

Galatians 5.16-25

Learning to Walk Again

Sermon #2 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on May 8, 2005.

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Main Idea: *Those who truly belong to Christ are empowered to change and walk in the Spirit.*

Introduction

Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, 26-27: “A teenage boy has allowed himself to be given over to rebellion against his parents. For four years he has continued either to angrily protest his innocence for obviously unacceptable conduct or to promised to "straighten up" this time.

So much pain, embarrassment and discouragement had been inflicted on these parents that the wife confided to her pastor that she did not know if she even loved her son any more. Her heart had grown hard against her own child.

One day another rebellious escapade had been revealed and the son again claimed innocence and also hastily promised to do better. The mother, however, felt unable to listen any more to the excuses, the rationalizations, and the lies. So she turned her back on her son as he gave his well-rehearsed speech and walked out of the room.

As the young man sat alone on the sofa, he began to leaf through a family photo album sitting on the coffee table. The pictures of better and happier days past filled him with increasing emotion. One picture struck him with a special sense of poignancy, and he called his mother back into the room to look at it. The photograph showed the son as a young child under the approving smile of his mother. The teen pointed to the photo and said, "Mom, when I see this picture, I understand why you don't know if you can love me anymore. Hope fills your eyes as you look down at your little boy. But I have dashed all your hopes, Mom. Please forgive me...."

With those words the mother's hardness was broken and she embraced her son with a renewed love. She was moved, not by his claims to innocence or even by a promise to change; she was moved by his statement of desperation and need.

Though I often disbelieve it, God's grace and mercy are not moved by my promises to do better, nor by my denials that I have done wrong; but by my admission that I cannot succeed, that I need help. I had a friend in Arkansas who often repeated this line: “Need is the key to the kingdom.” Another wise man said it this way: “All we need is need; but few have such as that.”

I tell you that story lest we forget that our heart attitude must be that of needing a work of grace, not straightening up so that we can receive grace. We are studying the fruit of the Holy Spirit, not the fruit of a healthy self-esteem, not the fruit of a wholly sanctified life, and certainly not the fruit of a harsh self-criticism and asceticism. It is not the fruit of our hands which we seek, but the fruit of God's Spirit. We want to find out from the Bible how GOD works in our lives—not how we work our lives so as to finally get God.

I find that when considering practical holiness, there are dangers to my soul. First, I may be driven to despair, saying to myself, “Woe is me; I have failed again; I have no hope.” But are not such thoughts merely pride in my own sinfulness? Or I might suppose that I have been pretty

good—but is that not pride in my innocence? Or I may be tempted to promise God that I will be better—pride in my performance.

Let us remember, above all, that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Let us **own** our inability to please God, and let us come to the Christ who fully pleases the Father. Let us abide in Christ, who is for us our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And with that heart and attitude, we can come to our text and see three foundational truths in bearing fruit in the Kingdom of God: 1) Entering into the Command, 2) Engaging in the Conflict and 3) Experiencing the Conquest.

1. Those who Belong to Christ Must Enter into the Command: “Walk In The Spirit” (Galatians 5.16a,18,25)

In three verses Paul uses four different Greek words to picture for us—the work of the Holy Spirit. The first is a command: **Galatians 5.16a**: “Walk in the Spirit.” It is a figure of speech; we have the same one in English as in Greek. What does it mean when we say that a young man is walking in his father’s footsteps? That the boy has a life like daddy’s.

My children have illustrated this for me. When Daniel was about four years old, we had one particularly large snow. My son wanted to play outside, but the snow was so deep that he literally could not take a step except where I had already mashed down the snow. He had to walk in my steps; he had to walk where I had already gone; he traveled only in the path which another had prepared. When he walked in the steps I had already taken, he was free to play and enjoy the snow!

Another time I took my kids to the park to play soccer; but to reach the field we had to cross a little muddy ditch. Going to the soccer field, Rebekah followed me carefully and avoided the deep mud by stepping on tufts of grass just as I did. However, when we finished playing soccer, and I told the kids we could play at the playground for a bit before going home, Rebekah was so excited she forgot to watch her step. She learned a new proverb, “Look before you leap.” She did not and splashed down in the middle of the mud.

The consequences of Rebekah’s little mud bath were small, but maybe some of us have been splashing in the mud of sin because we are unwilling to walk as the Holy Spirit would have us. Could that be true of us? Could it be that we are failing to enjoy life because we are refusing to play where the Spirit has already prepared the ground?

The next description of the Christian life is in **verse 18**: “led by the Spirit.” It is the same word for leading an animal: “Like a sheep led to the slaughter...” God is telling us that our lives should look as if the Holy Spirit has a rope around our necks, leading us where He wants us to go!

Third, we are to “live in the Spirit” (**verse 25a**). This phrase tells us that every thought, every action, every aspect of my life is to be the same as if the Holy Spirit were the essence of life animating my body! This text demands that I search out areas of my life in which I am not pleasing the Spirit of God!

Fourth, in **25b**, Paul says we are also to—(the NKJ translates it, “walk in the Spirit”)—but a better translation of the Greek is, “keep in step with the Spirit.” This is a different word from that used in verse 16.¹ The picture here is marching with soldiers. Just as each man must *keep in step* with the army, every step of a Christian’s life is to match that of the Spirit of God. We are to march with God’s Spirit!

¹ The Greek word in verse 25b is: στοιχώμεν. In verse 16 it is: περιπατεῖτε. In verse 18: ἄγεσθε. In 25a it is: ζώμεν.

All well and good for the different illustrations which Paul uses, but how do we do this? How are we to be led like sheep? How do we step where He has packed down the way? How do we march to the Spirit's drummer?

1.1. We "Walk in the Spirit" by Obeying the Word

When we want to know how the Spirit would have us live, surely we must begin with the Scriptures, which were written by the Spirit through holy men. To obey the command to walk in the Spirit we must obey the Bible.

So we cannot walk in the Spirit and enslave or abuse or detest people of other races. We cannot walk in the Spirit and murder children. We cannot walk in the Spirit and promote or practice gambling. We cannot walk in the Spirit and blaspheme God or curse men. We cannot walk in the Spirit and dishonor our parents or demean our spouse. To walk in the Spirit means, at the very minimum, that we obey the Bible.

But that is not enough, is it? The Bible does not define obedience by mere outward conformity, does it? The Word of God commends to us obedience from the heart, keeping and observing the law with the whole heart.

So what does this mean? It means this: when mom tells you to clean your room and your sigh and shrug and slam and stomp and swear in your heart that this is unfair—you have not really obeyed, have you? Even if you do clean your room out of fear of the Wrath of dad—you have **not** obeyed *from the heart*.

Can I love on you? Can we think about this more deeply?

Why do we sometimes huff and puff and complain and whine while complying externally with what is demanded? Why, when Helen asks me to ____, do I sometimes give my speech: "Fine! Fine! I will do it. Even though I have had a hard day; no, I don't mind."

Is this not an attempt to get extra credit for work I am doing? If we feel put upon when obeying, then we stir up greater degrees of self-righteousness. So we complain about obeying (whether to our God, our wife, or our mother) in the hopes of feeling better about ourselves.

Let me give you an illustration of the opposite. We see it every Sunday when we eat lunch at the Kaysers. Kathy does all this work for us, and so I go to her each Sunday after meal and say, "Kathy, that was wonderful; thank you so much for doing all that work for us." It is as if I am trying to load Kathy down with the burden of self-righteousness. But you know Kathy's response. She refuses the burden and says, "It is my joy." Kathy is promising not to hold it over our heads or God's—obedience is her joy, not her burden. *She has found great reward in the doing, not in demanding to be rewarded for the doing!*

How are we with obedience to God?

Here is a simple example to illustrate—how do you respond to the privilege of worship? From the time when our kids were born, we studiously avoided this sentence: "We *have* to go to church." Do you know what we said instead? "We **get** to go to church." Now obviously, the words themselves are not enough. But the words are a window into our hearts and a reminder of what God offers us in worship. Are you bitter because God has not rewarded you for your participation in worship, or are you delighting in the reward of worship?

We could apply this to marriage, to prayer, to every aspect of our lives. I have been a Christian for nearly 20 years, but I just feel that I am beginning to understand this truth: the commandments of God *are not burdensome because in the doing of them, they are their own reward!*

Do you know the joy which comes from receiving the reward of obedience rather than demanding a reward for your obedience?

1.2. We “Walk in the Spirit” by Living in Humility

The Holy Spirit is humble spirit; my spirit is a prideful spirit. Therefore, I must “die to self.” In order to walk in the Spirit, I must die to self in rebellion, in righteousness, in “rights,” in relationships.

I must even die to self in defining how I want to feel.

Andree Seu, “Out of the Blue,” *World Magazine*, April 16, 2005: “Mind your goals. If being rid of melancholy is your non-negotiable supplication, soul searching is in order to see if you have not substituted a set of your own ‘virtues’ for God’s. What God highly prizes is prayer, faith, and endurance. To practice these is not just the *means* to the better Christian life; it *is* the better Christian life. Have you fixated on success, worldly approval, and independence from the need of daily grace, and made the disciplines of godliness mere steppingstones to them?... The happy discovery is that even when depressed, you can be controlled by the Spirit and not the depression. You can have a moment-by-moment dependency on the Lover of your soul. You can say, ‘I’m depressed. So what?’—and carry on with the energy God supplies.... The condition is just what is common to man, the prescription is still faith, and the grace for it is inexhaustible.”

Do you hear what she is saying? She is noting that many people are asking, “How do I get Jesus to make my depression better?” I hear that question often. “How do I get Jesus to make my marriage better? How do I get God to change my husband? What do I have to do to get the Lord to make my boyfriend be godly?” Do you ever ask those questions? I do.

Do you know the Biblical answer? It is this: you do not. And when I give that answer (whether to myself or to one of you), the response is invariably sadness. That is because an idol is being cast down, and we are dying to its control.

Instead of worshipping that idol, God offers us himself, so that we can be better, regardless of the sin of those around us. Walking in the Spirit requires great humility.

1.3. We “Walk in the Spirit” by Living Christ-centered

Holy Spirit always points to Christ. So must my life if I am to walk in the Spirit.

1.4. We “Walk in the Spirit” by Glorifying God in All Things

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name be glory and honor and dominion and power and praise.

Point 1 was...Enter into the Command...

2. Those who Belong to Christ Must Engage in the Conflict: the Flesh versus the Spirit (Galatians 5.16,17,24)

If you have made a serious effort to follow Jesus, you know the conflict. I wince when well-meaning evangelism presentations tell people that Jesus will make it all better.

There is a scene in John Bunyan’s great book, (other than Bible, most sold book ever in English language) *Pilgrim’s Progress* in which Christian meets an enemy of the way. In order to lead the Christian off the path, **Worldly Wiseman** describes the walk with God this way: “There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than is that unto which he has directed you.... You have met some of the danger already, I perceive; for I see the dirt of the Slough of Despond is upon you. But that slough is only the beginning of the sorrows attending those that go on in that way. Hear me, I am older than you; you will meet, in the way which you go, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and, in a word, death, and what not!”

When our family listens to that book on tape or reads it together, Helen and I pause there to remind the kids that Worldly Wiseman spoke the truth. Though American Christianity promises ease and comfort to all who pray the prayer, the Jesus of the Bible promises no such thing!

Listen to Jesus: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.... If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.... If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.... Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.... If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

The way of Christianity is hard; are we entering the conflict?

John Bunyan allowed his congregation to see the conflict in which he was engaged by describing his own struggle with prayer: “If I may tell you the difficulty of praying to God as I ought, it is enough to make you entertain strange thoughts of me. For my heart, when I go to pray, is so loath to go to God, and when I am praying, is so loath to stay with Him, that many times I am forced in my prayers to beg of God that He would take my heart and set it on Himself in Christ.”

This encourages me so much because I realize that godliness is first and foremost, engaging in the conflict between my sin nature and the Holy Spirit. Not always spiritual victory, but engaging in battle itself is a victory in and of itself!

Even with this conflict, however, notice ...

3. Those who Belong to Christ Must Experience the Conquest: the Spirit's Victory (Gal 5.24)

Next week, Lord willing, I intend to bring a whole sermon on “crucifying the flesh.” Today I would simply note what it is not and a few implications about it.

3.1. *What It Is Not (3 things)*

3.1.1. Not Sinlessness

Please do not grow discouraged over the sin remaining in your life. Instead, allow the remaining sin and the constant struggle be to you a cause to look toward heaven. Though by faith we are now freed from the penalty of sin (in justification), and though we might, as the Spirit works, now be freed from some of the power of sin (in sanctification), there is coming a day when we will be forever freed from the very presence of sin (in glorification).

3.1.2. Not Beating the Body

Many have hoped to control sin by penance, fasting, crawling up certain stairwells on ones knees, and tiresome pilgrimages—but such methods are of no value against the indulgences of the flesh (Colossians 2.22).

3.1.3. Not Mere External Conformity

Those in Christ crucify both internal, heart sins, as well as external action sins.

3.2. *What It Implies*

3.2.1. Necessity of Conversion

Are there not many who claim to be Christians who yet know nothing of the crucifixion of sinful desires and passions. Have you experienced the victory of the Spirit in your life? If not, today can be the day of salvation. Please do not put it off. Come to Christ owning your need and dependence today.

3.2.2. Necessity of Christ

Some have been frustrated with sin and sought to end its tyranny apart from Jesus. Maybe you have tried hard to live a good life. Amy Grant had a song with these lyrics: "I have decided, being good is just a fable, I can't, 'cause I'm not able, I going to live what I believe." You can't be good—only those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh. Will you come to Christ today for your sanctification?

3.2.3. Necessity of Progress

As we grow up, we learn to cover sin better, but the heart can remain unchanged. I am not asking if you are getting too old to sin. I am asking if your thoughts and desires are being purified by God. If not, then ask Him for the grace to die to self and to live in the Spirit.

4. Conclusion

A young artist was unhappy at his progress in painting. So he snuck into the studio of his great teacher and stole a paint brush. How much do you think his painting improved?

He imagined that the master had vastly superior brushes. When he confessed to the crime, a friend told him, "It is not the Master's brush you need, **BUT THE MASTER'S SPIRIT.**"

Is not that true for us? We have all of the means of grace at our disposal. And all of them are important, for we cannot paint well without a good brush. But what we must have is God's Spirit. Will we seek the Spirit to make us truly Christ's; to make us love Jesus; to make us hunger and thirst for holiness of heart; to fill us with joy in dying to self. Will you?