

# What the Spirit Desires - Galatians 5 vv.16 - 26

by Michael Flowers

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in community, guided by the Holy Spirit, and receiving the gift of the fruit of the spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

**Duration:** 29:28

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:25 - 6:1, Galatians 6:18, Philippians 2:12-13

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of Galatians and not solely interpreting it as an individual experience. The speaker highlights that the message of Galatians is rooted in the big story of God and begins with a command to be set free from the law and justified by faith in Jesus Christ. The sermon focuses on the concept of walking in community, emphasizing that believers should not walk alone but rather walk together in fellowship. The speaker discusses the restoration of the image of God within believers through the fruit of the Spirit, particularly love, and how the Holy Spirit enables believers to turn their focus outward towards serving one another in love.

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## Transcript

I think I left my notes on the printer. No, that's OK. No, no, not that printer, my printer at home.

Oh, good. So here we go. It was only an improvement of this.

Right. So welcome to scrambled eggs. Yeah.

Here we go. Last week, as you know, if you were here, I sort of cast my dog in a bad light. If you weren't here, I was out the other morning.

It was it was last Saturday and last Sunday morning, actually. I let my dog out back and, you know, we have a square foot garden back there. And and I was wondering why my pepper plants weren't looking so good.

And so I just happened to catch him doing this on my pepper plants. I mean, I love spicy food, you know, and it's like they're dead now. I mean, it's just it just took that last shot to do them in.

But today I want to repent for making you dislike my dog, perhaps, because now I can't share those peppers with you. I don't think anyone would want them. But my dog serves another purpose.

And that is when it's five five thirty in the morning. He makes sure that we get up in the heat of the morning and we take him out for a walk. And so Liz and I have been getting up while it's been so crazy hot over the summer and we've been walking our dog.

And Nick has become really I don't think he's an inexpensive personal trainer, but nonetheless, he's our personal trainer. We've been taking these beautiful walks through Roanoke back and forth. We've been hiking here and there's hills that we can navigate.

And it calms him down because he's an Aussie border collie and he's got a lot of energy, even though he's about four years old. He's pretty mellow for that breed. But, you know, it just kind of calms him down and everything's good because he's walking together in his community and his family.

Right. And anybody like walking, hiking? Yeah, I do, too. I just love it.

I've always loved it. And we used to spend a lot of time up in Yosemite National Park in the days when we were in California. But everywhere we go, I'm not a big runner.

I used to run 10 miles a day when I was in college, but I can't do that anymore. My back is just it will not let me do that. But walking is is a very therapeutic.

And I like I like to walk with other people. And that's what today's passage is starting out with today. It's not talking about walking alone.

It's talking about walking in community. Walking in community. So often we read even this part of Galatians as sort of an individual psycho spiritual experience that's going on inside of me, flesh and spirit and all of that.

And it ends up, you know, by the time you read this, you need a psychiatrist sometimes because you're internalizing what wasn't meant to be completely internalized at all. From Paul's perspective. Paul's talking about something very big and cosmic that affects us psychologically and spiritually for sure, but it doesn't begin there.

It begins in the big story of God. And so he begins with a command. We've been talking throughout this book about being set free from the law of Sinai in order to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the benefits of that is receiving new commands. Like Jesus said, I will give you a new commandment. Right.

Love one another as I have loved you. That's harder than anything in the law. Right.

It's harder than keeping kosher. It may not be harder if I had to get circumcised right now, but I don't remember it. So it's not even harder than that.

And of course, circumcision is one of those issues that Paul is dealing with to be justified by the law. You need to get circumcised, even though you've gone through baptism, which we're going to celebrate today. The Judaizers are these people were coming in, telling the Galatian Christians that they needed more than faith in Jesus Christ.

They needed circumcision and they need to come back and observe much of the law, if not all of it. And that's debatable whether you there's three elements of the law or if it's all of the law. But Paul says it doesn't matter because if you submit to the law, you better obey all of it.

We've been set free from the slavery of something that was designed to be temporary until the coming of Jesus Christ. And so the law in Sinai, scripture says we've not come to Mount Sinai, but we've come to Zion. We've come to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, where thousands upon thousands of angels are worshiping around the throne.

And thousands upon thousands and saints and martyrs and apostles have gone before us and there before the throne, not embodied, but in spirit awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. But yes, absent from this body, present with the Lord awaiting the resurrection and redemption of the body. So going to heaven right now is an incomplete state until we're all raised at the same time as one body.

There's one body, right, the body of Christ and the resurrection will prove that because we shall all be raised, not individually, we shall all be raised at the same time at the sound of the trumpet, the prophetic call, wake up, you know, wake up, you who have fallen asleep. Christ has risen and now Christ is our judge. And judgment in Jesus is it can be the most awesome thing, you know, when you read about judgment in the Psalms, the fields clap their hands and the trees clap their hands because the judgment of God is good and righteous and loving and compassionate.

I want to be in the hands of the faithful, righteous judge on that day because he will be just to us, he will be just. Paul is giving this command to walk by the spirit. Now, you've got a translation there, the one that I printed, it says live, it's literally walk.

We're walking. It's an image of life in this world, walking through this present evil age. We're on a journey.

In the spirit of Jesus Christ, walk or live by the spirit, and then there's a promise and I don't want to point this out because this is new RSV. Richard Hayes would say, I love the new RSV, but he gets it wrong right here. It turns it in this first line, it turns it into two commands.

Get this live by the spirit, I say, and here's another command, do not gratify the desires of the flesh. It should be translated as the NIV translates it. NIV gets this one right.

Walk or live by the spirit and you will not gratify or fulfill or complete the desires of the flesh. Live in the spirit and here's the promise, you won't gratify the desire, singular, not plural here, it's singular in degree, the desire of the flesh. Of course, we're talking about the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the one that we're going to mention today in the Great Commission, Jesus said, go into all the world and make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That's the spirit that he's talking about today. Walk and live by the Holy Spirit, which came to you, Galatians, and to you, St. Adian's, in your baptism, right? You receive the spirit in the waters of baptism. And we're going to do two things today, we're going to baptize and we're going to chrismate and we're going to lay hands and we're going to say, come, Holy Spirit, and empower Elijah for works of service.

It's going to be beautiful. And I love it because we're going to be carrying out the two sacraments that Jesus actually instituted today, baptism and communion, which is beautiful. This is going through the Red Sea and this is eating the manna in the wilderness until Jesus returns.

Can you make it without the manna? No, no, no. Can you produce it yourself? No, no, no. Can you store it up? No, no, no.

Give us this day our. Our daily bread, it went rancid the next day, so that's what this gospel thing is building up to that Paul's talking about, and he's saying that if you live by the spirit, you will not gratify the desire of the flesh. OK, flesh, what is flesh? What is he talking about? The word is sarcasm, the Greek, and he's talking about it's used so many different ways it's used for the physical body.

But that's not what Paul is talking about. Right. The desires of the body.

The body's engaged in some of this, but the body is not the issue. The flesh is a macro term. It's a big phrase that Paul is using.

It describes life under the reign of sin and death. Living in the flesh, you'll see this throughout Paul's letters in Romans eight, if we're in the flesh, we cannot please God. That doesn't mean if I'm in my body, I cannot please God if we are in the flesh, if we are in old creation.

You see, because if all of those who are in Christ are in new creation, see, the problem is that we're living in the midst of two ages. We're living in the midst of this present evil age with the invasion of the Holy Spirit representing and yeah, representing and empowering the limited fashion of the kingdom of God that we're all getting a down payment and a foretaste of to the Holy Spirit's a down payment. It's not the full thing.

The Holy Spirit is the promise given to Abraham. The Holy Spirit is who animates us as Christians. The Holy Spirit is who we receive, the spirit of Jesus Christ.

I am always with you, even until the end of the world. No, even until the end of the age. It's not the end of the world, it's not cosmos there, it's the end of the age.

Jesus is coming back to inaugurate his kingdom and put an end to this present evil eon age. And I'm getting that from Galatians one, we've been rescued from this present evil age, doesn't feel like it all the time, does it? We read about the works of the flesh. All of that is a mirror image of this old creation, sexual brokenness and, you know, and all of that, all of the list there, it's relational brokenness, I would say.

It's not just sexual brokenness. You know, we turn it into sexual brokenness when we translate desire, lust. Many of your translations will say, if you walk in the spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

And boy, do we get that wrong when we go in that direction. Desire of the flesh is something so much bigger and more insidious than just disordered affections in the sexual realm. Oh, yes, it absolutely touches it, but it's much bigger than that.

It's much bigger than that. You will not gratify the lust. I don't like that.

It's the desire singular of the flesh for what the flesh desires, this fallen creation, you know, where impulses inside of us and there's these voices that tempt us and there's external media that feeds this fallenness in the world and it seeks to like gravity, just pull us down, pull us down and oppress us and to still kill and destroy us. But what this big idea of flesh describes, this fallen cosmos where creation is groaning, get it over with creation saying, please, Jesus, return Maranatha for what the flesh desires. You can get in touch with that, right? You've been there, what the flesh desires is opposed.

Here's a war going on, is opposed to the spirit. Now, this is not just this war inside you psychologically and spiritually, oh, the flesh and the spirit inside me, no, this is a cosmic battle of flesh, fallen creation and Jesus new creation, right? This is much bigger than we've read it because we're Americans, we like to individualize everything. Wow, this is all plural, this is all community, this is all about walking together, not as individuals, but as a community.

Yeah. Oh, man, forgive me, I feel extremely passionate about this passage, it's just, you know, when I was reading this last night, I had to go. Literally, I had to like, I had to like tense my arms and go, God, this is amazing, you know, but I didn't say it out loud, I was just going.

What the flesh desires, it's an opposition to what the spirit desires. What the spirit desires, what on earth is he talking about? The spirit has desire. Well, I'd like to know that for what the flesh desires is opposed to what the spirit desires.

All we're talking about today is what the spirit desires, what the spirit desires. These are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want. You see, there is that sense that without the spirit, we are turned in on ourselves.

Without the Holy Spirit animating us, we look this way. But as the spirit of God comes in, we begin to look this way. We cast our eyes upon the harvest and upon community and how to serve one another through love, which was last week's sermon, right? How to serve one another through love, how to build community, because what was happening here is that false teachers had come in and they were biting and devouring one another.

Those are reciprocal pronouns. One another. They're just going at it.

You ever had that? You know, families do this. Friends do this. Politics does this.

Education does this. This is where it's going. It's just like you're biting and devouring.

It's an animalistic image of a piece of meat and someone's contending over it. You're biting and devouring one another. If you don't stop it, you'll be consumed by one another, Paul said.

That's not the community I want to be a part of. That's not the church we're planting. That's yucky, as my little granddaughter would say.

Yucky. But here's the alternative. Verse 18.

But if you are led by the spirit. You're not under the slavery of the law. He goes on to describe in this big chunk between verses 19 and 21, this is a chunk.

Of what old creation produces, what fallen creation is in slavery to. And this is what Jesus has come to rescue us from, OK, with that in mind, with that bigger picture. This is just not some little problem inside of you.

This is cosmic in nature. This is huge. Now, the works of the flesh are obvious and it has a big effect on churches and groups and nations and politics right on down the line, because it's fueled by principalities and powers, demonic forces feeding this fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery.

And then look at this here, parenthetically, here's community stuff, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy. Got to have more than one person for that to be going on. Drunkenness, carousing and things like these.

This is not an exhaustive list. Oh, just for instance, Paul, this is what it looks like to live in old creation. And he says Galatians baptized in water and receiving the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to warn you. This is a warning to baptize Christians, he's saying, as I've warned you before, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now we're talking about the age to come.

The kingdom of God, which is actually coming down incrementally on Earth as it is in heaven. But as you read Revelation and through the books of Revelation, where you see the throne room and the saints and the angels, that's the kingdom of God, you guys. That's where Jesus is reigning supreme.

And our inheritance is at stake if we choose to live under the domination and slavery of flesh. Of this fallen creation where the reign of sin and death is in effect. He's saying that you don't have to live here.

I'm warning you, you will lose your inheritance that he's been talking about through Abraham. This is inheritance language. Sons and daughters of God, that's our inheritance.

Life in the sun. I'm warning you, but by contrast, I want to show you, Paul is saying, what new creation looks like. I want to show you your marching orders.

I want to show you how God is restoring the fallen and broken image of God into the restored image. This is the restoration of the image of the divine within us. And it begins with the fruit singular, the fruit singular of the spirit, the spirit of Christ.

Love. Now, I've heard others execute this where if it's singular, there's only one fruit and it's love and these are the manifestations of it. You can go that way.

I mean, I think you have to toss a coin. I think it's fruit singular talking about all of these qualities being integrated, inseparable. This is what the spirit's like.

This is what the image of Jesus Christ is like. And this is what is being restored to us as a gift. I want to tell you, this is a gift.

It's not something that you will cultivate by getting out your shovel and digging and digging and digging until you become loving. The harder you try to become loving without the Holy Spirit. The more burned out and disillusioned you'll get.

You ever tried to love, you know what it feels like. I mean, I run up against that all the time and I have to go back to the Holy Spirit. I need you, you know, because I'm trying to love here and I'm not doing a good job of it.

That's just flesh. Now, flesh is not. I would say NIV says your sinful nature.

That's a terrible translation. That's an interpretation, not a translation. As I said, flesh is beyond your sinful brokenness.

Flesh is cosmic. Flesh was happening in the garden. So he's talking about two trees, right? The flesh.

That's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's where the flesh was birthed. In fact, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is.

Flesh. Fallen. Ness, void of communion with God, driven east of Eden, out of the garden.

Until the coming one, the seed, the promise, King of David comes and is anointed by the Holy Spirit, goes through the waters of baptism as if he's going through the Red Sea for us and into the desert for 40 days as if he's enacting Moses in Sinai and the children of Israel in the desert for 40 years. It's all symbolic because this is the new Moses. This is the new Joshua that's enacting the old covenant and fulfilling it to a T so that we might rest in union with him.

He did it for us. This is the new Exodus community, then, by contrast, the fruit of the spirit. What is what does the church look like? What does the kingdom look like? Love and joy and peace, patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness.

That's the same word translated faith throughout the book. We're saved by the faithfulness of Christ, his faithfulness. We put our trust in his faithfulness and so faithfulness and gentleness.

And then here it is, self-control, restraint. There's restraint in the spirit, right, the spirit, just because we're not under the law of Sinai anymore and that we're in Christ, we have been given the gift of self-control, restraint. And let me say this, too, this is a big tree and it's communal.

And so it takes a community to exhibit all of this together and to experience it all together, love and joy and peace and patience. I need to get around sister patience today because I'm wearing thin, right, that kind of thing, that's community. I need to be around your brother kindness today or I need I need somebody to encourage me in faithfulness today because this person is living that out right now.

It's how it works. It's reciprocal. One another.

This is the reason this is the alternative to biting and devouring one another, but it's to receive the gift of the fruit that hangs on the tree of life. Here's the other tree, the tree of life. You can eat of all the trees in the garden, the tree of life is right in the middle, but don't eat of this tree over here, it's a tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This is the tree of life. There is no law against such things and to those who belong to Christ Jesus, isn't that beautiful? Just take a moment and breathe in and say, thank you, I belong to Christ Jesus. And there's nothing I could have done to accomplish that.

I belong to Christ Jesus. It's all his doing, it's a gift, the gift of belonging is what people are so thirsty for. People want to belong, that's why we have gangs in the urban core.

It's a twisted belonging. It's a disordered belonging, and those who belong to Christ Jesus have what, say it with me, crucified the flesh. Paul says, I've been crucified to the world and the world unto me, he's talking about this big idea of cosmic brokenness.

And it takes Jesus, the cosmic Christ. Because he fills all things, brothers and sisters, in the resurrection, I'm trying to sound New Age here. Cosmic is our word, it's a Greek word in the New Testament.

OK, so I don't care who uses it, it's our language. And we have a cosmic Jesus who fills the universe. No, you belong to him.

And ultimately, in the incarnation, you belong to him before you believe he owns all of us, before we ever know about him, because we were chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world. And so we've got this little thing called belong, believe, behave. And if we mess that up, we'll go right back into legalism, because some churches say in order to belong here, you must behave, behave first, then believe and then belong.

You'll be all you're one of us. That's not gospel. That is not gospel.

That's law. That's legalism. So, Michael, are you saying that what he hates always last? Yeah.

So you've got to play with those first to leave and belong. Most of us have been taught that is evangelicals. You have to believe and then belong.

And I'm here to tell you that Jesus has already gathered you up before you believe. And then you're believing sets that free. You begin to enjoy.

The salvation that he's wrought for you, belong, believe. And then he'll start working on your behavior. Ask me how I know he's still working on it.

He's still working on me, he's still working on you, are you still working out your salvation with fear and trembling? For it's God who is at work in you, both the will and to do according to his good pleasure. Now, I know some of you are going like, I don't like that, believe thing, wrestle with it. If you belong to Christ Jesus and have crucified the flesh with its passions, if we live by the spirit, let us also be guided by the spirit.

Let us not become conceited, competing against one another. Envy one another, see this this concern for community, this concern for relational unity. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

In fact, last week's sermon ended with through love become slaves of one another, serve one another through love. And lean into the power of the Holy Spirit so that the tree of life can just begin to grow all of this amazing fruit in our community, which it's already here, and just let it continue to grow and mature and spread out and fill the land. As the psalm said this morning, it took root and it filled the land.

Jesus is the vine that will fill the land in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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