

## How Do You Live Free?

Text: Galatians 5:16-26

Series: *No Other Gospel* [Galatians, #14]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

February 5, 2012

Theme: **You Must Walk By The Spirit To Live Free.**

### Introduction

In 1987 U.S. President Ronald Reagan gave a speech in Berlin, Germany at the Brandenburg gate which divided the city between East Germany and West Germany. He noted reports from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness, but asked if they were real or token gestures. He went on to say,

“There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”<sup>1</sup>

What happened? In a speech in October of this last year Mr. Gorbachev recounted how the Party Congress in the Soviet Union made the decision the year after President Reagan’s speech to change their entire system, to build a system for a free country, for political democracy.<sup>2</sup> In November of 1989 the East German government was unravelling. The Berlin wall was breached, and then was completely torn down in 1990. East and West were united. Twenty years later, the New York Times reported that decline continued in the former East Germany. While the economic gap between East and West was closing, they said it was more of “a leveling down than up.”<sup>3</sup> Those people are free, but many struggle to live free.

Many Christians face the same struggle spiritually. Believers have been set free in Christ. We don’t have to try to scale a mountain of laws or good works to try to please God and gain His favor. Our sins are forgiven, we are accepted by God by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone. We are free from the domination, the control of sin. We are free to live in fellowship with God and each other. We are free to serve God and each other.

*But ... many Christians struggle to live free. You may be one of them. How do you live free? In this last section of Galatians 5 Paul proclaims, you must walk by the Spirit to live free. Think about that with me this morning.*

## The dynamic of living free.

God does not leave us on our own here. He provides a dynamic power for you to live free. We see this dynamic here in Galatians 5 in three realities, three realities for every believer, three realities for you. The first reality is that believers have crucified the flesh. Drop down to verse 25. “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

You may ask, “What is he talking about? What does having *crucified the flesh* mean?” Turn to Romans 6, where Paul writes along the same lines. If you are using a pew Bible, that’s on page 122 of the second or New Testament section. Verse 1.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who *died to sin* still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus [that is, we who have been saved] have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (1-4)

Now drop down to verse 14. “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” You see, when God saved you, He not only forgave all your sins, He also broke the power sin had over you.

Before you placed your faith in Christ you were not able to please God,<sup>4</sup> and more than that, you were, as Paul writes in Romans 6:20, “a slave of sin.” But when you were saved, as Charles Wesley’s hymn sings, God “broke the power of canceled sin”—He set you free not only from the guilt and penalty of your sin, but also its power over you. The first dynamic for living free is the reality that the power and domination of sin over us was broken, crucified, put to death when God saved us.

The second reality that gives us power to live free is that we are no longer under the Law. Go back up to verse 18. “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” In Romans Paul writes that,

“... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”<sup>5</sup>

And that “... you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ...”<sup>6</sup>

The Law was not given as a means to salvation or as a power to overcome sin. Rather, it points out God’s holiness and our sinfulness. What Paul is saying is that if you are walking by the Holy Spirit, if you are following Him, if you are letting Him lead you, you are free from being under the Law’s condemnation.

We need to clearly understand that this freedom from the Law is not freedom to do whatever we want, freedom from living rightly. As one writer puts it, “Freedom from law

does not ... mean freedom *to sin*; it means freedom *from sin*.”<sup>7</sup> We are not under the constant accusation and condemnation of the Law—Christ fulfilled all the Law’s demands and enables us to experience the blessings of that fulfillment.

Another invaluable and indispensable reality is that you can now live free as you walk by the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 16, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” This word *walk* was a common term to describe walking around. Figuratively, it referred to a way of life. Here to live by the Spirit, not by the flesh or ourselves.

Now verse 18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” This is the same truth, but now the emphasis on the Holy Spirit leading us.

And verse 25, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” The word *walk* used here is a different word than the one used in verse 16. It originally described being in line or lining up with, such as a soldier lining up or staying in line in his formation. Figuratively, then, it described agreeing with, holding true to, keeping. Paul is saying, since we have life by the Spirit, let us keep in line, hold true to Him.

We were made alive spiritually by the Holy Spirit’s work. So now we can and are to live by His ministry, to follow His leading, to stay in agreement with Him. *But*, you may ask, how do I do that practically now, today, every day? As we look at the broad teaching of Scripture, we find God gives us practical direction. Let’s note a few highlights.

It begins with knowing, truly knowing and relying on who we are in Christ, including what we have seen here in chapter 5. Based on that, we need to decide to actually let the Holy Spirit lead us. This is more easily desired and said than done. I can say I want to follow God, pray for His clear leading and yet stay in the driver’s seat, or want to hold veto power. In Ephesians 6 Paul told slaves to serve their masters “in the sincerity of [their] heart, as to Christ.” And then he laid down a principle which applies to all believers in everything as he writes that they are to do “the will of God *from the heart*” (5, 6). To do God’s will, to follow him from the center of and with all of my being. Mark this: as long as, or whenever you and I stay in the driver’s seat or reserve the right of veto, we are not allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us.

As well, remember and bank on the fact that the Holy Spirit leads us through God’s Word, the Scriptures. When Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit coming as our helper who will be with us forever, He went on to stress that we continually keep His word, and that the Holy Spirit will teach us, remind us, bring His truth to our minds.<sup>8</sup>

Do you want to live in freedom from sin’s domination, to experience victory over it? Do you want to experience the Holy Spirit leading you? Read, think about, explore and study God’s Word.

Listen to the testimony and insight of George Müller, a 19<sup>th</sup> century man of great faith who relied on God daily to lead and provide.

“What is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God—not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe. No, we must consider what we read, ponder over it, and apply it to our hearts. When we pray, we speak to God. This exercise of the soul can be best performed after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God. Through His Word, our Father speaks to us, encourages us, comforts us, instructs us, humbles us, and reproves us. We may profitably meditate, with God’s blessing, although we are spiritually weak. The weaker we are, the more meditation we need to strengthen our inner man. Meditation on God’s Word has given me the help and strength to pass peacefully through deep trials. What a difference there is when the soul is refreshed in fellowship with God early in the morning! Without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day can be overwhelming.”<sup>9</sup>

Among other practical steps is not expecting God to drop a detailed schematic of your life down from heaven, but to seek and rely on His wisdom for choices you make. James wrote, “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”<sup>10</sup> He goes on to clarify,

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The environment of living free.**

You must walk by the Spirit to live free, *and you can!* So why then do we find it difficult? Chuck Swindoll shares that one of his mentors used to say,

“The longer I live and the closer I walk with Christ, the more I believe He does not take the time to explain why. So we trust Him through our lives without expecting the ‘why’ to be answered.”<sup>12</sup>

That is something we all need to learn and experience as a liberating, peace-giving truth.

But, why living free is difficult is *not* one of those things. God graciously tells us directly and in detail why this is so. In short, our difficulty stems from *our environment*. No, I can’t say it’s because of my parents, teachers, or society. Rather, it is my *inner environment*—what I am and what is going on within me. That is what makes it difficult.

Every believer has a war waging within. You have a war waging within you. Look at verse 17.

“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.”

There is a war between the old you and the new you. As I noted last week, John Stott described the old nature or flesh as not “what clothes our bony skeleton, but our fallen human nature, which we inherited from our parents and they inherited from theirs, and which is twisted with self-centredness and therefore prone to sin.”<sup>13</sup> Then, when you placed your faith in Christ, God made you a new creation.<sup>14</sup>

I am sure you have seen cartoons of a perplexed man with the devil sitting on one shoulder and an angel on the other, both whispering into his ear. That picture is not accurate in that it does not show the complete picture. At the same time, it rightly points out that a battle goes on, a battle between our flesh and Satan’s forces on one side and our new nature which the Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers on the other.

So whatever we want to do, *there will be* opposition. If I want to do what is right, my old nature and Satan’s forces will use fear, the unknown, lies, rationalization of “It’s not that bad” or “Other people do worse things” to defeat my intention. If I want to do what is wrong, the Holy Spirit will convict me and strengthen my new nature in line with Scripture.

We can identify with Paul who wrote in Romans 7, “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (15). And also,

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

And so, thinking of that war, he went on to tell us, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (24).

The truth here in Galatians 5, backed up by Paul’s personal testimony in Romans 7, tells us that not only does this war wage in us, it always will be a waging in us. There is no experience, there is no degree of spiritual growth and maturity that will change this. We will be free from this war when we are free from this life and see Christ face to face. We can cry out with Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

But—and this is wonderful and exciting—the prospect, the reality for you and me is not despair and defeat, but victory! Why? Because God tells us in His word

- “[We] have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer [we] who live, but Christ lives in [us]; and the life which [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave Himself up for [us].”<sup>15</sup>
- Because “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”<sup>16</sup>
- Because God strengthens us “with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.”<sup>17</sup>
- Because “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”<sup>18</sup>
- Because “God... always leads us in triumph in Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Yes, the war wages. Some specific battles continue for a long time. But as we walk by the Spirit we will live free, we will experience victory.

### **The evidence of living free.**

How are you doing? How do you *know* how you are doing? Turn to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6 verse 43 (that’s on page 50 in the second or New Testament section of the pew Bible. Verse 43, Jesus is speaking.

“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” (43-45)

How do we know? By the fruit, by the evidence of our lives—the evidence deep within our secret thoughts as well as that which is out there for all to see. Paul paints two contrasting pictures. The first is of the evidence of not living free and the second of living free. We could camp here for a number of weeks, but today I want us to see the big picture.

Living powered by, living in slavery to the flesh can be detected by the deeds of the flesh. Paul lists fifteen examples before he writes “and things like these” (21). These are examples of sin produced by our flesh “which is twisted with self-centredness and therefore prone to sin.”<sup>20</sup> People who are characterized by these works, verse 21 tells us, “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” That is, they are not really God’s people. Yes, believers sin and can keep themselves stuck in the muck and misery of sin. At times only God knows whether an individual belongs to Him or not.

The list begins with three examples of sexual sin in verse 19. First, note that God’s design and standard for sex is for one man and one woman in marriage. Paul begins with *immorality*, which refers to any and all kinds of immoral sexual behavior. Then *impurity*, describes the moral uncleanness of sexual sin. And *sensuality*, which pictures the uncontrolled passion of sexual sin.

Then Paul moves on to two sins of worship or religion in verse 20. *Idolatry* is giving anyone or anything the place, honor, commitment or worship that belong to God. We realize that this is not just bowing down to an idol—success, money, friends, reputation, even family can be idols. *Sorcery* also replaces trusting God. Here it goes to trying to figure out what is going to happen and beyond—to trying to shape or control, to pull the strings to get what I want.

Paul’s largest group of examples deals with relational sins. These eight sins fairly much speak for themselves: *Enmities*, a feuding and even hateful spirit; *Strife*; *Jealousy*; *Outbursts of anger*; *Disputes*; and escalating that, *Dissensions*; taking it up another notch, *Factions*; and *Envy*, wanting what others have, not being content with what God gives. These, and all works of the flesh, are evidence that a person is not free, is not walking by the Spirit.

Now the positive evidence. Living in the freedom of the Spirit can be detected by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of the *fruit* the Holy Spirit, the fruit He produces when we follow Him. While it is possible this is a collective noun referring to nine individual fruits, it is much more likely that this is one fruit with many dimensions. They come together.

While it is the Spirit’s work and not ours, we must take an active role. We have been told to “walk by the Spirit,” to “keep in line with the Spirit.” Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 that we are to “lay aside the old self” and “put on the new self” (22, 24).

Paul’s list starts in verse 22 with *Love*—the sacrificial love of God which was poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit when we were saved,<sup>21</sup> and without which we and all we do amounts to nothing.<sup>22</sup> *Joy*—the true happiness or rejoicing from God which can and should always be ours.<sup>23</sup> *Peace*—a sound, wholesome contentment that rules in our hearts.<sup>24</sup> *Patience*—enduring with difficult situations, difficult people and, yes, with God to answer and act. *Kindness*—which has its root in goodness and generosity. Just as God in His kindness sent Christ who saved us, we will be kind to others.<sup>25</sup> *Goodness*—is very similar to kindness, emphasizing both moral character and action. *Faithfulness*—being reliable and loyal, being one others can depend on. *Gentleness*—using power gently, even, as we read in 6:1, when correcting and restoring someone who has sinned. Gentle, even as Christ was gentle.<sup>26</sup> And then *Self-control*—while the works of the flesh demonstrate uncontrolled desires and passions, walking by the Spirit results in disciplined restraint.

And then, don’t miss verse 26. “Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.” Keeping in line with, in step with the Spirit and His fruit in us never results in pride. It always brings humility.

## Conclusion

How can you, how do you live free? *You must walk by the Spirit to live free.* As you walk by the Spirit you *will be* free.

- Free from the domination of sin.
- Free from trying to measure up to your own or others' standards.
- Free from sinful habits and addictions.
- Free from feeling like a failure,
- Free from feeling boxed in.

And also

- Free to open, loving, joyful fellowship with God and others.
- Free to confidence in Christ.
- Free to being real.
- Free to excitement in the day to day routine.
- Free to making a difference by serving God and others.

Live by the Spirit. You don't have to ask Him to come, He is with you always. Ask Him to fill or control your heart,<sup>27</sup> to move through all you are as you give Him control, to identify the struggles and sin He wants to lead you through to victory. Thank God that He is with you, does not give upon and you and will keep working to make you like Christ. Thank Him for what He has already accomplished in you as you have walked by the Spirit. Do that now in the next moments as you talk and listen to God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan. "Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin." *Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Library*. June 12, 1987. <[http://www.reaganfoundation.org/bw\\_detail.aspx?p=LMB4YGHF2&h1=0&h2=0&sw=&lm=berlinwall&args\\_a=cms&args\\_b=74&argsb=N&tx=1764](http://www.reaganfoundation.org/bw_detail.aspx?p=LMB4YGHF2&h1=0&h2=0&sw=&lm=berlinwall&args_a=cms&args_b=74&argsb=N&tx=1764)>. Accessed 01 February 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev. *Perspectives on Global Change*. October 19, 2011. <<http://www.lafayette.edu/about/news/2011/10/20/address-by-mikhail-gorbachev-%E2%80%9Cperspectives-on-global-change%E2%80%9D/>>. Accessed 01 February 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Kulish. "In East Germany, a Decline as Stark as a wall." *NY Times.com*. 19 June 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/19/world/europe/19germany.html?scp=1&sq=a%20decline%20as%20stark%20as%20a%20wall&st=cse>>. Accessed 01 February 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:8.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 7:4.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner. *Galatians (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, page 345. See also John R. W. Stott. *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968, page 140.

<sup>8</sup> John 14:1-26.

<sup>9</sup> George Müller. *Autobiography Of George Muller* (pages 139-140). Kindle Edition.

<sup>10</sup> James 1:5.

<sup>11</sup> James 1:6-8.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Waltke in *Embraced by the Spirit*, Charles R. Swindoll. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, page 106.

<sup>13</sup> Stott, page 140.

<sup>14</sup> cf. 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 4:4.

<sup>17</sup> Colossians 1:11.

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 4:13.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:14.

<sup>20</sup> Stott, page 140.

<sup>21</sup> Romans 5:5.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 3:15.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Titus 3:4-5.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:1.

<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 5:18.

© 2012 Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,  
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995  
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.