



LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES  
*People Of Christ With The Message Of Hope*

# *Live by the Spirit*

“So I say, live by the Spirit,  
and you will not gratify  
the desires of the sinful nature.”

Galatians 5:16

## GROUP BIBLE STUDIES 2008-2009

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# *Live by the Spirit*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

These devotions look at eleven verses from the fifth chapter of Galatians. Conservative scholarship estimates this letter was written near the middle of the first century A.D. Paul's target audience was believers living in Galatia, then a Roman province in central Asia Minor. One item in particular prompting this communication was Paul's concern that Judaizers had crept into a number of these Galatian assemblies. These Judaizers were claiming that certain traditional practices of the Old Testament—namely circumcision—were still necessary for the salvation of members of the New Testament church.

To those perpetrating this Gospel perversion, Paul did not mince his words: "If anybody is preaching to you a Gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:9b)

## **THESE DEVOTIONS:**

The focus of the first eleven devotions are the eleven verses of Galatians 5:16-26. The twelfth devotion is a brief recap of this passage and includes other relevant Scriptures.

In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul gives the churches in Galatia their marching orders: live by the Spirit. Without the Spirit in operation in their lives, these churches were in jeopardy. Some men working their way in among these Galatian believers were promoting a hybrid view of salvation where faith in Jesus Christ *and* circumcision were both necessary to make a man righteous before God. Paul is acutely aware of this situation and wants to set things straight immediately. He knows there is no time to waste.

"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the One who called you. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.' I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for the agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Galatians 5:7-12)

Then, Paul gets down to some nuts and bolts behavior issues. It was not enough, apparently, for certain Galatian believers to accept someone tinkering with their faith, they were also coming under the influence of increased carnality.

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire Law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Galatians 5:13-15).

It is our hope these studies will challenge and encourage you as you live by the Spirit.

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# *Devotion 1*

Galatians 5:16

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

## **OPENING THOUGHT:**

The apostle Paul in writing to the churches in Galatia had much to say. He knew the pitfalls of the sinful nature; he knew how intoxicating—and devious—the world could be. His love for the brethren in these churches in Asia Minor was steadfast. Yet, he rebuked them as “foolish Galatians” (Galatians. 3:1a) in matters of faith, especially when they were intent on adopting the worthless legal practices of circumcision encouraged by certain Judaizers, Paul’s chronic Jewish opponents. The apostle wrote, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians. 5:1) but warned, “do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Galatians. 5:13b). Today, it is imperative we remember this same thing. Society abounds with diversions, seductive pleasures, bogus nonsense spouted under the banner of self-help, and charlatans (religious and otherwise) at every turn.

**As Christians, we have been given the Spirit of God. He will lead us, but will we follow?**

## **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, we open our devotion to You seeking Your will and asking for the wisdom You provide through Your Holy Spirit. Of our own strength, we are powerless to resist the flesh and all its lurid enticements. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, however, we can walk in that newness of life reserved for those who call out for Your mercy. And this mercy is only available through the redemptive work of Your Son—sealed for all time by His resurrection. Thank You, Father, for so great a love as this. In Your almighty Name, we pray. Amen.

## **PASSAGE:**

Before looking at our verse, it will be helpful to read what comes before in chapter five. Paul’s Jewish opponents were telling some in the Galatian churches circumcision was necessary in accord with the practices of Old Testament Judaism. Paul vehemently denies circumcision has any worthwhile effect regarding obtaining salvation. In fact, to comply with this ritual gives the flesh-pleasing but false notion it does something to bring about one’s righteousness before God. For Paul, this was pure foolishness, writing that the one circumcised is “obligated to obey the whole law” (Galatians. 5:3b), which, of course, is an impossibility. Why? Because *that* impossible flesh obligation was the very requirement Christ satisfied for us through His sinless life and his redemptive work on the cross (Romans 8:1-4).

So, then what does it mean to “live by the Spirit”? And how will doing this “not gratify the desires of the sinful nature”? For Paul, living by the Spirit and denying the flesh was his full-time occupation. In many of his letters, he delineates the lifelong struggle that plays out in the lives of believers as they operate in this world but daily resist becoming a part of it. Walking by the Spirit then is part of our active obedience to God. In the daily pursuit of righteousness, our hunger for sin—our desire—is left ungratified and, by God’s grace, is overcome as the Holy Spirit renews us as His new creation.

**CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:**

The day had been a whirlwind ride for Marisa. Last night's delayed flight and late hotel arrival left her scrambling this morning to get ready for her business meeting. She slept as long as she could. Pinched for time and rushed, she neglected to call her husband or read her morning devotion. Non-stop meetings, irritable management, and a myriad of details left her exhausted as she finally sat down—alone—for dinner at 8:30 p.m. Then, from two tables over, a glass of wine arrived with compliments from a man sitting by himself.

**QUESTIONS:**

With enough willpower, determination, stamina, and good luck, is it possible to walk by the Spirit?

How is it that those who *do* walk by the Spirit are able to conquer the desires of the flesh?

What are some indications a person is walking by the Spirit?

And what about Paul's "desires of the sinful nature"? Are they just bad habits and less-than-appropriate tendencies? Are they something more? Are they damnable?

How does staying close to God through Scripture make a difference in our lives?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, teach us that by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we can live our lives in victory over the desires of the flesh. On our own, we could never do it. By Your power, however, all things are possible. As disciples, may the joy we have over our salvation in Jesus Christ be evident in our actions and accessible in our witness. So may it be for Your glory, Lord. Amen.

## *Devotion 2*

Galatians 5:17

**“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,  
and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.”**

### **OPENING THOUGHT:**

Aside from the specific pitfall of circumcision and trying to achieve righteousness based on fulfilling the Law, Paul delineates the struggle we all face. Though far removed in time, the folks in Galatia faced many of the same circumstances we still face today. Catch the evening news, read an Internet headline, listen to the radio, overhear a conversation—any source will do. Our world, like theirs, is in tension. What are we to make of these persistent struggles, these animosities, these conflicts—both internal and external—that are so much a part of living today? Jesus said they are nothing new. “In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b).

**By the grace of God, we know the desire of our sinful nature and the Spirit of God are in direct opposition. Should that impact the decisions we make?**

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, may our thoughts this day be sober and vigilant regarding the world we live in. Our natural inclination is to do the wrong thing and do it with reckless abandon. Left to our own devices, we are doomed. Powerless to overcome our own sinful nature, we daily surrender in word and deed to an enemy bent on our destruction. Even as the apostle Paul chided the churches he founded in Asia Minor for “so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Galatians 1:6-7a), remind us that the only way to overcome the flesh is through faith in Your Son Jesus Christ and walking by the Spirit. Amen.

### **PASSAGE:**

Here, Paul writes that our sinful nature is not just passively corrupt and prone toward evil. It is actively combative and eagerly seeks to do those things that oppose the Spirit. This battle, however, is not one-sided. The Holy Spirit is opposed to our sinful nature. Paul was all too familiar with this struggle. “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s Law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Romans 7:21-23). Now if the very Spirit of God is at odds with our sinful nature, how hell-bent must that nature be?

Thankfully, Paul had an answer to this question, too. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).

### **CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:**

Lenny's last semester in college had been brutal. Six classes stood between him and graduation; five classes were sure As. However, two lagging test scores in human anatomy and physiology made obtaining an A nearly impossible short of scoring 100 percent on the final. Without that A, the graduate school he sought most might not consider him for the full-ride scholarship he needed. He studied hard, but time seemed against him. Then, when doing graduate assistant work for an instructor in the science department, Lenny found the answer guide for his final—left behind on the copier.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Unexpected things can happen sometimes that might appear to make our way easier. It's almost as if *not* to take advantage would be the bigger blunder. How can we discriminate between good and bad in these circumstances?

What dangers do we run the risk of by not acting on an impulse to do the right thing right away?

Sometimes doing the right thing can cost us—or so it seems. Is there a benefit to living by the Spirit even when that decision might make things more difficult for us in this world?

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, by Your Holy Spirit keep us alert to the struggle we face in this world. Our corrupt nature is so perfectly predisposed to evil that we will debate our conscience at every chance, over every issue, no matter how clear cut the right choice might be. As You patiently lead us, train us to pursue Scripture daily so that we, too, might echo the psalmist's words: "I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). Without You we are lost. Thank You for knowing this and shepherding us to salvation. Amen.

## *Devotion 3*

Galatians 5:18

**“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”**

### **OPENING THOUGHT:**

Though today’s contemporary attitude tends to prize a disposition that is independent and charts its own way, sometimes being led is a good thing. When we’re lost, it’s good to know the one we’re following knows where he’s going. To expand on that, then, being led by the Spirit would seem to be *a very good thing*. The opposite—floundering around without a reliable compass where sin is our master and dictates the terms—puts us squarely under the Law with its impossible demands and its guaranteed punishment.

**How might our lives “led by the Spirit” make a difference in the world we live in?**

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, those who are redeemed through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ still must grapple daily with their sinful natures. Even as Christians, we can enter the moral and spiritual minefields of this world without a guide. If we insist on our own way and resist those means by which the Spirit leads and comforts His people (Bible study, communal worship, prayer, the sacraments), we can find our faith slipping and our path overgrown with thorns and thistles. Our faith, however, is evidence we have received the Holy Spirit. It is He who will guide us “into all truth” as Jesus told his disciples (John 16:13a). So, Lord, lead us and we will follow. Amen.

### **PASSAGE:**

What does it mean to be “led by the Spirit”? The things the Spirit of God would lead us to do would be those things pleasing to God Himself. Whether it’s a lowly shepherd from Tekoa telling wayward Israel her God demands “justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24), or it’s Peter telling first-century Christians that “just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1 Peter 1:15), it’s about practicing those things that show we are obedient to God. And, if we are obedient, this is because of Him, too. “Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know by the Spirit He gave us” (1 John 3:24).

Granted, with our 21<sup>st</sup>-century mindset, being “led by the Spirit” may sound like something otherworldly or impossible to comprehend, but it is integral to the relationship we have with God through His Son Jesus Christ. It is about doing the Christ-like thing with our thoughts and our actions. It is about freedom—freedom to serve God. Believers “have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Romans 6:22). Being “led by the Spirit” then is a quality characterizing one’s relationship with God.

Now, what does *not* being “under the Law” really mean? The Law, according to the Old Testament, is that which condemns the lawbreaker and demands absolute and irrevocable punishment for anyone who transgresses its code. This unfortunate destiny awaited us all—Jew and Gentile alike—as we are all sinners. “As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). Even on our best day, “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6b). Under this scrutiny no one could stand. “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

#### **CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:**

Don noticed that depending on whom he was talking to determined what he said about God. With members of his church or his Christian friends, it seemed he had a spiritual insight every step of the way. When talking to people in public though, it was rare for Don to offer up much of anything that might be considered “spiritual” or related to God.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

Do you find your conversations segmented into loose categories of Christian or non-Christian sometimes? Do you find yourself practicing a sort of situational ethics in your life?

Is that a natural way of relating to others or an adjusted approach so as not to make a situation uncomfortable?

While being “led by the Spirit” may sound passive, is it actually?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, the freedom won for us through Your Son’s agony on the cross is inexplicable to our mortal minds. That we are “not under the Law” and its condemnation because His righteousness is imparted to us certainly seems a gift too good to be true. Nonetheless, it is true, and as believers we are transformed through faith and as we are “led by the Spirit.” Create in each of us a clean heart, and make our lives count in Your service. Amen.

# *Devotion 4*

Galatians 5:19

**“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery”**

## **OPENING THOUGHT:**

Sin, of course, is nothing new, and Paul here begins his list with three of man’s marquee flaws: immorality, impurity, and debauchery. Note how these items are not so much specific acts; they’re more like traits or parts of our nature. We’re all immoral; we’re all impure; we’re all debauched. Just as “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), so are we stained entirely by an absolutely corrupt flesh. Even the apostle Paul, stalwart of the cross, knew this sad state of affairs all too well. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25a). As we consider these three—immorality, impurity, and debauchery—think how the world seductively appeals to these aspects of our nature on a daily basis. There is a liar at work, and he’s fluent in any tongue. Of this enemy Jesus said, “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44b).

**How can we guard ourselves from these enticements? What power do we have to overcome these things? How is the Holy Spirit there for us when the flesh is weak?**

## **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, if the deeds of the flesh were evident in Paul’s day, how much more so must they appear to You today? There are snares and entanglements whispering to us from every corner. Preserve us from the pitfalls that delude us of our Christian credibility and render our service to You a sham and ineffective. Warring against the deeds of the flesh is not a part-time job on our part, especially when You have given us the Holy Spirit, who is here on our behalf full time. Empower us to resist in all ways, reminding us of Jesus “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 12:2b). Revive our hearts and strengthen our resolve to resist this world, dear Lord. Amen.

## **PASSAGE:**

Paul moves here from the general desires of the flesh to some ugly specifics. Furthermore, he says these deeds—these stewing thoughts and contemplated actions welling up from the unfathomable depths of our degeneration—are plainly known. They’re evident, plain as day, clear as a bell, unmistakable: you get the point. As Paul begins to dig up and lay out man’s dirty laundry, he separates them into broad piles. In so doing, he shows that everyone by virtue of his or her deeds has spent plenty of time producing their own soiled rags. If you notice, the first three haven’t changed much in two thousand years: immorality was a problem then; it’s every bit as widespread and insidious today. The other two—impurity and debauchery—are immorality’s nasty cousins and they, too, are alive and well.

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

"It is going to be so good to get some help around here," Frank said, pushing another stack of papers toward Herb.

"You've needed it for some time," Herb agreed. "Look at this stuff. These folders go back to last fall." Frank nodded. "I know. We implemented two programs since we did those reports. The girl from the temp agency is going to have her hands full."

Just then, the door opened.

"Hello," said a girl in her twenties. "Is this Frank Carlisle's office?"

Frank looked at Herb, then back at the girl. "Yes, it is."

"Hi. I'm Melinda Reynolds. I'm from New Business Solutions."

She certainly looks different than that librarian NBS sent us last time, Frank thought.

### QUESTIONS:

Does even the few lines in the office scenario above lead you to think about how the scene might play out?

Are we almost predisposed to think about things in a sexual way?

If we have a predisposition toward thinking in a certain way, is it by nature, or perhaps long-time cultural grooming by society?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, there is no shortage of snares, landmines, cesspits, quicksand, or slippery slopes that can bring us down at any given time of the day. Guard us from these hazards that not only injure ourselves, but often hurt other people around us. Your Word makes known to us those things we should do and *should not do*. Teach us to seek the Holy Spirit's direction in all that we do. May our regular reading of Your Word, coupled with our active habit of doing the right thing, show us as disciples who live by the Spirit. Only in Your Name. Amen.

# *Devotion 5*

Galatians 5:20

“idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy,  
fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions”

## **OPENING THOUGHT:**

The apostle is catching his stride now, isn't he? Though believers are to be led by the Spirit, that, unfortunately, does not mean our sinful nature lies down and calls it quits. In the flesh, we are corrupt throughout. Though saved, we sin—and to our shame—our crimes are often obvious. Paul wouldn't be reciting this menu of sin options if the churches in Galatia weren't dealing with these items in the lives of some of their members. How often does one or more of the items Paul lists here crop up like a weed in our own lives? If we're completely honest, the answer would likely be daily. This list is by no means exhaustive. Nor does it even cover all the social issues plaguing the churches in Galatia. The human heart is ever busy devising new ways to defile itself. The negative potential of our sinful nature is boundless. Paul knew this. “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18a).

**With such a nature, how is it possible we are capable of service to the Lord at all?**

## **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, the unfortunate fact is we are completely stained with sin, absolutely corrupt, and incapable of doing good on our own. That's a sad indictment, but that's our state of affairs. “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Psalm 14:3b). Knowing our predicament, and thankful beyond words for Your Spirit, let us with diligence seek His hourly direction by clinging to Your Word—through study, examination, and committing it to memory. If we are to be led by the Spirit, then it is by Your Word He will guide us. Take our hand, dear Lord. Amen.

## **PASSAGE:**

“Idols”? “Witchcraft”? What were those churches in Asia Minor getting into anyway? Now, “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions”—sure, those we can understand, but the first two, well, they're a little over the top, don't you think? Is it possible Paul might say that in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America, idol worship is still alive and well? Maybe the images aren't engraved out of stone and resting on our mantels. Perhaps they're fashioned from our thoughts and set up in our hearts: the perfect job title, a chiseled body, a flawless wife, a superstar husband, a six-digit income, the latest toy—whatever amounts to the next best thing. And until it's attained, sculpted, married, earned, or bought it consumes our thinking and preoccupies us, neutralizing our service to God.

And witchcraft? Who practices witchcraft anymore? Maybe the question is this: who among us puts anything before God? We all do. We are all culpable by doing any one of the things in our lives that Paul lists here. And if any one be done, then we are liable for them all. There is no distinction. “For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). That verdict and its dire consequences for us, however, have been rescinded. How is this so? Who would do this? How could this be done? “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25).

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

Overhead the pipe organ filled the sanctuary with heavy chords from a tune penned three-hundred-and-fifty years ago. Gretchen flipped through the hymnal and found the offertory pages. The pastor's twenty-five minute sermon ran long by fifteen minutes and her five-year-old twins, Henry and Louis, hadn't stopped fidgeting and picking on each other since they all sat down. Her baby, Clarisse, was just getting over a cold and was cranky, too. A little help this Sunday—or any Sunday for that matter—would be nice, Gretchen thought. She recalled her husband, Tom, waving her off as he wheeled behind the garage on his riding lawn mower an hour earlier. Gretchen looked across the aisle at her high-school friends Vicky and her husband, John. Their two boys were younger than Henry and Louise but sat in the pew calmly, one on each side of Vicky and John: a happy family. Gretchen remembered going out with John in high school. She never would have figured him for a family man.

### QUESTIONS:

Trying to do the right thing without the support we value most can make for some bitter ill will. Gretchen might experience three or four different reactions when sitting in church on any given Sunday monitoring her children. What might they be?

It takes more than an act of willpower to overcome dissatisfaction with a marriage partner's performance sometimes. If asked, Gretchen would say she's done everything she can to get Tom into church. What's next?

How might frustration over a situation lead one into some negative head games?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, there are times we feel perfectly righteous and justified in our anger toward someone else. Even as the Galatians disputed with each other, devouring each other, so do we give our flesh free rein. This should not be. By Your Spirit's guidance, it will not be. We are called to resist sinning altogether, not just lament our crimes once committed as deficiencies. Paul is plain about this: "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). There is but one sentence suitable for our black hearts: death. But Father, in Your infinite mercy, You decided otherwise. Thanks be to Jesus. Amen.

## Devotion 6

Galatians 5:21

“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.”

### OPENING THOUGHT:

The freedom we have in Christ Jesus from the punishing effects of the Law is a powerful thing. Our liberty is wonderful, but apart from God’s Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit it might be taken as a license to satisfy the flesh. Apparently, there may have been some within the churches in Galatia keeping their sin skills sharp—even while maintaining their church association. This doesn’t fly with Paul. Tacking on three more sins for good measure, he dumps all of them into the same dung pile and warns those who do them that they “shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” The apostle wasn’t one to hold back, was he? Though we are saved by grace, “and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8b-9), we are to live our saved lives honoring God who redeemed us “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). Understanding through faith the supreme sacrifice made for us, there is no room then for the overt and plainly evident sins Paul talks about here, or any other private sin we coddle in our criminal hearts. We are to live by the Spirit and quite literally execute that which lurks in our base nature. Again, the voice of authority sounds forth: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

**Putting a habit to death seems straightforward enough. How do we do it?**

### OPENING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, we don’t give you much to work with, but You can do wonders just the same. Just as You transformed Saul from a vehement persecutor of Your Early Church into one of the most ardent and steadfast disciples of Your Son, so instill that same passion and that same purpose in our own lives. Like Abraham, we are children of faith in a promise, but like all children of faith, there are times when our believing is clouded by the lure and rattle of this world. By the Word that is to be our daily bread, lead us by Your Spirit to do the right thing and not act like those who have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

### PASSAGE:

Paul is here drafting quite the list of intentional sins. Conceivably, he could have come up with a few more but the phrase “and things like these” accomplishes that objective. This is not the first time Paul spoke of the foibles of the flesh to one of the assemblies; I’m sure it wasn’t the last. In fact, there’s not a single letter Paul wrote to a church or individual that doesn’t grapple with the issue of sin in the life of a believer. Why? That’s easy: sin isn’t supposed to be *in* the life of a believer. That it remains so is a sad fact of this temporal and corporeal reality. The *practice* of sinning, however, needs to be crucified along with the rest of our flesh. Paul already hammered this point home to the Galatians in the second chapter. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). And so as to leave no doubt, Paul concludes this verse reminding offenders within these churches “that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

**CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:**

Unbelievable, Jack thinks to himself, simply unbelievable. I have three items; she has 163. She must have seen me coming, and she still pushed her cart with all her—stuff—in front of me in the checkout line. Now she’s jabbering about cooking meals and making small talk, while she’s fumbling around with coupons. I’d be done and out of here by now. Oh, great. What’s this?

A small contingent of kids gathers at the end of the counter where a bagger is placing the lady’s groceries into her cart. The kids—each with some form of handicap or showing traits of Downs Syndrome—cling to the woman like chicks to a hen.

**QUESTIONS:**

Sometimes the knee-jerk stabs we take at other people are entirely unfounded. And even if we think they’re legitimate, they’re unnecessary. Often a deep breath and telling ourselves “it’s not about us” will work wonders.

Paul’s list of not-to-dos in Galatians includes some mighty stout sins. What about the smaller stuff—the impatience, irritability, name-calling—are these any less of an issue?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, both whoppers and whispers, our sins plainly condemn us. Your Son died for them all. Teach us by Your Spirit to respect His work on the cross on our behalf and live our lives according to Your Word. As David spoke of his Lord, so shepherd us to remove our want; lead us beside quiet waters; restore our souls, and guide us “in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3b). “Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to Your love remember me, for You are good, O Lord” (Psalm 15:7). You are faithful where we are not. Forgive our faithlessness, and make us whole. Amen.

# Devotion 7

Galatians 5:22

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”

## OPENING THOUGHT:

While the deeds of some in the Galatian churches have amply displayed the works of the flesh, those behaviors serve merely to show the completely self-serving and abject state of every sinner—then and now. Churches in Galatia, listen! Paul is saying. Your lives must not be weighed down under a yoke of slavery, such as adherence to the Law and submission to the mutilation of circumcision will bring upon you. No, he is telling the churches there, that *that* response to the Gospel is insufficient. “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). With the simple word “but,” Paul puts the skids on the downward spiral characterized by the unholy litany of behaviors he cited in the previous verses. He halts the believer in his tracks. “But,” he says, *your* lives, *your believing lives*, should be different. You should be living trees bearing fruit and blooms of all kinds: love and joy, peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. These are the live-enriching fruits born of a life led by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who leads. As Jesus said, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). There is no room for self where the Spirit is producing fruit. Self cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit’s fruit will not be apparent in a life absorbed in self.

How does self get in the way in your own life and hinder the development of the Spirit’s fruit?

## OPENING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, as wonderful as the attributes are Paul provides here of the Spirit’s gracious fruits, we must confess these traits are often the last things we offer to others. Instead, we give freely from the worn-out dustbin of the flesh. Rather than give we take, rather than love we hate, and we do these sinful things with unimaginable frequency and reckless disregard to whomever stands in our way. This should not be. Free us through Your Holy Spirit to a life that imitates goodness rather than badness. Grant us the desire—itsself born of God—to love with patience, to offer exceptional kindness, and to share our joy. In Your precious Name we pray, Amen.

## PASSAGE:

Here Paul turns the believer around and redirects his attention—not only to things he should be doing—but to the completely new life he should be living. And, he says, that new life’s qualities are not produced by the believer, but are the natural offshoot, the sweet fruit of the Spirit at work in his life. Note the contrast, too—“the *deeds* of the flesh” are set against “the *fruit* of the Spirit.” The first are our deeds. Wrought by our own volition, they plainly show our corruption, hemorrhaging from a decayed mind bearing the cancer of our fraudulent thinking in our every action, our every thought. The second is the Spirit’s fruit. It’s pure, born of the heavens, cultivated by the very Spirit of God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. These are the attributes believers should be displaying in abundance. These are the hallmarks of a Christian.

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

“Why didn’t you pick up Billy after band practice this afternoon?” Vivian asked. “You said you were going to. I had to pack Lilly into the van and run and get him when he called at 5:30 p.m. When I got there, it was only Billy and Mr. Wainwright, the band instructor, left. Neither one was in a very good mood.”

Vance looked at her and didn’t know what to say. He forgot; it was that simple. But *why* he forgot—the two hours spent talking to Human Resources about a disgruntled employee, the lukewarm reception he got in his own manager’s office over quarterly sales figures, the 20-page report he’s scrambling to get out tomorrow morning, and last night’s harangue from Vivian about his alcohol consumption—were all about to be made crystal clear. Vance was now ready to give his wife an answer.

### QUESTIONS:

When we’re tired, stressed out, or pulled in too many directions, we drop our guard. It’s often then that we say things better left unsaid. What might be a good strategy to use when we’re too tired to communicate?

If the fruit of the Spirit is to be part of our character, we have to be ready for it to bloom or come alive. What environment might this fruit grow best in?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, we live in a world where there is much good to be done. We are Your voice, Your hands, Your feet, Your embrace in this world. Let the good we can do be done by us. Living a life that bears the fruit of Your Holy Spirit is not some hypothetical exercise or impossible dream. It is doing good, going the extra mile, and lending a helping hand right now. Sometimes it is praying before speaking, patiently seeking before acting. It is opening our Bibles. “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17). Make Your thoughts our thoughts, Oh Lord. Conform us to Your Word. Amen.

# Devotion 8

Galatians 5:23

“gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no Law.”

## OPENING THOUGHT:

One thing this world affords the believer is the opportunity to do good at every turn. There is no lack of need or want of crisis in our societies to make doing the right thing irrelevant. Therefore, in exercising gentleness and self-control—and all the other traits our Christian lives should exhibit—we’re doing things both necessary and against which there is no Law. A single evil thought breaks God’s Law, and each of us has broken that Law. As believers in the all-sufficiency of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, complete forgiveness is now possible because the wrath of God is satisfied, and the Law—always condemning—is now fulfilled. There is no Law to condemn because Christ has paid the price the Law required. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him, the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). To be in a right relationship with God then can only mean the Law has been satisfied. While Paul’s previous list of bad deeds naturally condemned man for his behavior, now, for the believer, his acts of love and obedience in faith are the fruit of the Spirit and “against such things there is no Law.”

**Are the deeds done themselves the reason there is no Law, or is it something else?**

## OPENING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, Your Law was delivered on Mt. Sinai to a man leading an unruly and stiff-necked people. The words Aaron said to Moses, “You know how prone these people are to evil” (Exodus 32:22b) following Moses’ return from the mountain could just as easily be said of us. However, by Your grace, blessed Father, let these words *not* be said of us. Instead, by Your Spirit impress on us the mission each of us has been given to live as Christ’s ambassadors, “as though God were making His appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20b) to the world at large. As we display Christ-like virtues in our actions and Christ-like love in our words, may our witness, that like rendered to Paul by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:17a), be as Paul said of Christ: “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2b). Do with us according to Your will, Oh, Lord. Amen.

## PASSAGE:

Here Paul concludes his itemized list of Spirit fruits that should be visible and in operation in every Christian’s life. Ending with gentleness and self-control, he says against these and the other attributes previously given, there is no Law. Now, looking at the terms Paul uses, they don’t exactly strike one as overly masculine—love, joy, peace, gentleness, but, apparently, they do convey holiness. By definition, these terms are significant. Much is made in some circles today of how the Church is experiencing a crisis regarding its identity. Is it big and bold enough? Why doesn’t it come across as manlier, more testosterone-ish? Has it been overly softened by a predominately female presence in the pews? And what about Jesus? What kind of rough-and-tumble guy was He? How about Paul? While the debate can yield some valuable insights into the Church’s persona, holiness is concerned with Spirit-given qualities that are in operation at all times, in all places, and with all peoples. Oddly, while Paul’s list of negative behaviors carry an aggressive sense and are easily assignable to men, (it was probably mostly to men he was writing), his positive virtues have a more contemplative, toned down side to them, and are more like traits than behaviors.

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

The speaker that evening was the wealthy entrepreneur Walter Kannemann. His success in doing relief work among destitute villages of Third World countries was legendary. Bringing businesses and volunteer groups together for a common good was his forte. Elaine listened intently as he explained his goodwill philosophies with enthusiasm and great clarity. Once, Kannemann had even replied to a letter she wrote requesting detailed information on his views. That impressed her greatly. She was looking forward to meeting him after his talk. While she waited in line, a couple ahead of her spoke their minds. "Kannemann's done some good work, but his political views are old school and part of what's hurting our economy."

"There's no doubt about that," the other voice chimed in. "He's got business connections in several of the countries where he's spearheading relief projects. Why wouldn't he be pushing those agendas? It'll all come back to him in cash down the line."

The first person agreed, then added, "One thing I have heard is that his personal life isn't such a rousing success though. He's going through a horrendous divorce. She wants millions."

Elaine listened as she waited. Her view on Walter Kannemann had changed from what it was five minutes earlier.

### QUESTIONS:

Influences abound in this world. Have you ever noticed your opinion modified abruptly for some reason and you weren't sure why?

Sometimes we are prone to put the worst construction on everything. This is particularly true of our opinions of people. How can love neutralize this tendency?

What might we keep in mind when dealing with all people everywhere?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, as we live our lives in faith and obedience, following the pattern of Your Son, who "humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8b), let us strive to do good. No half-hearted attempt is sufficient; no laggard convenience walk is worthwhile. After all, Paul specifically tells us there is a higher road we are to follow, and he is not talking about some second-rate charade of substituting religion for true service. He is all about going the distance. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Train us as workmen fit for Your Service. Amen.

## *Devotion 9*

Galatians 5:24

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”

### **OPENING THOUGHT:**

Read the writings of the apostle Paul, and you will soon encounter the cross of Christ. For him, Jesus' death on a tree, while winning salvation for all, also conveys perfectly—by this most horrific of all executions—the bloody war we are to wage against our flesh “with its passions and desires.” Here the relationship between God and the believer is put into no uncertain terms. Those who belong to Christ have undergone crucifixion and for Paul this execution is both inward and outward. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). Crucifixion. That's awfully severe. Is *that* really necessary?

**What could possibly be so wrong with us we would need to have it put to death?**

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, of our own decision we would never curb our appetite for sin and the things that condemn us under the Law. We are completely inept to affect our own salvation. That is a work for which Christ alone was qualified and which He alone has accomplished. We rejoice in our faith and, like the apostle Paul, with confidence we “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Under the renewing influence of Your Word and by the power of Your Holy Spirit, produce in us fruit befitting the name of Christian. Let us join the apostle and maintain confidently that “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). From these lowly bones, raise up Your servants. Amen.

### **PASSAGE:**

Now, it must be admitted, mortifying the flesh is not something most of us are going to stand in line to do. Who wants to get rid of something we know so well? We all have our favorite little vices, don't we? Maybe we're exceptionally good at belittling others while not really appearing to put them down. Perhaps we're able to turn any comment into something lewd or off-color. Maybe we're adept at dividing people by subtly pairing them off against each other. Whatever our dark talent is (and most assuredly each of us has more than one), it is to be crucified—murdered—if you prefer. How else could this relationship be with our Messiah? There is to be no darkness in us. There is to be no question where our allegiance lay. Scripture puts it beautifully: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

Jan enjoyed fiddling in his basement workshop every chance he could. Today, he was putting together a crib for his daughter's new baby. Building it from scratch was always a challenge. And though it might prove exasperating at times, it brought him great pleasure. *Listening* to Jan, on the other hand, might not qualify as a pleasure, however. With every mis-cut board, dropped tool, or mis-measurement, he showed great prowess in constructing phrases that, as the saying goes, "would make a sailor blush." As the afternoon wore on, it was Jan's ingenious word splices and unlikely verbal pairings that showed him to be a true expert of the cuss word. He had no idea that six-year-old Marcie, the new grandbaby's sister, was sitting at the top of the basement stairs playing.

### QUESTIONS:

Does what we do in private require the same scrutiny as our public conduct?

How does what we do in private impact our public witness?

Words are powerful. They can bring the highest joy or the sharpest pain—often spoken from the same mouth. How can what we say influence those around us?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, may we turn our lives over to You. Holy Spirit, please revive us. Breathe into us new life. Work in our minds so we might see clearly those things that need to be left at foot of the cross—those things Jesus Christ died for already. Godliness is foreign to this mortal flesh we inhabit, but we can learn. That which we need to know is already available to us. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So equip us, dear Lord, for every good work, too. Amen.

# *Devotion 10*

Galatians 5:25

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

## **OPENING THOUGHT:**

And here we come full circle. Even as we “live by the Spirit” (v.16), as we are “led by the Spirit” (v.18), we should also “keep in step with the Spirit” (v.25). To “keep in step” here carries the additional verbal strength of being in harmony with the Spirit. Ours is not to be some over-the-top exhibition of religion that’s more spectacle and smoke and mirrors than obedience. We are to walk, follow after, and imitate those things Christ did. He went about doing good. We can at least do that much. Though we may grow weary and fatigued, “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

**Why, do you suppose, is there not a more dynamic, more lively and energetic expression here than “keep in step”?**

## **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus said You would send in His name is here now to teach us all things—*all things* (John 14:26). Teach us, simple though we may be, those truths too marvelous for us to understand without the gift of faith. Even as “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105), so is Your Holy Spirit our Counselor, our Advocate, our Supporter, who will guide each of us into all righteousness as we tread this dark world. We thank You Father that You have so closely supplied our every need. You have not forsaken us, but You deign to take our hand and daily shape us, even as You shaped the house of Israel during Jeremiah’s day (Jeremiah 18:6). As we live, as we keep in step with the Spirit, render us into vessels fit for Your use. Amen.

## **PASSAGE:**

Paul understood very well the value of reinforcement in teaching. Here he tells us that if we live by the Spirit, if that Spirit truly gives us life and life eternal, then keep in step with the Spirit and be guided—through prayer and supplication—by perseverance and fasting—with dedication and single-heartedness—to live the life the Spirit gives. Walk by the Spirit. How hard is this? How necessary is this pursuit to make a mark worth making in this world? Paul says, “The sinful mind is hostile to God” in Romans 8:7a. Yet, we are—through the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from *all* sin—able to walk by the Spirit. But what does this mean? How do we know if we’re indeed walking by the Spirit or just drifting through life in some sort of religious buzz? We know because we hold fast to the truths of God’s Word. There may not be any feel-good buzz to what we’re doing, but if we’re obedient according to Scripture—if we’re loving one another, showing patience to others, forgiving each other—even as Christ has forgiven us, then we know we are being obedient by our actions and His Word is real in our lives: we are walking by the Spirit.

### CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:

When Lloyd had money, he was content. Things were balanced; his life in and out of church was in perspective. He didn't have the biggest SUV in the cul-de-sac or the highest mortgage, but *he could have*. His wealth allowed him to be generous, and he was—sometimes to a fault. One bad business partnership, a tanking stock market, and he was the first on his block to declare bankruptcy. Now that Lloyd doesn't have money, he can't stop thinking about it.

### QUESTIONS:

Wealth (or at least enough money to live reasonably well) is a little bit like good health. You don't think a whole lot about it until it's impacted, diminished or, in the case of poor Lloyd, gone altogether. These are tough times for Lloyd and his family. How is he supposed to live by the Spirit?

When you're hungry and your food supply is in danger, patience is a luxury—so are love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, and all the other virtues of the Spirit. Life is full of things that show no humor and little mercy. How do we possibly live as though led by the Spirit in those trying circumstances?

Now that Lloyd's ship has come in and gone back out again, what's he to do?

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, calling on Your Name may seem easier when we know our needs are taken care of already. When things are good, a little frosting on top is always nice. But what about when we hit rock bottom and there's nowhere to go? It is then that Your Spirit can do some of His best work—if only we walk with Him—and through prayer seek His direction. In good times or bad, Lord, teach us to walk with You. Your Word is full of saints who clung close to Your side and, by their example of faith, inspired the world. Lead us to be that city on a hill that cannot be hidden, that lamp on a stand that “gives light to everyone in the house” (Matthew 5:15b). Let us know the unrivaled joy of faithful service to You. Amen.

# *Devotion 11*

Galatians 5:26

**“Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”**

## **OPENING THOUGHT:**

As long as we move through this world, there will be things we have to deal with. Here Paul adds a telling footnote to this entire passage of living by the Spirit and crucifying the flesh's sinful habits and desires. How often do we in contexts where we're patiently and consistently trying to make a change—some new business strategy, a different approach to raising our kids—get to a point of some success only to see our gains turn into boasting. Paul knew this human tendency and would likely have had little tolerance with conceited attitudes. His credentials within the Jewish scholastic community were impeccable (Philippians 3:4-7). Circumcised on the eighth day—check! Of the nation of Israel—check! Of the tribe of Benjamin—check! As to the Law a Pharisee—check! As to zeal, a persecutor of the Church—check! Blameless according to the righteousness based on the Law—check! If anyone had reason to boast in the flesh, Paul says, he had more. “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3:7). For Paul, these gains ultimately amounted to nothing, calling them dung or garbage when “compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). Calling a spade a spade is one thing. We all can recognize trash when we see it. But calling our hard-earned degrees, reputation, or standing among our peers trash, well, that's another thing entirely. Yet, that's what Paul did.

**How do we find satisfaction in what we achieve and not turn it into grounds for boasting?**

## **OPENING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, when it's all said and done, move our hearts to gratitude and humility that You allow us to serve You at all. What an honor it is to be Your disciple! Our status as Your child is certainly not because of anything we bring to the table. Let us not be foolish enough to think it is. Conceit has no place in the life of those who were condemned but now are set free. It's all Your doing, Oh, Father. Without Christ, we wouldn't have a chance. Thank You for that chance. Thank You for Your Spirit. Amen.

## **PASSAGE:**

This is a great conclusion to this passage. Paul walks us through it all—the flesh, the Law, the Spirit, the wickedness of the sinful nature, the character traits of those led by the Spirit, the crucifixion of the flesh for those belonging to Jesus Christ, and a final comment on how believers should be walking by the Spirit. Then, Paul, ever the stickler when it comes to man's sinful nature, reiterates to the Galatian churches to be wary of conceit, a provoking manner, and envy. Were these items restated as a wake-up call? Was Paul telling these brethren to be vigilant that these corrupt attitudes don't start cropping up in the future when they've let down their guard?

Dealing with the sensitive issue of other people's pet sins requires strong interpersonal skills, and a savvy understanding of human nature. Of course, without the visible example of an exemplary life to back it all up, Paul's critique would have been nothing more than words. In this regard, the apostle worked tirelessly to achieve in his own life what he longed for in the lives of believers throughout his churches. For him, the disciplined Christian life paralleled the rigorous world of Greek athletics. “Everyone who

competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

#### **CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO:**

The building committee was at a standstill. The suggestion to increase the size of the pre-school’s supply room was going to impinge on the size of the middle school’s library and audio-visual center. The board of elders had already met with the contractor on numerous occasions to consider additional propositions made by the congregation for adequate space in case of weather emergencies. Another modification was being drawn up on the principal’s office to accommodate his secretary, and she clearly wasn’t going to be happy even with that arrangement. When the pastor said the whole process was proving to be more fun than a barrel full of monkeys, three people on the building committee took offense. One quit.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

Working with others requires tact and finesse. Some have it; some have it in lesser amounts. Church work can be particularly thorny when it comes to people’s feelings. How might jealousies, selfish ambitions, dissensions, and conceits become issues?

Have you ever seen something (a church building project, for instance) that had great potential turn sour and divide people?

How might adopting the Spirit’s qualities of peace and self-control be a good starting point when it comes to collaborative ventures?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, when we get to the end of us, You’re still waiting. When our clever plans and self-serving agendas leave us empty and frustrated and spent at the end of the day, You’re still waiting—patiently waiting. Instill in our hearts the earnest desire for holiness. Remind us our pride is devilish and amounts to nothing more than self-worship. Impress on us by Your Holy Spirit that sometimes the best we can offer is silence—sweet silence before Your throne of grace and eternal forgiveness. We worship You, dear Father, for the unspeakable gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## *Devotion 12*

As we close these devotions, let's consider Paul's text in Galatians in its entirety.

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

“The acts of the sinful nature 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, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature 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 one another” (Galatians 5:16-26).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul took great pains to address the matter of circumcision as it was presented to area churches by Judaizers who claimed it was a necessary supplement to one's Christian faith. Having himself exited Judaism and become a believer as a result of the miraculous vision he had of Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was intent on “proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22b). Understanding that Christ as Messiah was alone sufficient for salvation, Paul was often engaged in rebutting and dismantling cherished beliefs about circumcision and other Law-related practices. Toward the end of Galatians, he states his case plainly and with great conviction:

“Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the Law, they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Galatians 6:12-15).

### **QUESTIONS:**

To say the Judaizers were a source of irritation for Paul's ministry would be putting it mildly. Throughout the letter, how does he get his points across effectively without digressing into a shouting match?

Though circumcision as a supplement to saving faith isn't the issue it once was in most churches today, Paul provides a catalog of sinful acts that can derail a believer's witness both inside and outside the church. What do you do to keep your faith sharp and your testimony sincere?

What does Paul say is essential and what is non-consequential in this final passage from chapter six?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for the men and women who have gone before us. From days of old, Your prophets, judges, messengers, soldiers, shepherds, apostles, and disciples have each—under Your inspiration—served the cause of salvation and proclaimed Your message. Paul wrote to Timothy in his first letter that there is “one mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5b). That mediator is Your Son, Jesus Christ. May Your Holy Spirit sanctify us unto life everlasting and guide our steps as each day we seek to “live by the Spirit.” Amen.