done, which we will do in detail, I want to discuss some thoughts about walking by the Spirit in relation to legalism and license, and give some examples as to what being led by the Spirit isn't.

If you are wanting to always find out "what you have to do" in order to get God off your back and let you live the way you want to, or perhaps to find some way to get ahead of others in your spiritual life, you are adding legalism to your life, and the more legalism you add, the more you are strangling the work of the Holy Spirit. By that I mean trying to find some formula or extra sacrifice or something you can do beyond the regular means of grace and discipleship such as bible study, prayer, fellowship with the saints, baptism and Communion, etc. A person could keep every type of law or formula or list and still be as wicked as they ever were. We are not under the law, the new life in the Spirit is about obeying God from the heart, it is not about scaring us into obedience, and it is also not about allowing us to slip into carelessness.

Now if God has clearly prescribed (do this) or proscribed (don't do this) something, then that is not legalism, that is a mandate from God for NT times. Being led by the Spirit is no license to try and skirt around an obvious biblical injunction or to avoid applying clear biblical instruction. Being led by

the Spirit is to be walking in obedience to the Word. The Spirit leads you to walk according to the Word, not against the Word.

Holiness starts in the heart not the hands. Holiness isn't how many times you read your bible, or pray, or fast, or go to church, or how much you give, or things like that. To create a list in your mind about these things is to add legalism. Now of course this is no excuse to be lazy, license is the other ditch to the side of the right kind of walk. This is the right way down the road, not legalism, not license, but liberty.

People looking for a loophole often find themselves in Satan's noose.

People looking for a formula often find themselves on a performance treadmill.

It isn't about what you must do, or what you don't have to do, it is about whom we are to do it with. We do things because we love God and we know He loves us. We aim to please God, not to get something from Him, but because we have already received something, His love. We try to imitate Him because it is the right thing to do, because it glorifies God, because we love Him, and because we want to, or at least we want to want to...but even when we fail, we look to Him with faith and realize the reason we can or want to do any of this anyway is because He has already done it for us, and it is His righteousness, His glory, His love, His "want to", and His perfect life that counts for us.

We are not called to live to win God's approval, but rather, God's approval through Christ is already ours and that should be what stirs us to live. So our motivations begin to change. Do you find yourself trusting in the finished work of the cross? Is the center of your motivation for living that God loves you and longs for what is best in your life? The best gifts God can

give us are those things that shake us to the core so that we will find our greatest treasure in Him alone and not in the passing things of this world.

Hopefully you can see this, legalism on one side and license (or looseness) on the other. One strangles the other slips.

The right road is liberty, walking by the Spirit. Again, the Spirit leads you to walk according to the Word, not against the Word. The Spirit also doesn't lead you to be bound by someone else's idea of what holiness is by conforming to some code or set of restrictions or ritual in order to prove you're spiritual. As we examine this passage carefully, we are going to discover what the Spirit leads us to do, what walking by the Spirit really is.

The Holy Spirit is leading us to trust and treasure Jesus Christ. Now everyone may say, "amen!" to that, but this text is specific, and it is especially apparent as to what trusting and treasuring Christ means as far as walking by the Spirit when we match it up with the rest of Galatians which we will do today. How we are to trust, what we are to trust, and how that treasure is developed is very clear, biblically.

If a man wills himself to never take a drink but his heart is still being satisfied by something other than Christ he has gained nothing. His treasure is still in his ability to control the situation. He might not be doing a bad thing externally which is good, of course, but he still is thinking about it and wanting to do it on the inside. It is like Jesus mentioned about looking with lust being adultery in your heart. Conversely, if a man excuses occasional drunkenness in the name of not being a legalist, he has slipped off the path.

As an illustration of law, license, and liberty, let us consider the story of three different 3 dogs (adapted from S. Lewis Johnson).

One dog has law but no liberty; he is on a chain, he struggles, and he grows angry, growls, bites, he knows he isn't free, and he is not happy.

Another dog has liberty but no law; he is loose, he is out of control, he doesn't serve any other master but himself, and he thinks he is free, but he is always in danger and he keeps getting wounded and eventually he gets run over.

One has liberty and law, he is on a leash, he is free but loves to obey his master, he gets plenty of opportunity to roam around, he is happy, healthy, and lives in freedom, and security.

Walking by the Spirit is about freedom, but not about a free for all. Sin doesn't run have to run wild where there isn't the law, because the Spirit is now restraining us from sin and giving us desires to be holy, working it in our lives. We can have holiness in our lives without legalism. The holiness comes as we walk by the energy of the Holy Spirit. Law, License, Liberty.

Our freedom is not to indulge the flesh, or to injure others, or to ignore the law. The true liberty of grace is that it never violates our selves (vs.13). It never violates God (vs.14). It never violates others (vs.15). Those are the three things our liberty will not do if we continue to walk by the Spirit. Paul reiterates this law of love again in vs.25-26. If we are being led by the Spirit we would not be violating a clear biblical injunction or instruction.

You say well, how do I keep from doing those bad things? Well, it is not walking *in* the Spirit as if you're inside some machine, but it's walking *by* His power, by His energy.

The biggest problem I see is that we are looking for some way to "have something" like a big gun to chase away the desire instead of being led way before the thing ever came up. Repentance is not for relaxation, although

this is what many see it as, they do something and then they can relax, but no, the battle goes on. Far too often people only want to find out “how” so that they can keep that info and use it when they think they need it, like when the “problem” arises, but they should have been walking all along. Walking by the Spirit is not pressing a button, it is learning. Yes, even new believers do have the power to do it, but we should be progressing in it. This is the topic for all of Paul's discussion then from verse 16-25. We basically have a complete presentation of the concept of walking by the Spirit.

This is present tense, keep walking by the Spirit; it is a daily thing, not an event. We will fulfill the law, not by circumscribing ourselves to an outside code, but by walking by the Spirit. Of course, this isn't just some idea of surrender and being yielded where we don't do anything or that we do whatever comes into our minds and think this is automatically the Spirit leading us.

In verses 16-17 we see war but also victory, and the desires of flesh and Spirit are spelled out in vs.19-23, the desires are worked out.

Now how does such a war exist at all if, as it says in vs.24, the flesh is already crucified? Paul obviously doesn't contradict himself. Somehow the flesh is crucified and yet there is also a battle going on. The truth is that Christians have internal struggles.

From this passage we see that you can have the Spirit but not be walking by the Spirit. A Christian is not someone who has no evil desires, a Christian is one who is at war with those evil desires, and that is why we must walk by the Spirit if we are to have victory over them. Regarding sin, a Christian is called to contention, not contentment.

Looking at verse vs.24, we must understand that the final outcome is secure; the decisive battle in the war has been fought and won; now it is simply skirmishes, we will always have a fight on our hands, we will never cover all the ground, but we can have victories, and claim all the ground we do cover. The key, as this passage teaches us, is to walk by the Spirit.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "WALK BY THE SPIRIT"?

Vs.18 – led by the Spirit is walking by the Spirit, it is like train cars behind the locomotive, or if not we get off the rails and wreck.

Vs.22-23 – this is what happens when you are led by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, this is how you know, and to walk by the Spirit is to bear this fruit (The tree produces the fruit).

The emphasis in these verses is on God's activity, the Holy Spirit is doing the driving (verse 18), and producing the fruit (verses 22-23). Yet it is acted out through faith within our lives. *To "walk by the Spirit" is to be led by the Spirit and the Spirit produces fruitfulness.*

Obviously the Spirit is doing the work, but you are following along in faith. This does involve your own will and you can deviate from the path, and disconnect. The Holy Spirit drives, but you have to get in the car and/or stay in the car.

Romans 13:9-14 is a parallel of sorts to Galatians 5:13-26.

The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a

neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

John 15 gives us the characteristics of authentic branches, the ones that bear fruit, who are abiding in the Vine. This is akin to walking by and being led by the Spirit. *"If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned"* (John 15:6). What does abiding in Christ look like? We can identify 7 things about believers here in this text.

1. They bear the fruit of Christ's character (vs.4-5).
2. They are pruned by God (vs.2b).
3. They give God glory by living through God's Word and prayer (vs.7-8).
4. They love and obey God's commandments (vs.10).
5. They love other Christians (vs.12-13).
6. They will be persecuted (vs.18-20).
7. They testify openly of Christ and His work (vs. 26-27).

So this is indicative of what walking by the Spirit looks like. So, now what are the incentives to walk by the Spirit if we are already saved?

WHY SHOULD WE WALK BY THE SPIRIT?

Vs.16 – incentive, you will not gratify the flesh if you are walking by the Spirit. This is a promise of VICTORY. You can win over sin.

Vs.18 – incentive, you are not under the law if you are walking by the Spirit. This is a promise of FREEDOM. No condemnation from God.

This verse doesn't mean we do not have to fulfill the law, vs.13-14 tells us we do (we have to serve one another in love because the whole law is fulfilled when we love our neighbor as ourselves).

Romans 8:3-4 gives this truth in summation.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

When you are walking by the Spirit, which is being led by the Spirit which produces the fruit of the Spirit, you are not under the condemnation of the law because you are fulfilling it.

The fruit is the fulfillment of the law (vs.22-23) as it also teaches in verse 14 (love is the fulfillment of the law and the fruit of the Spirit is love). You are not under the law because you are not satisfying the desires of the flesh. You are not violating spiritual self (vs.13), you are not violating God (vs.14), and you are not violating others (vs.15).

HOW DO WE WALK BY THE SPIRIT?

Follow this carefully, and you will see something that can really help you in your walk with God by the power of the Spirit.

Galatians 2:20 – faith is trust, Paul trusts that Christ did what was necessary and so he can live free, not to be his own fool, but to follow Christ in faith without fear (TRUST)

Galatians 3:5 – Does the Spirit do all He does regarding your life by doing works of the law or by hearing with faith, in other words, does your working it up matter, does the Holy Spirit act upon your adherence to the law or does He move upon your hearing with faith? (TREASURE)

- Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17), this renews your mind, and transforms your way (Romans 12:2)
- Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16), this has an individual and corporate application just as Galatians 3:5 does

Galatians 3:23 – faith is what takes you out from under the law

Galatians 5:4-6 – those that have fallen into law again do not realize what grace is, vs.4 connects to vs.5, (also vs.5 to vs.6) by the word “for”, and so grace is explained in vs.5-6, which is that we are waiting by faith, we

are trusting that His righteousness is enough and not trying to add our own as if we can be first in the line for grace, and this will work itself out in love.

Again, we see trust, in the work of Christ, and the hope of living by faith and the promise of His coming back, living as a righteous person now with the fruit of the Spirit being evident, not by the law but by love, because we are learning to treasure Christ, and we are eagerly waiting for that consummation, of our being glorified and perfectly fulfilling righteousness. Living for today by having an eye for tomorrow; look forward and you'll be fruitful.

The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of faith. Being filled with the Spirit we will be full of the fruit of the Spirit and our walk will be increasingly fruitful.

Stop thinking that you are earning favor with God or stopping the furor of God, both of those ways deny the work of Christ. Yes God rewards those who diligently seek Him, but they do that in faith and not for the flesh, and to try and earn is not the same as seeking it is only seeking to justify oneself. That way is fear, not faith, and perfect love drives out fear, and perfect love is driven by faith. You rest in His mercy and not try and merit. You follow Him with gladness not guilt, greed, or grief. It is a building process, like a child learns to crawl, and then stand up, and then walks and falls down a lot, and then more steady, slowly, and soon they are running all over the place.

We must learn to walk in the liberty of the Spirit. Then we can truly, biblically say, "I feel free".

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