

Walking by the Spirit

August 25th, 2013

Galatians 5:16-25

"¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, 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. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

We saw last week the nature and urgency of being led by the Spirit, and I had intended to include in that message the practice of being led by the Spirit. Now before we dig into the practical side of how we practice a life being led by the Spirit, let's refresh our minds as to what we saw last week from Romans 8:12-14,

"¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For 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. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

The Nature and Urgency of the Spirit's Leading

We saw, first, that what it means to be led by the Spirit (the nature of it) is that we are led by the Spirit into warfare with our sin and flesh. It is far too easy, and sadly, far too common, for Christians to use the language of being led by the Spirit as a spiritual-sounding way to justify their own personal desires for comfort and ease. The connection between verses 13-14 ("For...") shows that being led by the Spirit, and thus being a child of God, means being led by the Spirit into warfare with the impulse to live in comfort and ease at the expense of Christlike, sacrificial love.

Secondly, we saw from verse 13 that being led by the Spirit into warfare with your flesh (the "all-about-me" complex that every human is born into this world with) is a life and death issue. Heaven and hell are at stake in whether you are being led by the Spirit into warfare with sin. And we saw that this is so, not because sin-killing is the way we earn our way to heaven, but because it is the result of and the necessary evidence that we have been brought into union with Jesus by faith alone. If you are not at odds with sin, you are not at home with Jesus, *not* because being at odds with sin makes you at home with Jesus, but because being at home with Jesus makes you at odds with sin.

Union with Jesus necessarily and inevitably disunites you from His rivals. What makes this so is the presence of the Holy Spirit in you (8:4). The power for a sin-killing life comes through the sin-bearing death of Christ, because in His death He didn't just buy you *pardon* from sin's guilt, but *power* to free you from sin's enslaving tyranny.

The Practice of Being Led by the Spirit

Now today we want to talk more about this life of killing sin *by the Spirit*. What is this? What does it look like? How do we actually do this? It's clearly life in the Spirit: Paul speaks of walking according to the Spirit, living according to the Spirit, setting the mind on the things of the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and my soul aches to know this experience. Does yours?

How does this happen?! My guess is that many/most of you have heard this kind of language used by preachers, or in a Bible study, and walked away puzzled as to what this actually means in everyday life. Practically, this afternoon, Thursday morning, how do I walk by the Spirit? That's what this message is about, and I believe the key place to go in Scripture to explore this is Galatians 5, the only other place where Paul uses both the language of being led by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit. *So let's read Galatians 5:16-25.*

There's no way to focus on every detail of this chapter today, so let's just see how this text enhances what we saw last week from Romans 8 on what it means to walk, or be led by, the Spirit. We'll look first at what we're aiming at, and then consider how we get there.

Walk by the Spirit = Bear the Fruit of the Spirit

First, when we talk about walking by the Spirit, what are we aiming at exactly? What kind of lifestyle are we pursuing? We have answered this question already, but it (in accord with Romans 8) was sort of a "negative" perspective: to walk or be led by the Spirit is to be led into warfare, hostility, hatred with our sinful nature.

That's true, but we can say more positively what we're after, as opposed to just saying that the leadership of the Spirit is against sin. Let's not only talk about what we're *against*, but what we're *for*. And what we learn positively about walking by the Spirit here is that it's bearing the fruit of the Spirit. To walk by the Spirit, or to be led by the Spirit (Paul uses those terms interchangeably here) is to bear the fruit of the Spirit:

Love -- not, as is so often in our culture, being attracted to someone and treating them well because how they make you feel about yourself, but to serve a person for their good, even at cost to yourself, not for what the person brings to you.

Joy -- delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who He is and what He has done in Christ, not a circumstance-based happiness because of blessings He's given you.

Peace -- Freedom from anxiety and worry and fear, because of a confidence and rest in the wisdom and omnipotence of God, rather than your own.

Patience -- The ability to face trouble and hardships without blowing up and lashing out.

Kindness -- The ability to serve others practically in a way that makes you vulnerable

Goodness -- Or integrity, being the same person in every situation, rather than being a phony or a hypocrite.

Faithfulness -- Courageous loyalty, to be utterly reliable and true to your word, not a fair-weather friend.

Gentleness -- Or humility, or self-forgetfulness. The disposition to put the needs and desires of others ahead of your own.

Self-control -- The ability to pursue the important over the urgent, rather than to be always impulsive and chaotic.

What a wonderful picture of Jesus, whose Spirit now comes and dwells in those who belong to Him by faith. This is the fruit (singular, like a pomegranate) of walking by the Spirit, the fruit which flows from abiding in Him, and He in us (John 15:4-5). This is what we're aiming at; this is how we know He's at work in us. "Against such things there is no law", meaning we are not under the punishment of condemnation of the law, because what the law requires, the Spirit is producing (cf. 5:14). That's why Paul is careful to speak of being led by the Spirit; this doesn't depend on you!

In light of what the Word of God says we can look like -- indeed, in light of what God says is already in us by His Spirit -- should we not all step back and ask if we are settling for far too little in the Christian life?

Three Steps Toward Walking by the Spirit

Now, if that's what we're aiming at, and it happens by His leadership and doing, what actually do we do? How does this happen in us? Here is the practical side I promised last week, in three steps.

Step #1: Recognize that walking by the Spirit involves a war

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."*

Receive this as both a comfort, and a call. Comfort, because it calms the anxious, grieving, pained heart that sees this ongoing battle with "the flesh" and wonders, "What's wrong with me?", with the knowledge that this is normal Christian living. The fact that you still, at times, see "the works of the flesh" (v.19-21) rearing their ugliness in you should not drive you to despair and cause you to question your standing with God. ⁵"For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness," meaning you haven't attained it yet!

Conflict in your soul is not all bad. Though we long for the day when our flesh will be no more, and only pure and loving desires will fill our hearts, yet there is something worse than the war within between flesh and Spirit -- namely, no war within, because the flesh controls the citadel and all the outposts. Praise God for the war within! Peace with sin is death (v21b). The Spirit has landed to do battle with the flesh. So take heart if your soul feels like a battlefield at times. The sign of whether you are indwelt by the Spirit is not that you have no bad desires, but that you are *at war* with them!

But it's a call, because Spirit-indwelt people make war! When you take verses 16-18, along with verse 24, the driving point is not only war, but triumph in the Spirit (v.17c)! The flesh is trying to drag you down and turn you towards sin, but that's not the real you. The real you *wants* holiness. The real you is a new creation. The real you is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The old self has been crucified with Christ, in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that you would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6). So count yourself dead, and kill your sin (by the Spirit)! Stop grumbling and whining

about how you can't change; wake up each day ready for war! We're often so passive, and our minds are so lazy! Get ready for war!

Step #2: The war is a war of desires

*"¹⁷For 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 war within you is a war of competing desires. This is crucial practically because it shows us that the way to fight sin, to walk by the Spirit, to live the Christian life, is not a "just say no" ethic. Walking by the Spirit is not only about crucifying the desires of the flesh; it is about crucifying the desires of the flesh with stronger desires, the desires of the Spirit. It is about killing the deeds of the body -- the pleasures of the sinful nature -- with the expulsive power of a new affection (do I eat the Klondike Bar, or refrain so I don't get sick?).

What does the Spirit desire? What does He yearn for and delight in? Jesus! "¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." "¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The Spirit is not a mystical force or energy; He is a person. And He is a person who is very excited about Jesus, and uses all His infinite energy and power to share that excitement with you and me. His ministry is a floodlight ministry, shining His spotlight on Jesus so that we see Him in His greatness, beauty and splendor and being changed into His image because the desires of the flesh have grown dim in the light of His glory and grace. This is the way the Spirit moves; not by "just say no", but by fighting pleasure with pleasure! And Jesus is pleasure, and a treasure, infinitely and eternally enthralling!

Step #3: Hearing with faith

But what we must get more practical, because "beholding Jesus" is too vague and abstract. What do I do this afternoon, Thursday morning, to walk by the Spirit and kill these desires of the flesh? How do I awaken the Spirit's desires within me? The answer of Galatians is, faith. The Spirit wields His sin-killing power in you as you trust Jesus as He is revealed in the Scriptures. I say this for several reasons:

1. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in 5:22, but love is the fruit of faith in 5:6, so that the way to walk by the Spirit so that the fruit of love is produced is to walk by faith.
2. Galatians 5:5 ("⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness") shows that as you trust Jesus and His promise to bring you to glory in righteousness, you are waiting through the Spirit.
3. I say "trust *in Jesus*" because of Galatians 2:20, "²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (by His Spirit, 4:6). And the life I now live in the flesh (the life that arises from the Spirit living in me) I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The life that is produced by Christ's Spirit living in me is a life of faith in Jesus, resting in all that He is and all that He has done and all that He will yet do for me, because He loved and gave Himself for me.
4. Maybe most clearly, Galatians 3:5, "⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—" Every act of sin-killing is a miracle, and the Spirit's miracle-working power is supplied as we hear with faith." Hear what? The Word, which is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

The way we tap into the power of God for the miracle of sin-killing (ie, walking by the Spirit) is by hearing a blood-bought promise of God for

our situation (2 Corinthians 1:20), and by believing it, that is, by receiving it and embracing it as more true and more precious than the pleasure of the temptation in front of us. And when you hear with faith, that hearing with faith is the Spirit's powerful movement in your life. That is what it means to walk by the Spirit.

The connection between the Holy Spirit and you is the word of God and faith. They are like socket and plug. When the plug of your faith goes in the socket of God's Word, the Spirit is flowing. And when He flows, He kills sin, so that the fruit of the Spirit is borne in your life.

My Frontline Warfare with the Flesh

For me this week, this has looked like needing to put to death self-righteousness towards some people in my life, with resulting anger, irritation and even hatred. This is not the fruit of the Spirit. As my mind and heart dwell on these things, I am "making provision for the flesh" (5:13). Though I've been set free from the flesh, I am coddling the old me and allowing him to keep me from doing what I want. I am free, but I am living like a prisoner. What do I do? How do I walk by the Spirit, so that I don't gratify the desires of my flesh? I pick up the sword of the Spirit, and I'm on the lookout for who God is, what He has done in Christ, and who I am as a result. And this is what I saw:

"⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

"⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.""

"³¹Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

"⁷Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,"

I hear God's Word, and I believe it. I see God for who He is, and Christ for what He's done, and myself for who I am, and I receive Him as true and beautiful, and I see how I am in no position to be self-righteous towards anyone, because how miserable is my condition apart from the mercy and grace of Christ! And I see anger and hatred and self-righteous swallowed up by patience and humility and kindness. I am walking by the Spirit! The deeds of the body have been put to death, by the Spirit. Until tomorrow, when the war begins anew.

We become Christians by faith in Jesus, we stay Christians by faith in Jesus, and we grow as Christians by faith in Jesus. And this life of faith is what it means to walk by the Spirit!