

Galatians 5:25-6:10: Walking in the Spirit

1. The law was understood as the way to become righteous. Here, Paul addresses the question of what, in the absence of the Torah, keeps the Galatians from sinking into sin and just doing whatever they wanted (17). His answer is anchored in the Spirit, which we are to be led by (18) and keep in step with (25).

Rhetorically, an argument like this only works if the Galatians had witnessed first-hand the power of the Spirit. Practically, if we haven't experienced the power of the Spirit in our lives, we may be left feeling helpless, trapped in our sin, unable to change. In fact, in 3:3-5, we read:

Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well then, **does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you** by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?¹

Many of us began our faith journeys without the benefit of miracles demonstrating the Spirit's power and immediacy. This is not to say, though, that we haven't seen the Spirit work in power in our lives or those around us—but we may need to be deliberate in remembering what we have experienced, to remind ourselves that the Spirit has the power to accomplish what Christ has begun in us, and to bring about the character change which sometimes feels impossibly remote.

Can you think of an example of the power of the Spirit in your life or the lives of those you know?

2. In this context, based on parallel structure, what are the "burdens" Paul refers to in v. 2, 5?
3. In his instructions on how to "walk by the Spirit," Paul warns against the negative but also encourages the positive; see the "Do's and Don't's" table below. While you don't need to have a relationship with someone to not envy or provoke others, you *do* need to have a sufficiently close relationship if you are to restore someone else, and carry their burdens—both because it must be done in gentleness and because, within a close relationship, you are unlikely even to know of their struggles.

How many people are you close enough to that you would know if they fell into sin? Have you ever had occasion to support someone struggling with sin?

4. Last time we discussed how to "walk by the Spirit,"—to stop living by the flesh (5:17) and start bearing the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). For many of us who struggle with the same old sins (some of which may even appear in 5:19-21), and crave joy and peace (5:22), this is an important question.

In 6:1-10, Paul describes how Spirit-led people interact with one another. Since the life of the believer is necessarily one of conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (5:17), there will be sin;

¹ Paul had a powerful experience of the Spirit as well, going from, under the law, a murderer, to being healed miraculously and becoming someone capable of both working miracles and forgiving his persecutors, all in the power of the Spirit.

here is how to deal with it. Since we bear the fruit of the Spirit by walking in the Spirit, is Paul also giving us the secret to spiritual growth?

5. How would you implement this passage in your interactions on social media?
6. *After discussion of the passage:* Does your understanding of 6:2 and 6:7-8 based on context match the typical reading of these verses?
7. *Leftover from 5:13-26:* Keener notes that Paul’s vice list in 19-21 reflects sins from four categories: sexual sins (5:19); idolatry² and sorcery (5:20); relational sins (5:20-21a); and drunkenness and carousing (2:21)—or, as Bruce puts it, “sex, religion, society, and drink.”³ How would you update this list for the 2020s? (E.g. instead of “idolatry” one might include “Christian nationalism”.)

To Walk in the Spirit	
Don't	Do
Don't become conceited, provoking and envying one another (5:26)	Keep in step with the Spirit (5:25)
Don't be tempted lest you also fall into sin (6:1)	Restore in the Spirit's gentleness those caught in sin (6:1). Carry one another's burdens (6:2)
Don't compare yourself to others (6:4)	Watch yourself (6:1); test your actions (6:4); take pride in yourself alone (6:4)
Don't be deceived by thinking you can sow to the flesh but reap from the Spirit (6:7)	Carry your own load (6:5) [but also share with your teachers (6:6)]
Don't become weary in doing good (6:9)	Do good to all people, esp. believers (6:10)

² Note, from Eph 5:3-5, that Paul considers greed a form of idolatry.

³ Other vice lists can be found in Rom 1:29-31; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:5, 8.

Leader's Intro:

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