

The Perfect Model of a Spirit-Empowered Life

Scripture: Galatians 5:16–26

Code: 48-32

You can open your Bible to the fifth chapter of the book of Galatians. We are studying this wonderful epistle of Paul, and we have come to the fifth chapter, and in particular in the fifth chapter to a very familiar portion. To anyone who's been around the things of the Lord for any length of time we're familiar with the fifth chapter, because the chapter ends with a wonderful, rich section on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And that's what we're going to be looking at in part this morning. We'll just sort of get started today and continue to look at this section in the weeks ahead.

But I want to read it to you. We pick it up at chapter 5, verse 16: "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. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another." We now come to the section on "Walking in the Spirit." And this is the heart and soul of understanding the process of sanctification and the living of our Christian lives.

We're going to this morning just look at verse 16, "Walk by the Spirit." We want to talk about what that really means. And also, not only what it means in some kind of abstract form, but the example of what it looks like when it happens. What is someone like when they walk by the Spirit? And I want to look at that first before we actually dig a little deeper into that verse.

So turn in your Bible back to John 17; and I want you to understand this. We'll take a little time looking at a number of scriptures this morning, so you're going to need to follow along. But in John 17 our Lord prays His famous prayer to the Father, and He's praying on behalf of all who will ever believe on Him; He's praying for us. This is an illustration of His intercession for His own. And He says down in verse 17, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." So He's praying for the sanctification of His people through all of church history: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." So the Word of God is the means by which God will answer the prayer of Jesus and sanctify His people.

Then He goes on to say this: "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." So He parallels His commission with our commission. He was sent into the world; we are sent into the world. And then in verse 19, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth." This is a marvelous statement by our Lord: "I sanctify Myself" – stunning really –

“for their sakes.”

We need, we need a perfect model of sanctification. We need a perfect example of sanctification. Our Lord sanctified Himself in every way; but let's just focus on the idea that He was a sanctified person. He then becomes the model of sanctification, the example of sanctification. He was holy and innocent and undefiled, and never did anything wrong, never violated any command, any expression of God's will or law. To sanctify essentially means “to set apart from sin.” And that is exactly what defines the Lord Jesus. And so, He prays that His people will be like Him, that as He sanctified Himself, we will be sanctified, we will be made to become as much like Him as possible.

The essential reality of perfect sanctification is this: perfect love and perfect obedience. The essence – I'll say it again – the essence of perfect sanctification is perfect love and perfect obedience: perfect love toward God and perfect conformity to God's will and Word. So He was sanctified by His adherence to the truth, the revealed will of God; and He prays that we will be sanctified by our adherence to the truth, which is, of course, the revealed Word and will of God. Let me say it again: perfect sanctification is perfect obedience out of love to God's holy will as revealed in His Word. It is perfect conformity to Scripture. And Scripture is the revealed character of God. So it is perfect conformity to the character of God, and manifest particularly in Jesus Christ.

Our Lord had perfect love for the Father. He loved the Father in a perfect way. He says that, of course, in this same seventeenth chapter. His love for God was so perfect that His obedience, of course, followed as perfect as well. So let's look at what a perfect person is like. Let's go to the gospel of John again, but backing up all the way to chapter 5. Keep your Bible in a good place, because I want you to walk through this with me because it's very, very important, foundational.

In the fourth chapter of John it's going to yield a wonderful realization in a moment. In the fourth chapter of John we're going to be looking at the things that Jesus says about what He does. He says in John 4:34, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” Food speaks of the single greatest necessity of life. Without food you die. The Lord's great necessity in life was to “do the will of Him who sent Me and accomplish His work. I do only the will of God. I do only the work of God. That is my food.”

In the fifth chapter and verse 17 He is talking to the Jews who were persecuting Him, and He says, “My Father is working.” This happened to be on the Sabbath. My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” So He not only does the Father's will, obeys the Father's word, but He does the Father's work.

In verse 18, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’” He does only the will of the Father, only the word of the Father, only the work of the Father, and He does nothing but what the Father is doing, and He does it exactly as the Father does it. This is perfect love and, consequently, perfect obedience conforming to God.

Over in verse 30 of that same chapter, “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and

My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. Whatever it is, I don't do anything on My own initiative, including judging. I listen to the voice of God and take all My orders from Him, and obey Him perfectly.

Then over in the seventh chapter of John and verse 18, He says, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Jesus says, "I seek only the glory of the One who sent Me."

In the eighth chapter – just a few more – verse 28, Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me." Verse 29, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." Well, that's enough to make it absolutely clear. He always did what pleased God. He never did anything that did not please God. He rendered out of His own divine perfection perfect love and perfect obedience.

In John 14, verse 31, "but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me." Loving obedience marks perfect sanctification. Loving obedience marks perfect sanctification.

This is obviously demonstrated only in Jesus Christ; only He was perfect in His love and obedience. That is why at the baptism the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Again, perfect sanctification is flawless obedience from a heart of love to the will of God, revealed and manifest in Scripture. We then are sanctified in the same way Jesus was by our loving conformity to the will of God, to the word of God, to the work of God. We live to follow His example. That's why we talk about being like Christ. We don't mean like Him in the sense that we're deity, we mean like Him in the sense that we are sanctified, we are holy, we are lovingly obedient to God.

Now the question is this – and this is what gets us into the chapter before us: By what power did the Lord love and obey? By what power did the Lord love and obey? Because when He came into the world, He set aside His own prerogatives to use His power. He chose not to use His power. He says that. He says, "I emptied Myself," in a sense. "I came into this world. I don't know even when the Son will return. I do have the power to call legions of angels to My defense, but I do not use that power." He didn't lose His power, He didn't lose His understanding of things in the future, but He willingly set them aside and took on the form of a slave to God for the purpose of doing the will of God. But the question is, "By then what power did He render this perfect loving obedience?" And the answer comes to us initially from the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah chapter 11.

In Isaiah chapter 11 – I told you I'm going to use a lot of Scripture – so in Isaiah chapter 11 we have a prophecy of the coming Messiah, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what we read in Isaiah 11 – and you are familiar with this verse no doubt: "A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse." Now, we all know that Jesse was the father of David. "A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, a branch from his roots will bear fruit." There will come a Messiah – being referred to here – from the line of Jesse through David. Jesus, of course, the New Testament says, is the son of David.

And then in verse 2 it defines the power that will rest on Him and in Him and through Him: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him." This is the answer to, "By what power does Jesus render this perfect

obedience and perfect sanctification?” The answer here: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him.”

Since He set aside His own independent use of His attributes, He had to depend on someone else to empower His perfect sanctification; and it is the Holy Spirit who is then defined for us in the richness of His nature. He is the Spirit of the Lord, He is the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, the spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of the Lord. That’s seven characteristics that are referred to there. There are seven references to the Holy Spirit, which is why the menorah has seven candlesticks, because it is representative of the sevenfold power of the Holy Spirit here in Isaiah. And the full power of the Holy Spirit – that is including wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear or worship of God – will rest on the Messiah.

And if you go toward the end of Isaiah’s prophecy to chapter 61 there is another familiar messianic prophecy speaking of the coming Christ. Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.”

How is our Lord going to do this? How is He going to preach the good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, give liberty to captives, freedom to prisoners, and proclaim the coming favorable year of the Lord, and unleash vengeance and comfort as well? By what power will He do this? Verse 1, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” So the answer to the question is that the sanctification of our Lord was accomplished in Him by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, turn to the New Testament to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4. “Jesus goes back to Galilee” – it says – “in the power of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit.” He could not have done anything if it hadn’t been for the power of the Spirit. He began teaching, was praised by all. He goes to the synagogue in Nazareth, in verse 16, and He stands up to read, and the passage is Isaiah 61.

And so, “He reads,” – starting at verse 18, exactly what we just read in Isaiah 61 – ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. Sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.’ He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him,” to hear how He was going to interpret this. “And He began saying to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ He said, “I am that Spirit-filled, Spirit-anointed Messiah that Isaiah promised.”

Well, eventually you know how that day ended. Verse 28, “The people were filled with rage. They got up and drove Him out of the city, led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built,” – Nazareth – “in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way.” Our Lord said He did what He did by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the tenth chapter of Acts, I just want to show you one verse in that tenth chapter, but it’s a wonderful one: verse 38. Peter’s preaching, and he says in verse 38, “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him in the form of the Holy Spirit. God was with Him in the form of the Holy Spirit.

So, answer to the question, “How did Jesus do the will of God, the work of God in the way that God did it? How did He render perfect love toward God, perfect obedience toward God?” The answer, “By the power of the Holy Spirit.” The very person who empowered the perfect obedience of Christ is the very person that takes up residence in our lives as believers. So Jesus obeyed the word of God perfectly in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now listen, 1 John 2:6 says this: “The one who says he abides in Him” – in Christ – “ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” If you say you abide in Christ you ought to walk as He walked. How did He walk? He walked in the Spirit; He walked in the power of the Spirit.

Listen to Colossians 2:6, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” How did He walk? How do we walk? How do we walk in Him? In the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now someday we’ll do that perfectly, because it says in 1 John 3 that someday we’ll be like Him, and so we will have perfect love and perfect obedience. But now we are striving to walk like He walked. We have been given the Holy Spirit, the power is there. We are being led by the Spirit, as he says – and I read it earlier in Galatians 5. So if you’re led by the Spirit, then walk in the Spirit. There’s no such thing as a Christian who doesn’t have the Spirit. There’s no such thing as a Christian not being led by the Spirit. So follow and walk in the Spirit.

Now, one other portion of Scripture needs to be brought into consideration, and it’s Romans chapter 8. This is wonderful, encouraging truth. Romans 8:3, “For the law could not do.” Let me tell you about the law. The law makes demands and pronounces judgment if you violate them. And so we’re all under the law and we’re all basically guilty of breaking the law – I’m talking about God’s moral law. We’re all then sentenced to death and punishment.

The law has no power. The flesh has no power. The law can’t help us, it can’t empower us; it’s outside of us – the law, what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh. The law can’t help us, and we in our flesh can’t help ourselves. But what the law could not do, because it’s weak to the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. “God sent His Son into the world as an offering for sin. By that offering He condemned sin in the flesh, so” – verse 4 – “that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.” How then is the law fulfilled in us? By walking according to the Spirit; not walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

You want to fulfill the law of God, walk in the Spirit. This is so very important, because these legalists had come to the Galatian church and said, “You need to conform to the external rituals and ceremonies and rites, including circumcision, of Judaism. You can’t be saved without that, and you can’t be sanctified without that.” Paul has been saying, “No, you’re free from all of that. You’ve been set free from all of that.”

The question then comes, “If I don’t keep those rules and rituals, how do I please God? How do I do the will of God?” And the answer is, “You walk in the Spirit.” Legalism isn’t going to work. Legalism cannot overcome evil desire; legalism cannot restrain the flesh. Wherever you see a religious legalist, you see a hypocrite, every single time. They may appear to be moral, but it is hypocritical morality because they have no ability in their flesh to conform to the law of God or the will of God. The only way that happens is when there is a new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So the Holy Spirit enables us, Romans 8 says, to do what the law and the flesh could never ever do. Yes, we have been set free, but set free from the bondage of the law which cannot save us and cannot sanctify us. The Holy Spirit alone can save us through belief in the gospel. The Holy Spirit alone has the power to conform us to the Word and, thus, the will of God. So we want to be like Christ. We've talked about that a lot in Galatians. We want to be transformed into Christlikeness, which means that we want more and more to walk as He walk. How did He walk? He walked in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now with that in mind, let's go back to Galatians 5 and look again at verse 16 and just consider this one verse. Here's the command: "But I say, walk by the Spirit." Literally, present tense imperative: "Keep on walking. Keep on walking. Continually be walking." It implies effort. It implies consistency. It assumes difficulty because we have to be commanded to do it. That is evidence that there's going to be resistance, that there's going to be conflict – we'll see more about that next time.

But you can see for yourself in verse 17 that the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to each other. The flesh is producing all the horrible sins in verses 19, 20 and 21. The Spirit is producing all the virtues in verses 22 and 23. Both of those things reside in us because we still have unredeemed humanness, which is our flesh, as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is why we're in a war, we're in a battle, we're in a conflict, and we have to be commanded to walk in the Spirit, because there is so much resistance.

Now let's talk about "walk." What does "walk" mean? It's simply the ordering of life, one step at a time in life, putting one spiritual foot in front of the other and doing it consistently. And the Bible talks a lot about walking. Walking is just the normal process of progressive sanctification one step at a time.

And walking is a big theme in the New Testament. Spiritual progress isn't a sprint, it's a long, lifelong walk. We read in Romans 6 about walking in new life. We read in Romans 13 about walking decently. We read in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 1 about walking worthily. In Philippians 3, walking in unity. In Ephesians 4, walking in humility. In Romans 13, walking in purity. In 1 Corinthians 7, walking in contentment. In 2 Corinthians 5, walking in faith. In Ephesians 2, walking in good works. Second Thessalonians 3, walking in separation from sin and the world. Ephesians 5, walking in love. Again in Ephesians 5, walking in light. Again in Ephesians 5, walking in wisdom. In 3 John, walking in truth.

Summing it up, we walk like Jesus walked. He walked. He walked in perfect divine life. He walked decently; He walked worthily. He walked in integrity, humility, purity, contentment, faith, good works, separation, love, light, wisdom, truth. So we are to walk the way Jesus walked. And this assumes an effort. This isn't let go and let God. This isn't passivity, and it isn't some kind of antinomianism where now that we have been saved we have no responsibility. No. Walk, put one spiritual foot in front of the other and do exactly the kind of walking Jesus did, which meant conform your life to the will of the Father, the word of the Father, and the work of the Father. Do what God wants you to do, do what God has told you to do, and do what God Himself does.

Now the Christians in Galatia had been bewitched, as we saw back in chapter 3, to be lured into legalism. This is a foolish bewitching that retarded their sanctification. Remember chapter 4, verse 19, Paul says, "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you. You're not walking as Christ walked. You're not walking in the Spirit, and it's a painful thing for me to see."

In chapter 5 and verse 7, he said, "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? When it all started out you actually were moving fairly rapidly, and now it's all slowed down." Paul has rejected legalism in this book. It doesn't mean he rejects the moral law of God, but he rejects the fact that you in your own strength, or anybody, can earn salvation by keeping God's rules, or that as a Christian your sanctification is the result of your own ability to obey laws, particularly external laws rather than laws for the heart. False religion works up an external set of behaviors by which people supposedly are to please God. But as God said, even Israel was near to Him externally, but their hearts were far from Him. You are free; but no freedom for indulging the flesh, chapter 5, verse 13, as we saw.

And the moral law of God is holy, just, and good. The moral law of God is necessary if you want to honor God. The moral law of God is His will, and His word, and His command. We are not free to disobey. We are transformed to love. And Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit."

So, let's look back at verse 16. Command: "Walk by the Spirit." If you walk by the Spirit you will be sanctified. And it's expressed this way: "You will not carry out the desire of the flesh, if you walk by the Spirit, if you walk as Christ walked, if you walk in the truth of God as revealed in the word of God." The Holy Spirit is present in every believer to empower believers to live like Christ. The power is internal; the Holy Spirit is the energizer, the instructor, and the restrainer of evil.

Another way to understand that is Ephesians 5:18. In Ephesians 5:18 it says, "Don't be drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Holy Spirit." There were pagan religions where drunkenness and orgiastic behavior was essentially the way that pagans thought they were communing with deity. They actually thought that if they were completely inebriated somehow they ascended into transcendent communication with their gods. Paul says, "No, don't be drunk with wine as if that's some access to the supernatural; be filled with the Holy Spirit." The parallel in Colossians 3:16 is to, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." So when you're saturated by the Word and it takes richly over your life, that's the same as walking in the Spirit, because the Spirit's desire is to conform you to the Word, which is to conform you to Christ.

Now, let's look at the rest of the statement: "You will not carry out the desire of the flesh." You want to defeat your flesh. *Sarx* is the Greek word for "flesh." What does it mean? Not just your body, but the complex of sin that still remains until your glorification. You want to overcome that, you want to triumph over that, you want to defeat that, then walk by the Spirit. "Desires" is the word, *epithumia*, "yearnings," "longings," and usually referring to evil ones. All those evil impulses and longings that still exist in us – and we'll see more about that when Paul talks about it verse 17, and we compare it to Romans 7.

There's a war going on in us. How do we win the war? How do we triumph over the desires of the flesh? Answer: Walk in the Spirit. What does it mean again? It means to be like Christ. How is that possible? You have the power in the Holy Spirit, and you have the pattern in the Word of God. This is how we are to live. And so, we are commanded, in Romans 6:12, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

This is the Christian life, this is the Christian experience: walking in the Spirit. It is not passive, not at all. First Corinthians 9, Paul says, "I beat my body into submission." Paul talks a lot about the soldier as the model for a Christian at war, chapter 6 of Ephesians, putting on the whole armor of God. He talks about running a race. The end of his life he says, "I have fought the good fight." This is a battle. This is a war our whole life long.

We are new creations, incarcerated in unredeemed flesh, which still has its desires. And we know what the desires are, because they're manifest down in verse 19: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing. These are the kind of things that mark those who are not going into the kingdom. Those same desires still remain in us; although they have been trampled down they're still there, trampled down by the power of God, the transformation of the new birth, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, but still capable to rise up and cause us to sin.

So what do we do, passively surrender? No, we fight the battle with all our might by walking in the Spirit. You can only walk in the Spirit if you know the will of God, the work of God, the Word of God. So we learn the Scriptures, we take in the Scriptures, we think biblically, because that essentially fuels the working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot move us in a direction in which we're ignorant. So to be saturated with the Word of God enables the Spirit of God to empower us to triumph over the flesh. Walk by the Spirit. That's what Jesus did. He's our model of perfect love, rendering perfect obedience to His Father. And if we abide in Him we ought to walk the way He walked.

I guess sometimes Christians think that they'll just take whatever comes in this life, and hold on until they get to heaven and everything is perfect, and not worry about the struggle here. That is unacceptable, because that kind of resignation is a dishonor to God. But, secondly, it is foolish because it short-circuits your joy. John says, "These things are written to you that your joy may be full." If you want full joy, and along with that full usefulness, you have to be a vessel that is purged and cleansed. You might as well have all the joy you can get in this life, and it comes by walking in the Spirit.

Well, that is just the introduction and just the beginning. So much more to come; and we'll continue to look at that next week. Let's pray.

The consistency of Your Word, our Father, is a great testimony to its divine authorship. Wherever we go in Scripture when there is a principle or a truth, a reality, a doctrine, a propositional fact, we find it perfectly harmonizes with everything else in Your Word. How marvelous it is that You have called us to walk by the Holy Spirit, and You have given us a perfect model, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit's work is to conform us to Christ. When we walk in the Spirit we go from glory, to glory, to glory, to glory, one level of glory to the next, ever-increasingly more like Christ. This is the prize of the upward call, and it's the goal of life here. Help us to walk as He walk, to take on the marks of Christ, the beauties of Christ: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control – namely the fruit of the Spirit.

Help us, Lord, to walk in a way that brings You glory, that brings You honor, as our Lord Himself said He only did what gave You glory. And also, Lord, help us to live loving, obedient lives, so that we

may have full joy in this life. There is no reason to go through this life sad and depressed and discouraged when You offer us full joy for loving obedience. Help us to love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourself. Help us to know that this is the fulfillment of the law. It's fulfilled by loving obedience. Producing it is the work of Your Spirit. Thank You, blessed Holy Spirit, for residing in us; and may we submit to Your power and purpose. That's our prayer, in the Savior's name. Amen.

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