

LIVE|15 – The Ordinary Revolution

The Practice of Ordinary

Galatians 5:16-24

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¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:16–24 (ESV)

Do you realize how many things had to work for you to make it to church today? My guess is that you probably gave very little thought to how many ordinary things that led to this moment that went miraculously well. Your alarm went off on time, and you actually heard it. The hot water heater didn't fail overnight. The lights came on when you flipped the switch in the bathroom. You had enough milk for cereal, and the coffee pot wasn't crusted with hard water residue, so you could get a good cup of coffee. When you turned the key, your car started. The traffic lights were illuminated so that cars moved in an organized manner.

When you arrived at church, you suddenly discovered that other people had the same experience. Their alarms, hot water heaters, lights, grocery supply, coffee pot, car, and traffic lights also worked. In order for all of us to gather together, think about the thousands of things that had to work in order for this moment to happen. But my guess is that you never even gave a thought to everything that "worked" this morning. If everything went well, you probably thought that is was just an ordinary Sunday. Everything worked. It was ordinary.

The problem with the ordinary things in life is the fact that we tend to not notice them or appreciate them until they are gone. Things that consistently work as a part of everyday life tend to be viewed as ordinary.

Does Your Christianity Work?

This Sunday we are taking our third step in this journey that we are calling "The Ordinary Revolution," and I want you to consider whether or not you would describe your practice of the Christian life as "working." In other words, is your spiritual life going well? Are you finding victory over sin issues and struggles in

your life? Do you fairly consistently see ways that God is working in your life? If you could grade your spirituality, what grade would you give? Does your faith work?

Now I know that we all come at this issue from various perspectives. I have three groups of people in mind today. First, there are some of you who would have to answer my question by saying, "It does not work at all because I'm not a Christian." And I hope that today's message will give you a vision of what it means for the Christian life to work such that you'll become a follower of Jesus today. Second, there are those who would call themselves "Christians," but it's really not working. You may have moved from discouraged to defeated to doubt. You want Christianity to work, but it just doesn't. I hope today will be a turning point for you. Third, there are those who are Christians and, while things are not going perfectly, you are committed to following Jesus. I want you to leave encouraged and strengthened.

The beautiful hope of this message today is that God wants Christianity to work for you as much as you want it to work for you. The key is figuring out what the Bible says about the ordinary Christian life and then putting it into practice.

That is one reason why we have featured the weekly challenge connected to this series. We want you to take one challenge each week and make incremental progress in your spiritual life. Our hope and prayer is that you will learn something, try something, and share something with people around you such that you will discover how revolutionary the ordinary Christian life really is.

So far we have looked at the beauty of abiding in Christ as we learned what it means for the life, love, and power of Jesus to influence every area of our life such that we could say, "Apart from Jesus, I can do nothing." Last week we looked at role of the church in order to see that there is something special, powerful, and authoritative about the gathering of God's people together.

From Galatians 5:16-24, I want to see if we can identify some key concepts that relate to how the Christian life actually works. In other words, what are the marks of the ordinary Christian life?

Eight Marks of Ordinary Christianity

Our text may be a familiar one to some of you because it is a well-known summary of what the Christian life is all about. In 2012 we studied this text by looking at the Spirit's role in helping us to kill or mortify sin.¹ Today I want to examine it through the lens of what we can learn about the marks of the ordinary Christian life.

1. Freedom

The first mark is a positional issue, and it is the foundation of everything else that follows. If you miss this one, nothing else works. Verses 16-24 are the application or the expression of what it means to have freedom in and through Jesus Christ. In fact, the entire book of Galatians is written with this theme of freedom in mind. Let me show you a few places where this theme surfaces:

¹ <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/empowered-by-the-spirit/>

¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)*

¹ *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1 (ESV)*

The freedom that Paul is talking about here is the foundational principle that righteousness is given by God to those who put their faith in Christ. By trusting in Christ's death on the cross as your payment for sin, God frees you from the guilt, condemnation, and penalty of your sin. Through Christ, people are forgiven.

¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— Galatians 3:13 (ESV)*

The starting point of the ordinary Christian life is this freedom. Christianity doesn't work unless you have put your faith and trust in Jesus. There has to be a foundational relationship with Jesus. That is why we started in John 15 with the idea of abiding in Jesus. Jesus said that He is the vine, and we are the branches (John 15:5), and Paul says that we have been crucified with Christ.

²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (ESV)*

Do you see the connection in this text between how you live and are being crucified with Christ? The foundation of Christianity is a freedom which was bought by Christ and which is received by faith. This freedom empowers us to live differently:

The gospel produces peace and empowers us to live by faith. We are no longer anxious, but secure and invigorated because we are crucified and raised with Christ. We are no longer trying to live up to the starring role we've given ourselves, but are written into the story of Christ. We have nothing to prove, just a lot of work to do. Good works are no longer seen as a condition of our union with Christ, but as its fruit. We are no longer slaves, but the children of God – co-heirs with Christ, our elder brother.²

2. Walk

The second mark is a very important and helpful word: “walk.” Specifically, verse 16 says “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” I love the fact that while the gospel is ripe with big and eternal truths like justification, atonement, forgiveness, and freedom, the way it is lived out is by “walking.” And what could be more ordinary than walking? I think that is why Paul chose this term.

The word for walk (*peripateo*) is meant to communicate an all-encompassing and yet common activity. It is one of Paul's favorite words to describe the practical Christian life.³ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk** in him.* Colossians 2:6 (ESV) In the historical and cultural context, the students of

² Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable faith in a radical, restless world*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2014), 40.

³ See Rom. 6:4, 8:4, 13:13, 14:15; Eph. 2:2, 2:10, 4:1, 5:2, 5:8; Col. 1:10, 2:6, 3:7, 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12, 4:1

Aristotle who followed their teacher as he taught were called the Peripatetics, “the walkers.”⁴ Their life was marked by their teacher. They walked with him.

As applied to the Christian life, this word helps us to see that “walking” is the essence of ordinary Christianity. It means that we take the teachings of Jesus, the life of Jesus, and the actions of Jesus and so incorporate them into our lives that our lives look more and more like His. We walk like He walked. We act like He acted. Paul stated it this way:

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1–2 (ESV)

The key is not making the Christian life more complicated than what it is meant to be. It is as simple and yet transformational as being an imitator of God by walking in love and in light of how Christ has loved you. Christianity is as simple and yet profound as living like Jesus in every arena of life.

If you are a child, live like Jesus as you relate to your siblings, as you obey your parents, as you honor your teachers, and as you play with friends. If you are a teenager, live like Jesus in how you hang out with friends, in how you respond to your parents, in what you post online, and in how you act on a soccer field, classroom, or behind the counter at Chick-Fil-A. If you are a college student, the Christian life is as simple and profound as living like Jesus in your fraternity or sorority, when you are tailgating before the big game, in your conversations when you are out on Friday night, and in what decisions you make regarding moral issues. If you are a single adult, you live like Jesus in the friends you make and keep, in how you conduct yourself at work, in how you handle the dating scene, and how you battle loneliness. If you are married, you live like Jesus in how you love your spouse in all of his or her imperfections, how you selflessly care for your children, and how you conduct yourself at work and in your neighborhood.

The point here is simply that the Christian life is something that works as it is walked. Do not underestimate the power and impact of simply living like Jesus every day in every arena. And don’t make the mistake of thinking that the Christian life is just about major decisions. It is that. But even more so, the Christian life is about thousands of decisions made every day. The Christian life is a walk.

This should also encourage you if you feel like a failure sometimes because the progress in your life or in the life of others is slow. Sometimes there are major spiritual changes that happen in people’s lives. But normally those changes look more like walking than running.

3. The Spirit

The third mark of the ordinary Christian life is the third person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. Paul doesn’t just say “Walk!” He says, “walk by the Spirit.” So what is the Spirit’s role in all of this?

J.I. Packer in his wonderful book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, summarizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit this way: “*The essence of the Holy Spirit’s ministry, at this or any time in the Christian era, is to mediate the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”⁵ In other words, everything about the Holy Spirit’s role is to make the

⁴ George, Timothy. *Galatians*. Vol. 30. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. Print. The New American Commentary.

⁵ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit – Finding Fullness in our Walk with God*, (Grand Raids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), 49.

name of Jesus known. Tim Keller says that if you were to walk into the Holy Spirit's room, all you would see are pictures of Jesus. So it is the Spirit's mission to glorify the Father by making much of Jesus.

When a person receives Christ as Savior, he or she also receives the Spirit (Gal. 3:2-3). To have Christ is to have the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and to have the Spirit means that you are a Son of God (Rom. 8:14-17) and that you are sealed as God's children (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit is intimately involved in regeneration, conviction of sin, comfort, intercession, sanctification, spiritual gifts, unity of the body, and assurance, to name a few of his ministries.

Therefore, to walk by the Spirit means that the ordinary Christian life is birthed, empowered, encouraged, guarded, and continued through the personal presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. It means that the Christian life is as simple as living under the authority, influence, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is as ordinary as using the means through which the Holy Spirit works to keep walking – things like Bible reading, prayer, community, Lord's Supper, fasting, giving, service, and corporate worship. It means coming to realize that we have everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) right now.

Think of it! You have everything you need right now – through the gospel, the Word, the Spirit and the community of faith – to grow. So why aren't you? What's stopping you? What more are you looking for?

4. Promise

The ordinary Christian life is rooted in a promise in Galatians 5. Verse 16 and 18 says, "Walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh . . . If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law." Paul makes a very important connection here between walking in the Spirit and the desires of the flesh and the law. The way that the flesh is conquered and true obedience happens is by walking in the Spirit.

If you desire to not do the things that are characterized by the flesh, and if you are tired of doing things that are empty, broken, destructive and wrong, the solution is not found in your own strength or your own power. The fact of the matter is, you are actually THE problem. What you need is a supernatural empowerment that comes by the personal presence of Christ in your life.

You need a "God-taught, Spirit-wrought Christlikeness"⁶ in your life that can only come outside of yourself. You need Jesus. You need the Spirit. You need the gospel again and again. You need to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), be led by the Spirit (v. 18), to live by the Spirit (.v 25) and to keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25) such that the strength and allure of the flesh gets less and less as the Spirit's authority becomes greater and greater. It is similar to the promise and warning in Romans 8:13 - ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

So the reason that you do all the ordinary things in Christian life – like meditating on the Bible, spending time in prayer, allowing people to speak into your life, worshipping, serving the body, giving generously – is because they bring you life! Not always immediately. But eventually and progressively. And the reason why you are careful with what you look at, watch, read, talk about, who you hang with, where you go, and what you do is because those things can eventually lead to death.

⁶ Packer, 81.

So take heart if you ever struggle with wondering is this spiritual input really working? Is it really worth saying “No” to so many things that others say “Yes” to? There is a promise here about the ordinary Christian life: “walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

5. War

The next mark of the ordinary Christian life is that we are in a battle. Paul sets the stage very clearly for us in v. 17 - ¹⁷ *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and 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.* We learn a number of things in this text: 1) There are two realms – the flesh and the Spirit, 2) The battle zone is at the desire level, 3) The flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other, and 4) This battle manifests itself in action or inaction. The Christian life, therefore, is a constant battle at the most foundational level of our existence and affects specific actions.

Last week we talked about your vision of the church, and this week we come to your vision of the Christian life. Paul envisions the ordinary Christian life to be a battle, a war, and constant struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Is that how you view the Christian life?

Understanding this is helpful at a couple levels. First, it helps set our expectations as we live in the world. We are not living in a safe environment. We are not at peace with our flesh, sin, and the Devil. Therefore, when we face struggles, temptations, and even sin, we need to be reminded that this is what that the Christian life is all about – a struggle. Second, it gives us hope because true Christians never arrive; they just never stop fighting. Real Christians never stop, never quit, and are always mindful that the battle rages on. Finally, it helps us to be more vigilant. Complacency is spiritually deadly for Christians. We should live in the hope of the gospel, but also in somber realization of how quickly we can fall. The normal Christian life is war!

6. Morality

The next mark of the ordinary Christian life is a particular morality. Paul lists fifteen common sin issues in verses 19-21 that are naturally not associated with being a follower of Jesus. He calls these the “evident” works of the flesh. In other words, this is the ordinary flesh life:

¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,* ²¹ *envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these... Galatians 5:19–21 (ESV)*

These things are why we need laws, police, courts, and prisons. These are the things that dominate the evening news. It is what is wrong with us. And Paul draws a clear line in the sand by saying,

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:21 (ESV)

So, that means that there is an ethic or a morality that is directly connected to the ordinary Christian life. In other words, the ordinary Christian life is not characterized by sexual sin, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and anything else that is like this. This does not mean that Christians live perfectly. We can and do sin – sometimes royally.

But there is something important here. Christianity is tied to a morality. Theology creates ethics. And the ordinary pattern of the Christian life is marked by a Biblical morality. Verse 21 is very clear: those who do such things do not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, if the ordinary pattern of your life is marked by immorality, then you are simply not a Christian. The ordinary Christian life works. If it doesn't work, there is a problem . . . a very serious problem.

7. Fruit

The direct opposite of the immorality is the fruit of the Spirit identified in verses 22-23. The contrast between the two lists could not be any clearer. The ordinary Christian life is marked by the fruit of the Spirit not the works of the flesh.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV)

Notice a few things about this list. First, it is not a list of fruits. Rather, it is all one fruit. This is a singular fruit with multiple expressions. Second, while the immoral list focused on actions, the fruit of the Spirit is more character based. The fruit of the Spirit is about who you are. Third, by talking about the fruit of the Spirit versus the work of the Spirit, Paul is identifying that the fruit is something that is produced through the power of the Spirit. The fruit may be expressed in a believer's life, but he or she is not the source. The Spirit is the catalyst behind the fruit.

So what does the ordinary Christian life look like? It is a life marked by the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit such that character traits that are extraordinary to the human race become the ordinary life of a Christian. Because of the transformative power of the gospel, a Christian embraces true obedience ("against such there is no law") through life marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

This fruit is what ordinary Christianity looks like. Christianity works by producing spiritual fruit.

8. Hope

The final mark of the ordinary Christian comes out of verse 24 which serves as a book-end of the freedom in verse 16. In this verse we find hope as it relates to how Christians live: *²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24 (ESV)*

Belonging to Christ means that the followers of Jesus are "of Jesus Christ." If you are a Christian, that means you are His. Jesus, in His death, purchased your freedom. His crucifixion became yours. His victory was yours.

Therefore, there is hope for the ordinary Christian because all who belong to Jesus have been set up for daily victory over the flesh with its passions and desires. Through Christ there is a new identity, a new power, new desires, and new assistance to win the war with our flesh. Therefore, the ordinary Christian can have hope, not only at the grave, but every single day. Their mantra can be: "I belong to Jesus."

Once Again, Does Your Christianity Work?

I want to return to the question that we started with this morning: Does your Christianity work? When it comes to words like freedom, walk, the Spirit, promise, war, morality, fruit, and hope, how is it with your soul?

It may be that you've never experienced the ordinary Christian life because you are not yet a follower of Jesus. My prayer is that today you put your faith in Jesus and begin a life marked by freedom, forgiveness, and hope.

It may be that you are a follower of Jesus, but you are here weary and tired because you have a wrong understanding of what the ordinary Christian life really is. I hope this text is helpful in encourages you to keep walking, keep fighting, and keep trusting.

It may be that you are here today, and your Christian life is not working. Perhaps complacency, temptation or sin has gotten the best of you. Well, I want to remind you that God's grace is always more powerful than your failures. Perhaps today you simply need to acknowledge that it's not working, and ask the Lord to help you to start walking again.

Remember, Jesus bought your freedom, and "it is for freedom that Christ as set us free" (Gal 5:1). Jesus made the ordinary Christian life extraordinary.