

Galatians 5:13-26

Keep on Walking

10th November 2013

Today this sermon is entitled ‘Keep on Walking’ – so let me ask - who here enjoys walking? I ask that because I love walking, however, when it comes to serious walking my lovely wife takes the gold medal – be warned if you go for a walk with her it won’t just be a stroll. You could end up like this! (Picture of me lying down after a long walk with Ruth)

So before we get into the walking bit – let’s just have a brief up-date on where we are up to on our walk through this sermon series on Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Last week we looked at Galatians 5:1-12 – once again this reminded us we are saved by grace alone, we cannot add anything to our salvation. Jesus + nothing = everything. Remember – Paul’s letter to the Galatians was concerned about false teachers misdirecting new believers by telling them they needed Jesus plus Jewish religious ritual, for example, circumcision, for God to accept them. Paul was not happy and in last week’s passage it ended with him calling his opponents to “emasculate themselves!”

We also heard Paul calling the Galatians (and us) to live in freedom. But Paul knows such language as “freedom” can be very misleading to people. He knows when we speak of being “free from the law,” it’s tempting to think we are now free to determine our own standards of behaviour.

In today’s reading Paul highlights the dangers of taking God’s grace for granted and living as we please – without a relationship with Christ. Jesus calls us to freedom, but that does not mean independence. We are free from the bondage to the law and we don’t need the law to control us, but that doesn’t mean we can simply live as we please. It’s all too easy to take advantage of God’s amazing grace saying things like: “God knows I’m weak in this area. But that’s okay because after I sin when I ask him He’ll forgive me”. We need the Spirit, Jesus living in us, to guide us from within so that we may walk and work with Him! But, although we may have become a Christian we still have within us a sinful nature whose impulse is to rebel against God. One day that sinful nature will be destroyed, but until then there is an ongoing war in our hearts. How can we be victorious against it and live in that balance of being in relationship with Christ and walking with Him? This is what our passage this morning is going to help us with!

- I. **Walking with Love**
- II. **Walking with the Spirit**
- III. **Walking with fruit**

- 1. **Walking with love**

At the beginning of our reading last week in 5:1 Paul says: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Now in verse 13 he says it again: “You my brothers (and sisters), were called to be free”.

Paul says God called us. The gospel of grace is a call from God. “Come follow me!” We were in prison to sin. Jesus paid the debt for our release. He opens the prison door, fills our dungeon with light and calls us out! But Paul says, don’t get out of the prison cell and walk into another. When Christ saved us, we became a new creation. But there’s a part of us not yet redeemed – it’s called the ‘sinful nature’ that impulse in us, which encourages rebellion against God. Before we become Christians we are walking a life ruled by ourselves, rebelling against God. But even when we become Christians we don’t automatically lose our sinful nature. When Paul talks about Christian freedom and being free from the law he does not mean our sinful nature is given opportunity to continue sinning freely and without consequence. As John Stott says, “Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin”.

True freedom is not the privilege to do whatever one wants, but the privilege to do what God wants. Christian freedom is freedom to love. And the chief essence of love is self-sacrifice for the benefit of the one who is loved. Also consider the word “Serve” in v.13 which means to do that which is for the advantage of someone else. As we follow Jesus He is calling us to become less self-centered and more others-centered. Paul says when you truly are free in Christ, you actually fulfill the law you are trying so hard externally to follow. The heart of the Law in the Old Testament, boiled down to two things: “Love God and love your neighbour”.

Perhaps think of it like this... Jesus died with two beams: a horizontal and vertical beam. The vertical beam representing the fact that we can love God as we were intended to and the horizontal representing the fact that we can love others as God would want us to. Once we follow Jesus, the law is no longer an external thing we try hard to obey, but God instead will now write it in our hearts. As we live by the

Spirit we discover all the resources we need to live and love, since God has loved us and lives in us so we can live. But it's not necessarily automatic. Our sinful nature works against this. Look at verse 15 – Paul warns how we can become an animal and mutual destruction is always the result. I remember getting caught in a road rage incident. Neither me or the other driver were exactly motivated by love and we were close to literally devouring each other. And he was bigger than me so I would have been eaten first. Seriously though we are called by God to love but how do we do that and avoid and overcome our sinful nature? We must seek to live by the Spirit. And so to our second point...

II. Walking with the Spirit

In verse 16 Paul says: “So I say, live by the Spirit...”. The word “live” means to “go about,” or “walk around” or figuratively, “to conduct oneself.” It is in the present tense meaning to walk continuously. Walking is a “reiterated step.” It is to take a series of small steps in the same direction over a long period of time. The Christian life is a habitual, constant, moment-by-moment intentional and deliberate choice to be in tune with the Holy Spirit. To walk in the Spirit means to go where the Spirit is going, to listen to his voice, to discern his will, to follow his guidance. In this context “Walking” implies progress, going from where one is to where one ought to be.

In verse 16 Paul also promises - if you walk by the Spirit: “you will not (absolutely not) gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” It's not a charming personality, a theological degree or attending special seminars on how to live the Christian way that somehow makes a victorious Christian life. Rather it is a daily walking with the Spirit. The trouble is (and I hold my own hands up here) we sometimes live as though if we try hard NOT to gratify the desires of our sinful nature, we can walk by the Spirit? That's not what Paul is saying. The solution is not to pit our will against our sinful nature, but to surrender our will to the Holy Spirit. Just saying “no” to our sinful nature will not work. Instead it is saying yes to Christ. It is responding continually to His love. As Tim Keller says, “walking with God is a moment by moment awareness of God's awareness of you.”

But let's not pretend this is easy. Look at v.17. There is a war going on inside a Christian. Let me try to explain... Think of a pig – it's unclean and enjoys wallowing in muck. That's a bit like our old nature, always looking for something unclean to

feed on. Try cleaning up a pig. At the first opportunity it will almost certainly run back to the mucky pigpen. That's what our sinful nature is like. Consequently living the Christian life can sometimes feel like trying to walk up an escalator in the wrong direction. If you stop moving, the only way is down. But if you notice that war inside you, rejoice! The Spirit is in you fighting! You belong to Him! As much as we wish God would take our sinful nature away immediately upon salvation, we find God has another way to deal with it. Instead of removing it forever (which He will one day), He provides a source of power that will release us from the control of our sinful nature. That source of power is relationship with Himself, in the power of the Spirit.

In v.18. it says, "***if*** you are led by the Spirit." Please don't think being led by the Spirit means we do nothing. The Spirit's job is to lead but our job is to walk, in a way that comes from being in tune with the Spirit and listening to His call. It means having God-moments throughout the day, not just at quiet times. It means choosing to have those moments because they don't come automatically. Verse 18 literally reads, "But if you are *willingly led* by the Spirit, then you are not under the Law." Remember, the Holy Spirit writes God's Law on our hearts so that we *desire* to obey Him in love. We are not obeying because we have to, but because we want to and we love Him. When the Holy Spirit leads us he becomes the controlling influence in our lives instead of us being controlled by our sinful nature.

In verse 19 Paul then lists the acts of the sinful nature. Notice how everything he mentions is manufactured and made with our own hands. 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. It's interesting he finishes by saying (CLICK) "and the like." In other words, before we grin and say our stuff is not on this list (which I don't know how it can't be), but just in case, Paul says "and the like".

Paul then adds a warning in v.21 for those who habitually, continually, stubbornly, have no desire to change, in respect of their lifestyle – Paul warns such people they will not "inherit," the kingdom of God. The word 'inherit' again highlights that people in the kingdom do not earn their place; it is a gift to us from him who died for us. If the works of the sinful nature dominate a person's life and they have no

desire to change and no fight within, it shows the Holy Spirit does not live in them and therefore they must repent and turn to God.

Now read v.24. Paul says you belong to Christ. He's your master. And since you belong to Him, the sinful nature that controlled you at one point, was nailed to the cross. We don't have to give in to our sinful nature any more. So don't take it off the cross and carry it around. When our sinful nature rears its ugly head - turn to Christ, listen to the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. That's why Paul says in v.25 "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." As we sense the Lord calling us and we respond to His love, we will walk in the way He wants us to walk.

It's a bit like the Holy Spirit is our legs. Before we are a Christian, we can try walking in the Spirit, but we can't. But once we are a Christian, we get legs. And how do children learn to walk? *By learning to put their weight* on their legs and shifting that weight in a repeated motion, over and over again, for a lifetime. It is learning to lean on the Spirit over and over again. Are you led by the Spirit? Or driven by your sinful nature? Imagine two wolves living in your heart and they are at war with each other. One is vicious and cruel, the other is wise and kind. Which one will win? The answer is "The one you feed." If you feed your sinful nature all day, you will have starved the Spirit. When you feed your soul and listen to the Spirit, you will not just starve your sinful nature, but you'll kill it.

3. Walking with Fruit

How do we know we are walking by the Spirit? When we start to look like Jesus Christ in our character, bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said in John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Here's the key to bearing fruit: Stay close to Jesus. If we cut ourselves off from Jesus in any way, at any time, we won't bear fruit. If we remain in Jesus, fruit will come.

My mum had an apple tree growing in her back garden. It never moved – it just stayed there rooted and growing in her garden. Each year without any apparent effort it blossomed and then produced an amazing crop of apples. The tree just did it and I never wondered how it made those apples. By contrast sometimes as Christians we struggle and strive, doing this and doing that and can end up feeling totally 'done in' often because we fail to understand that the secret of fruit-bearing

is not to try to figure out how to make fruit. The secret of fruit-bearing is simply remaining in there with Jesus.

Our sinful nature produces “dead works” but the Spirit produces living fruit. Our sinful nature produces works for self. It is self-centered. Fruit exists for others. It exists to bless others. And this fruit has in it the seed for still more fruit. Love creates more love! Joy produces more joy! Jesus is concerned we produce “fruit... more fruit... much fruit”, because this is the way we glorify Him.

Also notice the fruit of the Spirit is not FRUITS, but FRUIT. They come together in our lives as followers of Jesus. Think of yourself as a garden. Some of the characteristics of the fruit in your garden may not be as strong as others and we need to grow in them, but nevertheless, as a follower of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit we are able to bear all of these characteristics. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and self control.

And the fruit does not come from trying hard to obey the rules. Paul says in V23, “against such things there is no law”. These are heart transformation things, which God does by His Spirit. How then, can the fruit of the Spirit take root in our hearts and be produced in our lives? In v24 Paul says we “belong to Christ Jesus”. All that is His, is ours. And because we belong to Christ we “have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires”. Paul is not saying: Be hard on yourself or just say ‘no’ to sin. Verse 24 is talking about an ongoing “crucifixion” putting to death the old nature within us.

In v25 we read “keep in step with the Spirit” (v25). This is a positive process (not simply giving things up), its an active process (which we do), and something more than simple obedience. The Spirit is a living person, who glorifies in and magnifies the work of Jesus.

Finally in verse 26 Paul writes: Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Our approval and welcome from God rests not on our character or actions, but on His. We don’t need to envy others. If we are God’s children we have His Holy Spirit as the loving guarantee of His approval.

And so to end let’s worship God, in step with the Holy Spirit, adoring Him until our hearts find Him more beautiful than anything else that might be getting in the way. As we do that, let’s allow Him to put to death our old sinful nature, clearing our

garden for the fruit of the Spirit to grow changing us more and more into the people we long to be, and God desires us to be.