

Walk by the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Last week, we looked at Galatians chapter 5, verses 13 through 15.

! Let's read those verses again because they set the stage for what we'll cover over the next few weeks.! Here are Galatians 5, verses 13 through 15. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Brothers only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. The main idea for that text was, release from bondage to sin and the law, true believers should model God's love.

And with all this talk of freedom, it would be easy to think that the Christian life is one spiritual triumph after another. After all, we're free from the bondage of sin.

[1 : 07] And we'll see tonight that if we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of our sinful nature. We're also free to serve. As we're led by the Spirit, we will fulfill the law of love.

But the reality is that Christians often suffer bitter spiritual defeats. We still sin, and we don't always want to serve. We fail to fulfill the law of God's love often.

So how can we explain the apparent contradiction between our freedom and our failings? Well, that apparent contradiction is why each of us likely struggled with the question at the end of last week's lesson.

That question was, are you modeling what it means to serve and love others? To truly answer yes to that question, we must be able to love like God loves.

Reflecting on that question and our other failings can be discouraging. If we're honest with ourselves, none of us can truthfully say that we love like God loves.

[2 : 12] After all, the only human who truly loves like God loves is Christ himself. Christ loves like God because Christ is more than human. He also is God.

If Paul ended his letter with the challenge to love that he gave us last week, we might get very discouraged. And some people might wonder if they truly are saved.

Fortunately for us, though, Paul continues his letter with the verses that we will begin studying tonight. We'll take several weeks to get through these verses, and those verses are Galatians chapter 5, verses 16 through 26.

We'll only look at three verses tonight, but those three verses will explain the apparent contradiction between our freedom and our failings. So these verses will give us hope as believers.

Galatians 5, verses 16 through 26 are one block, so we're going to go ahead and read all 11 verses now. Here are Galatians chapter 5, verses 16 through 26.

[3 : 18] Paul wrote, Now the works of the flesh are evident.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law, and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Here's the main idea for the entire section.

[4 : 53] The Holy Spirit within believers battles our worldly desires and enables us to become more and more like Christ. You'll be hearing that main idea a lot because we'll probably take four to seven weeks to get through the 11 verses that we just read.

And here is that main idea again. The Holy Spirit within believers battles our worldly desires and enables us to become more and more like Christ.

Before we narrow our focus to the three verses that we'll look at tonight, take a minute to see how often Paul mentions the Spirit in these verses. Paul mentions the Spirit seven times in 11 verses. As we work through the verses, we'll be talking about the Spirit a lot. And that's a good thing. These verses will be a good reminder of what the Holy Spirit does for us and a good reminder of a significant blessing that true believers have.

That blessing is to have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We need to preface our study of this passage with one more thing. The teaching that Paul mentions in verses 16 through 26 only applies to true believers.

[6:07] That is important. The teaching in verses 16 through 26 applies only to true believers. As we go through the next several lessons, we'll look at verses 16 through 26 under three major headings.

The verses we will cover tonight give us the first heading. And in verses 16 through 18, we see Paul's command. So Paul's command is your blank.

That actually is your only blank for tonight. While you're filling it in, here are verses 16 through 18 again. Paul said, That verse has the command and it also has a promise.

Verse 16 says, We need to define some terms starting with what it means to walk by the Spirit. This is the only place in Galatians where the word walk is used in this sense, but it's Paul's common designation for someone's daily conduct or lifestyle.

[7:42] The fact that the word for walk is used here in the present tense indicates that Paul is speaking of continuous, regular action. In other words, he's talking about a habitual way of life.

In its wider usage, the Greek word for walk means to walk in a general sense, but also to walk around after someone or to walk in a particular direction.

The students of Aristotle were known as peripatetics because of their habit of following the philosopher around from place to place as he dispensed his wisdom. In Paul's vocabulary, to walk in the Spirit or to be led by the Spirit means to go where the Spirit is going, to listen to the Spirit's voice, to discern the Spirit's will, and to follow the Spirit's guidance.

The good news for believers is that we receive the Holy Spirit as soon as we are saved. Listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14.

Here are Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14. In him, talking about Christ, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

[9:12] Remember also what Paul wrote earlier in Galatians. Here is Galatians chapter 4, verse 6. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Scripture is clear that every true believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit. All a believer absolutely needs to live a holy life according to the will of God is the Holy Spirit who is given to him the moment that the believer believes.

Even the newest, most untaught Christian is indwelt by God's own resident teacher and strengthener. Although the Spirit uses Scripture to assist believers to grow in truth and holiness, the Spirit himself is the supreme source of those virtues.

Life walked by the Spirit is life patterned after the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a life whose constant overriding desire is to be found in him, not having a righteousness of its own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, and the desire to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and to share in his sufferings.

That comes from Philippians chapter 3, verses 9 and 10. It's the same thing to walk by the Spirit as to be filled with the Spirit.

[10:41] And that's a phrase referring to the controlling power exerted by the Spirit on a willing Christian. Only pride or ignorance could lead a believer to live by an outward list of rules and commands in its own limited and sinful power when he can live by the perfect and sufficient inner power of the Holy Spirit.

But that is what many believers in the Galatian churches were trying to do. That's what many believers today still try to do. The last part of verse 16 gives us the promise of what will happen if

we walk by the Spirit.

The end of verse 16 says that if we walk by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The ESV's use of the word gratify there is a poor translation.

The original Greek word means to complete, accomplish, or finish. If you have a King James or a New King James, you'll see the word fulfill instead of gratify.

The New American Standard and the Holman Christian Standard use the phrase, carry out. If we walk by the Spirit, we may start the works of the flesh, but the Holy Spirit will do His work to prevent us from finishing the works of the flesh.

[12:01] It may take the Spirit longer in some of us than in others, but the Spirit will bring true believers back. We talked about the meaning of the flesh last week.

The flesh, in the language of the Apostle Paul, is our fallen human nature, which we inherited from our parents, and they inherited from theirs. It's twisted with self-centeredness, and therefore prone to sin.

The flesh is what remains of the old man after a person is saved. It refers to unredeemed humanness, the part of the believer that awaits future redemption at the time of the believer's glorification.

Until then, the believer has a redeemed self living in unredeemed humanness, and that creates great conflict. If you feel that conflict within you, that should give you hope.

Joseph Pippa said, That points us back to the meaning of the verb translated as gratify in the ESV, or fulfill or carry out in other versions.

[13:27] We periodically will do the works of the flesh, but the Holy Spirit will prevent us from making those works a way of life. The verb translated as gratify in the ESV is in a form that expresses completed action.

Although we will fall into sin, sin will never have dominion over believers. We will not complete the desire of the flesh. That's because the Spirit in us is lusting after holiness, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

We have the promise that we will grow in grace and in victory. So are you starting to see why this passage gives us hope, even if we can't live like God loves?

Those who yield to the Spirit daily have the promise that they will not gratify their fallen human nature. Either we are submitting to the Spirit's leadership, or we're gratifying our flesh.

If we're submitting to the Spirit, we cannot gratify the flesh. One person said, you cannot pray and look at pornography at the same time. The way you deal with your sin is more than by saying no to the flesh.

[14:40] It's also by saying yes to the Spirit's work within you. John MacArthur said, We see the tension here between God's divine power and the believer's human choice.

Christians must decide to walk by the Spirit continually, and at the same time, the Spirit is at work to create new appetites and give new power to resist the flesh and to please God.

Let's move on to verse 17 now. In that verse, Paul will explain the apparent contradiction between our freedom and our failures. This is Galatians 5:17 again.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

So do you see why believers sometimes, and perhaps even often, fail to live up to our calling to love like God loves? The desires of the flesh are fighting against the desires of the Spirit.

[16:09] Even as Paul lays down the reason for our failures, he comforts us by reminding us that this battle is not simply between our new natures and the remnant of sin, but between the Holy Spirit and the remnant of sin.

The two references to Spirit are not to our spirits, but to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads our new nature in this battle, and the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us strength to resist.

One commentator said, The flesh opposes the Spirit, that men may not do what they will in accordance with the mind of the Spirit, and the Spirit opposes the flesh, that they may not do what they will after the flesh.

Does the man choose evil? If so, the Spirit opposes him. Does he choose good? If so, the flesh hinders him. Regardless of what we choose, we'll have a conflict going on within us.

And Philip Ryken used an example that gives us a picture of this conflict. He said, This verse describes the war within, the constant conflict raging inside the human heart.

[17 : 24] One desire grapples with the other, like two giant sumo wrestlers trying to push each other out of the ring. Flesh against spirit, sinful nature against regenerate nature.

The result of this conflict is that we do not always do what we want to do. Often we do exactly the opposite, because the flesh wars against the spirit.

Remember now that this is the spiritual condition of the believer. Paul is talking to Galatian Christians who had already received the Holy Spirit. We saw that all the way back in Galatians chapter 3, verse 3.

These people were members of the church of Jesus Christ. That means the Christian is practically a self-contradiction, pulled by the flesh and the spirit in two different directions at once.

What takes place within the heart, mind, soul, and body of the believer is nothing less than a civil war, a violent confrontation between opposing forces, and irreconcilable antagonism.

[18 : 33] The references to a civil war and to an irreconcilable antagonism came from John Stott. And here's the full John Stott quote. He said, Some teachers maintain that the Christian has no inner conflict, no civil war within himself, because, they say, his flesh has been eradicated and his old nature is dead.

This passage contradicts such a view. Christian people, in Luther's graphic expression, are not stocks and stones. That is, people who are never moved with anything and who never feel any lust or desires of the flesh.

Certainly, as we learn to walk in the spirit, the flesh becomes increasingly subdued. But the flesh and the spirit remain, and the conflict between them is fierce and unremitting.

Indeed, one may go further and say that this is a specifically Christian conduct and conflict. We do not deny that there is such a thing as moral conflict in non-Christian people, though we assert that it is fiercer in Christians because they possess two natures, flesh and spirit, in irreconcilable antagonism.

If you need more proof that the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and that the desires of the spirit are against the flesh, just scan down to Galatians 5, 19-23.

[20 : 04] Those verses are where Paul lists the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. Here are Galatians 5, 19-23 again. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Some of you know that before Martin Luther left the monastery and turned from Catholicism to true Christianity, he struggled mightily with guilt over his sins.

He would spend hours every day in the confessional. He spent so much time each day confessing his sins that some of his fellow monks thought that he simply was trying to get out of work.

[21 : 28] Our very own Tom Holland likes to ask this question, how much sinning could Luther possibly do in just one day while living as a monk in an isolated monastery? Well, Luther answered Tom's question in his Galatians commentary, and here's what he said.

Luther said, When I was a monk, I thought by and by that I was utterly cast away if at any time I felt the strong desire of the flesh.

That is to say, if I felt any evil motion, fleshly lust, wrath, hatred, or envy against any brother. I assayed many ways.

I went to the confession daily, but it profited me not. The strong desire of my flesh did always return so that I could not rest, but was continually vexed with these thoughts.

This or that sin that thou hast done and committed, thou art infected with envy, with impatience, and other such sins. Therefore thou art entered into this holy order in vain, and all thy good works are unprofitable.

[22 : 41] If then I had rightly understood these sentences of Paul, the flesh lusteth contrary to the spirit, and the spirit contrary to the flesh, and that these two are against one another, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would do, I should not have been so miserably tormenting myself, but should have thought and said to myself, as I now commonly do, Martin, thou shalt not utterly be without sin, for thou hast yet flesh.

Thou shalt therefore feel the battle thereof, according to the saying of Paul, the flesh resisteth the spirit. Despair not, therefore, but resist it strongly, and fulfill not the lust thereof.

Luther also said, in respect of the flesh, we are sinners, but in respect of the spirit, we are righteous, and so we are partly sinners and partly righteous.

Notwithstanding that fact, our righteousness is much more plentiful than our sin, because the holiness and righteousness of Christ our mediator doth far exceed the sin of the whole world, and the forgiveness of sins which we have through him is so great, so large, and so infinite, that it easily swalloweth up all sins.

Here's what Charles Spurgeon wrote about Galatians 5.17. Spurgeon said, You are pulled about by two contrary forces.

[24 : 17] You are dragged downward by the flesh, and you are drawn upward by the spirit. They will never agree. These two powers are always contrary to one another.

If you think that you can help God by getting angry, you make a great mistake. You cannot fight God's battles with the devil's weapons. It is not possible that the power of the flesh should help the power of the spirit.

Here's another Joseph Pippa quote. He said, If you are not at war with your lust and the remnant of sin in you, then most likely you remain unconverted.

Mind you, I am not talking about always winning the war, but if there is no warfare within you, that is an indication that you are not born again. Do not let the reality of the battle discourage you.

The fact that you have these interior wars is a sign to you that you are alive. So far, just in considering Galatians 5, 16 and 17, we've looked at several quotes from theologians that we respect.

[25 : 30] We've heard from Luther, Spurgeon, Stott, MacArthur, Pippa, and others. Using that many quotes was intentional. We need to understand the conflict that believers feel and we need to understand that that conflict is to be expected.

Even more importantly, we need to let that conflict give us hope. That conflict is evidence that we are saved. Unbelievers lack that conflict.

Before we leave verse 17, we'll look at a different quote from another theologian. That theologian is the Apostle Paul himself. Turn over to Romans chapter 7.

In Romans chapter 7 verses 14 through 25, Paul wrote about the internal battle he faced. Here are Romans chapter 7 verses 14 through 25.

Paul said, For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

[26 : 49] Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

[28 : 12] For you believers who may at times have wished that you could be like Martin Luther or perhaps even the Apostle Paul, guess what? You actually are like them in at least two ways.

You still struggle with sin, and you are a sinner who's been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We should never be surprised by sin as if we expected God to make us perfect in this life, nor should sin cause us to doubt our salvation.

We are most aware of our sin when the Spirit is most active in fighting against our old adversary.

That's our sinful desire. Remember what John wrote in 1 John chapter 1 verses 8 through 10.

1 John 1 8 through 10 say, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. Always look to the Bible when you are struggling with sin.

[29 : 27] The Bible and the Holy Spirit will give you hope. Here's another Martin Luther quote about verse 17. He said, In this conflict, therefore, of the flesh against the spirit, there is nothing better than to have the word of God before thine eyes, and therein to seek the comfort of the spirit.

Let's move on to verse 18 now. Here's verse 18. Again, Galatians 5. 18 says, But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.

Being led by the spirit is the same thing as walking by the spirit. We know from verse 16 what Paul meant by walking by the spirit. And we'll spend our time on verse 18 thinking about what Paul meant when he said that people who are led by the!

Spirit are not under the law. Martin Luther's commentary was particularly good on tonight's verses probably because the verses were so significant to him.

Here is part of what Luther said about verse 18. So great then is the power of the dominion of the spirit that the law cannot accuse the godly though they commit that which is sin indeed.

[30 : 50] For Christ is our righteousness whom we apprehend by faith. He is without all sin and therefore the law cannot accuse him. As long as we cleave fast unto him we are led by the spirit and are free from the law.

When Luther says we're free from the law he's talking about being free from the penalty of the law. And even though we're free from the penalty of the law we still have a relationship to that law.

God has never done away with his law. His basic commands are unchanged. His will for our lives as expressed in his moral law is eternal.

Listen to what Jesus said in John chapter 14 verses 15 through 17. Here is what Jesus said in John 14 15 through 17.

Jesus said if you love me you will keep my commandments and I will ask the father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him you know him for he dwells with you and will be in you remember Jesus spoke those words before he went to the cross so the day of Pentecost had not come now we know that the Holy Spirit is indeed in all believers the Holy Spirit who dwells within us becomes our constant helper and that means our relationship with the law changes we're free from the law but now the spirit uses the law to help us exercise our freedom what enables us to live a holy life is no longer the outward!

[32 : 40] constrain of the law but the inward compulsion of the Holy Spirit and that is what the prophets meant when they promised that God's law would be written on our hearts like Jeremiah 31 33 says it's also what the apostle James meant when he spoke about the law of liberty in James 1 25 although we cannot gain God's acceptance by keeping the law once we have been accepted we will keep the law out of love for him who has accepted us and given us his spirit to enable us to keep the law in New Testament terminology our justification depends not on the law but on Christ crucified yet our sanctification consists in the fulfillment of the law here's an illustration from Joseph Pippa he said one way to illustrate the different uses of the law is to compare God's law to a pair of ice skates the value of ice skates as a mode of transportation depends entirely on where they are being used they are rather awkward for example on hot asphalt or in a grassy meadow the only place ice skates are of much use is at the skating rink or perhaps on an icy pond in the same way before we come to

Christ the law cannot help us to please God in fact the more we try to use the law to become good enough for God the more we stumble and fall but coming to faith in Christ is like going to the ice rink after we receive his spirit the ice skates of God's law transport us through the Christian life I'm not sure that's a good example or not I was trying to get the image of the sumo wrestlers out of your head but I wound up with an image of ice skating sumo wrestlers so you can ponder both of those tonight the bottom line is that the most the law can do for us and has done Christ it does something else for us it shows us how to live for God by telling us to love our neighbor among other things the law does not tell this as a way of getting right with

God as far as justification is concerned we are not under the law the law shows us a way of living free in the spirit our liberty is not lawless!

we are! under the law nevertheless we fulfill the law Charles Spurgeon explained the end of verse 18 like this and perhaps it will help you understand the verse a little better Spurgeon said what is God's law now it is not above a Christian it is under a Christian some men hold God's law like a rod

in terror over Christians and say if you sin you will be punished with it it is not so the law is under a Christian it is for him to walk on to be his guide his rule his pattern we are not under the law but under grace law is the road which guides us not the rod which drives us nor the spirit which actuates us the law is good and excellent if it keep its place remember the main idea the holy spirit within believers battles our worldly desires and enables us to become more and more like Christ holiness comes only from the holy spirit holy living does not come from our performance for god but from his performance through us by his own spirit holy living is to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being as we are being filled with the spirit that comes from Ephesians 3 16 and also Ephesians 5 18 we need to remember that we also have a role to play in our sanctification we are more than passive observers while the Holy Spirit does its work we must also use the means of grace because the spirit rarely works apart from them daily private Bible study prayer and meditation family worship and most importantly corporate worship are the means that God has appointed to work grace in our lives we must also practice mortification of the flesh make peace with no sin we must bring every sin every lust to the cross to be crucified with [37 : 45] Christ we must ask him to drive the nails into the heart of our favorite sin that we might die to it and it to us we choke off the sin's lifeline we deprive it of all of its support we also should pray for the spirit to do his work within us listen to what Jesus said in Luke 11 13 here are Jesus words in Luke 11 13 he said if then you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him here here's one more quote from Joseph Pippa it is the spirit who will excite our affections it is the spirit who will put to death the lust that are within us if we cry out to

God to give us this work and to increase his work by the spirit within us he will not hold back the savior has promised us that if we pray! according to the will of! father he will grant what we ask is it the will of God that you be holy is it the will of God that you be led by the spirit of course it is he will give you the spirit in full measure for grace and strength we pray as will that God will keep us from temptation and that when we are tempted he will deliver us from evil and of course that last part comes from Matthew 6 at being more Christ like as the spirit sanctifies us but we will fail and we will fail often and when we do fail here's another important reminder from Martin Luther he wrote the faithful therefore receive great consolation by this doctrine of Paul in that they know themselves to have partly the flesh and partly the spirit he that knoweth not this doctrine and thinketh that the faithful ought to be without all fault and yet seeth the contrary in himself must needs at the length be swallowed up by the spirit of heaviness and fall into desperation but whoso knoweth this doctrine well and useth it rightly to him the things that are evil turn unto good for when the flesh provoketh him to sin by occasion thereof he is stirred up and forced to seek forgiveness of sin by

Christ and to embrace the righteousness of faith which else he would not so greatly esteem nor seek for the same with so great a desire therefore it profited thus very much to feel sometimes the wickedness of our nature and corruption of our flesh that even by this means we may be waked and stirred up to faith to call upon Christ listen to that last part again therefore it profiteth us very much to feel sometimes the wickedness of our nature and corruption of our flesh that even by this means we may be waked and stirred up to faith and to call upon Christ we need to remember something else too the war between the flesh and the spirit will not last forever nor will the struggle between the flesh and the spirit end in a stalemate one day the spirit will gain total victory and the flesh will torment us no longer in the meantime true believers still sin sometimes we as believers will sin often and sin big for biblical proof of that consider how often

King David sinned but Galatians 5 16 through 18 explain the apparent contradiction between our freedom and our failures Luther's quote about sin stirring us to call upon Christ was good but the Bible's message to us is even better and the Bible gets the final word we heard what Paul said in Romans 7 about his own struggles with sin always remember that Romans 8 comes after Romans 7 listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8 1 through 4 verses that support tonight's passage from Galatians here are Romans 8 1 through 4 there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit let's pray father we thank you for the reminder that you do expect us to walk by the spirit

we also thank you for the reminder that we can never perfectly live up to that calling in this life help us be more and more willing to yield to the holy spirit so that we continue to become more and more like

[43 : 42] Christ give us the strength to follow your will in Jesus name we pray amen