

Are You Being Led by the Spirit? * Galatians 5:16-25
October 11, 2015 * Rod Fultz

Even in our age of information, internal medicine is not an exact science. Physicians have to examine many factors and observe certain symptoms in order to determine if certain organs in your body are diseased or healthy. Likewise for Christians, in whom the Spirit of God has come to reside in the temple of our hearts, it is not always clear (to us) whether we are walking in the Spirit or in the flesh, whether we are following God or still following ourselves and asking God to trail behind. But in Galatians 5 this morning, Paul is going to tell us that is one reason we need the Church because it is evident to those around us. The title of the sermon is a diagnostic question

Are You Being Led by the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Godhead who imparts the saving work of Christ to our lives. First He comes convicting us of our need for Christ that we have fallen short of God's holy standard and will perish forever unless God saves us. He regenerates us, graciously imparting new spiritual life to our dead souls through the hearing of the gospel. He then makes us the Temple of God by coming to reside in us. This is true of every born again believer

1 John 4:13 (ESV)

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

--in order to complete the good work He has begun in us through a process called sanctification.

Sanctification (to be made holy) is that process of God causing us to become who He has declared us to be in Christ. It is a progressive work, which we get to participate in. We choose day by day (even moment by moment) whether or not to grieve the Holy Spirit and walk in our old autonomous way or to be led by Him into the paths of righteousness, into the sphere of obedience so that His fruit can be produced through our lives here on earth. Paul addressed this choice and activity:

Romans 8:13–14 (ESV)

For 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. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

At any given moment it is beneficial for you to ask, "Am I (right now) being guided, empowered led by the Holy Spirit?" In our passage today Paul tells us why this is of critical importance:

Galatians 5:16–25 (ESV)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh
 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.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, 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.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is:

Love	joy	peace
Patience	kindness	goodness
Faithfulness	gentleness	self-control

against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Walking, especially in the ancient world, was a way of life. No one had cars, bikes, or the metro. You hoofed it wherever you went (No pun intended). Walking is a step by step process. Every step is a choice to either continue moving in the same direction or choose another path. In our text, Paul emphasizes that walking in the Spirit is exactly the same type of procedure. Except that, for Christians, almost every step we take involves what is sometimes a difficult choice.

Are you Led by the Holy Spirit?

1. Acknowledge the Conflict

Civil wars are perhaps the most painful kind. The nation of Syria has been in a horrendous civil conflict since 2011. Over 300,000 Syrians have died and well over 2 million have been displaced. To say control of the country is divided is a massive understatement. Yet, do you realize that when someone becomes a Christian they are entering into a Civil war of sorts in their own souls? If you are born again, your heart is now a battlefield between the realities of the Age to Come (where righteousness rules) and this present evil age in which you dwell. A new eschatological reality has dawned in your mind but your flesh is still wanting you to walk in darkness.

I am not saying non-Christians do not sometimes experience internal moral conflicts but for a Christian, the battle is far more intense because it is not just mere cognitive dissonance, it is the essence of good versus evil right within your soul. You experience that war within don't you? The good news about our Civil War is that we have the certain promise of victory when we walk with God! For you to walk in His Victory, you must first acknowledge the conflict is real.

Galatians 5:16–17 (ESV)

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.

The flesh- in all of Paul's letters represents our old nature: our depraved mind, the sin nature we inherited from Adam. Paul said (Rom. 7) in my flesh dwells no good thing. In other words, left to myself I will choose to operate under my own power for my own glory and on my own terms every time. Apart from the grace of God (through the Holy Spirit), I will be controlled by sinful impulses choosing whatever pleases me (maximizes me) even if it means breaking God's Law every time.

God's Promise! – If you keep on walking by the Spirit, you won't yield to the temptations of the flesh. That ought to be powerful news, especially if you are battling spiritual strongholds in your life right now. If you have sin patterns you just can't seem to kick, like Paul in Rom. 7 you know the right thing to do, but this other voice floods your thinking and arouses your body to do just the opposite. Or when you want to obey Christ, your flesh fills your heart with fears doubts what ifs.

God Himself promises to thwart and conquer the desires of your flesh as you yield to His Spirit's lead. Your daily life as a follower of Christ was dramatized with Israel crossing the Red Sea. Remember how their enslaver (Pharaoh) was breathing down their necks (behind them)? Our flesh (with all our old thought patterns) does the same thing. As we follow Christ by faith, walking by faith across the sea bed of our lives while the raging waters of fear and doubt are heaped up on both sides of us, God's word beckons us to keep going, to keep being led by the Spirit one step at a time until He brings us safely to the other side where we will finally be able to turn and see our enemy (Satan) drowned in the sea and finally cast into hell itself.

Gospel! (1:4)

Christ has come to deliver us from this present evil age! Even when your flesh is screaming at you to forsake God (or put Him on the shelf) and gratify the "longings of your heart," God the Holy Spirit will bring promises to your mind that (like a sword) slice up the lies of the flesh, exposing the emptiness and stench of the consequences of sin. I'll ask you again, do recognize that battle? That is the first step in being led by the Spirit. Recognizing the Christian life is no cake walk. It is war!

Galatians 5:18 (ESV)

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The Law is God's standard of righteousness and so it is good and holy, but the Law has no power to deliver you from temptation. In fact, our sin nature is so corrupt that when the holy standard of God's law is brought alongside us, it makes us want to sin more! You see this in your children and in yourself. "Don't touch the cookies." Now all they can think about is how good a cookie would taste. But if you are led by God's indwelling Holy Spirit, He is your ruler and He continually will remind you of this truth: You have been delivered from sin, through the blood price of Jesus!

The Spirit will always lead you to triumph over sin and into paths of holiness from the inside out by effecting the reality of God's Promises to your heart and soul. So the first step in diagnosing whether you are presently being led by the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge at least some of the

time you are not. At least some of the time you are led by your flesh. Acknowledge the Conflict but, on the other hand, Paul says your life tells the story of Who you are following.

Are you Led by the Holy Spirit?

2. Examine the Evidence

The old joke among old men used to be, “What is the best way to avoid open heart surgery? Stay out of a Dr.’s office.” That is exactly what some of us do with our souls. We don’t want to deal with the ugliness of our sin so we avoid an honest look at ourselves. Paul says your lifestyle makes is clear whether you are led by your flesh or not:

Galatians 5:19–21 (ESV)

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,
²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,
²¹ envy, 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.

Paul lists out a partial harvest of vices seen in a life lived in the flesh. These are some of the evil practices which characterize someone who is not led by the Spirit. It is not incidental that he lists sexual sins first, for this is our softest target, the area (especially in a culture like ours) where we are most vulnerable to succumb to Satan’s lies.

Sexual immorality refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage. That activity, Jesus says, starts in the thoughts you entertain in your mind.

Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Impurity is any type of lewd conduct.

Sensuality is the whole tone of sexual innuendos (which most of what our culture calls entertainment is laden with). I honestly do not think anything is labeled as vulgar any more. As we see all through history, sexual sin is a one-way street to false worship.

Idolatry – is replacing the worship of God with something created (either creation itself or things made by man)

Sorcery – (J.B. Lightfoot) the secret tampering with the powers of evil. Pharmakei – (pharmaceuticals) the illicit use of drugs, magic potions, spells.

Paul’s catalogue of carnality then moves to habitual practices of sin against people. These Schreiner calls “Social sins that disrupt community in the home and church.”

Enmity- An underlying hostility towards God and others. Ongoing angst of soul

Strife- the contentions (flowing out of your hostilities) which divide you from others.

Jealousy - you want what you believe others are getting for yourself.

Envy – the hatred of the people who seem to have what you want.

Fits of anger- (bursts of rage) the opposite of self control damages others in its wake. Make no mistake this is only the temper tantrum a 2 yr. old throws in adult form.

Rivalries / Dissensions / Divisions - competitive (and collective) effort to put others down in order that you might be exalted

Drunkenness – unrestrained self-indulgence in the abuse of alcohol. Always used as the polar opposite of being filled with the Spirit.

Orgies- perverted sexual activity in groups like Zach preached about from Judges 2 weeks ago.

Such things- meaning these are not an exhaustive list. These types of activities (you get the picture) are what characterize a person who walks according to the impulses and desires of their flesh. Notice that these people are not characterized as victims (even though some might have been). They are characterized as responsible for who and what they choose to follow in their lives.

Galatians 5:21b (ESV)

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Word for "Do these things"= habitual practice, not an isolated lapse. (Stott)

So if you reached the limit of your patience this week and yelled at your kids, or you found yourself exalting something Created by God (like another human being, or a car or a sports team) instead of worshiping God alone, there is grace to repent of those lapses, to begin to follow Jesus again, to acknowledge you were following the course of your flesh in those moments, and to turn to walk with the Spirit. (Even now you can talk to God about that and afterwards talk to those affected by your sin.) But if one or more of these vices is not just an occasional lapse but does, in fact, describe your life style, if you are characterized by carnal things, please heed this warning! These aren't road signs on the way to heaven. They are indicators you may well be on the road to destruction in hell. John repeats the same caution here:

Revelation 21:8 (ESV)

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

If you are gripped by one of these vices but want to be freed from them, that is evidence of God's grace in your life! He wants you to know that He is stronger than your sin patterns! He has nailed to the cross the power of evil that keeps you in bondage. We as a church (like the church in Galatia) are just a bunch of people redeemed from these things by the blood of the Lamb and the ongoing power of His Spirit. We are fellow pilgrims with you! God has brought us to a place where He may have brought some of you, even as I speak, where you realize that walking according to your flesh is no longer an option. That is how you define conversion. There is a decisive break with sin and (2:20) you consider old carnal self as having been crucified with Christ.

Galatians 5:24 (ESV)

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We count our old sin-stained life as having died with Christ so that now, as they arise to tempt us back into death, we declare that is no longer an option. I have died to sin. I am new in Christ Jesus by His grace! You can be free as you walk in His Spirit. Here are the characteristics the Holy Spirit will produce in you as you walk with Him:

Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

These virtues are produced by the Spirit, not through human ingenuity or power. In fact, every one of these characteristics flows straight from God into the hearts of His people and then outwardly to others. Fruit – singular – not individual qualities but a cluster of good fruit which the Spirit always produces in someone being led by Him. The image implies spiritual growth, progress, maturity in stark contrast with deterioration, corruption and ultimate destruction.



Brand new Christians to the untrained eye don't even look like grapes! But the grace of God is evident in that His fruit is beginning to form. Might not be very sweet yet but it's coming!

Then, as one walks in the Spirit, imbibing the means of grace, nourished in the Word of God, walking in accountable relationships and serving the Bride of Christ instead of their own self-interests, the fruit begins to grow. Love, Joy, Peace begin to not only be evident but tasty!



Finally, in a mature believer these fruits should dominate the landscape of their lives like Grapes do in September in a Vineyard. Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those are all patterns of life character traits, not isolated occurrences but part of a cluster of God's grace on display called the Fruit of the Spirit:

Love – is not the ability to be kind to someone who you are attracted to or click with.(pun intended). It is the God-empowered ability to give of yourself to those who (in the flesh) you would not even like. It means valuing all people equally, especially those in the household of God. Remarkable! – God takes envious, angry and divisive people and gradually transforms them into conduits of His love for others. All the other virtues “stem” from this one. Love is the sweetness of God manifested in each fruit of the Spirit in a slightly different flavor.

Joy is the experience of God’s gladness and blessing even in the midst of great suffering. If you want to be able to distinguish how God’s joy feels in contrast to mere earthly happiness, think of the feeling you get when you give something (at a personal sacrifice to yourself) because you believe it is more blessed to give than to receive. That is Joy.

Peace = It is not the mere absence of strife / conflict. Rather, it is the wellbeing produced and protected by the blessed presence of God. God’s peace is experienced only by those who are reconciled to Him.

Patience – (a result of experiencing God’s peace) an enduring tolerance of wrongs suffered, or of circumstances while entrusting the offenders into God’s hands. That does not mean that judgment or even discipline is not coming for evil but only you are able to trust in the Lord for His timing instead of your immediate gratification. In light of that, try and calculate exactly how patient Christ has been with you.

1 Timothy 1:16 (ESV)

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Kindness – A tender heart which desires to display gentle care and intentional love towards others (especially those who do not deserve or expect it). Kindness is particularly evident in motherly care. (Hosea) God displayed it towards Israel as He led them with cords of kindness and bands of love. He eased the yoke on their necks and bent down to feed them.

Goodness – the trait of collective moral beauty (like a mosaic) as the righteousness of God is put on display through fruit bearing.

Faithfulness- the consistent reliability of someone who follows Christ. His steadfast faith towards God is manifested horizontally in a loyalty others can continually rely on.

Gentleness- The meekness brought about through humility. It is the opposite of self-assertiveness. So that a gentleman is not someone who is merely polite when others are around or of the upper crust of society. He is someone whose demeanor is like Jesus who invites us to become like Himself:

Matthew 11:29 (ESV)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Self-Control- a disciplined restraint of one's body and mind from carnal desires in order to live exclusively for God's purposes.

Good news! Paul says these are not illegal anywhere! You are free to practice them and enjoy them wherever you want! As you seek to be led by the Holy Spirit, these qualities are what He will produce in and through your life, guaranteed, because He does not change. Finally, Paul is about to tell us how to walk with and be led by the Spirit.

Are you Led By the Holy Spirit?

3. Enjoy His Rhythm

Honest question: If Zach were to put you on the spot for a tryout, how many of you can actually clap to the beat and sing at the same time? The ability to do that is called Rhythm = the pattern of beats in music. It is also the cadence of marching. Each one of you have seen bad marching. That is how we look as we are learning to walk in the footsteps of Christ. But the Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we might learn to march with the Army of God! So that whether we are alone or at work in our home or at church, we learn to follow the cadence of the Spirit as He leads us into the footsteps of Jesus. And we get to enjoy the beauty of living in Harmony with God and His People!

Galatians 5:25 (ESV)

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Do you believe and understand that it is the Spirit Who gives you eternal life in Jesus' Name, and do you believe that He is the One who maintains your trust in Christ by imparting life giving doses of grace into your soul each morning? Paul says stop charting your own course. Keep in step with His. How can I do that? He is invisible. I have a hard time distinguishing His voice from my own. You can keep in step with the Spirit in two ways:

- 1) Seek not to grieve Him or quench Him.
- 2) Ask Him to fill you with Himself so that you might walk in harmony with Him.

Your soul has been joined to Him, knit together with Him in order that you might (together with us) bear His fruit and enjoy His Rhythm, which is the very heartbeat of God.