

Galatians 5:16-26July 22, 2007 – Preached on the 8th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Keep in Step with the Spirit**✠ **Led through the conflict (vv.16-18)**✠ **Protecting our inheritance (vv.19-21)**✠ **Bearing good fruits of faith (vv.22-26)**

In the name of Jesus Christ, the soul's best Friend, dearly redeemed believers:

Remember in the 60's when hippies kept insisting, "Don't trust anyone over thirty!" As a boy I wondered what they would say when they turned thirty. Now that many of them are part of the same "establishment" they abhorred in their younger years, some don't trust anyone with a different world view than theirs. Who would have thought that conservatives would ever become the new radicals?

But is that so far fetched? Wasn't Jesus considered a radical in His day, condemning the religious elite for their anti-God, anti-neighbor traditions? And weren't His apostles, especially Paul, accused of turning the world upside down? In these verses of what may have been the first of Paul's thirteen epistles, the Holy Spirit inspires Jesus' apostle to the Gentiles to trash every lust and passion of the human heart, while extolling the virtues of the Spirit-filled life. The battle lines are drawn, the conflict is clear, the stakes are eternal. And we are called upon as soldiers of the cross to **Keep in Step with the Spirit**. Against the backdrop of man's opinions, ancient or modern, this sounds pretty radical. Things just can't be soft and easy when we're living in a battle zone. As in a smoky fire, we need to be...

✠ **Led through the conflict (vv.16-18)**

As we heard in last week's sermon, "*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 law.*"

This **conflict** does not exist in our natural born flesh. As babies we cry if we're not fed at whatever hour we decide we're hungry. We keep mom and dad and all the siblings awake if we're thirsty. We cry as if no one else matters but us. If our parents and grandparents try to give us everything we want, we keep crying like babies all our lives. The government, the church, the establishment or God Himself seems like our enemy because real life does not fulfill all our desires. Even if we have some discipline growing, it's still perfectly natural to be nice when it suits you. A young woman respects her boyfriend so long as he treats her right. He does the same as long as she makes him happy. But break the relationship, and hurt instantly turns to war. Conflict abounds in our society, because we have no way of knowing how to battle the real enemy. No one wants to admit that the real enemy lurks inside us.

But baptize that baby, teach the toddler his Jesus stories, keep building the faith of little ones through their teen years with Sunday School, VBS and Confirmation, and every day becomes a new battle for eternal victory. Now the new man lives inside, powered by God the Holy Spirit in Word and sacraments. God's grace and mercy kindly reveal **the conflict** where our sinful nature fights against our new nature. And though we fail again and again whenever our Old Adam gets the upper hand, "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*" You are "*under grace*" (Romans 6:14f) the Lord says. The smoke burns our eyes and the explosions can be terrifying, but press on because we are surely and courageously **Led through the conflict** by the dear Holy Spirit working in God's Word.

✠ **Protecting our inheritance (vv.19-21)**

Keep in Step with the Spirit because the stakes are eternal – high as heaven, deep as hell. Before we investigate the details, think how serious this is. The Lord says through His holy apostle: "*I warn you as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" He's being very

realistic and practical. We are saved by grace through faith alone in what Christ finished 2,000 years ago on the cross and in the empty tomb. ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*** (Romans 4:25 NIV) Though nothing can separate us from God’s love, yet He knows that our life of sanctification, to **Keep in Step with the Spirit**, is never easy. We fall again and again into sins of spirit, mind and body. So the Holy Spirit uses a word for ***“live like this”*** which refers to the practice or pattern of our lives. Living in sin will finally cost you the inheritance of heaven. In spite of religious scholars and critics who say otherwise, unrepentant sin will prove the torturous reality of hell.

It’s as if we’re walking a narrow wooden plank through a molten lava field where every misstep could be our last. We can’t stop and think about it because wood burns. We have to keep placing one foot in front of the other to **Keep in Step with the Spirit**. He wants us to know that slipping is not an option nor is jumping in with the sinful world to enjoy the pretty colors of the fire. ***“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.”*** You know these by other names. Living together unmarried, enjoying sex outside of marriage appeals to our sinful nature. Unbridled wickedness at parties may look as harmless as *Mardi Gras*. *Harry Potter* may seem like better reading than the Bible to kids and parents alike. Church people might even think they’re doing God’s work by *discord* and *fits of rage*. *Selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy* may seem as harmless as *drunkenness* and *orgies* as long as you only watch them on TV. But let any of these become the pattern of your life, and heaven will never be your home.

Bearing good fruits of faith (vv.22-26)

How well can a blind man walk a plank? If the earth is shaking and he is weak and faltering as we are ***“dead in our transgressions and sins”*** (Ephesians 2:1), no amount of concentrated effort will keep you following the steep and winding way through this war zone. This is why we can praise the Lord now and forever for sending us the dear Holy Spirit just as He promised. He has also promised on the Last Day or our last day to send His holy angels to carry us like a helicopter up and away to safety, home at last with God. His grace put us on this boardwalk and His grace alone can **Keep us in Step with the Spirit**.

That’s why Paul speaks of this as God’s work: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*** God alone gave us His unconditional, self-sacrificing, *agape*-love in Christ. God alone can make it the beating of our heart and the pattern of our lives. With God’s Word the Holy Spirit gives us ***“joy”*** even through tears of grief. We can be like the tiny bird above white water rapids in that artist’s picture of ***“peace,”*** or like the little bird outside Martin Luther’s window, his “best preacher” ever. Singing God’s praises all day long then tucking our heads under our wing to sleep peacefully at night – that’s a blessed way to **Keep in Step with the Spirit**. He gives the ***“patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”*** our hearts and minds desire in this new life with Christ.

Truly, ***“against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”*** That’s painful for sure. You daily die inside when you **Keep in Step with the Spirit**. In spite of all these priceless blessings in Christ, this eternal, free and unimaginable inheritance of eternal life bought with His blood and guaranteed by His resurrection, watch out. ***“Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”***

Picture a coach on the sideline grabbing his player’s face mask and chewing him out nose-to-nose right in front of the home crowd. That’s how disgusting our pride looks when envy gets hold of us. We will not live like that because Christ died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Forgiveness is ours by the cross of Christ. He is ever willing, early intent to **Keep us in Step with the Spirit – Bearing good fruits of faith** that only God can produce.

“Jesus, still lead on Till our rest is won. Heav'nly Leader, still direct us; Still support, console, protect us Till we safely stand In our fatherland.” (CW 422:4) Amen.