

Live by the Spirit Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ *What I am saying is this: Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out what the sinful flesh desires.* ¹⁷ *For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do.* ¹⁸ *But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the control of the law.* ¹⁹ *Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, complete lack of restraint,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies,* ²¹ *envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things similar to these. I warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to 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, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* ²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires.* ²⁵ *If we live by the spirit, let us also walk in step with it.*

Are rules meant to be broke? What would happen if there were no rules? What if we didn't set bedtimes for our children? What if there were no limits to the speed we drive? I'm not sure I'd be comfortable living in a world without rules? Some people were not too comfortable with what Paul was telling Christians in the Roman province of Galatia about the freedom they now had in Christ. Paul taught that Jesus has completely freed them from God's law. No longer did they need to obey a single command to get right with God. They simply need to trust in Christ Jesus as their only Savior. He'll take them all the way to eternal life. But some people were concerned that if you take God's law away from people, they'll start living godless lives. Did the gospel about Jesus promote sin in people's lives? The Apostle Paul shows us why that could not be farther from the truth. In the Scripture before us Paul urges his Christian brothers and sisters in Galatia not to use their relationship with Christ to indulge the sinful nature. Instead, he urges them to keep in step with the Spirit. Paul also encourages all of us to live by the Spirit.

Paul first of all warns the Galatian Christians not to indulge the sinful nature. Paul lists a number of sins that every person can find lingering deep within. Some of them are obvious. Paul mentions "*sexual immorality, impurity,*" and a "*complete lack of restraint.*" Some of those sins are committed directly against our holy God. He mentions *idolatry* and *sorcery*. More than half of the sins Paul mentions are committed against one's fellowman. They are *hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies, envy,* and *murders*. Paul even mentions some that a person violates against himself: *drunkenness* and *orgies* or uncontrollably wild living. All of these sins lie deep within every person's sinful flesh.

Paul didn't want anyone to indulge the sinful nature in any of these ways. Paul makes a special emphasis on sins against one's neighbor. That would violate one side of God's law. Paul had mentioned earlier in this chapter, "*The whole law is summed up in this one*

statement: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Paul hints that the Galatians may have had difficulty loving their neighbor. Instead of loving one another, Paul mentions how they kept *"biting and devouring one another."* Paul warned them to stop gratifying the desires of their sinful nature. Not only did this transgress God's command to love one another. It was working against the new man or new spirit that the Holy Spirit created in their lives. Paul writes: *For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do.* By working against God's Spirit in them, their sinful *flesh* could only cause them to lose eternal life. Paul told them, *"I warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."* Paul proclaims the judgment over those who live this way. They will not have a part of the inheritance that is promised to believers in Christ. These sinners, these unbelievers are condemned. But what could the Galatians do about their sinful flesh? They were born with it. Even after coming to faith in Christ, they still had it. They would take it to the grave with them.

Is that the lot of all sinners? Those who believe in Christ Jesus have been led to trust in his death for them. They know that all the sins of their flesh were nailed with him to that cross. And because Christ rose again they know they are forgiven for every sin. They are now at peace with God. How can that be? The Holy Spirit has brought us to that belief. They trust solely in Christ as their Savior. They see in Christ's death their death as well. And his glorious return to life assures them that all their fleshly desires are forgiven. They are now at peace with God. No longer are they objects of his wrath. They are loved by God and are heirs of eternal life. The Holy Spirit has convinced them of that.

Paul reminds the Galatians, *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires."* We normally think of Christ's crucifixion as a lonely death. He had to suffer God's punishment all alone on that cross. Even his heavenly Father had forsaken him. But nailed with him to that cross was every person's sinful flesh. Paul mentioned that in his letter to the Romans, *"Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* (6:3). Jesus willingly took on the curse of God's law. He became God's curse on Calvary's cross for all sinful flesh. He did this after fulfilling every righteous requirement that God's law demands. Every thought, word, and deed that came out of him was perfect. And since the Holy Spirit has planted faith in our hearts, we get credit for that perfection. Completely free from God's law by Christ, Paul now urges us not to indulge sinful flesh any longer.

Sadly, sinful flesh is still a powerful influence in our life. Consider that it's been with you longer than faith has been in your heart. Already in our mother's womb we appeared sinful in God's sight. We were born objects of his eternal wrath. Thankfully God supplied us with a precious gift of his Spirit. The Holy Spirit works saving faith in our hearts. The Spirit works faith in us through the gospel in God's Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. Through these means the Holy Spirit washes us clean of sin and clothes

us with Christ's holiness. And now we have a new spirit that loves God and wants to follow his ways. But covered in sinful flesh, there's still a battle within, until the day we die. The moment the Spirit appeared in our life, the flesh went to battle. Sinful flesh allows no one to enter his domain without a struggle. But the Spirit doesn't either. He came to our heart to take possession of it and to destroy the work of the devil. The Spirit comes directly into the heart and proceeds to break the will of the flesh. Our sinful flesh was crucified when the Holy Spirit brought us faith. The flesh's power and dominion over us were ended. To crucify means to put to death. But sinful flesh doesn't want to stay dead. Daily it revives and reasserts itself. How necessary it is that we remember Christ's crucifixion daily. We belong to Christ Jesus. We are his through faith. We war against the flesh. We do this, letting our new man or new spirit join the fight. That spirit moves us to live before God in righteousness and purity. Most may not see the gospel producing genuinely fine fruits. But for those who have the Spirit, it does not remain hidden. It shows itself in a fruitful life.

Paul urges that life of fruitfulness instead of indulging the sinful flesh. *Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out what the sinful flesh desires.* When you walk by or live by the Spirit you keep the sinful flesh exactly where it belongs: nailed to the cross, buried in Christ's tomb, and submerged in the waters of baptism. When you live by the Spirit you enjoy special freedom. Paul mentions it. *If you are led by the spirit, you are not under the control of the law.* When you live by the Spirit there are no legal requirements that need to be made. There is no curse on you either. There's only fruit. Paul mentions a harvest full: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* When you live by the Spirit you always have love from God. It's a love that nothing in all creation can separate you from. And God's love is then reflected in your love for others. When you live by the Spirit you have joy knowing that no matter how rough this life gets, you have heaven as your home with an eternal inheritance waiting for you. Walk by the Spirit and you'll have peace knowing God is no longer angry with you about sins that he's already punished Jesus for. God's Spirit will supply you with patience to endure any hardship or heartache. He's promised to work all those bad thing out for good. The Spirit produces kindness and goodness in you leaving no room for *hatred, discord, jealousy, etc.* that sinful flesh loves to produce. When you live by the Spirit you are so full of faith that you can't lose your grip on any of God's promises. You'll have gentleness and self-control so you're no longer controlled by your sinful flesh. All those fruits of the Spirit are yours by faith. They will help you live a fruitful life serving one another in love.

How do we live by the Spirit if we're constantly battling our sinful flesh. We must keep in step with the Spirit. We must hold on to the same tool he uses. It comes to us spoken, preached or read. It's poured on us with a little water. It's consumed by us in a holy supper. It's the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's the good news that our Savior has done everything necessary to win us eternal life. Keep God's gospel part of everyday life. Don't leave any room for sinful flesh. Instead live a fruitful life serving one another in love. That's what happens when you live by the Spirit.