

KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT
PART 1

TEXT: GALATIANS 5:25-6:10

February 19, 2012

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

Thus far in chapter 5 we have seen how:

- I. PAUL DEFINES THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. 5:13-15
- II. PAUL DESCRIBES THE CONFLICT OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. 5:16-18
- III. PAUL CONTRASTS THE FRUIT OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. 5:19-23

In the final exhortation section of this letter (Note: the exhortation section began in 4:12) we will see how:

- IV. PAUL ELABORATES THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. 5:25-6:10

Having warned the Galatians of the threat of license in 5:13-24 and calling on them to walk by/be led by the Spirit as the antidote to license, Paul now develops how a Spirit-led walk works out practically in one's daily relationships. Paul elaborates on v. 14 (i.e., what it looks like to serve one another through love and fulfill the law rather than dismiss it). So, again in this final section Paul shows that a Spirit-led life does not lead to license but rather love (i.e., law-keeping).

Moreover, we learn from 5:25-6:10 that being led by the Holy Spirit doesn't imply passivity. To be sure, living a life that is pleasing to God is a result of the Holy Spirit's gracious work rather than the result of self-effort. Nevertheless, those who now live by the Spirit must also keep in step with the Spirit, which involves serving one another through love. Lastly, Paul will show that keeping in step with the Spirit is not self-focused but rather other-focused. Keeping in step with the Spirit is not marked by self-centered individualism (a shared characteristic of all the works of the flesh) but rather a life of love where believers care for one another's spiritual and material needs in community.

In v. 25, Paul issues a general exhortation to believers to keep in step with the Spirit. Then, in 5:26-6:10, he gives two practical expressions of what it means to keep in step with the Spirit. Specifically, Paul applies gentleness and goodness (fruit of the Spirit, vv. 22-23) and shows how they work out practically in the life of the church. These two expressions elaborate on what it looks like in daily life to love one's neighbor (i.e., fulfill the law, 5:14). Again, both gentleness and goodness remind us

that such practical expressions of love for one's neighbor is only possible as one walks by the Spirit.

First, Paul exhorts believers to keep in step with the Spirit in order to restore sinning believers (5:26-6:5). The Holy Spirit leads us to help believers with their spiritual needs (5:26-6:5). Second, Paul exhorts believers to keep in step with the Spirit in order to do good for needy believers (6:6-10). The Holy Spirit leads us to help believers with their material needs (6:6-10). 5:25-6:10 then reveals what it means to keep in step with the Spirit and fulfill the responsibilities of Christian freedom (i.e., love of neighbor).

To live in the church of Jesus Christ is to practice and experience gentleness and goodness toward one another (cf. ἀλλήλων, 5:26; 6:2). We keep in step with the Spirit to gently restore those who have fallen and to do good to those in need. Again, it is helpful to keep in mind that gentleness and goodness are both qualities of God. Christ restores sinners with gentleness (Matt. 11:29) and is good toward them (abundantly generous; cf. Eph. 1:3).

Where there is gentleness and goodness (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit manifest in meeting believers spiritual and material needs), there we see the power and life of the Spirit (a church keeping in step with the Spirit and living in freedom). This is a good time to point out that the badge of Christian freedom is not drinking alcohol and smoking cigars! Rather, Paul shows us that Christian freedom expresses itself in meeting the spiritual and material needs of fellow believers.

LESSON:

Before examining the two practical expressions of what it looks like to keep in step with the Spirit (i.e., serve one another through love, 5:26-6:10), we will first look at Paul's general exhortation in v. 25

Paul writes, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." In v. 25, Paul reveals a very important insight into how the Christian life is to be lived. First, Paul reminds believers of the source of their new life (v. 25a) and then he exhorts believers to keep in step with their new life (v. 25b). First, he states a fact: Those who belong to Jesus (v. 24) live by the Spirit (v. 25a). Then, in light of this fact, Paul issues a command: keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25b).

I. PAUL REMINDS BELIEVERS OF THE SOURCE OF THEIR NEW LIFE. V. 25A

Paul states a fact, "*Since we live by the Spirit*, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (emphasis mine).

The word, "if" (Εἰ) doesn't imply doubt (cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 317). Rather, the idea expressed here is "since" (contra Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 356; see Longenecker, *Galatians*, pp. 264-265). Paul is reminding the Galatians (and us) of the source of

their new life (i.e., Paul's statement assumes the reality of what is stated, cf. v. 18, Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 265).

All who "belong to Jesus" (v. 24) live by the Spirit. What then does it mean to live by the Spirit? First, the phrase "live by the Spirit" is simply a way of saying that the Holy Spirit is the source of the believer's life (cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 317). Paul is recalling his previous teaching in 3:1-5, 14 where he spoke of the believer's initial reception of the Spirit. At regeneration, the Holy Spirit brings a dead sinner to life. The Holy Spirit has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do (cf. Gal. 3:21; Rom. 8:2-4). In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul writes, "...For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Thus, in contrast to the law, which cannot bring life (3:21), the Holy Spirit is the source of the believer's life.

Second, "living by the Spirit" is not a result of human effort but rather comes through faith in Christ alone (2:16, 19; 3:1-5, 14). Through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit is at work uniting sinners to Jesus (3:2). The gospel is the "pipe" or "channel" (i.e., means) through which the Holy Spirit comes to bring life to sinners (see Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith*, p. 48). Such a life is a gift received by grace through faith rather than something that is earned by self-effort.

Third, "living by the Spirit" refers to the new life that believers possess as a result of trusting in Christ for salvation. What does this new life consist of?

A. REGENERATION

By the gracious, sovereign, effective work of the Holy Spirit, we have been brought from death to life in regeneration, which is the beginning of all saving grace in us (cf. John 3:3-8).

B. JUSTIFICATION

Second, through faith in Christ—the first evidence of regeneration—we receive the blessing of justification (3:14), the fundamental blessing of the gospel. Therefore, living by the Spirit consists in freedom from the curse/condemnation of the law (Gal. 2:16; 3:13). Through faith in Christ we have been justified/declared righteous (i.e., just as if we've never sinned and just as if we have always obeyed).

c. Adoption

Third, through faith in Christ the Holy Spirit grants us the gift of adoption/sonship (4:1-7), the highest privilege of the gospel. As J.I. Packer notes, "To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is a greater" (*Knowing God*, p. 188).

D. FREEDOM

Fourth, life in the Spirit consists of freedom. Through faith in Christ, we are justified and thus set free from the curse of the law (3:13). The old age of the condemnation of the law and its curse no longer rule and reign over the believer. Moreover, we have also been set free from the rule and reign of the flesh (5:24). All who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh (Old Adam) with its passions and desires (5:24). Calvin writes, “The death of the flesh is the life of the Spirit” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 169*). Since the old Adam has been crucified (v. 24), the flesh no longer enslaves believers. Believers now possess a glorious freedom that empowers them to genuinely obey rather than dismiss God’s law for the first time in their lives (5:13-14).

e. Sanctification

The fruit of the Spirit (i.e., obedience to God’s law rather than legalism or license) inevitably and necessarily flows from justification. A Spirit-wrought life results in a new quality of life (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit; vv. 22-23; fulfilling rather than dismissing the law; albeit not in perfection, 5:17). Calvin writes, “As the soul does not remain idle in the body, but gives motion and vigour to every member and part, so the Spirit of God cannot dwell in us without manifesting Himself by the outward effects” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 169*).

It is vital to note how Paul in Galatians 3:14 reveals that all who trust in Christ not only receive the blessing of justification but also the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:14). Timothy George writes, “...Those persons upon whom God bestows the Spirit are justified; the persons whom God reckons righteous have the Spirit poured out upon them” (*Galatians, p. 243*). Simply put, those whom God justifies, He also sanctifies (transforms) through the gift of the Spirit.

Thus, we see that justification is necessary for us to live to God. In 2:19, Paul writes, “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.” As long as one remains “under law” (i.e., “Do this and live”) he cannot “live to God.” The reason no one can live to God while under law (cf. 5:18) is because to be under law is to be enslaved under the law’s curse (3:13), to be enslaved to the flesh and sin (3:22) and in need of redemption (4:4-5). Thus, all who are “under law” are unable to fulfill what the law demands. This is why justification is necessary to live a life pleasing to God. You must first be set free from the condemnation of the law. Justification meets our primary spiritual need. J.I. Packer reminds us,

We all stand by nature under God’s judgment; His law condemns us; guilt gnaws at us, making us restless, miserable, and in our lucid moments afraid; we have no peace in ourselves, because we have not peace with our Maker. So we need the forgiveness of our sins, and assurance of a restored relationship with God, more than we need anything else in the world; and this the gospel offers us before it offers us anything else” (*Knowing God, p. 186*).

Since then believers experience a new quality of life (5:22-23) by virtue of having received the gift of the Spirit (3:1-5, 14), they now have the responsibility to keep in step with the Spirit. This leads us to Paul's command in v. 25b.

II. PAUL EXHORTS BELIEVERS TO KEEP IN STEP WITH THEIR NEW LIFE (v. 25B).

Following his customary indicative/imperative scheme, Paul exhorts, "Since we live by the Spirit, *let us also keep in step with the Spirit*" (emphasis mine). Paul is simply saying to us: Be who you are!

Paul's command raises two questions: What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit? Second, how do you do it? First, what does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit?

The verb Paul uses here in v. 25 (στοιχῶμεν) differs from the verb he uses in 5:16 (περιπατεῖτε). The verb translated as "keep in step with" literally means, "to stand in line...to stand in a row...be in line with... hence to keep in step with..." (see Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 317; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 265). This verb was a military term, which meant to stay in formation (cf. Ryken, *Galatians*, p. 239). When commanded by his superiors, a good soldier falls into line and maintains his formation by keeping in step with the other soldiers. Similarly speaking, in regeneration the Holy Spirit brings the believer to life and immediately begins working in us to keep us in line with the requirements of the law. The Holy Spirit changes our disposition from legalism (diminishing the law) and license (dismissing the law) to love (fulfilling the law).

The Spirit of God begins to gently lead, convict, encourage and empower obedience. He begins to turn us away from a self-centered focus and enable us to begin serving one another through love (i.e., gently restore those who have fallen [5:26-6:5] and do good to those in need [6:6-10]).

The Galatians, however, were failing to keep in step with the Holy Spirit. For example, in 5:15 and 26, Paul reveals how the Galatians had clearly fallen out of step with the Spirit. Instead of serving one another through love, they were biting and devouring one another (v. 15). They had fallen prey to prideful ambition and thus were provoking and envying one another (v. 26). In 1:6, Paul says the Galatians were not only falling out of formation but they were in the process of deserting their post (nearly guilty of treason!).

In v. 25, Paul is simply repeating his exhortation from 3:3 (cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, 317). He is once again calling on the Galatians (and us) to live the Christian life the same way they began (by hearing the gospel with faith). This leads us to ask: How do you keep in step with the Spirit?

Paul has shown us right here in chapter 5. If you want to keep in step with the Spirit you must continue hearing the gospel with faith as well as heeding the commands

and warnings of the law. One's initial reception of the Spirit comes by way of hearing the gospel with faith (3:2). And, life directed/controlled/led by the Spirit also comes by way of hearing this same gospel over and over again (cf. Gal. 3:3; 5:18b, 23b-24).

But, when a believer fails to be motivated by the gospel and gives into the desires of the flesh, we learned from 5:21 how the law issues a warning that is intended to call us to repentance, not just initially but throughout our entire lives. So, when the allurements of the gospel motivate us little, God warns us with the conviction of His law. Question 115 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks: "If in this life no one can keep the ten commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly?" Here's the answer:

A. First, that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ. Second, that we may be zealous for good deeds and constantly pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that He may more and more renew us after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection.

So we see that keeping in step with the Spirit involves both the allurements of the gospel to empower us as well as the direction of the law to guide us and the conviction of the law to warn us in order to lead us continually back to faith in Christ.

REFLECTION:

In 5:25, Paul reveals a very important insight into how the Christian life is to be lived. Paul first states a fact: Those who belong to Jesus live by the Spirit. Second, based on this fact he issues a command: keep in step with the Spirit. So, he is saying to us: Be who you are!

Do you know who you are? *You cannot live the Christian life if you don't first know who you are!* Therefore, know this: If you belong to Christ (v. 24), the Spirit of Christ (cf. 4:6) lives in you. You have been brought from death to life (regeneration). You have been justified (i.e., declared just as if you've never sinned and just as if you've always obeyed). You have been adopted. You are no longer a slave but a son! You have been freed from the dominating desires of your flesh and now for the first time in your life you can obey. And, even though your obedience is imperfect God receives it as if it were perfect and complete in every respect because of Christ alone.

You have a new disposition. The Holy Spirit changes your disposition from legalism (diminishing the law) and license (dismissing the law) to love (fulfilling the law). Consequently, the preaching of the law begins to have a different effect in you. Instead of rebelling against what is commanded (Rom. 7:8) you now delight in what is commanded (Rom. 7:21-22). Instead of condemning you (3:10) the law now

simply serves as a guide—*rule of life*—to teach you the good works God has saved you to walk in (Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:26-6:10). Instead of written externally on tablets of stone, the Holy Spirit writes the law internally on your heart (cf. Ezek. Jer. 31:33; 36:26-27; Gal. 5:22-23). Therefore, you obey not *for life* but rather *from life* (i.e., the life which the Holy Spirit imparts to you by grace through faith in Christ alone). The Spirit of Christ Himself (Gal. 4:6)—rather than rules and regulations—is the principle energizing power of your life.

Since all of this is true, Paul calls you to keep in step with the Spirit (i.e., let him govern your actions in accordance with His law). As we will come to see in 5:26-6:10, such a Spirit-led walk manifests itself in helping one another face the difficulties of life both spiritually and materially (i.e., serving one another through love).

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