

“Live by the Spirit”

May 4, 2025

Galatians 5:13-26

I. Introduction

Before we took a break to consider some events surrounding the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, we were working our way through the Book of Galatians. As you may remember, false teachers, called Judaizers, had come to the churches in Galatia claiming that Paul didn't really know what he was talking about. They taught that Christianity was more than having faith in Jesus Christ. God's favor needed to be gained by obeying the Mosaic Laws. The Book of Galatians was Paul's response to these false teachers and their false doctrines. **Galatians 2:16**, the key verse for all of Paul's arguments, says, **“Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”**

In these last 2 chapters of Galatians, Paul turned from argument to application. Fallen man is a slave to his sinful nature, an addict who cannot successfully control his sinful thoughts and actions even when he may want to. But Jesus said in **John 8:36**, **“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** This is the main point of Galatians—in **Galatians 5:1** Paul wrote, **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free”** and now here in **verse 13** he again wrote, **“You, my brothers, were called to be free.”**

The Christian is a free. He is free from the guilt of sin because he has experienced God's forgiveness. He is free from the penalty of sin because Christ died in his place on the cross. He, through the Holy Spirit, is free from the power of sin in his daily life. He is, also, free from the Law with its demands and threats. But with freedom comes responsibility, Paul wrote, **“But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.”** Christian liberty is not a license to sin, but an opportunity to serve. A Christian should desire to please God, not because he must please God like a slave, but because he is God's son and wants to please his Father. A Christian serves God, not because of pressure from outside such as the Law, but he serves God because he loves Him. In **John 14:15**, Jesus said, **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”**

Not only are Christians to serve God in love, but Paul wrote that they are to **“serve one another in love.”** Paul went on to write that **“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor**

as yourself.” Agape love takes the place of all the laws God ever gave. Turn to Romans 13:8-10. Love in one’s heart is God’s substitute for laws and threats. This love is from God--Romans 5:5 says, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” The loving Christian willingly gives up the freedom to serve himself, which is another name for the sinful flesh and pride, in order to become a slave to God. Romans 6:22 says, “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”

Paul concluded the introduction of this section by giving a picture of what happens when believers do not love and serve each other—they “keep on biting and devouring each other.” Without love, they are in danger of destroying one another. The Galatians were proof that law cannot force people to get along with each other. As we all know, you cannot legislate morality. No matter how many rules or standards a church may adopt, they are no guarantee of spirituality—inside the church or outside in the world. Unless the Holy Spirit is allowed to fill hearts with His love, selfishness and competition will rule. This was Paul’s challenge to the Galatians: Live by the Spirit

II. Paul’s Challenge: Live by the Spirit

In verse 16 Paul gave a command and its results: “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Every Christian has two natures—the new and the old; the Spirit and the old sinful nature, sometimes called the flesh. Every Christian knows that the Spirit and the old sinful nature are at war with one another. The unsaved person knows nothing about this battle because he doesn’t have the Holy Spirit; Romans 8:9 says, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” As a Christian, Paul had these two natures at war inside him. He described this turmoil in his heart and mind; turn to Romans 7:18-19, 21-23. Paul didn’t say there can’t be victory. But what he did say was that we cannot win the victory in our own strength and by our own will.

The solution for victory isn’t to set one’s will against the flesh, but as Paul wrote in Gal. 5:18 one needs to surrender his will to the Holy Spirit and be “led by the Spirit.” A believer can accomplish nothing

for the Lord in his own power; similarly, the Spirit can accomplish little through a believer without the believer's submission and commitment. This is why Eph. 5:18 says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”—i.e., *be continually filled with the Spirit*. Do you want a victorious life? Live by the Spirit! Paul then contrasted the acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

III. The Acts of the Flesh

Paul began by listing some of the ugly acts or deeds of the flesh—the old nature. It's easy for the flesh to manufacture sin, but impossible to produce the righteousness of God—Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” This list of the acts of the flesh can be divided into three major categories beginning with “sensual sins.”

A. Sensual sins Paul began with “sexual immorality.” This term comes from the Greek word *pornei*, a *porneia* which is the English word *pornography*. It refers to things like adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, and prostitution. The second term “impurity” means a filthy heart and mind that makes a person defiled. Finally, “debauchery” refers to uninhibited sexual actions without shame and without concern for what others think or how they may be affected.

B. Religious sins Then there are religious sins beginning with “idolatry.” We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture entirely. An idol is anything that replaces God. The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car, his job, or family than he does to serving God is in danger of idolatry.

The word “witchcraft” comes from the Greek word *farmakei*, a *pharmakeia*; the English word is *pharmacy*. This generally means “the use of drugs” especially of mood and mind-altering drugs as was done in occult worship and in witchcraft; again, worshipping something other than God.

C. Social or Relational Sins Finally, there are social or relational sins. These don't need defining: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies. By adding “and the like,” Paul was indicating that this list of “*the acts of the flesh*” is not a complete list.

When Paul wrote “that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God,” he wasn’t writing about an occasional sin but the continual, habitual practice of such sins. Paul made a similar statement to the church in Corinth—turn to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Verse 11 makes it clear that such things are no longer the practice of believers. Or as 1 John 3:9 says, “No one born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

IV. The Fruit of the Spirit

Contrasting the acts of the flesh, Paul gave a list of the fruit of the Spirit. Acts of the flesh are done by a person’s own efforts, whether he is saved or unsaved. But the fruit of the Spirit is produced by God’s own Spirit and is only in the lives of those who belong to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. When one is led by the Holy Spirit, it causes the believer to put away the habitual, ongoing, sinful acts of the flesh and instead causes him to bear the good fruit produced by the Holy Spirit.

There are several different kinds of “fruit” mentioned in the Bible, e.g., new Christians Rom. 1:13; eternal life; 6:22; every good deed Col 1:10; praise Heb. 13:15. The fruit of the Spirit has to do with Christian character. The fruit of the Spirit is an outward indicator of salvation. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, “By their fruit you will recognize them.” Back in the Galatians, Paul listed nine characteristics of the godly fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life. These are 9-parts or sections of the whole fruit—think of an orange. One characteristic isn’t produced or seen in isolation from the others.

Paul began with agape love—sacrificial love. Such love isn’t an option, in Ephesians 5:2 Paul commanded: “Live a life of love.” But the command cannot be fulfilled without the power of the Holy Spirit. The second characteristic joy is the inward peace and contentment that isn’t affected by outward circumstances—turn to Philippians 4:10-13. Love and joy together produce peace—calmness in the midst of storm—as Phil. 4:7 says, “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” This is why Jesus was able to say to those who trust in Him in John 14:1, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Patience has to do with endurance without quitting; it’s the calm willingness to accept situations that are irritating or painful. Kindness refers to tender concern for others. Goodness is love and kindness in

action. **Faithfulness** relates to being dependable; trustworthy. **Gentleness** is better translated as “**meekness**.” The meek Christian doesn’t throw his weight around or assert himself. He demonstrates the appropriate use of power and authority. Paul finished his list with **self-control** which is victory over sinful desires.

Paul wrote that “**against such things there is no law.**” The world doesn’t make laws against such behavior but usually prizes it. The believer who walks in the Spirit and demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit does not need a system of laws to produce the right attitudes and behavior—they come from within.

V. Conclusion

Paul finished by writing that if the fruit of the Spirit is to grow, the conditions must be right. **First**, the sinful nature must be crucified, i.e., the fruitful Christian will not yield to the sinful nature. The only way that this can happen is by the believer surrendering to Christ and allowing Him to have His way. The **second** condition is to “**let us keep in step with the Spirit.**” We aren’t to lag behind or run ahead of the Spirit. We need to walk “in step” with the Spirit. Keeping “**in step with the Spirit**” involves spending time in God’s Word, prayer, worship, praise, and fellowship with God’s people. It also means pulling out the weeds of sin so that the seed of the Word can take root and bear fruit.

It is possible for the old nature to counterfeit part of the fruit of the Spirit, but the flesh can never *produce* the complete fruit of the Spirit. One difference is that when the Spirit produces fruit, God gets the glory and the believer isn’t particularly conscious of his spirituality; but when the flesh is at work, the person is inwardly proud of himself and is pleased when others compliment him. The work of the Spirit is to make us more like Christ for His glory not for the praise of men.

Finally, Christians don’t bear fruit for their own consumption; they bear fruit that others might be fed and helped, and that Christ may be glorified. The flesh may manufacture “*results*” that bring praise to the individual, but the flesh cannot bear fruit that brings glory to God. It takes patience, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you, knowledge of God’s Word, walking in the Light, and a sincere desire to honor Christ to produce fruit of the Spirit. Solomon put it this way in **Prov. 3:5-6**, “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**”

Communion Devotion - May, 2025

Luke 22:14-20

The Christian church is not immune from legalism. If we aren't on guard, forms of legalism will creep in here just as it did in Galatia. As Paul has reminded us over and over in Galatians, as a church and as individuals, we need to examine our motives for the things we do. A good work can be spoiled by a bad motive. For example, why are we taking communion this morning? As we just read in Luke, Jesus said to **“do this in remembrance of Me.”** There is no saving or redeeming value in “taking communion.” It's a symbol—something we do to remember the sacrifice the Son of God did in our place.

This piece of matzos is a symbol of Jesus' body that was broken for you and me. The holes remind us of the nails and the thorns and the spear that pierced His side—all for us. The coloration or stripes remind us of the beatings Jesus received as the Lamb of God who died for us. The lack of leaven reminds us that as **1 John 3:5** says, **“In Him was found no sin.”** The individual pieces of matzos in the trays remind us that Jesus was broken for us—He allowed the world—the soldiers—to nail Him to the cross.

The juice—the grape juice—reminds us of the blood that flowed from the beatings he received; from the crown of thorns they placed on His head; from the spear that pierced His side. It reminds us of the blood that the Jews in Egypt put on their door posts so that the angel of death would pass over. Blood that saved them from imminent death. Today, it reminds us of the blood of the Lamb of God that was shed for us. Blood that had to be shed for the forgiveness of sin. Blood that saves us from an eternal death—an eternity in hell.

If you have accepted God's gift of eternal life because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for you, then whether or not you are a member of TBC, we invite you to join us in this time of remembrance of God's love and celebration of your eternal life. I would also challenge you to look at your life—your actions, your words, your thoughts. Is the fruit of the Spirit obvious in your life? Do the things you do bring praise and honor to God? Do they shout that Jesus is your Lord and Savior? Why do you do what you do—is it for your glory or for God's glory? As the elements are being passed, take time to thank God for the gift of eternal life and take time to inventory your life—is it what it should be?