

# GOD WITH US

## Part 10: EARLY LETTERS

### Message 2 – Galatians

#### In Defense of Walking in the Spirit

#### Galatians 5-6

#### Introduction

The Book of Galatians defends two major Christian doctrines. First, it defends the doctrine of *salvation by grace through faith*. No person is “saved” by obeying a set of rules or engaging in religious rituals. Instead, we are justified (declared right with God, or ‘saved’) by His grace through the redemption accomplished by Jesus on the cross. When we place our faith (trust) in what Jesus did for us, we are saved. Second, Galatians defends the doctrine of *sanctification by the power of the Spirit*. Sanctification (“cleansing”) is the process by which we are made more and more like Jesus Christ. Paul will argue that sanctification is a work of the Spirit Who dwells within us. Just as we cannot be saved by the works of the Law, so we cannot be sanctified by sheer obedience to a set of rules. As we learn to “walk in the power of the Spirit” we will overcome the power of the flesh (the sin nature) and become increasingly like Christ.

The defense of the doctrine of sanctification by the power of the Spirit was necessary as a corollary to the defense of the gospel of grace, for this reason: Paul was charged with giving people a free ticket to sin (because of the gift of “grace”). His response to this charge is two-fold. First, the Law is unable to produce the kind of change within us that God truly desires. Second, Paul affirms (5:13) that indeed as his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they have been called into freedom, but not as a free ticket to gratify the sin nature, rather to serve one another in love. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, and when He comes to dwell within a believer, it is as if “*the law is written on our hearts.*” The believer now has an internal operating system that produces Christ-like transformation, from the inside-out. The key, then to sanctification is *walking in step with the Spirit*, NOT seeking to tame the sin nature with a rule book. The Law is unable to *save us* and/or to *sanctify us*. Jesus saves us (by His grace) and the Spirit sanctifies us (by His power).

## Defense of Spirit-led Liberty: 5:1 – 6:18

### - Stand firm in Grace: 5:1-12

Before turning to the issue of Spirit-led liberty, Paul one final time admonishes the Galatian believers to stand firm in the grace of God and to do away with the false teachers who had misled them.

***“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (5:1-6).***

In review, the false teachers had convinced the new Gentile believers that in order to be ‘fully saved’ they needed to undergo the Jewish rite of circumcision and comply with all the Laws of Moses. When Paul warns the Galatians that they are in danger of being “severed from Christ” and of “falling from grace,” he is not saying that they can “lose their salvation.” Scripture makes it clear in many other places that once a person is “saved” they are “sealed securely” by the Holy Spirit as a child of God (Ephesians 1:13,14). Yet, even a child of God can “fall away” from sound doctrine, and be “severed” from the true meaning of what Jesus did for us on the cross. By reverting to a system of trying to be saved by obeying the Laws of Moses, the Galatians were falling from the *principle of grace*, (not from their personal *position of grace*). As at the beginning of the letter, Paul calls out the false teachers and warns his readers to stay have nothing to do with them (5:7-11).

### - Freedom to Love Well: 5:13-15

Here, Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus, namely, that the entire O.T. Law can be summarized in one idea: *Love your neighbor as yourself*.

***“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and***

***devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another” (5:13-15).***

No, *freedom from sin does not mean freedom to sin.* Freedom from sin means we have not only accepted the forgiveness that flows from the cross; but we have also invited the Spirit of Christ to live within us, and His Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, will always be at work in believers to empower and direct them to *love others well, not serve self.*

**- Walk in the power of the Spirit: 5:16-25**

Central to the message of Galatians is Paul’s teaching on the Spirit-led life. As in Romans 6-8, Paul teaches that there is an ongoing battle inside of every believer between the flesh (the sinful nature, the “old man”) and the Spirit. The flesh strives to produce unrighteous qualities, while the Spirit desires to produce Christ-like qualities. The key, then, to living the Christian life is NOT to seek to tame the flesh by living under a set of rules; rather, to keep in step with the supernatural, internal Person of the Holy Spirit.

***“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law” (5:16-18).***

Paul lists various deeds of the flesh, and places these in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit.

***The flesh: “When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: 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” (5:19-21 NLT).***

***The Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (5:22,23).***

Note that the “fruit” of the Spirit is singular, not plural. This indicates that if the Spirit is in control of our lives, He will be producing all these 9 characteristics in a steady increase over time. Again, the key is not striving to become a better person in any 1 of these 9 areas; rather, the key is to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit Who will produce all 9 fruits in our lives.

The final line summarizes the entire message of Galatians:

***“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (5:25 and see 3:3 for the same idea).***

It is the Spirit that has given us new life. It is the Spirit that can now teach us how to live out that new life, as we keep in step with Him.

\*\* Please study the extended essay on Walking in the Spirit at the end of this section of the notes. There we deal in more detail with what it means to “walk in the Spirit.”

### **- Practical Admonitions: 6:1-10**

Paul’s letters were usually packed with doctrinal content (explaining our position in Christ). But he also had practical sections where he explained what the Christian life will look like when it is being lived out under the power, guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. In the final chapter of Galatians, Paul touches on several key issues of Christian living.

1. Helping those who have fallen into sin.

***“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (6:1).***

Genuine love for a fallen brother or sister is the backdrop for this command. Restoration should be done gently and humbly . . . knowing that we are all prone to fall into sin.

*We talk a lot at Oak Pointe about getting “connected” to others in genuine, life-on-life relationships. Who picks you up when you’ve fallen down? Who holds you accountable and helps restore you when you’ve been weak? On the other hand, who is it right now that needs your gentle touch of love and restoration? We can’t live out the Christian life in isolation. It can only happen in community with other committed believers. So . . . Who are your 2 a.m. friends?*

2. Bearing one another’s burdens.

***“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2).***

The word “burden” here refers to a heavy load. We should help one another in those seasons of life when someone is suffering under a heavy load. Note: 6:5 states: *“Each person will bear their own*

*load.*” The word “load” in v.5 refers to something more like a personal backpack. Each of us have personal responsibilities that we need to accept and fulfill. If a friend has the responsibility to do their own work, then I do not need to do that work for them. They need to carry their own backpack! On the other hand, if a friend is suffering heavily under a trying set of circumstances, then I need to help “bear their burden.” Jesus told of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37), who for a season bore the burdens of the man who had been robbed and beaten severely. Once the man was healed and able to carry his own ‘load’ again, they parted ways. Verse 2 is talking about the law of love. Verse 5 is talking about the issue of personal responsibility and accountability. We must each apply both principles in the spirit of love.

### 3. Staying humble.

***“For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another” 6:3,4).***

When the Galatians believers were falling back into the Law, they were essentially falling into a performance environment where peoples’ good and bad behavior could be ranked. Paul is encouraging these believers to “stay low,” and to maintain a humble demeanor toward one another. Pride and conceit are signs that we are blind and deceiving ourselves. God is opposed to proud people. We should all be thankful for whatever work God is doing in us and through us. To Him be all the glory . . . not to us.

### 4. Caring for teachers.

***“The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him” (6:6).***

In the early church, there were no paid positions. Yet, some people had to spend considerable time to prepare teachings so that the new believers could grow in their faith. Thus, the first Christians were encouraged to care for their teachers in tangible ways by sharing their resources with them. Paul was an exception, because he never wanted his critics to be able to accuse him of being in it for the money. He supported himself by making and selling tents. He was grateful for the love-gifts from believers when he was in prison and couldn’t work (Philippians 4:10,15,16).

## 5. Sowing to the Spirit.

***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (6:7,8).***

Paul returns to the theme of walking in the Spirit . . . but he uses “reap and sow” terminology to describe how the Spirit-flesh battle will play out. As in farming and planting, we reap a harvest in keeping with whatever seeds we sow. If we are “sowing to the flesh” this means that we are feeding the flesh and/or giving it the opportunity to thrive and the result will be corruption (or, the manifestation of the deeds of the flesh). If, on the other hand, we are “sowing to the Spirit” (meaning that we are doing those things that keep us in step with the Spirit’s will, influence and movement), the Spirit will produce His eternal-life fruits in us.

## 6. Persevering in doing good.

***“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (6:9,10).***

Sometimes we tire of “doing good” because there is no response to our efforts. But here we are encouraged to persevere in doing good, even when we do not see the results . . . because “in due time we will reap, if we do not grow weary.” Is there some situation right now where you have grown weary in doing good? Think of ways that you might continue forward down the path of doing good, regardless of the response you are getting. Perhaps you can ask some people to pray for you, that you will not lose heart in doing good. God’s promise to you is that eventually, in His timing, you will reap a reward of some kind. It’s up to Him to determine when and how that reward comes. It’s up to you to take God at His word and keep doing good! Hebrews Ch.11 reminds us of many people who persevered in doing ‘good’ by walking faithfully with God, even though they never saw the ‘earthly fruit’ of their lives. We who have followed several thousands of years later are their fruit! But, God is faithful to His promise and they will (as we will) receive the harvest of God’s praise and rewards in heaven someday.

## - Final Words: 6:11-18

Paul has come to the end of his letter . . . but his anger over the false teachers is still quite evident. He warns that their motives are entirely self-centered; that they want to boast in how many people are following them, and they want to avoid being persecuted (as Paul was persecuted) for preaching about the cross of Christ. As for Paul, he only cared to boast about one thing:

***“As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world’s interest in me has also died” (6:14 – NLT).***

The cross of Christ was *everything* to Paul, and he would preach about that cross anywhere and everywhere, no matter what the cost. He was not looking for the world’s applause; rather, He was living for an audience of ONE.

### Additional Thoughts on . . . **WALKING IN THE SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit is a person (the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity). When we place our faith in Jesus, for salvation, the Spirit comes to dwell within us. He regenerates us, giving us “new birth.” From that moment forward, He becomes the animating (life-giving) power that produces spiritual growth and transformation (sanctification) in our lives. Spiritual transformation is a progressive work of the Spirit, as we learn to “*walk in step with the Spirit*” (*Galatians 5:25*).

Both Galatians 5 and Romans 6-8 make it very clear that spiritual transformation will involve a *battle between the flesh and the Spirit*. The flesh (the sinful nature, the old man) will always seek to produce unrighteous characteristics in our lives. The Spirit, on the other hand, will always seek to produce a crop of righteous fruit in our lives. The key to winning this battle is *NOT trying to tame the flesh by means of some set of rules*, rather, *learning to walk in the power of the Spirit*. This is Paul’s strong emphasis in both Galatians 5 and Romans 6-8. Walking in the power of the Spirit is the only way to be “*putting to death the deeds of the flesh*” in an ongoing way (Romans 8:13). The question is: How do we “walk in the Spirit?”

## 1. YIELD

The first key is to yield to the Person of the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is truly in control of our lives, He will produce His fruit naturally

(Galatians 5:22,23). Ephesians 5:18 describes this yielding as *an ongoing process* where we *invite* the Spirit to lead, guide, empower and control us. The “flesh” is constantly trying to take control of our lives, and “warring” against the rule of the Holy Spirit within us. Yielding is a disposition of the heart toward the person of the Spirit. This yielding can be done by means of a simple prayer. We start by confessing any sin(s) that we are aware of (any flesh-driven behaviors that the Spirit makes us aware of) that might be “grieving the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30 – or blocking His flow in and through us). When we confess our sins, we can know, by faith, that God forgives us and “*cleanses us from all unrighteousness*” (1John 1:9). Then, we are ready to yield to the control of the Holy Spirit. We might pray as follows:

*Holy Spirit, I thank you that you live within me. Thank you that you have given me new life in Christ. I now invite you to take control of my life. Empower me, protect me, lead me and use me for Your purposes. Help me to keep in step with You. Amen.*

When we have prayed, it is *by faith* that we believe that the Spirit has taken His seat on the throne in our heart. He is then free to flow through us and produce His fruit within us as we walk in step with Him. He will be active within if we have a desire to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings, actions and reactions throughout our day.

Note: Yielding to the Spirit can be compared to unclogging a pipe so that water can flow through. The Holy Spirit will make us aware of things that the “flesh” is producing in us (“clogs in the pipe”). We need to *pay attention* to the things that He is revealing to us. We need to *seek His wisdom* as to the deeper causes of our attitudes and actions (just as David prayed that God would reveal to him the hidden “ways of pain” within him, Psalm 139:23,24). And, we need to *confess to Him* these flesh-driven ways. As we learn to practice this kind of self-awareness, the “clogs in the pipe” begin to dissolve and the “fruit of the Spirit” will begin to flow in and through us.

## 2. LISTEN

The second key to walking in the Spirit is to be constantly listening to the Holy Spirit, as He seeks to direct us. The “voice” of the Spirit comes to us in different ways.

- **The Word of God:** The primary way we listen to the Spirit is by *spending time in the Spirit-inspired Word of God*. It is important to note that Ephesians 5:18 (the command to “be filled with the Spirit”) has a parallel passage in Colossians 3:16 (the command to “let the Word

of Christ richly dwell within you”). These passages, when studied together, provide us with a key insight into what it means to keep in step with the Holy Spirit: *The Spirit-filled life and the Word-filled life go hand in hand*. The Spirit of God produced the Word of God. It makes sense, then, that the Spirit would use His Word to transform us. *The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to transform the child of God*. When we listen to the Word of God, we are listening of the voice of the Holy Spirit. Thus, spending *regular time in God’s Word* is the most important part of the process of learning to keep in step with the Spirit.

- **The words of fellow-believers:** We can also listen to the Spirit when His voice comes to us through other believers. We are told to admonish one another, teach one another, encourage one another, comfort one another, pray for one another, speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, etc. Thus, we will often “hear” the Spirit “speaking to us” through the words of fellow believers who are speaking into our lives. For example, the Holy Spirit has gifted some believers with the spiritual gift of teaching. When we are sitting under their teaching ministry, we are “hearing” the Spirit speak in and through them. Again, the Holy Spirit has gifted other believers with the gift of exhortation. When they come to us and exhort us (challenge and encourage us), we are “hearing” the Spirit speak through them. The Holy Spirit has gifted others with the gift of prayer. When they pray with you or for you, you will often “hear” the Spirit praying in and through them. Thus, listening attentively to the Spirit speaking through other believers is an important part of walking in the Spirit.

- **The voice of our emotions:** Our triune God is an emotional being. For example, throughout the Old Testament God displayed emotions towards people in general, often in sadness over their lack of desire to have a relationship with Him; but also in His relationships with individuals like Moses, or speaking tenderly to Hagar. Jesus showed a full range of emotions throughout the Gospels: anxiety, anger, shame, sadness, pain, surprise, hope, faith, love, joy, and peace. The Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), can groan within us (Romans 8:26), and be jealous for us (James 4:5). Since the Holy Spirit is God, it makes sense that all the emotions of God can be produced within us, through the Spirit. It says in Romans 8 that *“the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16)*. In some mysterious way, the Holy Spirit’s emotions and our emotions intermix within us.

Again, it is important to practice *self-awareness*. We should not ignore emotions when they arise within us; rather, we should *interrogate our emotions*. On the positive side, we might be experiencing the joy of the

Spirit, or the peace of the Spirit, or the comfort of the Spirit, or the encouragement of the Spirit, or the thankfulness of the Spirit. When we experience these positive emotions (“consolations”), it is good to stop and say, “thank you” to the Spirit Who lives in us. These positive emotions are used by God to show us what delights our soul and makes us feel fully alive.

Negative emotions (“desolations”) are equally important. Often, the Spirit is able to reveal an area hidden to you when you have a big emotional reaction. If you have a “\$5 reaction” to some situation, then probably nothing is to be explored. But, if you have a “\$500 reaction” then it is time to let the Holy Spirit reveal what is at the ‘root’ of the ‘fruit’ you have just experienced. If you have a feeling of anger, stop and ask: Holy Spirit, why am I feeling angry right now? What are my more tender emotions under my anger? If you are sad, ask: Holy Spirit, what is the root of this sadness? If you are fearful or anxious, ask: Holy Spirit, what are the deeper insecurities or lies I am believing, driving my fears and anxiety? Or, why am I having a hard time trusting you in this situation? Negative emotions are like the red light on the dashboard of a car. They signal to us that something is going on inside of us. Negative emotions will usually point in one of two directions. Take anger: The Spirit might be prompting within us a *righteous anger* over an injustice. On the other hand, the Spirit might convict us of having *unrighteous anger* because we are made to wait in line too long. Take fear: The Spirit might be prompting within us a *healthy fear* to keep us from walking into danger. On the other hand, the Spirit might be convicting us of having an *unhealthy fear* because we cannot control a situation. The point is that the Spirit of God uses our emotions, both positive and negative, to get our attention. Learning to “keep in step with the Spirit” is learning to pay attention, and to interrogate emotions as they arise within us.

### 3. WALK

Finally, the language of the New Testament regarding the Spirit requires that in the end we *move out in the direction the Spirit wants to take us*. Yielding and listening are essential prerequisites; but once we have yielded and heard His voice, it is time to *WALK in the Spirit (keep in step with the Spirit; follow the Spirit)*. If the Spirit is inviting us to take a step of faith, then we begin to exercise faith and move in that direction. If the Spirit is convicting us to stop doing something, then we take steps to stop doing it. If the Spirit is allowing anger to bubble to the surface, we seek to discern then source of our anger and then we follow His lead in dealing with the anger and its source. If the Spirit of

God has used the Word of God to get our attention about something, then we take steps to be “doers of the Word, not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22).

**YIELD > LISTEN > WALK.** Walking in the Spirit cannot be reduced to a formula. It is learning to dance with the God Who has taken up residence in our hearts. It is learning to “keep in step with” the movements of the Holy Spirit Who has an agenda for our lives. We have likened it to unclogging the flow in a pipe. Another analogy would be that of a wind turbine. You may have seen fields dotted with hundreds of huge wind turbines that produce electricity. These wind turbines cannot produce power on their own. They can only harness the power of the wind, and allow that power to flow through them. The key to these wind turbines functioning is that they need to “catch the wind” so that the blades turn. Thus, the turbines are designed to automatically turn to face the wind. When we “walk in step with the Spirit” we are basically turning our lives to catch the wind of the Spirit so that His power and His fruit can flow in and through us.

Jesus used yet another analogy with His disciples. He said something like this: *I am the vine and you are the branches. A branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains connected to the vine. So, you cannot bear fruit unless you stay connected to Me. If you stay connected to Me, you will bear much fruit. By so doing, you will bring glory to My Father and you will prove to be My true disciples. But remember . . . apart from Me you can do nothing.* (See John 15:1-11 for Jesus’ exact words.)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some new things you have learned about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity - the Holy Spirit?
2. Can you think of a time when you heard the voice of the Spirit through the Word, through community, or through your emotions?
3. Can you discuss a time when you really felt like you were keeping in step with the Spirit at some key point in your life?
4. What ‘clog’ in your ‘pipe’ is the Holy Spirit trying to unblock?
5. How has Galatians helped you learn more about freedom and grace in your life?

**JAMES 1-2**  
**Works are the Fruit of Faith**  
**STUDY AHEAD**

Paul has made the strong case that salvation is not based on works, but on the grace of God. So, the question is, what is the place of “good works” in Christian theology? James will make the case that works are the *fruit* of salvation, not the *root*. Read the following key passages as you study ahead in the book of James.

Note: James was the human ‘1/2’ brother of Jesus, born of Joseph and Mary. He followed Jesus around and listened to Him teach, but didn’t believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. Notice similarities between James’ style of exhorting his followers, and Jesus style. Many have noted how the Book of James parallels in many ways Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), both in style and content.

**1:1-4** Based on his introduction, what do you think the recipients were facing when James wrote this letter? See also 1:12.

**1:5-8** What might be the connection between trials (1-4) and asking God for wisdom (5-8)?

**1:9-11** James has a lot to say about rich/poor issues in the early church. As you read James this week, see if you can pick out all the places he addresses this.

**1:13-15** What does this passage teach us about how sin works?

**1:21-25** Compare this passage to Matthew 7:24-27. What are they both saying?

**2:14-26** This is THE key passage on the relationship between “faith and works.” Study it carefully to see what you can learn.