

Shaped By the Spirit (Part Ten): In Step with the Spirit

By Pastor Dave Fields

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” – Galatians 5:25

I. “Since we live by the Spirit...”

A. The Spirit Who Is God

God is Unified in God’s Actions

“The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:2). In God’s work of creating, the “Spirit” is active and moving. We find, too, that Mary is pregnant with baby Jesus by “the Holy Spirit” (Lk 2). The *agent* of Jesus’ own conception is the *Spirit of God*.

The Bible speaks of “God” creating (Gen 1:1), and the Spirit creating (Gen 1:2; Luke 2), and of Jesus creating (Col 1:15). So, who creates? God does. Who saves? God does. Who changes our hearts? God does.

God is Simple

To say God is “simple” means that God doesn’t have “parts” – God isn’t “a little bit of this...a little bit of that...” as though you could take one part of God away. God is *one* in the sense that God cannot be divided.

“The three Persons subsist in the one Divine essence. They do not *co-exist* alongside one another. Water co-exists as liquid, solid and vapor; but it does not *subsist* as liquid, solid and vapor. I co-exist with my wife...and our kids; but I *subsist* as husband, father, son, pastor, teacher. The three Persons of the Trinity do not exist alongside one another but subsist in eternal-interrelatedness.” – Darrell Johnson

B. The Fullness of God in Us

“For this reason, ***I kneel before the Father***, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may ***strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being***, so that ***Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***”

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all Lord’s people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be ***filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***” - Ephesians 3:14-19

“We are born out of the laughter of the Trinity.” – Meister Eckhard.

God did not create out of a sense of loneliness. God has never been lonely, or needy. God has always had a relational “fullness”. And so, you and I, we were created *out of love* – between Father, Son, and Spirit – and we were created *for love*; to be “in him”.

“The universe is an explosion of God’s glory. Perfect goodness, beauty, and love radiate from God and draw creatures to ever increasingly share in the Godhead’s joy and delight.... The ultimate end [the purpose] of creation, then, is union in love between God and loving creatures.” - Jonathan Edwards

When Paul writes to the Galatians – to a group of Christian who were being tempted to slide back into law keeping – he is reminding them that God himself is now *in them*; *the Spirit will lead them*. It’s not the law that gives them life. And it’s not the law that will lead them now.

“If the Spirit is the source of our life [that’s the fact – and it is in opposition to the law-code that God gave Israel, for a time – then this], let the Spirit also direct our course.” [that’s the instruction]. – Galatians 5:25 New English Bible

II. “Let us keep in step with the Spirit...”

When Paul says, “let us keep in step with the Spirit,” he’s drawing on a powerful metaphor. This word for ‘keep in step’ is not the usual word for “walking” in the New Testament – it’s very rarely used – and it comes from the world of military drills – the sort of training that’ will make us into a certain sort of person.

A. Hearing the Spirit in the Everyday and Ordinary

“Listen to your life.” – Fredrick Buechner

Buechner is saying God is at work in and around you all the time, and one of the keyways to ‘hear God’ is to be attentive to how God is working through the simple, every day, ordinary things of life. It's God speaking to us through conversations with friends, through circumstances that God put us in, through little prompts and nudges toward openness to others.

And the way you know it’s God is, well, does it lead you to act in ways that are...loving – that look and feel and smell like the life of Jesus coming alive in you? Like, is it joyful and soaked in God’s peace? Is what you are ‘hearing’ nudging you to greater patience, generosity, and goodness? Is it leading you to faithful love for God, to the ability to say “yes” and “no” to the right things?

B. The Spirit in Character Formation

“Against such things there is no law.” – Galatians 5:23b

Paul may be quoting Aristotle, who says the exact same phrase a few hundred years earlier in relation to character ethics – about doing the right thing because we have been made into different/new sorts of people.

“Against” (Gk = *kata*) can also be translated “about” or “concerning such things.”

And Paul (like Aristotle) probably means something like this. “This list, you can’t ‘legislate’ people into behaving like this, it must become a part of their very nature – who they are.”

You can tell them, “You can’t punch your neighbour, even if they are being a jerk – we have laws against that...and jail-time.” But no law can say, “You have to be patient – you have to be generous and joy-filled.” Those things only come out of a changed heart.