

“ Walking in the Spirit ...*Living in the Spirit* ”

- Galatians 5:13-26 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on September 25, 2022

Galatians 5:13-26 *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not [use] liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, [even] in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told [you] in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those [who are] Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*



5:13

Throughout my years of ministry here I have spoke often concerning the issue of one's personal calling. I have even done classes on finding one's calling. I'm not sure whether I have ever really affected anyone's journey in this matter, but it wasn't for not trying. I have always believed that in most instances we fail to ever discover our calling because truthfully we don't *really* want to. The stakes are just too high in that we have no idea what craziness God would drag us into if we just gave Him full latitude. We usually are looking into this matter so we can see if there are any "cracks" we might squeeze through...areas that might be susceptible to manipulation to get God to give us what *we* want for our lives. But it is a precarious walk...we wouldn't want Him to catch us and put us on a plane to deep Africa. The bottom line is that *most* of us won't ever truly know why we are here on this earth.

In this passage however, Paul begins by throwing down right off the bat, saying "brothers...you have been *called*... The language is specific and striking. Indeed Paul could have used another word there...another vernacular; "...you have been *commanded*." Or, "God desires that you have..." Maybe "charged" or "required." But the word that he used and that is rendered in every Bible version I could find is "called." God is "calling" us to *freedom*. That seems almost to need some dramatic music when it is said!

For the seeking and avoiding we all seem to do in the matter of our 'calling', Paul is spiritually "outing" us. No where to run on this: the "phone is ringing." We are all "called to liberty," all called to a freedom that exists inside of Christ and lived out in the Christ framework. This idea is naturally fraught with trouble because folks either pick up the ball and take off running unrestrained down the field or we bristle in indignation as if we are being asked to shuck all moral restraint and holy living. But if we were to just read in context we wouldn't attack the idea or enshrine it either.

First of all, Paul's point is that our walk in Christ is not to be controlled by a set of rules. Christianity is never to be a mandated list of do's and don'ts...not comprised by our church attendance and moral standing, like bookends of our Christian experience. While Satan and the world wants people to believe that Christianity is all about rules...constraint and confinement, Paul is declaring just the opposite. Being a child of God means experiencing authentic freedom.

In contrast, our lives in the world were spent in captivity. Sin, pride, lust, jealousy, ...and so much more, it all held us in subjection. It stole our time, our joy, and any ability to actually choose a life path because it seemed to be dictated for us by some inexplicable invisible force. Today we live in a whole generation that is essentially being led around by one of those hooks in the nose. Social and cultural propaganda and newsfeeds that are just accepted as fact, especially among the younger generations...never questioned, despite the reality that even a cursory look around we would be unable to argue that the world is collapsing on multiple fronts. But like

a herd of cattle we just keep marching on in mass. The alarms keep going off yet are seemingly unheard. The Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly of the UN this last week...speaking on his priorities for 2022...says the "world is on fire" in a multiplicity of ways. 1 Jn 5:19 says it straight... "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." All the while the world is "eating, and drinking...marrying and giving in marriage..." as in Matthew 24:38.

But Christ came for us and saved us out of that bondage, that herd mentality, and suddenly the world began to unfurl before us. The bondage to sin, the bondage to rules, the bondage to the world, ourselves and our fleshly desires were being beaten back and the sun began to shine through the clouds.

But Paul is not saying that our freedom is not without its dangers. Again...the guy running unrestrained done the field... he sees this freedom as a license to indulge in his flesh. He is apt to use other vernaculars...words like grace, immunity and individual independence. Instead of actually living free, many of us are so apt to use our new found freedom not for Christ and the kingdom, but as a path back to the sweet taste of temporal sin. The bible makes no argument against the fact that sin is indeed sweet for a brief time (Hebrews 11:25, Prov 20:17, Job 20:12). We can inadvertently see this "freedom" as a license to indulge in the world without restraint.

The other extreme is a kneejerk reaction to retreat to extreme religious orthodoxy ...entrenched in measuring the length of ones skirt, head coverings, hymnals and King James only bibles. We will just "leave the world" contrary to what Jesus expressly prayed against in John 17:15.

What are we supposed to be doing with this new found liberty? This passage says our liberty...our "freedom" is to be expressed in our loving each other and serving each other. We tend to see freedom in the context of personal and individual. Jesus has a different definition. Religion says we are **supposed** to do those things, we **have** to do those things. We are under legal mandate. We are lucky to get such done in that framework and certainly there is no joy in it. When I was a kid we were pretty poor so we had a really big garden to put food on our table. All summer long we kids had to weed and care for that garden and we hated every minute of it. Now I don't have to have one but I do. I love our garden and the time we spend there.

I don't know if we will ever grasp the full impact of our redemption. Salvation changes us! It is both dramatic and mysterious. Then the Holy Spirit filling us suddenly changes the whole way we see the world. Our eyes are opened, our minds perceive things we would have never noticed before. We inexplicably have clarity where there was none. We aren't so suckered by the worlds propaganda and indoctrinated by Satan's news feed.

Everything is different. If we are indeed surrendered and reborn believers, we now **want** to love, even at our own expense. We are driven to serve by an inexplicable motivation driving us from within. We want to be a involved with what God is doing around us. This is one of the most valid, if not **the** most valid proofs, of our changed state. Truth is, there are still many among us that just cannot seem to move beyond our own selves. Our conversations begin and end with us and what's happening in **our** lives. Interactions with **us** revolve around **us**. Plans for the day are centered on **us**. We are easily miffed and quickly angered, and invariably it is always about **us**.

Over the years we may have become comfortable with the idea that we are saved, and therefore we have long since stopped looking for evidence of such. For proof ...for manifest of the Holy Spirits presence and moreover, His control. And now we are so wrapped up in ourselves that honestly any thought that we might be living a fraud would never pass through our minds! And yet real other-centered love and passionate kingdom service is wholly lacking. Occasionally we have moments, but they are not passion out of freedom, they are passing feelings of guilt. So out of legalism we respond for a time, but that never lasts. All we know then is rules and restraint and never freedom and grace.

All of that is the distinct markings of religion, but it's not relationship. Religion will never save you from hell, and it will never bring you any joy or meaning in this present life. The irony is that so many of us that would never even entertain the thought that we are 'legalists' are in fact so trapped by our own self-imposed legalism that we don't even know that we are there and that there is another life outside of the one we live.

5:14

This truly is where the 'buck stops': the 'proof-text' of our salvation. Christianity as simple and succinct as possible. The bottom line is that without love we cannot claim we are Christians. Ironically one doesn't have to walk the wider Christian road for long before you will come across folks who are bitter, angry, and carry a torch of disdain toward others...often other believers. We can wrestle forever with this enigma...try to make it make sense. But scripture already has already clarified that for us, but we just generally are uncomfortable with such acknowledgement because sometimes these folks are friends, acquaintances, or even family! But the bible says this: "*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*" (1 John

3:15) “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20) “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.” 1 John 2:9. If you detest a Christian brother or sister these passages say you are not a true born again Christian. Love is the manifest of true redemption and Spirit dwelling. Love makes us free. Hatred and bitterness is bondage.

We must be very careful in this, because we have a potential trap here. Our religious tendency is to render our Christian love a mental thing instead of a physical thing. Paul has already given us both the instruction and the demonstration of such love, and that is in service to one another. Service unto the body, the kingdom, or God Himself is pointless if it fails to come from a heart of Christ, the Holy Spirit indwelling within us.

If we do so out of constraint, or in attempt to “do what we are supposed to do,” we not only fail to express real Christ love, but it is in fact a ‘slap in the face’ to the cross. Note Isaiah 1:10-20. Paul calls upon us to truly love others...to live in awareness of others...to render decisions in acknowledgement of others. We cry out “but I want to!” and “what about me?” when no such line of thinking was ever apart of Christ or his living and dying for us.

This is one reason why the law no longer is needed. Because the fact is, if we truly loved each other, we would be fulfilling all of the law anyway. The same plays out in our marriages. If we truly love our spouses as we should, we don’t need counseling or marital rules and guidelines. Love is an incredible motivator. When we truly understand Christ’s love for us, we naturally reciprocate. Those who have trouble loving Christ or others around them do not grasp His love and sacrifice for them. Those of us that **do** understand, over flow with that love and it gets all over everyone we come into contact with.

5:15

Bitterness and hatred has an inevitable way of coming back to us. We may deny that fact, *many of us do*, but it happens just the same! A bad heart always leads to quarreling and bitterness. They, the church in Galatia, knew what they were supposed to be doing, it was the law after all! If love is the fulfillment of the law, then the believers there in Galatia ironically were failing to do the very thing that encompassed that law! But let us not throw these folks under the bus, because while they failed to grasp that such a love can never be mandated, can never be forced, **so do we most of the time**. They needed...*we need*, a “ringer.” A champion. Someone who can win when we can’t. They needed Jesus! For He *is* love, and only with Him inside of us can we love as He loves. Only then can the ‘unnatural’ become so very natural.

Clearly there were problems in the Galatian church. For we must remember to just whom Paul is writing. This is not to outsiders, but rather to those inside the church...those who thought themselves to be holy and upright. The warning therefore is for us as believers. We must never think we are out of Satan’s reach!

It’s a strange truth that even whole churches can begin to accept, even built upon, the hatred of other believers. They slander, they criticize. And not legitimate criticism over content, but over style. Over jealousy and ego. They bite and devour those outside, only to finally and inevitably turn inward and destroy each other. When such behavior is sanctioned, you turn against the Savior Himself, the embodiment of love, and you commit spiritual suicide.

5:16

Many of us will spend our lifetimes struggling against Satan and our own flesh. We often go to AA or some other ‘program’ to rid ourselves of our habits and addictions, or turn to mood altering pharmaceuticals or to psychiatrists for answers. And sometimes it works! But then we are left with a gaping hole where such once filled in our lives. As far back as a 1980 study shows 73 percent of psychiatrists had experienced moderate to incapacitating anxiety in their careers, and 58 percent moderate to incapacitating depression. “Physician heal thyself” indeed!

Here in this verse lies the secret of Holy living. The answer is not to fight the darkness, but to ‘turn on the light.’ The answer is walk in the Spirit. Such a walk naturally and innately demands movement and involvement. This is one of the reasons we are not just a church here, but an Intentional Christian Community. Our intention is to participate in an environment of action, a faith-filled ‘immersion’ lifestyle. But such cannot be just in church, rather in living out our faith. In “walking in the Spirit.”

5:17-18

The answer to not fulfilling the flesh is walking in the Spirit. It’s offense, not just defense! If we are not actively pursuing a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual lifestyle, then the best we can do is flail widely in the dark at a slippery enemy and hope to keep him at bay most of the time. Paul tells us that if we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the law. We are not ‘under the law’ because we are ‘under the Spirit.’ It’s not hard to make the leap here, if we aren’t led by the Spirit, then we must acknowledge that we are under the law. There is no in between. You are walking in God’s spirit of grace, or you are still under the law and all of its guilt, condemnation, and death. It’s our choice.

5:19-21

But truly, how do we know where we are? Do we really know where we personally stand? Check it out: *are the works of the flesh evident in our lives?* Paul gives us a ‘short list’ of these works. Not an exhaustive one, but a mirror we can look to and see if we find our reflection. “*Sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.*” Then we have the bottom line to all of it, and Paul is blunt and stark: **“those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”**

Now before you start saying, “Well, that’s not me. I haven’t been getting drunk at wild parties, I haven’t indulged in adultery or witchcraft, etc.,” let’s look at the list again. What about “lustful pleasures”? Meaning; impurity of lustful, luxurious living and/or impure motives. How about selfish ambitions? Causing ‘dissensions’ or “divisions.” Arguing? Jealousy? Idolatry? Hostility? Outbursts of anger? Hmm, those hit a little closer to home, huh? The fact is many of us know these things are a part of our lives and yet we refuse to acknowledge the truth of scripture. This does not mean those guilty of such things cannot be saved. It just means that if these things are a practice in our lives, not all of them, but any of them, we need, we should, we **MUST** take a look at ourselves and question our very salvation, or at the very least, our spiritual health.

5:22-23

Now Paul gives us the ‘flip side.’ What **should** we be manifesting? Well, walking in the Spirit we will emanate the attributes of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. How about that? Does that describe your life? These good and bad attributes are not a shopping list. They’re not a “do and don’t do” directory for you to write down and try to follow the good ones and shun the bad ones. You can’t. Only the Spirit of God can. So the choice is obvious. Walk ***in the Spirit***, or walk ***in the flesh***. Which is it going to be?

5:24-26

This is not meant to be a safari for you guys. The way to the latter list is salvation and Holy Spirit indwelling. Those who are saved want to walk in the Spirit, and the Spirit wants to walk with us! When we are reborn, we “crucify the flesh” and all of its passions and flesh. That does not mean a perfect Christian walk, oh, how I wish it did! But do not be a fool on this! Salvation means a dramatically changed life! If we say we live in the Spirit of God, then gang, we must be walking in that same Spirit. Do we understand what that means? To actually walk in the Spirit of God? To do this, we must constantly count ourselves dead to this world. If we remain in our conceit, if we remain in our pride, we stand to lose everything.