



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Paul's Mission
Galatians 5:13–26
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April 19, 2015

series: The Story

I love stories where a person contains an amazing power and we watch them discover it. Like *Spiderman*. Due to a spider bite, Peter Parker is changed into a hybrid of a man and spider. He is a totally different being. Part of the intrigue of the story is watching him discover how powerful he is.

The Matrix might be the ultimate example of this. Neo took the red pill in the first movie. In that single act, he is a changed man. However, we watch him struggle to believe he's as powerful as Trinity and Morpheus tell him. Remember the scene when he struggles to accept his new reality of being able to defy gravity and jump from building top to building top while he's inside *The Matrix*?

These kinds of transformations are a picture of what happens when the resurrection power of Jesus Christ comes into a person's life.

Step 1: That person is completely changed when they're saved; the old is gone and the new has come.

Step 2: Over the slow tick of time, they learn how to access that power. This process is called sanctification.

Our sermon this morning from Galatians 5 describes this second step. As a Christian accesses this power, they live in freedom and walk in the Spirit.

Before we get into the specifics of this, let me give you some perspective of how this fits into our on-going progression through The Story. Today we are in Chapter 29 of 31 weeks.

Two weeks ago, on Easter, we covered the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Last week we looked at the first growth season for the church: thousands of people in Jerusalem were placing their faith in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and the Savior of the world. Today we're going to look at the second growth season for the church: tens of thousands of people in Asia Minor and Greece are placing their faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world. This includes the very important spread of The Gospel to the Gentiles through the preaching of Peter, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark. And they are learning how to live in freedom and walk in the Spirit.

Regarding our passage of scripture today Tim Keller said, "there is no better passage in the Bible to teach you how to change inside deeply and permanently."

Turn in your Bibles to Galatians 5.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free (v. 13).

Called = summoned. Jesus has called them to live in "freedom," called them to leave their former way of life, being controlled by their sinful nature—their flesh.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh (verses 14–16).

Notice that the emphasis is on "walking in the Spirit" and the by-product is not gratifying the desires of the flesh. It does not say, just say no to all of the desires of the flesh. Flesh = sinful nature. Flesh is summarizing a person's life before they are saved. A person lives in the flesh, in their sinful nature. In this verse, Paul is giving instruction to how a person accesses the power of their salvation: they walk by the Spirit.

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want (v. 17).

Two ways of living are contrasted here: walking in the Spirit or in the flesh. Walking in the Spirit is the new, powerful experience available to the Christian. Walking in the flesh describes every person before they are saved by Jesus. The last phrase indicates how difficult it is to stop living by the flesh; it often feels so natural. We've been doing it for years! We are born in the sinful nature; surrounded by it; groomed in it. Dislodging it is a life-long process.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (v. 18).

Being "under the law" is characterized by a life of just saying no to all of the desires of the flesh.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (verses 19–26).

There is a simple truth in these verses: When you become a Christian the same power that raised Jesus from the dead comes into you. The spiritual deadness in you—the fear, guilt, struggles, joylessness—everything a part of the flesh can be overcome by the victorious resurrection power of Jesus. Like Peter Parker learned how to access the power within him to be a superhero, the Christian learns too. This is described in these verses as walking in the Spirit (v. 16); led by the Spirit (v. 18); live by the Spirit (v. 25); keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25).

The result of “walking in the Spirit” is seen in the Fruit of the Spirit. It is the product. This is not like living “under the Law.” In contrast, it is described as freedom. You have the power of freedom and victory available to you. Salvation fully accomplished the initial change. Now we’re shedding the flesh and learning a new way to live.

Are you settling for too little change in your life? Are you settling for too little power demonstrated in your life? Certainly we’ve changed. But looking at what’s available, there’s further to go!

About 12 years ago I was interviewing for jobs. As churches interview potential new pastors, one of the last steps involves a multiple-day trip to the church. As a trip was getting closer and closer my left eye started twitching. At first this was confusing. Why is my body doing this? It was only through an internet search that I discovered this is one way the body releases stress. Shows you how emotionally in touch I was! I didn’t even know I was stressed. Even to this day, this is the best way for me to know I’m under stress.

Is this what walking in the Spirit looks like? No. This is an example of walking in the flesh. Well, I better figure out a way to fix this! I’m a pastor. I better be walking in the Spirit. So I told myself to stop being stressed. I asked God for peace. I surrendered the entire job search to Jesus. I shared my feelings with a trusted friend.

These are all good actions. I recommend them as the fourth step in “walking in the Spirit.” But I was still stressed. What was I missing? Why was I stressed? Because I really wanted the job? Not so much. Because I was low on money? Not really. I had both a job and \$30K in equity in my house with no debt.

I was stressed because I had an **over-desire to control** the outcome of my life. Every interview reminded me that **those** people had all of the control over **my** life. I wanted to control my life, lead my life, set the direction of where I went, not them. My desire wasn’t in a healthy range; it was an over-desire.

God doesn’t place His Spirit within us with the resurrection power of Jesus so that we can live like this! We have the potential for freedom and victory.

Let me show you four steps from these verses to walk in the Spirit:

1 – Surrender your life to Jesus

2 – Identify your over-desires of the flesh

3 – Confess them

4 – Turn your affection to Jesus

Surrender your life to Jesus. This is presumed in these verses.

Identify your over-desires of the flesh. In verse 16 “the desires” is used. Older translations used the word “lusts.” The Greek word is *epi-thu-mea*. All of the pastoral epistles of Paul and Peter use this word often. In translation, “desire” is too weak of a word; “lust” is misleading. *Epi-thu-mea* means “over-desire;” “super-desire.” Paul is saying you’ve got to figure out how to crucify the flesh and its over-desires because the over-desires of your flesh are the source of everything that’s wrong with your life. These over-desires are tricky to deal with for two reasons: they reside deeply and subtly in our heart, and they usually aren’t a bad thing but a good thing we want too badly.

Think of it this way: the average Christian thinks their problem is their desire is a desire for bad things. Certainly that can be true in some situations. However, the problem that’s more pervasive is an over-desire for good things. For example:

“I drink too much – I need to cut back.”

“I hit people when I get mad.”

“I fudge on my taxes.”

“I worry – I need to get that under control.”

These are all bad. Clearly. A typical Christian’s approach is to try and control them or hedge them in by trying to “get better.” This approach won’t work and it’s not what Paul is talking about here. Getting better with only behavior modification is like living under the law, as described in verse 18. Living under the law is like living under a different slave master. The Law won’t bring victory or freedom any more than living under the sinful nature does.

Instead, the deeper spiritual discipline is understanding the over-desire in your heart that manifests itself in drinking too much, hitting people, fudging taxes or worrying. Often this desire of the heart is a good thing but we want it too badly. I call these the Root. As I interviewed for jobs, my over-desire was Control. I had to deal with that in order to walk in the Spirit.

Some prevalent Roots are:

Control. Control is a good thing. God is sovereign and controls everything. And he wants us to responsibly and maturely lead our lives.

Escape. Escape is a good thing. In heaven we're told that there won't be any tears or suffering. It will be a glorious escape from all the suffering we face.

Comfort. Comfort is a good thing. Jesus gives us comfort in the midst of hardship. We are meant to experience comfort from the support of one another.

Approval. Approval is a good thing. Unless we're a hermit, we live in community with one another. This involves friendship and friends like one another.

Power. Power is a good thing. Power is like authority. God gave humanity authority in the garden and instructed Adam and Eve to rule over the earth and subdue it.

When we want any of these too much, we aren't walking in the Spirit. Instead, we are walking in the flesh. We are living like someone who doesn't have the resurrection power of Jesus inside of them. But we do have the power to live differently. Let me give you an example.

About a year ago I realized that I was kind of grumpy inside, a bit on edge. Fidgety. I wasn't at peace. The fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness—weren't the dominant characteristics of my life.

After some reflection and prayer I identified that this was the result of not being able to buy a house. I'd been listening to podcasts on the inability of the middle class to own houses—check; send children to college—check; save for retirement—check. These frustrations, fears and disappointments were swirling in my heart like a sin nature cocktail. That's why I was a mess.

Do you know the Root of it all? Comfort and Control. I wanted them **too** much. They were *epi-thu-mea*, over-desires. Since I couldn't satisfy the over-desire for comfort or the over-desire for control, I was a mess.

This doesn't sound like walking in freedom, does it. This doesn't sound like walking in the Spirit either. So I had identified the over-desire of my flesh. What do you do next?

Confess them. In verse 25 we're told to "keep in step with the Spirit" and following up with what's said in verse 24, that means to crucify, to put to death, the passions and over-desires of the flesh. Confessing puts them to death. Confession disarms them. Confession strips them of their power. Confessing them means we look at each of our over-desires in light of the cross. We consider how Jesus was willing to die for us and ask ourselves, Why do I feel like I need something else so badly? It's like we're saying I need Jesus + something else.

Paul is saying to take it to the cross and that's what I did with those two over-desires one morning as I wrote in my journal. I confessed my heart's raging desire to control my future by owning a home instead of renting, and bring comfort to my

wife and kids by providing them the stability of schools and their room and their neighborhood.

I called myself out with stark honesty for what I was doing. Looking to these two things to bring me joy, peace, happiness and contentment, I acknowledged to God that I was rebelling against Jesus and His love for me. And something amazing happened. I felt the grip of the flesh release. In an instant, I felt free.

Don't underestimate the power of confession. Along this theme, Pastor and author Jack Miller wrote the following: "I have been able again and again to confess my anxieties – really deep ones – and ask God to take them away because I cannot. They are simply too deeply rooted in me and my past. But once the Spirit shows me the self-centered unbelieving core of my fears, then help usually comes to me very quickly in the form of release. Essentially I need to confess to God that I have a deep-seated need to protect and control my life and ministry. Once I acknowledge that hard, painful fact to Him, grace seems to stream into my life. Somehow the Father delights in honesty. Usually when my anxieties dominate and will not go away, I need to face the truth that my devotion is not being given to God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, but to myself."

Are you wondering what **your** over-desires might be? People can have an over-desire for anything, in addition to the five I gave earlier—happy children or grandchildren, success in business, justice, a cheerful heart. When we wrap our heart's affection around something, we depend upon that for our everything. And when it's threatened to be taken away the over-desires of the flesh emerge. Success in business can produce anxiety, can lead to financial compromises, can produce anger because your everything depends on it. Raising "good" kids can produce worry when they're average, unhealthy obsession on their success, fear when they fail because your everything depends on it.

Confessing the over-desires of your heart is a vital step in walking in the Spirit.

Turn your over-desire affection to Jesus. After we Confess, tell Jesus that He's enough to satisfy all of your desires. Reflect on Jesus' unconditional love for you and let your heart swell with affection for Him. Instead of wrapping your heart's affection around something else, wrap your heart's affection around Jesus. When you do that you are living in a position that shows that you depend upon Jesus for your everything. Tell Jesus, "I surrender to You the specific misplaced over-desires."

If it's approval, tell Jesus that His approval is enough.

If it's control, tell Jesus that you trust His sovereign hand control your life.

If it's power, tell Jesus that you gladly relinquish all the power over your life to Him.

If it's comfort, tell Jesus that His peace in the middle of the storm is enough for you.

In essence, tell Jesus that you don't need anything other than Him. As you do this, you are turning your deepest affections to Jesus and the result of these four steps is walking in the Spirit. When we're doing this, some miraculous things happen. The Fruits of the Spirit emerge in your life. You don't have to manufacture more:

Love
Joy
Peace
Patience
Kindness
Goodness
Faithfulness
Gentleness
Self-control

The Spirit of God reveals them **in** you. It's His role to produce and reveal them; it's your role to surrender your deepest affections to Jesus. Through salvation, the Holy Spirit lives inside of you with the resurrection power of Jesus. Having this on our mind

is walking in the Spirit. He desires to show us the glory of Jesus. When we see that; when we experience Him; when we are confessing our misplaced over-desires, we are living in the freedom of the Spirit.

Just imagine how wonderful and free your life would be. Just imagine all of us living free from these over-desires and the demands of the law. This is what the Apostle Paul was helping these young churches learn throughout Asia Minor and Greece. As you imagine what it would be like for us walk in the Spirit, consider what happened to the church in its second grown season. They were persecuted but they also experienced the Holy Spirit move powerfully.

The persecution we accept because God is in control. The powerful movement of the Holy Spirit is what we pray for—that God would use us to help people know Him as Savior and grow in their faith. Our response to confess and turn our affections to Jesus will determine how God uses our church today.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.