

# Walk by the Spirit: Grace and Relationships

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Galatians | The Grace Manifesto

*Walk by the Spirit: Grace and Relationships*

Galatians 5.25-6.5

8.25.19

*25If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

*26Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*

*6.1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. 3For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5For each one will bear his own load.*

We've been looking at St. Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia... and we're coming to the end.

Everything we've read and seen in this revolutionary letter is like a wave carrying us into this last section. Last week, Phil unpacked these two lists from CH 5 and how God's Spirit cultivates the fruit of His own character IN the believer and actually begins to change our very desires leading us to love.

Today we ride that wave as we consider how we do WE – how relationships take shape in the GROUP of people who believe the Good News of Jesus Christ TOGETHER! How does the wave of the Gospel and the Presence of God, the Spirit, mold and form a unique kind of community – the Church?

And, of course, IN OUR OWN DAY, this is a problem: we keep hearing news of people leaving organized religion in search of more authentic ways to practice spirituality, to know God, to grow as people and live full and free lives. Organized religion has, for so many people, NOT helped them realize those ends.

And yet...new forms of spirituality are often just a private mix of beliefs and practices compiled by each individual. In the new spirituality, attempting to be free from tradition, dogma and “things that I don’t find meaningful” every person concocts his/her own mixture – and that LOOKS like freedom but it actually makes community and spiritual togetherness an impossibility (I practice “T.J.-ism”)

And we might conclude that IF the Gospel (basic message of Christianity) is TRUE and if, therefore, it can help people, then it has to bring people together in a way that’s different than modern spirituality (where it’s everyone on his/her own private journey) AND different than (what we THINK of as typical organized religion). And GOOD NEWS, that’s exactly what we find in this section: a new and different way of doing life together in the community of the Spirit.

Let’s see: **1) TWO Ways of Doing Group-Life**

**2) A New Principle That Changes Everything**

**3) How this Leads to a New Group-Life**

Our friend in New York, Tim Keller, often quotes the African, Church Father, Tertullian, who said (2nd-3rdC) that the Gospel is always crucified between two thieves. One is the thief of legalism and the other thief is license/looseness.

Paul seems to be thinking of traditional, legalistic religion when he says, (v.26) “let us NOT become boastful, provoking one another, envying one another”. Boasting, provoking and envying – those are so often the accompanying signs and symptoms of a typical religious approach to community.

There’s a lot of competition... a lot of comparing and measuring-up. You get accepted by God by doing your part and when you’ve done what’s required then God

is obligated to bless you, save you. God helps those who help themselves (Ben Franklin). And if God is NOT helping you (if you're not [#Blessed](#)) then you must not be helping yourself – must NOT be measuring up.

And you can see – in that cause and effect environment – that people who are suffering or poor or unsuccessful are only getting what they deserve and rich, successful, healthy people are obviously doing the right thing – YOU CAN SEE HOW that leads to a LOT of comparison, competition and jealousy.

And people today – people who have fled religious organizations where every Sunday is a fashion-show or where this moralistic/legalistic attitude prevails – you can see why people would be repulsed by that.

There's a lot of judgment and suspicion and "Why is he successful and blessed when I know darn well, he doesn't give like I do, pray like I do, obey like I do!"

Paul referred to this earlier when he warned, "If you return to THAT kind of religion beware, if you bite and devour one another that you are not consumed by one another." (5.15) In other words, religion that's based on measuring up will produce a group-life full of judgment, gossip, whispering and hypocrisy – because – let's face it: NO ONE MEASURES UP!

So...the obvious answer...is to just leave each other alone. Live and let live. Let everyone's conscience be his own guide. You be you – I'll be me and we'll just be tolerant of one another. And we'll have no creed, no doctrine or agreed-upon narrative/scripture...

"AND isn't that what Paul is teaching in the final words of today's text?": "For each one will bear his own load." (6.5)?

Well, I'll get to that verse in a moment but to begin with, when you say, "We have no creed" – that IS your creed. You can't escape it.

And if I say, "May I join your group even if I have my own beliefs?" and then the answer is, "Oh, yes! We're tolerant of all beliefs!"

And then I ASK, “Well, I don’t believe in tolerance – may I still join?”

The response has to be: “Well, you have to believe in tolerance... to join us” (And THAT’S the creed!)

We THINK we can escape the one thief (which is legalism and moralism) by running to the OTHER thief which is license/laxity and pure individual freedom to think anything or believe whatever you want but that thief is just as bad as the first thief!

We may run from traditional “God-helps-those-who-help-themselves” religion INTO the arms of the new spirituality (spiritual but not religious) but neither are satisfying and BOTH end in fragmentation. The bitterness of religious competition/comparison/envy and (on the other hand) the open-minded toleration that has no Center to hold us together as a group and ends up in radical individualism and loneliness because tolerance without truth/love is just apathy.

But the real way out is NOT religion where you do your part and then God rewards you (and where we all compete and compare to be the best law-keeper) and NOT rabid individualism and hyper-tolerance but the Third Way – the Gospel ITSELF.

“If we LIVE by the Spirit let us also WALK by the Spirit”. It’s Paul’s way of saying, “We didn’t measure up and we didn’t climb to God by being better than others and we didn’t muscle and FLESH OUR WAY UP TO GOD – NO! God came down to us! Grace comes down! God sent forth His Son and God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba Father!

Grace comes down. We don’t do anything here below to conjure it or cajole it or produce it by the flesh. We’ve left the elemental things (4.3,9) – the cause and effect way we used to think about religion and spirituality and we have entered the realm of the Spirit. He made us alive so let’s continue to rely on Him.

It’s another way of saying, “How you started this life with God – is how you continue - same way!” He who made you alive is He who keeps you alive – it ALL depends on HIM...God the Father planned it; God the Son carried it out and God the Spirit applied it to your life. So you can stop acting like it depended on you like you did

something to make it happen – like you caused the effect. There’s NO boasting in this Way!

God gave His Son and He, Jesus the Messiah, came with one simple job description: to carry. (Luke 4.18; Mat 11.27ff)

This was the animating principle that moved Jesus Christ – Paul refers to it as “the law of Christ” (in Romans CH 8 Paul said something similar: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Rom 8.2)

This is the truth or dogma that defines us (as believers in Jesus) and yet rather than make us envious and conceited, this fundamental/defining idea moves us toward one another. Because He carried me, I want to carry you – “Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”(6.2)

This is the New Law – the purpose that moved Jesus Christ; He came as a Burden-bearer. And if you know the overwhelming relief of sins forgiven and peace with God – if the principle that moved Christ has come TO YOU then let it also come THROUGH YOU... If that Spirit who moved Jesus Christ to bear your guilt is IN you, He will move you in the same direction – to bear the burdens of others.

Now, how will this dynamic (not old religion based on MY sweat and performance leading to comparison and competition AND not everyone for himself radical tolerance/openness i.e. apathy!) how will this NEW WAY show up in a new kind of group life?

Well, we should start by saying that the DOGMA (and dogma usually divides but this doctrine/dogma – THIS fundamental unites) we should start by saying that the Main Thing has to be the main thing! That was the first sermon in this series and here it is again!

We live by the Spirit and we walk by the Spirit. This is NOT something we generate (by flesh/performance) but something we receive – the Spirit breathes life into us

(at the start) and we continue to rely on Him at every step. “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (3)

Jesus Christ said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” and Paul echoes that here – the Holy Spirit makes you holy (that makes sense) and you get grace and the Spirit NOT by works of the flesh but by depending on what Jesus Christ did as the Burden-Bearer. That means believing and repenting again and again is the THE most Christian thing there IS!

Jesus life, death and resurrection IS the main thing and to sing and muse and pray about and sit before and see it from different and new angles and to make your BOAST in what He did – THIS is walking in step with the Spirit – how the Main Thing stays central.

If we live that way, it’ll curb our natural inclination to compare ourselves to others, to envy, to compete and judge one another. I’m not defending my own rightness – instead, I’m depending on His!

Therefore, under this New Logic, I don’t walk around judging brothers and sisters in the church – in our own strength and effort we are all disqualified and we are only right with God because Jesus Christ did His thing – was a burden-bearer. He carries me and if YOU depend on Him, He carries YOU. No boasting.

But it doesn't mean that we're merely tolerant or apathetic toward one another. We're called to help each other. We NEED one another. And even if I'm hurtful toward you and insensitive and I don't even know that I hurt you and you want to push me away – DON'T! “Brothers and Sisters, even if a man is fallen in a sin (a sin he may not even see!) YOU WHO ARE SPIRIT-PEOPLE restore that person...”

It requires something MUCH more than tolerance! It means that I see YOU and I see MYSELF as redeemed and carried by Jesus Christ – we're people of the Spirit (not of the flesh/performance). I have to learn to talk and listen to you – to converse and share life.

It requires a lot of soul-searching: “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”(6.1)

Jesus Christ is gentle with me...the Spirit’s character is love and gentleness (last week, 5.23) so I must be possessed by that Spirit. AND I see that I have a real tendency/temptation toward self-righteousness, comparison and competition... So I’m not a gunslinger looking to judge/rebuke people... BUT I also see that I need YOU and YOU NEED ME – staying aloof (drive-thru spirituality is not an option – it’s the old logic!). We will not make progress in the new life unless we cooperate – it’s a team-sport.

AND it’s also radically individual in the sense that NOW we can help each other (can bear each other’s burdens) but time will come where each of us, as an individual will stand before God – so let’s help each other now, while we can.

And if you MUST compare – then compare how you WERE to how you ARE – the progress may be slow but it will be there...

This is a little picture of the new society – it’s a Body with amazing diversity of gifts and personalities and strengths and weaknesses and variety of roles and functions. AND it’s a burden-bearing community where we’re learning to live NOT in self-confidence but boasting in a crucified and resurrected Savior who is replicating/extending His basic principle IN us.

So, join us – if you want to trust in Jesus Christ and live the new life...jump in. And if you're on the edges, come in (get in some small group/class/ministry); relate, receive and restore.

Let’s pray.