

## 20260517 Living by the Spirit – Ps Bijoy

Galatians 5:13-26

In 2009, a man named Matthew Parris, a leading voice in the New Atheist movement, wrote a piece in The Times entitled, "As an Atheist, I Truly Believe Africa Needs God." He returned to Africa after forty years and found his entire naturalistic worldview shaken. Not by an argument. Not by a debate. But by watching Christians live their lives.

He wrote: "The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world. They stood tall."

Now, some of us heard that and we were moved. Here is a skeptic, rattled by the witness of ordinary believers. But others of us heard it and felt something more uncomfortable. Because we thought: I know what Christianity promises. Liberation, freedom. And yet I'm not sure that's true about me. That question is exactly what this passage is trying to answer. When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they don't just adopt a new set of rules. They are adopted by God. The Spirit of God comes in, plants a seed, and that seed begins to grow, organically, from the inside out, shaping and changing the person. The change is real. The change is lasting. And it is evident to the people around them.

So let's look at this passage together. Life in the Spirit in three ways: the Hope of the Spirit, the Help of the Spirit, and the Heart of the Harvest.

### **The Hope of the Spirit: Freedom so you can love and serve**

Paul opens Galatians 5 with a stunning declaration: "For freedom, Christ has set us free." If you asked someone on the street what Christianity is about, they might say salvation, the Bible, Jesus dying on a cross. They probably wouldn't say: personal inner freedom, now. But that's exactly what Paul is saying. If all those other things are true, you can experience deep, personal, inner freedom right now.

Now, freedom is a word we need to handle carefully. We tend to think freedom means the absence of all restriction. But true freedom doesn't work that way. Think of a great pianist. How is he so free at that keyboard? Because for years he submitted to restrictions: scales, discipline, practice. The restrictions created the freedom.

True freedom is not the absence of burden. It's the ability to discern which burdens are worth bearing and which will simply bury you.

And here's the point. The Spirit gives us that kind of freedom, not so we can do whatever we want, but so we can love. Eugene Peterson, writing on Galatians, notes that the Greek word Paul uses in verse 13 originally had a military meaning. It referred to a launch point for an attack. So Paul is saying: your freedom is a launch point. Use it to launch an assault of loving service on the people around you.

Now when Paul talks about the flesh, he is not talking about the skin on your bones. He is talking about the fallen nature every human being inherits from Adam. It is that bent toward sin, that thing in us that says "if it feels good, do it," that voice that whispers "you can ask forgiveness later."

Here is the hard truth: the flesh is always drawing us into sin. You can be listening to a sermon and the most vile thought can come into your mind. You can be taking the Lord's Supper and a strange temptation rises up. You can sing on the praise team on Sunday and slander somebody on your way out the door. What a strange thing it is to be a Christian.

But here is what Paul says to do with that freedom: serve one another in love. Love fulfills the whole law of God. That is the alternative to indulging the flesh.

And if you're sitting here thinking, I haven't had the mountaintop moment yet, Paul addresses this in Philippians 2. He says: "If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit..." Notice the word any. Any means the least possible amount. If you've experienced even the smallest measure of God's comfort, the faintest sense of His presence, Paul says: that's enough. Move out. Launch the attack and God will be with you.

## **2. The Help of the Spirit: Through conflict, so you glorify God**

The second thing the Spirit does is help us through the conflict that rages inside every human being. Paul describes it plainly: the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are at war with each other. The flesh wants self-glory, instant gratification, selfish means. The Spirit wants love, holiness, the glorification of God. And they are in constant conflict.

Charles Dickens and Dostoevsky once crossed paths in London. Dickens confessed: sometimes I feel as though there are two people living inside of me, one that knows what is good, and one that chooses to do otherwise. Dostoevsky turned to him and said: you only have two?

That is the human condition. And Paul, in Romans 7, names it with devastating honesty: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing." When I talk about this with teenagers in any meetings, every eye in the room is on me. Because the Bible is naming something they experience every single day, but nobody has ever told them what it's called. Verse 17 tells us that the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh. There is a war going on inside you. Praise God for that war.

The presence of that struggle is not a sign that you are failing. It is proof that you are alive. Do you hate your own sin? Does it grieve you when you fall? Your struggle with sin is evidence of your divine heritage.

And here is what we gain from the struggle: it reveals our weakness, kills our pride, humbles us before God, forces us to cry out for help, teaches us to rely on the Lord alone, leads us into continual repentance, makes us long for heaven, and drives us to lean on our brothers and sisters.

So how does the Spirit help us through this conflict?

First, the Spirit helps you remember your status. Paul addresses them as brothers and sisters, but before that, they are sons and daughters. He draws a contrast between a slave and a son living in the same house. The slave's every decision is driven by fear of being cast out: anxiety, survival, selfishness. But the son operates from a completely different posture, security and intimacy with the Father. He's never afraid of being thrown out. The Spirit's job is to remind you: your status is not slave, it is son. It is daughter. I have nothing to lose, im already accepted. What do I have to fear? That's the posture the Spirit gives us.

Second, the Spirit helps you recognize your insufficiency. The phrase is "walk by the Spirit." Walking is something I can do. I can be deliberate, I can step forward in love. But there are things I cannot do on my own. And it's good to know that. Because when I recognize my insufficiency, I understand I'm not meant to walk alone.

Third, the Spirit helps you rejoice in the Savior. In every decision, good step or misstep, the Spirit's job is to draw your eyes to Christ. If you take a good step, the Spirit keeps you from pride: of course I did well, I went to the right school. But if you misstep, the Spirit keeps you from despair: look to the Lord. He died for you. He loves you. And that makes repentance possible, because your relationship with the Father is not built on fear, but on intimacy and security.

This is Paul's answer to the agonized question at the end of Romans 7: who will rescue me from this body of death? The Lord Jesus, who was utterly free, eternal, unconstrained, took on a human body for 33 years. That is real restriction. He bore it for you and for me, so that we could be freed now, in our bodies, and freed forever. He is the true Son who laid down his life for the slaves, so that you and I could become sons and daughters, and then give that life freely to others, without fear.

### **3. The Heart of the Harvest: The fruit of the Spirit**

Finally, the fruit. Two lists are in this passage. One is the fruit of rebellion: self-service, flesh, the fall. The other is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. One word captures that second list: holiness. That can feel like an intimidating word. But let these fruit define holiness for you. Holiness is not distant or arrogant. Holiness looks like love, joy, peace, and patience operating through a human life.

The fruit of the Spirit is produced by the Holy Spirit himself, not by our self-effort. You do not manufacture love. You do not generate peace. The Holy Spirit grows those things in you as you walk with him.

Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. That crucifixion must be pitiless, painful, decisive, and daily. We cannot throw a pity party for the flesh. We cannot crawl back down off the cross because it hurts. Martin Luther said the flesh is like a man's beard: you can shave it off, but it grows back. You have to shave it every single day.

Second, keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25). This is a military image. We are in the army now. Line up behind the Holy Spirit and keep in step. Every morning when you rise: Holy Spirit, help me obey God today. Holy Spirit, lead me in the steps of Jesus today. If you keep in step with the Spirit, step by step, God will take you from where you are to where he always wanted you to be.

And if you're looking at that list and thinking, I'm nowhere near that, take heart. Paul writes in Philippians 1: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ." If you are in Christ, you will be holy. It may take time. It may take pain. But you will get there.

The fruit of the Spirit is aptly named, because fruit is organic. It's alive. It's growing. You may not feel it. You may not see it. But one day you will turn around, and the evidence will be there. Your growth will come in season. And it will be for others to share.