



## **FREE TO LIVE** **Galatians 5:16-26**

I want us to look at Galatians 5:16-26. Go ahead and flip over to Romans 8, and hold your place there in Romans 8. We'll be flipping back and forth quite a bit between Galatians 5 and Romans 8. These texts run parallel in a lot of ways, and Paul wrote Galatians prior to Romans, and so Romans 8 kind of unpacks some of the things that he's talking about here in Galatians.

However, I want us to read this text. So Galatians 5:16:

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

Like I said, I want to start back where we ended last week. Christian freedom means to live by faith through the Spirit in hope with love. That was a summary statement given for verses 1 through 15. Today, we're going to be looking at...at just one part of last week's text that Paul focuses on in Galatians 5:16-26.

### **"With Love"**

We began with, "We walk with love." The statement that you see there...there were two statements you heard from this series that said, "We are free from slavery to the law but we are free to the slavery of love."

Now, this statement is referring back to Galatians 5:13-14, so I want to look at that real quick. Just look back, just prior to where we just read. Galatians 5:13, it says: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;

*rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*"

See, you've got Paul here recognizing freedom from slavery to the law but free to the slavery of love, even giving a command here and showing how love actually fulfills the law. So, I've given you two definitions of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, and this is helpful for me, at least, to define what this means.

We love our neighbor as ourself. According to Paul, we're free. So, we are free to desire the good of others as much as our own. We're free to desire the good of others as much as our own. Secondly, we are free to care for the needs of others as much as our own. We are free to care for the needs of others as much as our own.

Now, that definition looks at two things. First, the heart, the desire to do good, or the desire for the good of others. Then, secondly, action, actually caring for the needs of others. One example of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. As we look at this definition, I think we see immediately this opposed to our natural sinful desires, and if you really feel the weight of this command, "Love your neighbor as yourself," it may not even seem like freedom at all.

Most mornings here in church, I have to be honest...most of the time, I'm not thinking about anything but me and thinking about my family and getting us out of bed and cleaned and fed and out the door so we can go about the task of the day. That's not a bad thing. We all do that. We all experience that same thing. Mornings are crazy, at our house, anyway, but often, I see this in my life and I see this in other people's lives, that we carry that attitude, that same sense of self-centeredness, throughout the day with us.

Often, I get emails from members of this faith family, people asking for help. Not asking for help in the sense that they're not asking for physical needs, but they're at...they're wanting to do some kind of community outreach project, or they're wanting to minister some way in the community, and so they email me because they know I've got access to this database that's got thousands of email addresses. So, they ask, you know, "Ben, can you send out a request to whoever...100 people, 500 people...and see if somebody is willing to help me with this project?" We get those emails quite a bit.

So, I send them out, and sometimes it's to 50 people. Sometimes, it's to 100. Sometimes, to 500, but very rarely do we get responses. Very rarely do people say, "Yeah, I'd love to lay down what I'm doing. Even though what I'm doing is important, I'm going to look out for the good of another and care for the needs of another and help somebody." I don't say that to accuse anybody of guilt or make you feel ashamed. I fall into that category too. I'm the one that gets that initial email, and often, I just forward it on and don't help either, but what I want to show you by that example is just how hard it is to carry out what Paul tells us to do here, to love our neighbor as ourself, to desire the good of others and care for the needs of others as much as our own. If this is the Christian life, then the Christian life seems very hard. It almost seems impossible, in some sense, and really not like we have any freedom at all.

However, I want you to see in verse 15 that Paul gives us an example; he makes a shift here, gives us an example of what it looks like if we don't have that kind of love in our life. Look what he says in verse 15: *"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."*

Now, this doesn't sound like love at all, does it? Paul is giving us a picture of the opposite of love. This opposes love. Biting and devouring each other? I mean, come on! The idea of back-biting...you think about that in the English language, talking back to somebody or speaking disrespectfully to somebody. The word here in the Greek, "devour" literally means "to take from," even in cause injury to somebody as you take from them. It has nothing to do with giving or caring for their needs. It's taking things away. So biting and devouring one another. We can see that people that act this way, they will end up destroying each other. This is a big deal for Paul.

I want to show you another place he talks about a similar idea in the text. Look at the end, in verse 26. Galatians 5:26. He says very similar words here. He says, "*Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*" Well, that's kind of the...a similar idea, isn't it? This...those behaviors, they oppose love as well. Being conceited and thinking that you're better than others and provoking, maybe inciting people to fight or to argue, envying one another...those are things that are in opposition to love. There are two times Paul has mentioned, verse 15 and verse 26, these actions, these behaviors that directly oppose love. I want you to see that these verses serve as bookends; they serve as markers, if you will, for this entire center section where Paul talks about the Spirit.

However, I also want you to look at the middle. Look at verse 20. This is in the list where Paul lists the acts of the sinful nature. Verse 20, he lists things like "*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.*" There's envy again. Eight things he lists here, and it's more than half of this list, and each of these things directly opposes a love relationship between individuals. So, when we look at the fact that Paul mentions this three different times, these things that oppose love, three different times, over a span of 12 verses, we have got to know that he's taking this idea pretty serious. This seems to be an emergency situation to Paul.

## **"Through the Spirit" Three Aspects of Living by the Spirit**

It's at this point that we might ask ourselves, based on what he says in verse 14, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and in verse 13, "Serve one another in love," is Paul giving a command to the believer? Is Paul...is he so concerned about disunity among the body, does he want to see the body of Christ unified so much that he's saying, "You know, you can set aside all the other laws of the Old Testament, but you have got to keep this one."? Is Paul reverting to legalism here by saying this? Well, no, absolutely not. He's not reverting to legalism in any sense of the word, and that's why this text is so crucial, because Paul understands...and we see this in verse 5 of Galatians 5...he understands that loving your neighbor as yourself can only be accomplished through the Spirit. In fact, the entire life of faith can only be accomplished through the Spirit.

Look what it says in verse 5...or what Paul says in verse 5, "*But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.*" So, Paul takes those three words, "through the Spirit" and he unpacks what this means. What does it mean to live through the Spirit? That's what he tells us in verses 16-25. So that's what we're going to look at today. We're going to explore three aspects of this spotlight, three aspects of living by the Spirit.

Now, I use that word, "aspect" there because Paul's not giving us a lot of different definitions of what it means to live by the Spirit. However, really, he's just giving us three

ways, three sides to this one truth. If you think about, say, like a pyramid, having different sides, it's one pyramid with different sides. It looks different depending on how you look at it. Well, this truth is the same way. It's got some different aspects to it, and some different sides.

### **Living out the desires of the Spirit.**

So, the first thing I want to point out...this is from the text; this is verses 16 and 17...that living by the Spirit means living out the desires of the Spirit. Living out the desires of the Spirit. Now, throughout the New Testament, we see that the necessity of the Spirit's work is emphasized over and over again. We see it in Paul's writing especially, but I want you to see here in verse 16, there's a clear command here: "*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*" Now, depending on what translation you have, you might have "walk by the Spirit" there. That's actually a more literal translation of the text. "Walk by the Spirit."

The NIV uses this idea of living because when you read about people walking with God in the Old Testament, it means that they're ordering their lives in accordance with God's commands. They're ordering their lives in a way that's consistent with God's character. So, walking literally means this living out your faith. So, the NIV translates this as, "live by the Spirit" because that's what we're doing. We're living; we're walking by the Spirit. It's a command here. We can't miss the fact that our wills are highly involved in this process of living by the Spirit. Every choice we make, we're choosing whether we live by the Spirit or whether we gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

So, another way that we might think about what it means to live out the desires of the Spirit in our lives is to say that we consistently obey the commands of Christ. We consistently obey the commands of Christ. That idea is going to produce one of two reactions in your heart. One, it's going to send us to legalism. You know, we're going to say, "All right, we have got to find a list. Where is a list of all of Christ's commands so we can start obeying them?" That's going to take us down a road that we don't want to go, or we're going to embrace a sense of failing and say, "Well, there's just too many!" If you look at the Sermon on the Mount, especially like Matthew 5, and you go, "How could we ever live up to Christ's commands? So why even try?"

However, we can't look at either of those options. We have to realize that Christ's commands are opposed by our sinful nature. Christ's commands are opposed by our sinful nature. This is what we see in verse 17. Let's read verse 17: "*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.*" Now again, depending on what translation you have, you might have "sinful nature" there. You might have the "flesh" there, and again, "flesh" is a more literal translation, but the NIV uses "sinful nature" here because, when we think of flesh, we typically think of the body. We think of physical sins.

Even Paul kind of goes that way in verse 19 when he lists the acts of the flesh, or the sinful nature. The very first one he lists is sexual immorality, a physical sin, but that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about the body or just talking about physical sin. If you go on in that list...and we already saw some of these...some of these things are sins of the heart. Hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, and envy. Those things are not physical sins. They reside in the heart, and so that has to do with the flesh too. What we need to see in verse 17 is that our sinful natures war against the commands of Christ. They war against the Spirit. We all face this battle.

A Christ-follower is not somebody that doesn't have a battle in his or her heart. We all feel that lure, that enticing of sin. A Christ-follower feels that battle, recognizes that battle, and in fact, it would be much worse if we didn't have the battle at all. I've met people before that say, "Well, I'm fine with this lifestyle. I like carrying out this sin," or "I just don't agree with what the Bible says. I think it's wrong in this one case." They're living out...not fighting it at all.

Romans 8:7 says something about that. If we don't have this battle, it reveals something about our heart. Look at Romans 8:7. Romans 8:7: "*The sinful mind is hostile to God.*" That's in the last part of verse 7, 8. "*It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*" "*The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*" You see, without the Spirit, we don't even want to fight. This battle that we have between the sinful nature and between the Spirit, what Paul talks about in verse 17, is actually evidence of the Spirit within us. We should in some sense praise God that there is a battle. If there were no battle, it would mean that we were hostile to God, and we were not submitting to His law.

Now, there's another phrase in verse 17, at the last part of verse 17, when he says, "But if you were..." I'm sorry, he says, "*They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*" Verse 17, he's talking about the sinful nature and the Spirit. "*They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*" When you first look at that, is Paul saying that the sinful nature doesn't let the Spirit do what He wants? Or is he saying that the Spirit doesn't let the sinful nature do what it wants? He doesn't really specify here in verse 17. He just says, "They're in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

If you just look at verse 17, and you only see that battle, it's not real clear, but if you look in verse 16, you take verse 16 and 17 together, you just don't see the picture of a battle, you see a picture of victory. Look at what he says in verse 16, "*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*" Even though there's a war, if you live by the Spirit, you will not gratify...the flesh will not win. The sinful nature will not win that war.

So, I think Paul is assuming here that the Galatian believers, they heard the gospel. Paul preached the gospel to them. They received Christ. They received the Holy Spirit. Paul is assuming that they want to do what the Spirit wants them to do. They want to carry out the Spirit's desires, but their sinful nature is in conflict, so they find themselves not doing the things that they want to do, and this leads us to the next point...very important...that Christ's commands cannot be obeyed in our own power. Christ's commands cannot be obeyed in our own power.

Think about John 14:15, when Jesus says, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*" I mean, that's pretty clear. If you love Jesus, you're going to do what He says. Well, flip back...go back to John real quick. Look at this verse. John 14. John 14:15 is where Jesus says, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*", but I want to pay attention to what he says in verse 16. Verse 16, he says, "*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor...*" or a Helper, "*...to be with you forever.*" Then, look at verse 17. He identifies who that is. It's the Spirit. "The Spirit of truth."

It's almost as if Jesus knows that we have this battle within us. Almost as if He created us! Jesus is our Creator. He knows the battle in our heart, and He knows that for us to follow the Spirit without any kind of interference from the sinful nature is impossible. We all face that battle, but praise God, we have this Helper! We have the Spirit, that Christ's commands

are joyfully accomplished by His Spirit. Christ's commands are joyfully accomplished by His Spirit.

You ever notice how we seem to be led by our strongest desire? I know that sometimes it doesn't seem like it applies. Maybe you hate the sin that you're struggling with, but you still fall into it. I think about food. Just a real simple illustration. My small group, we eat a lot together, and we kind of do a potluck thing. Everybody brings something, and I learned really quick, when I started the group, and we started bringing food to our group times, our meetings, that people started bringing things with cream cheese and mayonnaise. Everything! Cream cheese and mayonnaise on everything! I hate cream cheese and mayonnaise, and it's in everything! I mean, all over the place! "You want cream cheese? You want mayonnaise? Here's some cream cheese! Oh, have some mayonnaise." It's just all over the place, and mayonnaise on a hamburger, I still don't get, but we'll not go there.

However, there's no temptation there for me. There's no desire. When you put a piece of cheesecake or a bagel with cream cheese on it, I say, "No, I hate that!" The desire within me to not eat that is far stronger than the desire within me to eat it. Even if I'm really hungry, there's a desire to feed myself, but the desire to not eat it is so much stronger, that I push it away and I say, "No. I'm not going to do that."

I think that principle applies to other issues that we struggle with in our lives. If we hate sin, if we hate the sinful nature and the passions and desires of the sinful nature, we're not going to pursue those things. We're going to pursue the desires that the Spirit puts in us.

I want to show you this. Look at Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel 36. If you have trouble finding it, I'll just read this. He's writing to the people of Israel, but this gives us an understanding, an idea, of how God works in the hearts of men. Ezekiel 36, this is verse 26. He said, "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*" Now there, the flesh, it's kind of confusing. Again, we immediately think, "body, sexually immorality, sinful things." That's not what the "flesh" is talking about here. The flesh, in this case, literally means "flesh." It's something that's soft and that can be changed compared to a stone that is unyielding and unsubmitive and hard and stubborn. That's the contrast that he's making here in verse 26, but look at what he says in verse 27: "*I will put my Spirit in you...*" and notice this...this is huge... "*and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*"

You see the Spirit empowers us to live by the Spirit. He puts the desires in us that should be the strongest desires when we are joyfully obeying Christ's commands. We joyfully obey Christ's commands because the Spirit puts the strongest desire in us to do that. That's part of what it means to live by the Spirit.

### **Living under the leadership of the Spirit.**

Now, secondly...one of the second aspects, rather, of living by the Spirit, is living under the leadership of the Spirit. Living under the leadership of the Spirit. Now, this is what we see in verse 18. Very short, very powerful verse here. "*But if you were led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*" Now, notice that Paul doesn't use the word, "follow" here. We talk about following Christ a lot, and that's key when we think about disciple-making and following Christ, but Paul doesn't use that word in this case. He says, "If you were led by the Spirit." He just as easily could have said, "If you follow by the Spirit," but his purpose here was to highlight, to emphasize, the Spirit's initiative. The Spirit's enabling power in this process.

Paul points out that it's the Spirit that leads. We don't just follow. We are helpless to follow in our power. We're helpless to follow in our own power, but we are eagerly led by the

Spirit's power. We are eagerly led by the Spirit's power. One pastor that I've heard used this illustration about a train. If you think about a big train engine, a locomotive, that is pulling along a huge line of cars, box cars, rail cars. Those cars are following that train. The train is the power. It's the driving force. It's pulling them. It's the energy moving forward, and all the cars are following along, because they're being pulled. That's not a...we shouldn't take that illustration and say that this is a...it's a reluctant picture of us being dragged along by the Spirit. The Spirit is leading us by dragging us along, against our wills. No! Remember, our wills are highly involved in the process. It's not some image of reluctance. We should want to be connected to the Spirit, if the Spirit is the one putting desires in us.

Think about Romans 8:14. Romans 8:14 says, *"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* So, we're eagerly led by the Spirit because God's children pursue His Spirit. We're eager to be led because we're His children. If we're God's children, and if we're adopted in Christ, then we're overjoyed that the Spirit is leading us. We want to be connected to Him.

The second part of verse 18 sometimes causes people trouble. When you look at verse 18, he says, *"[But] if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."* That word "under law" there is actually, just in one chapter back in Galatians, connected with being a child of God. Look at this. Look at Galatians 4:4-5. Look for the phrase again, "under law." Galatians 4:4-5. He says, *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."* So, Paul is able to say in Galatians 5:18, *"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."* If you're led by the Spirit, you're a child of God, and if you're a child of God, you're not under the law. You see the connection? Paul paints this amazing picture for us, and so we're able to say that we are not under the law. We are eagerly led by the Spirit's power, because God's children pursue His Spirit, and because God's children are not under the law. Our justification is not brought about by the law.

Now, remember there was a question I asked at the beginning. Is Paul seeking to bring some kind of law on the Christian by telling him to love his neighbor as himself? Well, no. He's not doing that. Paul never loses sight that our justification comes from Christ. Even as he commands believers to love, he knows that can only be done in the power of the Spirit as we are led. We are not under the law. We claim Christ as our righteousness. Always claim Christ as our righteousness, never looking to a law, whether it's loving our neighbor as ourself, or any variety of other laws. We always claim Christ only as our righteousness.

Romans 8:3-4. You don't have to turn there. It says, *"He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature."* Well, how do we live? We live according to the Spirit. God's children are not under God's law because we are alive by the Spirit. God's children are alive by His Spirit. That almost seems redundant. I'm kind of saying the same things over and over again. We live by the Spirit because we're alive by the Spirit, and we're God's children and we're not under the law. So, we're not under the law because we're alive by God's Spirit.

Remember, Paul's saying the same thing over and over again in different ways. Remember, he's giving us different aspects of this same truth. What it means to live by the Spirit, and I really need to hear this. My stubborn heart...sometimes I have a hard time believing some of the promises that God has given me, so I need to hear this in a couple of different ways.

Now understand that this phrase, "under the law" or "under law" does not mean that we don't obey the law. David has talked about this for several weeks, but when I think of...just a good example of this, think of the Transcontinental Railroad, the railroad that connected the eastern half of the country with the western half of the country. It made it possible to cross the Rocky Mountains without having to go through some wagon train. It made the west easily accessible from people from the east. It was finished in the late 1800s, and they laid about 1700 miles of track in a period of about seven to eight years.

When I think about the amount of work that went into that...they used Chinese...primarily Chinese and Irish immigrants to lay those tracks, and they weren't slaves. They were paid, but it was very poor wages. They worked under very harsh conditions. Because they were crossing the Rocky Mountains at some point, those train tracks went from elevation of 0 to about 7,000 feet over a course of around 25 miles.

So, these men were doing some amazing things, and very hard things. Some of them were losing their lives. They were dying of heat exhaustion. They were getting arms and legs broken and cut off. These men were sacrificing their lives and their health to build this railroad, and you have got to think, at some point, they hated that thing. It was a burden to them. Those things were heavy. Imagine getting to a point in the desert and looking across as far as you can see, and saying, "That's where we're taking this thing." Then, once you get to that point, realizing, "We just have got to go that much further again." This thing was a burden to them, and they hated it.

However, once it was completed, it was considered the greatest technological, the greatest engineering feat of the entire 19th century in this country. People loved it. Once that track was complete, people loved it. They sailed across that thing in luxury. For the first time, crossing the Rocky Mountains and entering into the old West, or entering into the West like they'd never done before. They loved it! It was enjoyable. It was an adventure. It all depends on which perspective you're looking at that train track, and I think it's the way we look at the law as well.

Before the law was completed, it was a burden. It was heavy. We died, trying to fulfill the law, but Christ completed the law, and He fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law in us, so that we are now able to enjoy our obedience. God's children are not under the law because we enjoy obedience. We look at a command like this, or what Jesus says in John 14, and He says, "*If you love me, you will obey my commandments.*" Well, praise God! "Jesus, we love you, so how can we obey? We are excited to obey! It's an adventure for us to obey." If the Spirit is in us, the Spirit that's in us desires to obey Christ's commands, and we should also desire to obey His law. So, that's living under the leadership of the Spirit.

### **Living with the evidence of the spirit.**

The third aspect we're going to look at, and this is the one most people are familiar with, is living with the evidence of the Spirit. Living with the evidence of the Spirit. Look at verses 22-23: "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*" The fruit of the Spirit is a powerful image of the character of the living Christ being displayed in our lives, being born by the grace of God in our lives. The Spirit ensures that we will demonstrate the character of Christ. The Spirit ensures that we demonstrate the character of Christ, and we need to know what that looks like.

So, Paul gives us this list. He gives us this list with the fruit of the Spirit. I know we don't have time to get at each one of these as far as definitions, but I want to point out one to you. It's the fruit of joy. Now, joy is...and really, all of these relate to this, but joy...it's



really just about trusting in God. If we trust that God is good and that God is unchanging, that He's stable and consistent, that He loves us and He's working things for our benefit, then our emotions don't go up and down when we face difficult circumstances because our emotions are not based on those circumstances. Our emotions, our entire lives, are based on trusting in who God is, and if God is constant and stable, then we can be constant and stable in our emotions, and that's how joy...it creates kind of an excitement in our lives when we face trials. We're wondering, "What's God up to? What's going on? I know God is good, and this is a bad thing, but God's good, and He's working this for my good."

I think of Asaph, and Psalm 73 is my favorite Psalm. Asaph, the worship leader at the time in Israel, he is complaining to God. He's complaining; he's saying, "God, why are the wicked blessed? The unrighteous get all this blessing, all these riches, and then I and the poor and oppressed, we don't get anything." Asaph is judging here and saying, "I'm not getting what I deserve, and I'm upset about it." He came to a crisis of faith.

Then, the greatest thing happens. He walks into the sanctuary. He walks into God's presence, and he encounters God, and he realizes that God is everything. He says these words. He says, "The earth has nothing I desire besides you. Nothing I desire besides you, God." That is the essence of joy. It's trusting in God at that level and nothing else...nothing else matters.

Now, the danger in looking at these lists, and even defining these things, is that our sinful natures will grab hold of these, and we'll think we can do some of these things ourselves. We'll not trust in the Spirit; we'll not ask for His power in our lives to bear these fruits. Rather, we'll start doing good and stop doing bad, and that's not Paul's point here at all. Paul is not interested in modifying our behavior. Fruit produced by the Spirit does not command performance. Fruit produced by the Spirit does not command performance.

Now, it's good for us to know what's right and wrong, like I said before, but if we're not careful, we can actually use God's Word to end up expressing our sinful nature. Now think about this: we love to be praised for doing good and kind things. So, we might take those fruits, or that fruit of goodness and kindness and begin doing works in our own power, and then sitting back and waiting for the praise. "Aren't you proud of me for being so good and so kind?" We twist it! We twist what God has given us as a good thing, so that we'll know what's right. We try to overcome our own sinfulness, our own sinful nature. We begin to be "self-justifiers." We look at how good and how kind we are, and that's not at all Paul's point. Paul wants us to be new creations that live out behaviors from hearts that are growing to know and become like Christ.

We can appear to grow and not be transformed. Have you ever seen a 50-foot acorn? That was a question posed by Mel Lawrenz in his book, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*. He asks this question, "Why don't we see 50-foot acorns?" I mean, an acorn's a seed. A squirrel gets it and plants it in the ground, and what does it do? It grows, right? However, it doesn't become a bigger, better, stronger acorn, does it? As cool as that would be, to walk out and see a forest of 50-foot acorns, that's not what happens. The acorn becomes an oak. It changes into something else. That's exactly what the work of transformation is doing. We're not just becoming better, wiser, stronger people. We are becoming something brand new. We're becoming Christ-like, and that's the work of the Spirit.

Now, secondly, we demonstrate the character of Christ. We see that the fruit produced by the Spirit fulfills the law. The fruit produced by the Spirit fulfills the law. Now, this is the most obvious contrast in the text. It's the same contrast that we already saw. When you look at this list of the works of the flesh, or the works of the sinful nature, and you look at

the list of the fruit of the Spirit, they are in dynamic opposition to one another. They contrast in the most severe way, but we see the same thing in verses 13-14. Look what he says. *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge..."* in what? *"...in the sinful nature."*

We know what that looks like, now, don't we? Paul told us. This is what the act of the sinful nature looks like. Paul says, "Don't use your freedom to indulge in those kinds of things. Rather," here's the contrast, "serve one another in love." We saw that a fruit of the Spirit was love, right? We saw that the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives...one of those fruits, if you will, is love. Well, notice what he says about love in verse 14, *"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Do you see the connection? Do you see what Paul's doing here? He's saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Do this impossible thing but be led by the Spirit to do it. Trust in God's Spirit to bear that fruit in your life." Don't miss that connection. Fruit produced by the Spirit fulfills the law.*

Finally, fruit produced by the Spirit proclaims union with Christ. Fruit produced by the Spirit proclaims union with Christ. That's an interesting word, "fruit", and I've made a slip-up a couple of times, just in the last few minutes. It's singular in the Greek. It's not plural. We can't say, "fruits" of the Spirit. It is a fruit. It's singular. We can't separate these things out and say, "Well, I'm good at one thing, and bad at another. I can do all these other things, but love, man, that's a tough one." We can't separate these things out. It's one fruit of the Spirit, and if we follow Christ, our union with Him will be proclaimed through a display of all of these. A display of the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, we can be self-reliant, and we can claim that, you know, "I have the fruit of gentleness in my life.", and really, that gentleness be a result of the sinful nature. You might be plagued with fear and live that out in a sense of timidity that portrays itself as gentleness. That's being self-reliant. That's not living by the Spirit. What about faithfulness? You might have a consistent, steady, unshakable work ethic and attitude, and people might look at you and say, "Wow, that guy is faithful! That girl is faithful!" When, really, it might just be pride and arrogance working overtime in your life. It's making you better than others and try to exalt yourself. See, we can't be self-reliant as we try to fulfill the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit has to produce...the Spirit has to produce those fruit in us.

Now, each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit has to be growing in our lives, and it may be in very small ways, but it has to be growing in our lives, or we can't really be sure that we even have the Spirit of God. The work of the Spirit is a work of transformation in our heart, and if we're not seeing fruit born out in our lives, we can't be sure we even have the Spirit.

Now, this is what Paul points out in Romans 8:9. Like I said, Romans 8 goes into more detail about these issues of the Spirit. Now, look at this, Romans 8:9. You have got to see this. Romans 8:9: *"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."* Let me read that again. *"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."*

Now, Jesus says this in another way, when He says that a tree is known by its fruit. I've often heard people make a distinction here between fruit and works, or acts of the sinful nature. They say, "Well, acts and works, they take effort, but fruit, that's effortless." Well, I don't really agree with that. I don't see how that relates exactly, because Jesus says a bad tree bears bad fruit effortlessly. The works of the flesh, or the acts of the sinful nature are

just as effortless for one who is bound to the sinful nature as one who is bound to the Spirit and living by the Spirit produces fruit. It's effortless in either case. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit. If we are united with Christ, the good fruit should dominate our lives.

Now again, there's still a battle. He's not calling us to be perfect in this sense, but that good fruit should dominate our lives, and if we are without Christ, if we are without His Spirit, then that bad fruit will dominate our lives and ultimately bring judgment. That's what you see in verse 21. Galatians 5. If these things dominate a person's life, look what it says at the end of verse 21: *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this..."* and some of your translations say...may say, "do these things." It implies that sense of consistent doing, it characterizes a person's lifestyle. If you live like this, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. A bad tree bears bad fruit effortlessly.

## Two Avenues of Living by the Spirit

So, Paul has given three aspects, but he doesn't just leave us wondering how we do this. He's given us the "what" and told us what it means to live by the Spirit, but doesn't...he also tells us the "how" here. So, there's two avenues of living by the Spirit. Two avenues that we're going to look through really quickly, what it means to live by the Spirit.

### **Be victorious over the sinful nature.**

First, and we see this in verse 24, is to be victorious over the sinful nature. Let's read verse 24. It says, *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."* Now, I use the word here, "be"...be victorious. That's an Old Testament word that's used a lot. It's used in the New Testament, too, but in Leviticus, all throughout Leviticus, God is saying, "Be holy." It's like, "Well, how do you do that? What do you mean, be holy?" Paul, in Ephesians, says, *"Be filled with the Spirit."* Again, it's kind of a general term. We're not real clear what that means sometimes, but he's very clear in verse 24. He uses a very specific word, doesn't he? He uses the word "crucify." That word has lost a lot of its power in our cultural context, and you hear about a comedian standing up to do a set, and the audience, you know, boos him and runs him off the stage. They say, "Well, the audience crucified him." Well, no! They casted insult at him. They didn't brutally kill him.

In Jesus' case, he was brutally murdered. That's what crucified means. Crucify is a horrible, horrible thing. It's death. The first century readers, when they read this letter, they would have known that. They would have identified with that image immediately. This is a harsh, harsh death. So, we might ask, "Well, wait a minute. If we can crucify the flesh, then why is there a battle? Why does verse 17 talk about this battle between the sinful nature and the Spirit, when right here, it says that the flesh can be crucified?"

Well, remember, it's the same thing he started with in verse 16. Remember, he's talking repeatedly. It's very circular. Verse 16, the picture of victory, *"I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."* There will be a war, but the winner will be the Spirit. When the Spirit is taking control in our lives, then the sinful nature no longer has control, but the sinful nature is still intact. It's still there. Do you recognize it? If you're in Christ, do you recognize the sinful nature? Do you recognize some of the emotions that you have a hard time controlling? What about some of the habits that you can't seem to break? Are those out of control? That's what he means when he says in verse 24, *"Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."* If we

are living by the Spirit and seeking His power, these things should not have control in our lives like they do. We should be victorious over them.

Let me give you two things here. We've got to recognize our heart's focus. Recognize your heart's focus. Ask yourself, "What aspect of your sinful nature...what does your sinful nature drawn to the center of your life and declared, this is the most important thing?" Remember, your heart's focus, whatever your strongest desire is, is ultimately what you'll pursue and satisfy. If the Spirit is leading you, if you're walking by the Spirit, then He puts that strong desire in you to do what He wants. The Spirit makes the life of faith work. That's what we saw in Galatians 5:5. It's what we saw last week, and we've seen again this week. *"But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit."* The Spirit makes the life of faith work. From the beginning to the end, it's the Spirit working in our hearts, initially doing the work of regeneration, and then carrying out the work of sanctification in our lives. We have to stop filling our lives with things other than God.

Like Asaph, we've got to be able to say, "God, you are the only thing in this earth that I delight in." We can't just focus on Christ in our initial encounter with Him, receive forgiveness of sin and say that we are justified before God and that God has saved us. We also have to realize His sustaining grace...realize the sustaining grace of Christ in our lives from that moment forward, from that initial encounter, that moment forward, and that's what Paul's addressing in verse 25.

Galatians 5:25, he says, *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."* Now, in this sense, the "live" in the beginning of verse 25, is a little different than the "live" we saw in verse 16. Well, it's very different. This idea of living here means being alive. *"Since we are made alive by the Spirit,"* that's talking about that initial work of the Holy Spirit, that regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. Let us keep in step with the Spirit. That's the issue of following along again. See, Paul's saying the same things over and over. We've been regenerated. We've been made alive by the Spirit, and so let's continue following, walking in step with the Spirit.

### **Belong to Christ!**

This is the key to being victorious over our sinful nature. This last thing, the second avenue, and that's belonging to Christ. Belong to Christ. If we belong to Christ, then the sinful nature no longer rules in our lives. It's been crucified, according to verse 24. Did you catch it the first time we read it? *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."*

Now, don't miss that word "be" here either and "belong to Christ." This is covenant language. The idea of belonging. Think back to Exodus 6, when God says, "I will be their God." Also, in Leviticus 26, God says, "I will be their God, and they will be my people." This is the image of belonging, this mutual belonging. We are God's and God is ours. Mutual belonging. If you belong to Christ, then the Spirit is unconditionally committed to your sanctification and to your transformation. We have to identify with Christ in our life and realize whether or not we really belong to Him.

Growing up, I was an only child, and so I spent the summers alone a lot, just since my...both my parents working. I watched a lot of T.V. I've developed into a T.V.-aholic. It's something I still struggle with today. There may be some others of you out there that struggle with that, and as you know, as all good T.V.-aholics do, we flip channels, because you want to see everything you can watch, you know, before you pick the thing that you're going to watch. You want to find the best thing on T.V., and with all the channels they've got for us now, that's becoming harder and harder.

However, as we flip through channels, I've noticed sometimes images appear, images pop up on the screen that I know I shouldn't watch. So, I keep going past them, but I feel that pull, that tug, that enticing back, "Oh, maybe you want to check that out, man! That's...it looked interesting." I have a choice at that point. I can say, "Well, you know, my kids might walk in the room, or my wife, and I don't want them to catch me watching something like that. It's not good for them, and they might think bad of me," and so, you don't watch it. Well, that's not a terrible motivation, but it's certainly not living by the Spirit. Or you know, you may...I think, "Well, if I watch this, I'm just going to feel guilty afterwards. I'm going to have to confess it, and my accountability group, I have got to tell them about it. It's just too much trouble." So again, you know, motivation, but not really living by the Spirit, is it?

We might even use God's Word that says, "Well, you know, the fruit of the Spirit doesn't say anything like this. This looks more like some of those things that I see in that list, and I want to be a good rule follower. I want to do my duty, and so I'm just not going to do it because I want to be diligent and do my duty here and obey this list that Paul has given me." Again, not a bad motivation. We're using the Word of God to guide us. That's a good thing, but is that living by the Spirit? Or, when we feel that pull, whatever it is, whether it's T.V. or anything else, we feel that pull, that desire, just welling up within us, and seeking to drag us away, creating the tension in that battle. Can we just simply say, "No, I belong to Christ! That doesn't own me anymore! I have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. I belong to Jesus Christ."?

Think Jeremiah 31, when the prophet writes about a newer, better covenant. Listen to what he says. It's that language of belonging again. He says, "I will put my law in their mind and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people." That is a picture of belonging to God, of belonging to Christ. Live by His Spirit, live by His Word. Live as though you belong to Christ and like He belongs to you. Live as God's people. Keep in step with the Spirit. That is the way to gain victory in this war over the sinful nature.

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