

Walking in the Spirit During Transition

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the importance of walking in the Spirit to foster love and unity during transitions in the church community.

Duration: 31:39

Scripture: Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christian Living"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living by the Spirit, connecting with God's new commandment to love one another as Christ loved us. It delves into the significance of being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and aligning our lives with the Holy Spirit's guidance. The message highlights the dangers of jealousy, envy, and strife in the church, urging believers to trust in God's sovereignty and focus on building up the body of Christ.

Transcript

We'll go to Galatians first, and then we're going to go to 1 Corinthians 3. And I'll try to keep it shorter, this is harder than it was. I argued in that sermon that the new commandment, love each other as I have loved you, and by this will all men know that you're my disciples, is new, not simply that it was given a new comparison, like love each other not just as you love yourselves, but love each other as I have loved you. That is new in that the Son of God had never been in the world before, had never loved like he loved, had never died, had never died for his own, and therefore love like that would have a new feel to it.

But I said it was more than that. We're not just copying, we're connecting, that was my phrase. This is not, I even said not mainly new because of its copy factor, but its connecting factor.

And I argued that from the 1 John 2 verse 9 where he says it's new because the light is already shining in the world, and therefore the idea is that the kingdom is common, the glory is common, and God is at work in the world, and you now are part of that newness of God's sweep in the world. And then to confirm that went over to chapter 15 of John where the new commandment is repeated one more time in connection with I am the vine and you are the branches. And so now loving like me is loving with my love.

This is sap, not imitation. The vine is not saying to the branches on the ground who are broken off and dry, now copy me up here with all my pulsing life. No, you grasped it in and now the newness of Christ in the world and the newness of Christ in me, which simply means love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is why

we're in Galatians 5 here.

So let's read, I just want to put five or six other phrases on that. Start at verse 16 of chapter 5. But I say walk by the Spirit. So there's the first one, walk by the Spirit.

So love by the power that flows through the connection with the vine. Let's call him this time the Holy Spirit. And you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.

The desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, number two, so now we're not just walking by the Spirit, we're being led by the Spirit. He's the initiative out there in front, pulling, drawing, guiding, shaping our lives.

If you're led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, sexual morality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, and strife. Where I'm going in this devotion is through Galatians 5 and establishing this connectedness that we have with Jesus and with the Spirit so that all of our loving is not ours but his through us.

Where I'm going with that is over to 1 Corinthians 3 where the issue is envy and strife and jealousy based on choosing favorite leaders. I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, we're of Christ, all you other jerks are partisan. And what that was about to do to the church in Corinth.

That was the issue in chapter 1 and it's the issue in chapter 3 and so that's where I'm going. So when you hear the word jealousy here and strife and enmity, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, you can hear what the Holy Spirit doesn't do. He does the opposite.

That's what the flesh does and transitions in church life are fertile soil for that kind of fleshly activity and fleshly thinking. I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God but the fruit of the Spirit. There's number three.

Walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, now bear the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with his passions and desires if we live by the Spirit.

There's number four. So we got walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, bear the fruit of the Spirit, and live by the Spirit which is what we do if we're born again. If we live by the Spirit let us also walk by the Spirit.

You think it's repetition. It's not. The first one is peripeteo, this one is stoicheo.

You can't see it in Greek but peripeteo is this kind of walking right here. Walk by the Spirit, typical metaphor for living the Christian life. Stoicheo is unusual.

It's a lining up of troops getting in lines for marching and then keeping in step so that one's not going there. That's the image. That's the word.

Stoicheo, line up with the Spirit. So he's in the formation, don't get out of step with the Holy Spirit. So march well and keep the legs moving and the arms swinging and the face looking just like the Holy Spirit does so that you're looking like the Holy Spirit.

So it's a different metaphor. It's not just repetitions. Now we got five.

Walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, bear the fruit as the Spirit, be alive by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. Let's not become deceived, provoking one another, envying one another. Now drop down to six six.

One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked for whatever one sows that will he reap.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from his flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit, that's number six, which is the most puzzling of all to me. It's the one I can hardly get my head around. And commentaries are almost useless, it seems to me.

Commentary after commentary and they don't wrestle with the oddness of it. Okay, what's the picture? I'm sowing to the Spirit. Let me finish it.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked for whatever one sows that will he 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.

So what do you sow to the Spirit? You've got a bag of seeds. What's that? What are the seeds? And two, you sow two. The Spirit is the ground, the furrow.

I don't know what to make. I just, it's so hard to figure out what he, you know, most commentators just pass right over. Do we have some metaphor for living by the Spirit of all this? Well, yeah, but help me.

What is sow? How do you sow? What are you sowing? And is it my heart? Is it my actions? Is it my money? What am I sowing? And what does two mean? And where's the Holy Spirit? And how's the seed land on him? And my best shot is to say that the Holy Spirit has attitudes and behaviors that he means for us to be alive in and be fruitful in, and he plows that furrow, and we should throw the seeds in there. We shouldn't throw them over there. We should throw the seeds of our life, the seeds of our attention, the seeds of our action in the road of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, God.

He's just, he is doing work to cut these, and we join him in this case by sowing the seeds of our life, maybe. And then he isn't just a row burrow maker, but covers it over, he waters it, nurtures it. So join him in putting yourself and your life and your efforts, but count on him.

If that seed's going anywhere, that's where it's going. So let's go to 1 Corinthians 3, because that's where we pick it up. One sows, another waters.

So what we take away now, oh wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, I jumped the gun, I jumped the gun. To make the connection with chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, I've got to establish one more thing from chapter 3 of Galatians. Practically, as I read 1 Corinthians 3, we're just going to read the whole chapter together and come in as we go.

And I pause seven times and say that's an argument from the aspired apostle for Bethlehem, a desiring God, not having jealousy and rivalry and envy around this candidate or me or somebody you wish would have been the candidate. There's the triad, I can see. We don't like him, we do like or don't like Piper, we wish it had been him, and now we're all in these groups and we're either very unhappy.

And I don't think that's going to happen, but it happened at Garth, and I think if we see reasons why it won't or shouldn't happen, it will help us. But to see them, we have to ask, well if we walk by the Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit and are led by the Spirit and live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit and sow to the Spirit, very practically, what does that mean when I hear the Word of God? And the answer is, it means believe. And that's in chapter 3 verse 5. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you, that's what I want to know, okay, I want that, and works miracles among you, yes, like love, do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith? And the answer is, not by works of the law, but by hearing with faith.

So when I hear the Word of God, faith comes by hearing, when I hear the Word of God, the Gospel, the arguments that Paul gives when I hear God talking, faith says yes, and that yes is a work of the Holy Spirit, and what he creates at that yes is like a conduit through which he powerfully moves. So faith is the creation of the Holy Spirit and the conduit of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of faith's conduit mediating the Spirit is love. All right, now we're ready.

First Corinthians chapter 3. And I've got, I wrote down seven arguments that Paul gives against jealousy, against envy, against strife, against party spirit, against boasting in Paul or Cephas or Apollos, and they are amazing, especially the last one. But let's move through these, and I'll just read the whole chapter and pause and point them out. You'll see them as we go.

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. Why? Well, what's the problem? I fed you with milk, not solitude, for you were not yet ready for it, and even now you're not ready, for you're all still of the flesh. There's flesh, works of flesh, we saw what they were, now what are they here? You're all still of the flesh, for while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For one says, I follow Paul.

Another says, I follow Apollos. Are you not being merely human? That's a horrible indictment. I mean, it's one thing to be called babes in Christ.

I can handle that. To be called merely human is to be called an unbeliever. He doesn't call it an unbeliever, he says you're acting like it.

You are babes in Christ, I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt here, but you're acting like you're just human, zero Holy Spirit, just like everybody else in the world is the way you're acting, and that's the argument. If you split up like this, and you start boasting in Paul, Cephas, and you divvy up the church into these rivalry factions, you're acting like unbelievers, and that's really dangerous, because you might prove to be one, if you go on in this. So that's argument number one, and we should now hear that, and sow to the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, that means trust God and believe that's serious.

I embrace that, I hear that, I receive that warning and that interpretation of this, I believe that. Verse five, five through oops, oh yeah, five, just five by itself. What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.

So what's the argument there? You're boasting, you're lining up behind slaves, that's the word, servants, and if you have been one to Christ through them, or received any blessing through them, it is because the Lord sovereignly chose to assign that to them. So let it behind the Lord, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. That's argument number two, verse five, now six through nine.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth, so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. We are God's work, God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building.

So the emphasis is, decisively speaking, Apollos and I are nothing. That will sound to a lot of people like an overstatement, make sure you see it, neither he, verse seven, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything. So he reaches to the limit to nullify himself, and nullify Apollos and Cephas, and what he's saying is that's really true when it comes to the decisive cause of anything good in this church.

Decisive keyword. We are instruments, and he's willing to back up and say that, but if you want to get right down to it, what brought about any decisive good here, any eternal good here, any salvation here, any genuine faith here, any genuine spirit prompted love here, God did that. So you're saying really bad things about God if you get too lined up with a teacher, if you get him out of whack.

Verses 10 through 15, number four, according to the grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation and someone else is building upon it. So I looked at the candidate at this point, and I said, I've built here, and you will build, you build well. However, that's not the main point here.

I laid a foundation and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that one has built on the foundation survives, he'll receive a reward.

If anyone's work is burned up, he's talking about how you build on the foundation of Christ in the church. This is not just random good being good. This is building the church with right doctrine and right structures and right affections.

If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. So here's the main thing I'm seeing there for me and this candidate, and for your proper assessment. Verse 13, each one's work will become manifest.

For the day, capital D, that's right, the day of judgment will disclose it. We do not know what the last 30 years have been. You have some measure, we have some measure of spiritual discernment, but by and large I think we'll probably be surprised.

Some things are just going to be swept away. They didn't care. They looked so successful.

They look impressive, and they're just going to be swept away. Other things, maybe little things, little things, gonna shine like diamonds. Little acts in the nursery that somebody did because they heard a word from me.

So I'm given that that's a good thing that happened. That will be a diamond. And then another program that was developed that was shining, and it will be seen to be pollen, and there's a lot of flesh in it.

And right now, the reason you have to think this way is because there are people with huge churches who are heretics. So growing a church to 5,000 folks is proof of nothing. It proves nothing.

This is what proves everything. Gold, silver, precious stone, or wood, hay, and stubble, the day will disclose it. Right now, you think you can see wood, hay, and stubble.

No, you don't have the fire to disclose it. The fire will disclose it, which is why Paul, I think, said later in chapter 4, I don't even judge myself. I don't trust my own judgment about my ministry.

God will be my judge. And that's the way I feel about hundreds of decisions I've made in the ministry. I made a decision on Wednesday.

I had to make a decision. It had to do with something's going to happen, and I wasn't sure. I was not sure the godly thing to do.

I made it. I had to make it. Now, right now, if you say, did you make the right decision? I say, I don't know.

I've lived a lot of my life that way in the ministry. You just do the best you can, and you hand it over to him. That's pretty sobering, and for people in the church, they should be very slow to assume that they can discern gold, silver, precious stone, and wood, hay, and stubble.

When in fact, Paul says, the day will disclose it, and he's talking about his own and Apollos' and Cephas' work. Verse 16 and 17. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

You're not talking individually. It's a church. You are that temple.

In other words, you who say, I'm of Apollos, and I'm of Cephas, and I'm of Paul, don't you realize this could destroy the church in Corinth, and if you do, I'll kill you. I will take you out. You kill my church.

He is jealous for his temple. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. So, we hear that, and faith says, yes, I embrace that.

That's God's word to me. I hear that. I tremble with that.

I will guard my mouth and my life and do nothing that could destroy his temple. I will build. I will build.

Everything will be for oikodomain. I will build this church. It will not destroy.

18 to 19, let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he's wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise, for the wisdom of this world is folly with God, for it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness, and again, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are few. So, beware of how deceitful intelligence and eloquence and personality are.

That's what was going on in Corinth. Apollos was really good in front of people. Everybody loved to listen to Apollos.

He was eloquent and smart. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks that he's wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise, for the wisdom of this world is folly with God.

God is not mainly looking for eloquence and intelligence and personality. He's looking for prayer, humility, and faith, and courage, and love, and spiritual anointing. That's what you vote on.

You vote on that. So, he's just pushing them away from lining up behind Apollos. He's got a lot of eloquence.

Cephas, I kind of like his personality, some of us do. Lastly, verses 20 and 21, the best of all. This is so counterintuitive, it blows you away, blows me away.

So, let no one boast in men. So, he's still handling Paul, Cephas, Apollos. This is the issue in the first three chapters of Corinth.

Divisions, circling around teachers that are threatening through jealousy, and envy, and strife to destroy the church. And now, he's given his final argument why you shouldn't boast in men. All things are yours.

Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, you want to own them, you own them. The world will throw that in. Life, that's yours.

Death, it'll serve you too. That's yours, your own special servant. Present things, future things, they're all yours, they're all serving you.

Why? You're Christ, and Christ is God. So, God has Christ, Christ has you, and you have everything. So, why? What is he assuming here? Isn't he assuming that behind this vicarious need to identify with a leader, is this need? You're acting like you're not an owner of the universe, like you're a needy person.

You're needy inside. And you get some strokes, or some inner strength, or some riches of soul, by lining up behind Apollos. What's with that? You own everything in Christ? You're an heir of the universe.

You're acting like you're poverty stricken, and in need of some kind of help. That's amazing, that's amazing. Most of our grumbling, most of our complaining, most of our jealousies, envies, and strife are owing to the fact that we don't believe what we have.

We don't believe how rich we are, how stunning it is to be saved, what it means to be a child of the living God. Not an employee, not a slave, but an heir. And it's just around the corner.

And we already have the down payment. And if we believed it, I mean, what does Piper define faith as? Being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus? Well, this is a place where we better kick in. Because if we're not satisfied with what we're offered here in verses 21 and 22, we're probably going to line up behind people in an inappropriate way.

So, let's walk by the Spirit, and be led by the Spirit, and bear the fruit of the Spirit, and be alive in the Spirit, and keep in step with the Spirit, and sow the Spirit by believing 1 Corinthians 7. And thus being set free from jealousy, and envy, and strife, and party spirit. And so, be a blessing to Bethlehem.

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