

Life in the Spirit

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[0:00] Yeah, there's quite a few faces here I don't recognise, so there must be a few visitors. So a special welcome from me and I hope very much that this will be useful to you. But my intention is simply to help the Word of God to speak for itself and to let it challenge us all.

Let's just pray along those lines. Father, we've read about turmoil within us. We pray that you will help us between a pull to follow your ways and other things in us like baggage that drag us back. And we pray that you will help us to get the advice from your Word and to come closer to your Spirit, to experience him and know his help. Help me as I explain.

And may you do much more work than I can in our midst. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, the subject of what Phil has read to us is very clear.

There is a battle between our text talked about spirit and flesh, but I will unpack a little bit. Some of these words, flesh, makes you think physical, doesn't it, only?

[1:24] It's much more general, I think, we'll find, that it is to do with the sinful nature and finding help in a battle. But as an introduction, I want us to understand a little better or think about where we live.

And I wonder, perhaps we all understand perfectly clearly what this world is about, but maybe we try and not think too hard about the trouble that the world is in and that we face.

So, first of all, we are created, this is back in Genesis 1, to live in a garden. I don't think that is Eden. Actually, when you think of the whole of our lives, there's an awful lot that comes against us that is far from beautiful, far from sin-free, far from lacking sorrow.

But that is where we were meant to live. That is where deep down in us there is a longing to be. So, there's my smiley face.

[2:52] But actually, we live, as this text has told us, we live on a battlefield. Some of you might think, what's he on about?

But I hope by the end you might get something from the word of God in this. Our text says very clearly that the spirit and the flesh are in conflict.

So, that had a sad face. Yeah. Now, in the film, which I think many of you will know, thinking about the battle scene, Saving Private Ryan, there is a soldier heading for the front line.

And he asks his commanding officer, he says, can I take my typewriter? Many of you will know this film. And he's actually only offered a pencil.

Because, I'm stating the obvious, you might have guessed it, if you're going into a battleground where you're going to have to move and dodge and uproot and do things quickly, a typewriter, not the size of a little iPad or a phone these days, more like a small suitcase, you don't want one of those with you in a battle.

[4:06] But it just gives you a glimpse of someone who was rather out of touch with the battle that he was going into. And a verse comes to mind in Hebrews to do with going on with God.

Let us throw everything off that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run, it says, with perseverance, the race set for us. So there is this, you know, there are plenty of other scriptures, I'm not going to go to all of them, that remind us that there is stuff that drags us down, we need to throw it off, so that we can get on with making the best in this very difficult situation of the battle that we are in.

So let me just ask you, do you understand where you live? Or do you spend most of the time just thinking everything is like a garden and not really engaging with this battle that there really is?

That's a challenge. Do you understand where you live? Because some of us will be just in a sense of unreality. And of course, if you're a soldier on a battlefield and you have no idea what's going on, instead of your gun, you've got a typewriter, your lot is, you're not going to last very long, are you? So we are talking about the spirit versus the sinful nature. And you'll notice in verse 16, it says, walk by the spirit.

[5:41] I'm aware there might be quite a few visitors here and you'll think, what on earth is this about? So I just want to address the question briefly, who has the spirit? And I quote a verse in Acts 2.

This is Peter speaking at Pentecost. He says, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, if you didn't know that, that's the spirit of God to come and live within you. Sounds marvelous, sounds incredible, sounds as you look around you if you're a visitor here.

Do these people really have this? And you'll be wondering, well, mingle and talk with us. It doesn't show itself overnight in people, how the spirit works in us.

But this is the promise that God has given us of his spirit. Even if you're young in the faith, you have the spirit of God. And no one else can say, you need something else.

[6:43] The process of how the spirit grows in you, well, that's what I think we're coming to here. I think it was Phil who recently reminded us at a prayer meeting.

Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3, you must be born again. And it's very clear in that chapter he's talking about being born of the spirit. And Paul says, this is in Ephesians, challenges to not get drunk on wine, but instead to be filled with the spirit.

So we will be talking about the spirit a bit later. But the trouble is to do with, there are times when we have felt very filled with the spirit. We've come and we've asked and God has filled us for something.

But the trouble is that we leak. Yeah? Sometimes we are very full of the spirit of God. Sometimes we are very drained and we're trying to do everything in our own strength.

We leak. And I hope this might help the idea that, although it's a little crazy coupe child's car, just imagine being able to see the petrol tank in the back.

[7:53] And that one's fairly full. But then, as you go through things, sometimes the level of fuel in your car, it goes right down. And I'm thinking of the spirit in us.

We don't get these windows into each other's lives. But sometimes we get into those phases in life where we're trying to function, sort it all out ourselves. Because we have actual natural instincts to not really ask God for help, and just to try and sort it out.

And we're not asking for his presence and for his help. So this is our text, the first part of our text. I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires.

The authorised version says, lusts of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

That's a slightly different translation from the one in the footnote of the New NIV. That's there. So that you do not do what you want. So for Christians, this conflict between the flesh and the spirit within us is real.

[9:05] Not to be sidestepped. The AV talks about the lusts of the flesh, new NIV desires of the flesh, the old NIV desires of the sinful nature.

None of these are ideal translations. Lust is, to us, the first thing you think of is an unrestrained sexual desires. Desires, the NIV is better.

But the Greek word, and exactly what it is isn't relevant, but it's literally meaning an over-desire. Right? An over-desire. An all-controlling desire or longing.

That is the idea of this desiring. The flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit. And in the New Testament, flesh, we think body.

The Greek word is sarx. When opposed to the spirit, this does not refer to our physical nature, but it is to the sin-desiring aspect within us.

[10:07] So it's not just our physical appetites for wrong, as opposed to the God-desiring aspect. So if you put that together, you could say, for

the sinful nature, over-desires what is contrary to the spirit.

And I just say, although there is a list of quite horrible things that we will just skim through, qualities that we need to examine and think, I hope these not are in us, but if they are our problems, I hope we're working on them.

But over-desire is often directed towards things that in themselves are quite good. But because we over-desire, they've become too important.

They've become like an idol. I could think of having a career, having a good job, a very healthy and a good thing to do. Put that ambition too high, and something else in your life will lose out that really shouldn't.

And it's become an idol. Family, children, grandchildren, ever so important, something that you would put a lot of time into. But even a family, even your children and grandchildren, you can put so much in there that you're forgetting other things that are more important.

[11:28] So beware of over-desire. Here's a quote from David Powlison. He says, If idolatry is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, and there are plenty of passages in the Old Testament that talk about that, making idols for themselves out of gold, then desires, this word in our passage, is the New Testament word for the same drift.

And it includes lust, craving, yearning, and greedy demand. So I just ask, do we prayerfully think deeply about what matters most to us, holding our possessions, whatever God has given us, and our ambitions, lightly?

So it says, For the sinful nature over-desires what is contrary to the Spirit. But it also says, And the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

You'll notice that it's not explicitly said that the Spirit is over-desiring, because how could the Holy Spirit do over-desiring? But it is implied that he has yearnings and longings.

So what does he long for? The Spirit of God, who has been given to those who believe. In John 16, it says, So the Spirit inside us, his main job is to show us Christ, to help us to be overtaken by his beauty, taken up with it, overwhelmed by it.

[13:15] He longs to show us Christ. Now, do remember where we were in chapter 4, verse 19, My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth, this is Paul speaking, until Christ is formed in you.

So Paul is the person who's longing to see these Galatians grow. What's his longing? That Christ be formed in you. By his Spirit, I could add.

But that's how your nature inside you can change. So the Holy Spirit renews and regenerates us by dwelling within us. But that part of us, not yet renewed, and if we're honest, there's plenty there in our lives that has not yet been renewed.

Our problem is that we think we're nearly there, don't we? If we honestly can see the part of us that is not renewed, it is our sinful nature. So both are within us and at war with each other.

So we come to this list of the works of the flesh. This is in verse 19 onwards. Fifteen are listed. They fall broadly into four areas.

[14:32] Some of them are to do with sex. There is the immorality, which I think is taken to mean the more unlawful.

And biblically, certainly, sexual intercourse between people who are not married is unlawful. It talks about impurity, probably more to do with unnatural ideas.

Debauchery are much more open and reckless things to do with sexual activity. There are things about religion, about idolatry.

We've touched on that. The update of that might be over desires. But worshipping of other gods, a very big problem in our day. Yes, it won't be a gold graven image for many of us, but there'll be something in our lives that is getting far too much attention.

And it's become, it's taking the place of God. Witchcraft. We don't know many places, I suppose, where that's going on, but Ouija boards and other things.

[15:34] Tampering with the powers of evil. Evil really does have a power. Jesus is stronger. God is stronger. But it's not to be messed about with. Then there's stuff to do with relationships.

And I just put at the bottom there, some in red and some in blue. Destructive attitudes and the results of those attitudes. Hatred. Discord.

What's that mean? Arguing a lot. Someone who likes to pick fights. Jealousy. That arises when a valued relationship is threatened by someone else.

Something else. Fits of rage. Selfish ambition. Dissensions. That means kind of divisions between people. Factions.

That's much more permanent fighting between groups. And you can think of places in our world where they don't want to sit down at the table and really make any peace at all.

[16:29] They just hate each other. They just want to keep on fighting. And envy is desiring what others have. So many of these are just destructive attitudes, but they result in other things as well.

And then there is the last two substance abuses. It's how I've classified these. They're drunkenness. Orgies.

And it is most likely drinking orgies is the idea. But that is a point of... There may be some people who have had problems with drink or drugs.

And at that point, you are out of control. And when you surrender control, terrible things can happen. Terrible things can happen. Evil can enter when you are out of control completely.

And you can do things you would never do when you are in control. Then there is a warning after this list. And it's a very solemn warning in the last part of verse 21.

[17:32] It says, Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But I quickly add, in case anyone is here with a very tender conscience, that this is not so much isolated slip-ups, but this is a continuing, that this kind of is the colour of your life that you are, just pleasing yourself and going down these routes.

Do you remember this character in The Lord of the Rings? I just thought I'd throw this in for a bit of light relief. This is Gollum. Some of you might not know the film. Sometimes he's angry and evil. Quite scary. He's Gollum. Sometimes he's kind and friendly. That's Smeagol. So the good and the bad within him are in conflict.

Now I say of this fictional character, he has no hope. I don't think he has many friends either. He's sort of seen in the film, just scouting around the caves, wondering about his precious ring that he used to have.

Yeah. But we do have a hope. hope. And if some of that was quite hard to think about from it, we do have a hope.

[19:00] And so the second major area I want to come into is that there is help in the battle. And I won't think this is exactly in the order it's coming. But one of the things here is about crucifying the sinful nature.

And you'll notice in verse 24, it says, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh. You could read that as the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

And I just want to draw attention. I don't particularly like thinking of instruments of killing people.

It's not a... I think most of us would try to flinch away from it. But I think there are some aspects of... If some of our own nature in us is being crucified or is being crucified, we do well to think about it a little.

People who were crucified in Roman days, it was reserved as... This was for the most pitiless...

This was the worst criminals. And if there are aspects of our life that are wrong, that we're trying to crucify, there should be this having no mercy, really, on these aspects.

[20:12] It will be painful, as crucifixion was, identifying things in you that you need to get rid of. And there's also something very decisive about it.

And all I want to picture here is if... When someone had been nailed to a cross and Roman soldiers were on guard, that was so no one would come and rescue him. That was so that the death would happen.

It didn't change. It was decisive. No one got up there and tried to get the nails out. So as we think of things in your life that you're trying to get rid of, I just throw those out as helpful points that we should work on.

And then the second point is to stay close to the Spirit. Stay close to the Holy Spirit. There was that example. We'll come back at it at the end, about that we can be full and we can get empty, and we need to keep on being filled by the Spirit.

But the particular words used in our passage, walk by the Spirit in verse 16, that is an ordinary word, but it's an active thing.

[21:14] Being led by the Spirit in verse 18, slightly more passive, but it does generate the question, are you willing to be led by God?

Or do you always think you know better? And since we live by the Spirit, in verse 25 it says, keep in step with the Spirit.

It's a slightly different word for walking, but it means to be in line with, almost like following a code. Keeping and knowing what he wants and going that way.

Again, a very active thing. So, then there is this rather beautiful list, and we'd do well to dwell on this a bit, but I will draw attention to, I'm borrowing some information here.

Tim Keller is very good on this, and there are 30 or so, near Angel, there are 30 or so lists of these nine qualities that we're about to go through.

[22:18] I've got the definitions in my slides, but there's more about opposites and counterfeits of these things. So, there are a few there. If they go quickly, I can probably get some more.

But there is a bit more information than I'm about to, but these definitions have come from Tim Keller, but they're very helpful. Fruits of the Spirit. Love. The idea of serving a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what that person brings you.

There can be a lot you superficially see where someone appears to be loving, but actually they're really just wanting something back. Joy. This is a delight in God and his salvation for the sheer beauty and worth of who he is.

Peace. Confidence and a rest in the wisdom and control of God more than your own. This is where the rubber hits the road, isn't it?

That we actually wish it wasn't like somehow, sometimes the way God lets things happen, we wish it was very different and we don't trust him. Patience.

[23:32] Forbearance, I think, in our NIV. The ability to take trouble from others or life without blowing up. To suffer joyfully. Kindness.

Practical kindness with vulnerability springing from deep inner security. Goodness. Goodness. Which is an honesty, a transparency.

Being the same person in one situation and another, not being two-faced. Faithfulness. Loyalty. Courage to be principle-driven. Committed. Utterly reliable. You said you're going to do something and you do it. True to one's word.

Gentleness. Self-forgetfulness. And self-control. The ability, Tim Keller sums it up, the ability to choose the important thing over the urgent.

[24:40] So I've mentioned, there are some of those at the back and we can get more. If you find that list interesting and want to look at what the opposites are and what the counterfeits might be, that might be useful.

to encourage us to think, not a bad idea to look through these things and think, where am I, how am I measuring up? You might actually find that your natural temperament puts you in quite good score on some of these things.

But what we're really looking at is for the Spirit of God to be working and He tends to produce it all in us. So there's the summary again of those qualities, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things, it says in our passage, there is no law. Notice the fruit is singular. All of these qualities are meant to grow in us.

With the pace of our modern age and children and younger people who love things to happen quickly, how quickly does this fruit grow in Christians? I'm afraid it takes a long, long time.

[25:56] It takes a long time for these things to grow and there is a great need for patience as we work through these things. But fruit is for all of these things in all of us whereas the gifts of the Spirit, that's another subject, specific things, to one is given such and such a gift and to another, such and such a gift.

That is a very different matter. So I'm going to come back to summary now. I know we've had quite a long session. We live on a battleground.

Don't be deceived to think you live somewhere else. Some of our enemies, well, our primary enemy is very invisible. There is a devil.

There is the evil and he loves to undermine Christians and make them fall and sow thoughts in their head. And when you get voices that are crushing you down and making you ineffective, one bit of advice from the front here would be just think when these voices come at you, where is that voice coming from?

And if it's up to no good, it probably is the devil and learn how to reason with temptations and things like that that come your way. Don't be deceived. We live on a battleground.

[27:15] Ephesians 5 would tell you lots or is it 6 about armor. We're not going there at the moment, but there are various measures to protect yourself in this battle.

But then the challenge of our passage to be led by, to be willing to be led by, and to keep in step with the Spirit, with the Spirit's help to put to death the old nature.

Not just the blatant sin, but to beware of these over desires. And with the Spirit's help to grow this, his beautiful fruit, and to be filled with the Spirit, but remembering that we leak, and I'll throw that picture in again, is the tank nearly empty?

I suspect for some of us, even this morning, we need something fresh from God. We long for something fresh from God. And we need, we do our best actually when we come facing something that we can't sort.

And with empty hands, we're saying to God, help, come, fill me. So we frequently need to come and ask to be filled again.

[28:30] There are things to avoid, and we're not going to dwell much more on it now, but look at these things again and think, are there areas in your life, I don't know what's going on in your private life, but are there areas here that are dishonoring to God and that you just need to work on and be decisive about putting these things away, but neither be crushed when occasionally there is a slip.

That's the other challenge, isn't it? Occasional slips. Don't think, I'm useless, I can't do anything. Seek love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Take time to prayerfully think about how you're doing. And I add this, because some of this you might have all done by yourself, you might just go home, I know exactly what I'm like, I'm going to work this out.

You know the sign of a good, mature Christian, if there is a close buddy who you trust, who you might compare notes with, because I suspect that if I just did an analysis of a scoring of myself on some of these things and then I found someone who really knew me and I compared notes, you know, I don't think they'd be the same.

I really don't. And I would do well to listen to someone I trust. And more of a, I have finished the bit we're doing, but other disciplines that are useful.

[30:05] It's not like if you do these, the Spirit automatically comes and is sensed. But these are things elsewhere taught in the Scripture. It could almost be a series of studies coming. There's things to do with Sabbath, living in simplicity, taking time to be silent.

Jesus did it, didn't he? In his ministry, do we not often hear him going away to pray and to be quiet? Fasting, prayer, Scripture, living in community, generosity, hospitality.

All of those things could be a sermon in their own right. But they, they just get us in the right spirit. I am finished here. Except I will read in Ephesians, just to finish.

I want to read a little bit from Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. This is, I'm skimming from verse 14 onwards in chapter 3.

Paul is praying, verse 16, I pray that out of his glorious riches, Paul is interested that he may strengthen you with power through the Spirit, through his Spirit in your inner being.

[31:29] Does that sound similar to what we have been looking at in our inner being? But why do you need this strengthening with power? This is so interesting, isn't it? So that Christ may dwell in your heart.

