

Keeping in Step With the Spirit

Galatians 5:25

Hello Listeners:

Are you keeping up and keeping in step? “With who and with what” you ask? It seems you have a wide choice. There’s the family Kardashians whose exploits and privileged private lives you just can’t afford to miss. You are encouraged to get your hands on their fourteenth season and to hold out until they disappear while some new family’s shenanigans catches the attention of millions.

There are many more stars of stage and screen, of sports and fashion whose lives beckon for adulation, and whose steps, right to their footwear, you need to follow and copy.

Or do you? Or do you? For is it not so that many who have large followings today, are discovered some time later to have been anything but worthy role models leading lives that were far from exemplary.

That’s just the way it is with fallible, impressionable, and yes, sinful, human beings. There are those who would cast caution to the wind and who shout, “*Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.*” It’s a ready-made excuse for engaging in riotous living. ¹ Yet in considering such slogans the apostle Paul says, “*Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character”*” (1 Corinthians 15: 33).

¹ It’s also a quote for Isaiah 22:13 repeated in 1 Corinthians 15: 32b

There is One however, One great and gracious Person who is not just a role model but who is “*The Lord and Giver of life.*”² He is the One who together with the Father and the Son is true God. The bible also knows him as the Comforter or Counselor. (John 14:26) He doesn’t only work repentance in the hearts of people but is there to lead and to guide them.

That’s a wonderful blessing and that leading is necessary for all people if they are to reach the ‘finish line’ in this marathon called the race of faith, (1 Corinthians 9:24; Hebrews 12:1).

In a letter of the apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia which today is known as Turkey, this missionary preacher had a lot to say about living by the Spirit. No wonder for many in those churches were former Jews, some of whom still insisted Christians keep to the old ceremonial laws and the human traditions that had been added to these. There were also those who came from a gentile or unbelieving background. Although that was to be expected for the Galatians lived right in a secular world dominated by the powers of Rome.

However, some serious false teachings were in danger of creeping in. Teachings which perverted the doctrine of God’s grace, that wonderful freedom gained for people by Christ’s death on the cross. An amazing gift that gave them the liberty to live the “new life” in the Spirit. In that new life the Holy Spirit promised them that He’d have them bring forth “*fruits*” even the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5: 16-26).

Those fruits stand in contrast to those desires of one’s sinful nature. Desires and actions that are a great grief to God the Holy Spirit.

² As confessed in the Nicene Creed

Now it is so, says Paul, that those who belong to Christ have “ *Crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*” (Gal. 5: 24). That’s a strong expression and it must mean that those who are Christians find their life outside of themselves but solidly in close fellowship with Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. They are no longer controlled by their fleshly desires but Christ is before them in all things for they are inseparable from him.

Well then, says Paul, “ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” If the source of our life, the *fountain*, or the *motor*, of your life, the pulse, your very life’s blood is owned and directed by God the Holy Spirit what can and must we do but “keep in step with the Spirit.”

We may think of those ranks of soldiers, on parade, marching together, their steps in unison, heading in the same direction. With “*Eyes front!*” they salute as they come past the reviewing stand. The person taking that salute will be a high-ranking officer or perhaps even the leader of the military or the country.

The One who would see us walking, or running is the Holy Spirit, who insists we keep in step with him! He would have us honor him. He would not have us come or go out of step . If a soldier in one of the ranks would do so it could spell disaster, especially if he/she has no intention for getting back “in step”.

So it is with us and with all those who would be followers of Christ. They must have their lives, that is, their whole walk of life, directed by the Holy Spirit for only then will they make good and safe progress towards the goal , the *perfection* of their lives at the return of Christ Jesus.

Keeping in step with the Holy Spirit is also the only way to effectively deal with the many temptations that come our way . Temptations to throw in our

lot with the dictates of the devil, this sinful world and our impulsive, sinful human nature.

No, this way of walking and running the Christian life is no reason to boast of our abilities and progress as if we could well take care of our security and reach our goal in our own strength. What did Paul go on to say? “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying one another.” (v. 26). 4

Someone has said, “ *God does not approve of windbags*”.³ Haughtiness and conceit has no place for those who would belong to the kingdom of God. Another way of looking at it is that we should practice self-denial, not self-indulgence. We need to be ‘in practice what we are or have confessed to be, in principle. It is not enough that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do good and do it well!

Dear listeners, the Lord God knows that it far easier for you and me to ‘step out of line’ and insist on a selfish, God-denying way of life than to walk “in step” with the Spirit. Yet God has not left us without hope . He has not left us to flounder while losing our way. “*The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.*” (Romans 8: 26a) He would even go so far as to intercede for us with the Father.

Are you a Christian? Then surely you are blessed. You have even two heavenly intercessors, both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. While Christ performs his task in heaven (Romans 8: 34) the Holy Spirit works right inside of us, in our very hearts (John 14:16, 17).

What if you are not, or not yet, a Christian? Do not hold back or doubt the goodness of God. He so loved the world that he sent his One and Only Son. That whoever believes in him would not perish but have life

³ W. Hendriksen in his New Testament Commentary on Galatians. p. 227

everlasting. It's that amazing gift and amazing grace that saved people the world over. People lost and wandering people like you and me. People young and older, living in a broken world, full of conflicting ideas, many of which run counter to the truth. The truth which is God's holy Word. The truth which is Christ Jesus himself who said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life.*"

The Holy Spirit knowing our weaknesses would lead us *to* the truth and *in* the truth. So that we might have a sure hope, and stability today. The Holy Spirit promises you and me peace and mercy if we but follow the path of truth He has marked out for us.

Yes then there will be storms and trials which we all will have to face. But those who believe in Jesus Christ do not only have the prospect of eternal life which is to come. Today, when we hear Christ's voice and keep in step with the Spirit we already have this great comfort. We will never be forsaken, never rejected if daily we confess our sins and live in close fellowship and in humility before the Lord. He has promised and he is faithful still!

Amen, and thanks so much for listening.