

Walk by the Spirit
Galatians 5.13-26
October 7

In his letter to the Galatian churches, the apostle Paul contrasted legalism and spirituality. The term "law" occurs thirty-three times in Galatians. The term "Spirit" (Holy Spirit) occurs sixteen times in Galatians. The key verse is Paul's contrast between "law" and Spirit" concerning Christian living occurs in Galatians 5.8: "But if the Spirit leads you, you are not under the law." Within Galatians 5, Paul challenged believers to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5.16), "be led by the Spirit" (5.18), "live by the Spirit" (5.20), and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5.25).

What did Paul identify as crucial aspects of Christian living in Galatians 5?

First, Christian freedom entails Christian service (Gal. 5.13-16). The opposite of legalism can be libertarianism – the claim that freedom from the law necessitates the rejection of moral parameters. Christian liberty is freedom to develop submissiveness to godly principles. One writer described the difference between the false liberty of libertarianism and the true freedom of moral parameters. "There are two freedoms – the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the true, where a man is free to do what he ought." Libertarianism welcome "an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5.13). True Christian liberty is the freedom to be a slave to others (v. 13) continually. (The word translated "servant" in the *Christian Standard Bible* is a verb form of slave – "doulos.") Christian freedom does not neglect the law of God. Christian freedom fulfills the law of God regarding neighbor love. Christians exhibit freedom by self-control, loving service to others, and obedience to God's law. When Christian love is absent, church members bite, devour, and consume one another like wild animals (v. 15).

Second, walking in the Spirit empowers Christian freedom fighters (Gal. 5.16-18). Here Paul described the Christian life as a walk. In the Bible, the activity of "walking" describes our manner of life. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* described the significance of the metaphor of "walk" for the manner of life. "Walking is one of the Bible's vivid metaphors for how godly people should live, both positively concerning what to follow and negatively in warnings about what to avoid." The Spirit assists believers to "walk in the newness of life" (Rom. 6.4), "walk with decency (Rom. 13.13), "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5.7), "walk in love" (Eph. 5.2), and "walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1.10).

Christians fight against "desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5.17). Following the "desires of the flesh" rather than "walking in the Spirit" produces disruption in God's design for humans in three areas, namely, sexuality, worship, and relationships with others. The "flesh" produces "works." The Spirit produces fruit. Perhaps Paul's point is that "works of the flesh" flow from the outward acts to inward corruption. Fruit flows from inward Spirit-filling to outward manifestations.

Third, walking in the Spirit produces fruit (Gal. 5.22-26). "Fruit" is a singular noun. The "fruit of the Spirit" is like a cluster of grapes. Paul lists nine "fruits" in the cluster. "Love" willingly forfeits

rights and privileges for another person. "Joy" is the happiness and pleasure that a believer experiences even in the midst of storms because a believer is a child of the king. "Peace" characterizes the life of one no longer an enemy of God; therefore, a believer can experience harmonious relationships with others. "Patience" describes an individual that can remain steadfast despite provocation from others (long-suffering). "Kindness" is the quality of consideration and sympathetic action. "Goodness" describes positive benevolence towards others. "Faithfulness" is the quality of being trustworthy, dependable, and trustworthy. "Gentleness" is the outward manifestation of humility, meekness, and considerateness. "Self-control" is the inner strength to control one's emotions, desires, and actions.