

## Licensed to Kill: Strategies for Killing the Sin Within (Part 4 of 5)

“Empowered by the Spirit”

Galatians 5:16-25

Mark Vroegop

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*<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–25 - ESV).*

I found a wonderful quotation this week in J. I. Packer’s book *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, one of the best books, by the way, on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. He quoted Robert Murray McCheyne, who was a pastor in the 1800s in Scotland and who was renowned for his passionate preaching, his yearly Bible reading plan, and his early death at age 29. Here is what McCheyne said:

**“Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be!”**

Does that resonate with you? Does it capture what is on your heart today? Is that why you came to church today? I sure hope so.

I love that quotation because it captures a tension that we have been looking at in the month of August. On the one hand, the followers of Jesus are “saved sinners.” We have a positional righteousness that is irrevocable and established in the court room of heaven. But on the other hand, we are not perfect. We still struggle with indwelling sin or the remnants of the realm of the flesh. So there is a need for us to become holy.

That is the vision for LIVE|12 and the reason why we are focusing on the theme of mortification of sin. The aim of this series is to have you live out the vision of College Park Church – igniting a passion to follow Jesus. And that only happens by simultaneously extinguishing a passion to follow sin. So we have to “put it to death” (Rom. 8:13) which looks more like atrophy than it does amputation. You starve the flesh, causing it to lose its power, capacity, and authority.

Yet this is not something we can do on our own. Unlike justification, which is totally a work of God and based upon grace alone, sanctification is a work in which I cooperate. As Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13 – “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is **God who works in**

**you** both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” In other words, the daily battle with sin is fought through a power beyond ourselves.

*The battle is within;  
Daily I must fight;  
Death comes from sin,  
Killed only by Christ's might*

This is really good news, but you might wonder: “How does God work in me?” or “How is sin killed by Christ’s might?” or in our text today, “What does it mean to ‘walk in the Spirit?’” Today I want to show you the vital role that the Holy Spirit plays in our battle with sin.

### **What is the power behind real life change?**

Galatians 5 is one of the best passages on the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification. As you read this text and others, something very clear emerges. Look at the following verses and see if you can discover it:

- *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16)*
- *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Galatians 5:18)*
- *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . . ” (Galatians 5:22-23)*
- *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25)*
- *“ . . . if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13)*

Did you see how often the word “by” was used? Did you hear the “of” in the fruit of the Spirit? What do we make of this?

It essentially means that everything related to our spiritual life is somehow connected to the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to **walk by** the Holy Spirit. We are to be **led by** the Holy Spirit. We are to **live by** the Holy Spirit. We are **put to death** the deeds of the body **by** the Holy Spirit. We are to bear the **fruit of** the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the means, the agent, and the power by which spiritual progress happens.

To state it even more clearly – there is no power for life change without the Holy Spirit. He is that important.

Now I don’t know what your perspective is on the Holy Spirit, but often the Holy Spirit is not very well understood, especially by conservative Evangelicals. Understanding who He is and what He does is vital to our ability to walk by, be led by, live by, and put to death the deeds of the body by the Holy Spirit. Let me give you a few things to consider.

First, it is important for you to know that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune Godhead; He is not a thing, a force, an idea, or a feeling. He is a person, and He is fully God.

*The Holy Spirit is said to hear, speak, witness, convince, glorify Christ, lead, guide, teach, command, forbid, desire, groan, give speech, give help, and interceded for Christians with*

*inarticulate groans, himself crying to God in their prayers (see John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7-15; Acts 2:4, 8:29, 13:2, 16:6-7; Rom. 8:14,16, 26-27; Gal. 4:6, 5:17-18). Also, he can be lied to and grieved (Acts 5:3-4, Eph. 4:30).<sup>1</sup>*

Second, His role is vital to the mission of God through the gospel. His ministry “at this time or any time in the Christian era, is to mediate the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit was actively involved in the Old Testament through creation (Gen. 1:2), revealing God’s truth (Num. 24:2), teaching God’s people (Neh. 9:20), calling people to respond to God (Ps. 52:1-12), and empowering leaders (Num. 11:17).<sup>3</sup> But in the New Testament the Spirit takes on a very specific role as it relates to Christ. At Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3:16, the Spirit rests upon Jesus like a dove, and then Jesus is led “by the Spirit” into the wilderness, where the devil tempts Him (Matthew 4). The Spirit is said to have led and empowered Jesus during his earthly ministry (Luke 4:14), and it is the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead:

*<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11).*

This passage in Romans serves as a good bridge into the third aspect of the Spirit’s role. It is the Spirit who is actively involved in the salvation of human beings, linking us to Christ and His work. The Holy Spirit is directly involved in the “new birth” (John 3:3-8) and in uniting us to Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-11). Once converted, the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11), and the Spirit is given as a “mark of ownership” that the believer belongs to God (Eph. 1:13).<sup>4</sup> Each believer is united together with other believers in the body of Christ:

*<sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

The Spirit’s mission is to make us individually and corporately more and more transformed into the likeness and image of Jesus. His amazing role is to work in us and through us, so that over time, we look like Jesus Christ in real and specific ways. This is gloriously spoken about in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

*<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

God is on a mission to rescue us from our sin in the future and even now, and it is the Holy Spirit who personally empowers every believer to become more and more like Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who is actively working in us in the process of mortification leading to sanctification. The power for real life change comes from the intimate intervention of a person of the Godhead whose mission is to save you, seal you, secure you, and sanctify you. The Spirit yearns for you to be holy, and He is ready to make it happen. He was given to us so that we could be righteous, godly, Christ-like people. His mission is the glorify Christ by creating Christ’s glory in you.

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit – Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Packer, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Packer, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Packer, 61.

## **Why is walking in the Spirit important?**

Now that we know more about the role of the Holy Spirit in general, we can dive more specifically into the idea of “walking in the Spirit.” Galatians 5:16-25 help us to see why this is so important. Three reasons are evident in the text:

### **1. It is how you defeat the desires of the flesh (v 16)**

The Bible tells that there are two different spiritual realms: spirit – the renewed aspect of your being, and flesh – the remnants of the fall. Verse 17 clearly indicates that these are in direct opposition to one another, and the effect is that you are “kept from doing the things you want to do.” In other words, there is a struggle between good and evil, between two ethical realms, and between two very different ways of living.

But how do you win the battle with the flesh? Paul answers that clearly in verse 16 with a promise. He says, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” So there is a very important promise to note here. If you want to defeat the desires of the flesh, then learn to walk in the Spirit.

### **2. It is how true obedience is produced (v 18)**

The second reason why this idea of walking in the Spirit is important is related to what true obedience looks like. In verse 18, Paul says “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” He changes his words here, but the meaning is essentially the same. Walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit are not two totally different things. They are different sides of the same coin.

In the book of Galatians, Paul is making the case for true righteousness based upon the gospel, not the Law (see 1:6-7, 2:16). The message of the book is to live by promise, not performance. And the Spirit is vital to that distinction –

*Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:2–3).*

The Spirit is not only in contrast to the flesh but also to the Law, and verse 18 essentially is saying that when you are led by the Spirit, you are pursuing obedience beyond what the Law could ever produce. In other words, the Spirit creates a new, internal law which was promised in the New Covenant:

*<sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezekiel 36:26–27).*

Being led by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit are the means by which real obedience is produced in the life of a believer. The Spirit frees us from the condemnation of the Law (Rom. 8:4), and the Spirit produces godly desires within us, such that the commands of God are not just narrowly obeyed but become a joy to our hearts. The Spirit frees us from the condemnation of external obedience, and He frees us by making obedience a delight. Walking in the Spirit creates true obedience.

### 3. It creates good fruit rather than fleshly works (vv 19-24)

The final reason this is important is the difference between what the flesh and the Spirit produce. There is a remarkable contrast between verses 19-21 and 22-23.

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

These are obviously bad. But Paul adds an additional warning that we need to really hear: “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21b). Why can he give such a clear warning? Simple. If you are indwelt with the Spirit of Christ, you cannot continue in these things. Why? Because you are a Spirit person, and the internal aspect of who you are has been eternally altered. You will fight against these things because you want to.

Then Paul identifies the contrast to fleshly works, and he calls it the “fruit of the Spirit.” Even the titles are telling – works of the flesh vs. the fruit of the Spirit. The believer in Jesus is to allow these nine characteristics of the very heart and character of Jesus to be produced in his or her life:

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

When this fruit is born out of believer’s life, there is no “law” because this fruit of the Spirit fulfills the very heart of the law. Loving God and loving one’s neighbor is the ultimate fulfillment of the Law (Matt. 22:37-40), and it is addressing how to love one’s neighbor that led Paul to talk about this in Galatians 5 (see Gal. 5:13-15).

Do you see how important this matter of walking in the Spirit really is? Now I know that some of you are thinking, “But you haven’t even told us what ‘walking in the Spirit’ means yet!” True. And I’ll get there. But there is something valuable about simply getting you even thinking about this concept.

You see, I think that a lot of our problem with the mortification of sin is that we tend to forget about the power of the Holy Spirit. The nature of our culture and the track record of our past collude to convince us that sin is normal and pretty much impossible to resist. Then Galatians 5:16 comes along with this huge promise – “Walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” So part of the strategy for you walk in the Spirit is to know and to be reminded that you **can**.

As a husband I hear Ephesians call me to “love my wife like Christ loved the church.” And I find that the more I think about and study Christ, the better I am able to fulfill that command. I don’t need a long “to-do” list of what it means to love my wife when I am beholding the beauty of Jesus. In the same way, looking at the Spirit and His work is the first step toward discovering what it means to walk by Him.

## What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Now let's turn to the very specific issue as to what it actually means to walk in the Spirit. We need to be careful here, because while I'm going to try to make this specific and applicable, there is a reason why the Bible says, "Walk in the Spirit" versus "Do these things and you're good!" Kevin DeYoung has new book called *The Hole in our Holiness – Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*. Here is what he says:

*"It's all too easy to turn the fight of faith into sanctification-by-checklist. Take care of a few bad habits, develop a couple good ones, and you're set. But a moral checklist doesn't take into consideration the idols of the hearts. It may not even have the gospel as part of the equation. And inevitably, checklist spirituality is highly selective. So you end up feeling successful at sanctification because you stayed away from drugs, lost weight, served at the soup kitchen, and renounced Styrofoam. But you've ignored gentleness, humility, joy, and sexual purity."<sup>5</sup>*

So even as I try to give you some clarity and specificity, please be careful!

First, I'll try to give you a definition which I think captures the essence of what it means to walk in the Spirit:

**It is a Spirit-dependent way of life that involves believing the promises of God, choosing to do what is right, and thanking God for the result.**

Second, let's pull apart the sentence and talk about each part:

**Spirit-dependent** – We talked about this earlier, so I will not spend a lot of time here. Walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and producing the fruit of the Spirit all point to the fact that it is the Spirit who is the active agent, the means by which progress happens, and the ultimate power behind what is happening. Again, you take your first step by agreeing with Jesus in John 15:5 – "Apart from you I can do nothing!" That's the negative side.

Positively, it means that you have an unbelievable and powerful authority within you. You have the very presence and power of Christ within you – to help you, guide you, convict you, convince you, comfort you, and empower you.

**Way of life** – In Galatians 5:16 Paul uses the term "walk." The term (*peripateo*) comes from a Jewish understanding of every day life, and it is Paul's most common word to refer to or to describe ethical behavior.<sup>6</sup> Putting those two thoughts together, it simply means that we are to do all the things that are a part of life, but we are to do them in the power of the Spirit.

"To walk" is an all-encompassing term. It implies action and activity. You could think of it like grocery shopping. What does it mean to shop for groceries? What comes to mind? Developing a grocery list. Comparing prices. Selecting the right foods. Packing the cart. Unpacking the cart. My wife and I were out grocery shopping together this week and we found ourselves laughing at

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<sup>5</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness – Filling the Gap Between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2012), 34.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence – The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 429.

all that is involved, especially if you shop at Aldi. You have to find a quarter, get a cart, put the groceries in the cart, put them on the belt, watch as they are put back in cart, you take them out of the cart, put them in bags, put them in the car, take them home, put them in the house, unpack the bags on the counter top, and *finally* put them in the fridge or pantry. We counted no less than 12 steps! My point? There is a lot behind the word “grocery shopping.” There is a lot behind the word “walk.”

**Believing the promises of God** – Walking in the Spirit means that you see what God says in His word about you, and you believe it! If you missed last week’s sermon, go back and listen to it, because I talked about what it means to be dead to sin and alive to Christ.<sup>7</sup> Sin tempts you by making promises to you. The gospel triumphs over sin by giving you two things: 1) greater promises to believe, and 2) the empowerment to believe them through the Holy Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit is simply seeing the promises of God and believing them! Here are a few examples:

- For anger: *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19)*
- For lust: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8)*
- For pride: *“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5)*
- For anxiety: *“casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7)*
- For hopelessness: *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13)*

So you have to be a promise collector! You have to read the Bible, digging and searching for promises to cling to. Next week we’ll talk more about the spiritual disciplines, but I simply want you to see this week that you need to know, cherish, and recite the promises of God to your soul.

**Chose to do what is right** – With all of this talk about empowerment, dependence, and the Spirit, you might think that our role is to simply “let go and let God.” But nothing could be further from the truth. Sin is conquered as you take tangible and specific action steps. After we have appealed for the Spirit’s empowerment and thrown ourselves on His promises, believing that He can help us, **then** we have to work with all our might!<sup>8</sup> Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 this very thing:

*<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).*

We have to “work out our salvation” (Phil. 4:12). This is where some of you need to really listen. The problem in your life, and the reason why sin is still so much a part of your life, is because every

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/sin-in-the-cross-hairs/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/let-us-walk-by-the-spirit>

day you are choosing to follow it when you don't have to. You have a choice! You are not alone in this fight.

**Thanking God for the result** – Where does the mortification of sin lead? What is produced in us through sanctification? What is the effect when we see the fruit of the Spirit? We know that without God's help, no victories would be won and no fruit would be produced. When you walk in the Spirit and do not fulfill the desires of the flesh, it is then that you know that it is "God who is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). You see "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

And when you see this, it creates gratitude in your heart to God. You know that it is God who is doing this in you. Seeing this births a renewed sense of confidence in God and assurance that you are real! Sin has the opposite effect – it assaults your confidence in God and in who you really are.

Oh how I long for you to walk in the Spirit! Not just so that you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. I surely want that happen. But there is more here. When you walk by the Spirit - **a Spirit-dependent way of life that involves believing the promises of God, choosing to do what is right, and thanking God for the result** – you are amazed at what God can really do.

And when your heart is full of the love of God, the Spirit has accomplished His purpose on earth!

So brothers and sisters, for the sake of what it means to be free from sin, for the sake of what kind of fruit could be produced, for the sake of what confidence it will give your faith, for the sake of the message of the church – be holy! Kill sin! Walk by the Spirit! Keep in step with the Spirit!

Say, along with Robert Murray McCheyne, "**Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be!**"

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