

Live by the Spirit

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Date: 11 April 2010

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[0 : 00] All right, let's go Galatians chapter 5, 16 to 26. Good to have it open. And I want to start tonight by talking about war. Because there is a war going on right now that intimately involves every one of us.

It's been going on for many hundreds, maybe thousands of years. And it's interesting to start a sermon in a Christian church about war because if you ask ten people on the street whether the words Christian and war go together, they would say emphatically no.

Because the popular view of Christians really is that we are limp-wristed choir boys who couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper bag. That's the truth, isn't it? That's the perception.

But if you read your Bible, you'll see that Christians are constantly referred to as soldiers. We are constantly admonished to fight the fight. That we're involved in a battle.

Of course, the war that I'm talking about is the war against our flesh. The war against our sinful nature. The war against Satan. That we're meant to live out every day.

[1 : 10] That we're meant to battle against every single day. It's about perseverance in maintaining your Christian belief. And tonight we're going to hear about this war in terms of how we should battle against the flesh and for the spirit.

How we should live by the spirit and not live according to the flesh. That's how Paul's going to put the two opposing armies against each other.

It's spirit and flesh. It's God and sinfulness. Tonight is all about encouraging us to fight the good fight.

To keep battling away at the Christian life. Now, just to bring us up to speed in Galatians. The whole book up to now. You've heard a lot of repetition.

I think this is week 9. I've lost count. But I think this is week 9 out of 10. And we have heard similar things over and over again. And partly that's because that's the situation that Paul's talking about.

[2 : 10] And the people he is writing to. But also, I think we just need to hear this repeatedly throughout our lives as Christians. That we are saved by grace. Not according to our works.

That we can't fulfill any kind of law to be right with God. We can't add anything to our faith and our right standing with God. Everything is given to us by grace, through faith, because of Jesus.

That's it. And so Paul's been talking a lot about what our identity is. That our identity is in Christ and not in our ability or our lack of ability to fulfill the law.

That we're saved and we're saved into a life that is lived by the Spirit. That's what he's going to talk about tonight. If that's true, if you're saved by grace, to be a Christian, to be a disciple of Jesus, then there's a certain way to live that reflects that truth.

That's what he's going to be talking about. So let's go. Verse 16. We'll just see what he has to say. And tonight, I hope, is going to be a real reality check for us. Just to see where we're at in our Christian walk.

[3 : 20] So verse 16 says this. Live by the Spirit. It just leads off with it. This is what it's all about. Live by the Spirit, I say. And do not gratify the desires of the flesh. Live by the Spirit.

Do not live by the flesh. So there's two opposing ways of living, straight up. You've got a choice in front of you, the way that you're going to live your life. You've got Spirit. You've got flesh.

You have to choose one or the other. No soldier can fight for both sides of the army. You've got to choose one side to fight for. Jesus said it in Matthew 6. I think it's 24.

You can't serve two masters. You'll hate one and love the other. You cannot be a soldier on two opposing armies. You can't live two lives. You can't battle for both sides.

So what are your options tonight? If you're not a believer, you're thinking about becoming a Christian. If you are a believer, but you keep struggling with this life of sin versus this life of living by the Spirit, we'll hear your choices.

[4 : 20] We'll start with a bad choice first. This is not the one you want to go with. It's the one you will go with apart from God. Let's have a look. Verse 19 we'll go to.

It says, Now the works of the flesh, so this life living according to the flesh, it's obvious. It's all about fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

That's what it's about. That's the life lived according to the flesh. That's the life that you want to live if you're left to your own devices. Just take a minute to break it down just so we know exactly what we're talking about.

Start with fornication, impurity, and licentiousness. This is what we would call indulging in your sexual freedom. This is your God-given right if you are living in this generation, which obviously you are.

This is our highest right. And if you try and attack my sexual freedom I will get very, very angry with you. Fornication, that's sex outside of the marriage relationship.

[5 : 41] One man, one woman for life. Outside of that relationship, sexual conduct is fornication. Impurity, licentiousness, just taking license to do whatever you please.

That is what we're on about today. Just ask anybody. That is a big part of my life apart from Christ. I want to explore my sexual freedom.

I want to take, along the way, inevitably take advantage of other people to further my kind of sexual career. And Paul says, if you live like that, you're living according to the flesh.

And every one of us wants to be part of that. Every one of us, whether you admit it or not, you want to fornicate. You want to be impure. You want to take license with people and with sexuality.

That's what the sinful nature tends towards. And so, if you're not saved, that's where you're going to be. And that's where many of us have been. About verse 20, idolatry, sorcery.

[6 : 44] This is what spiritual people like you and me tend towards when we reject God, but we still want spirituality. So, every one of us, the Bible says, is made in the likeness and image of God.

We're made for a relationship with God. We're made to be aware of the spiritual realm. We are more than just animals. We're more than just chunks of meat.

We are image bearers. We're spiritual people. But, what happens when you take someone and you, and they reject the God of the Bible, they reject their creator, they don't always completely tend away from spiritual things and reject spiritual things.

In fact, our generation is probably the most spiritual for many, many years. And so, what happens when you reject the God of the Bible, when you reject Jesus, you tend towards spirituality, alternative spirituality.

And part of that is sorcery or, you know, the kinds of things I'm talking about, Ouija boards or horoscopes or whatever it is. Spirituality. Either you do that or you go towards idolatry or you could do both.

[7 : 48] I'm sure many of us and many people we know do this. But idolatry is more like taking the things that you own, your possessions, your friends, relationships and making them into your God.

So, not necessarily becoming a Buddhist or worshipping some kind of alternative religious figure but rather making what you have into your gods instead.

That's idolatry. Replacing God with anything else, with your boyfriend, girlfriend, girlfriend, with your computer or, you know, you fill the blanks. That's what happens when people reject God, when they're made for a relationship with God.

He continues on. Ennities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions. This is what happens when you do as the world tells you to do and you live for number one.

Right? If you've got advice from anyone in the secular world, maybe a career coach or a secular mentor or someone, they will constantly, constantly encourage you to look out for number one, to climb the ladder at the expense of other people and this is what happens when we live that way, when we live selfish lives, ennities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, it's broken relationships.

[9 : 10] This is what you choose if you go with the flesh. Alright? Let's keep going. There's more. Verse 21, envy. You know, one of the great marks, this is how you can tell if someone's living by the spirit over living by the flesh, is when they're content.

If we get around really older Christians, Christians who have been Christians for 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 years, this is something you might be missing out on if you come to this service only.

Although I think we've got a pretty good age spread at this service compared to many others but if you want to get around some really old Christians, they wouldn't mind me saying this, you need to just set your alarm and get the coffee ready and come down and meet me here at 8am on Sunday morning and you'll meet some really old Christians who have been Christians for many years and they are great to be around because overwhelmingly what comes out of them is contentment.

There's one guy here who's got inoperable cancer. He will die anytime soon and he is constantly beaming, joyful, happy that he's going to be with Jesus, not angry at God, just content.

Now the opposite of contentment is envy. Envy what other people have, envying that blessing that God has given that person, wishing you were in that position, not understanding that your life is unfolding according to God's sovereign will.

[10 : 47] The opposite of contentment is envy. And then he finishes with drunkenness, carousing and things like these.

And I think really what he's talking about here is when people living according to the flesh take good God-given gifts and misuse them and abuse them and suddenly they turn into dreadful, dreadful sins.

So drunkenness and carousing, the whole flavour of that is both obviously drunkenness but also sexual iniquity or bound up with drunkenness.

So carousing can also mean orgies just like any kind of MTV video movie that you can watch on a Saturday morning. It's that kind of dirty, gutter, drunken, drug filled nudity.

It's that kind of thing. That's what he's talking about. And so what people do when they get into those situations they've taken something like alcohol which is a gift from God so if you read I think it's Psalm 104 verse 15 I've needed to use this quite a bit with angry people who don't like me saying this but I believe that alcohol is a good gift from God and Psalm 104 verse 15 I think it says that wine is given by God to gladden the hearts of men.

[12:08] It's a good gift that we ought to enjoy and praise God for. I constantly and frequently say grace before I have a beer just because I am so grateful to God for that gift.

Now what can happen is though and you know this is you can take a good gift like that and overdo it and suddenly it becomes the centre of such dreadful, dreadful sin.

The Bible emphatically says do not get drunk and yet we do it don't we? We fall into that and more the more so if you're living according to the flesh because you'll have no limits.

Again with carousing it's taking something like sex which is a beautiful gift of God an amazing beautiful thing to be shared with your wife or husband and we can turn it into orgies we can turn it into all kinds of iniquity and filth.

Paul says if you're going to go with the flesh that's where you're going to end up. And just to make sure you know he's really serious he says this in verse 21 second part I am warning you as I warned you before those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[13:26] Let's let that wash over you. I am warning you talking to the church as I warned you before those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

You won't go to heaven. Seriously. Now when I first read that a few years ago I tried to figure out what he really meant because he couldn't mean that if you do those things you won't go to heaven.

So that sounds a lot like what he's been saying is not the case in that you can your works contribute to whether you go to heaven or hell. But listen this is how it works. First of all you need to understand the Greek grammar behind this sentence.

So when it says those who do such things I think the Greek word there is prosontes and it's where we get our word practice. So it's those who practice are in the practice of doing these things.

It's about habitual ongoing sin. So it's not like if you got drunk once you had five beers too many that's it you're going to hell. It's not like that. But if you continually find yourself getting drunk and habitually and deliberately sin in that way or any of the other ways that he talks about not just drunkenness I mean the harder ones like jealousy quarrels if you habitually find yourself in that practice you will not inherit the kingdom of God because you're not persevering in Christian faith.

[15:00] You're showing yourself not to be saved is what he's saying. It's not that you can you either are a good little Christian church boy and you go to heaven or you're one of those bad guys who drinks and goes to hell it's not that.

It's just that if you continue in this kind of sin you reveal to everyone that you were never saved in the first place. You're not living as a Christian or to live in response to being saved purely by grace.

Does that make sense? Form a line after the service and we'll talk about it. Those who are in the practice of doing these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Why? Because it's in opposition to Jesus. You're fighting the battle against Jesus and other Christians. You've switched teams. verse 17 this is all about the war.

For what the flesh desires what your sinful natural inclination is what that desires is opposed to the spirit and what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.

[16:11] For these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want. I love that sentence. God knows that what you want is all that sinful stuff because it's really enjoyable in the short term until you start getting your life ripped apart.

But we're not saying it's not enjoyable. We're just saying it's not what God has created us for. God understands that you tend to want to indulge in that sinful activity.

And so the spirit opposes that kind of mentality, that fleshly way of living to show you and to prevent you from doing what you want. Some Christians say that Christians shouldn't struggle with sin.

You've been saved from your sins. Christ died for you on the cross. He was raised to new life. Your sinful nature has been crucified with Christ.

You've been raised with him. Heaven starts now in a way. Maybe perfection is possible. God says be perfect. Christians ought not to struggle with these things but I disagree with that.

[17:29] I think all of us struggle with sin. All of us struggle with one or all of these things that he's talking about, living according to the flesh. Constantly.

We get beaten down and we have to get up and then the battle sways against us and we have to pray for strength to fight back. That's what this life is all about. But the issue is are you persevering or are you giving in?

Paul says it like this in Romans 7. Listen to this. Romans 7:18 to 19. Now these same people on the other side of the debate say that he's just talking about unbelievers in this passage.

I don't think that's true. I think he's talking about believers like you and me. Now listen. Is this you? Romans 7:18 to 19. He wants to please God but he can't.

He doesn't want to commit sin but he does. That's what characterizes the Christian life. Sometimes more intensely than in other seasons but constantly we're doing what we don't want to do and not doing what we want to do.

[18:54] That's the battle that we're fighting against the flesh day by day. That's the war that's going on that we need to be serious about fighting. Now what does it look like?

If you want to fight the good fight if you want to live by the spirit what does that mean? What does that look like? What kind of things should you be looking for in your life that are evidence that you are actually fighting and not just giving in?

That you are persevering and not falling away from faith? Verse 22 Follow this with me. By contrast in opposition to all of those terrible things the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

That's the goal for our life. That we would grow more and more into those attributes. Let's take a look at them a little bit closer. Love. This is the most important. This is why it's written first.

Love is the most important attribute that we can have. It's the closest thing to God's heart. God is love, the Bible says. And so love should be abounding in us.

[20:18] We should have more love for people than impatience with people, more love for people than hatred for people. Love for God and for his people is the most important attribute we can have.

Very close to love is joy next on the list. God wants us to be joyful. Sometimes you get around Christians and you lose that fact entirely.

We tend to be a pretty solemn group sometimes. But no, the Bible says we ought to be joyful, like bursting out of your skin joyful. Why? Because Christ has forgiven you.

Because Jesus rose again which guarantees that you will do the same, that you've got an eternity of heaven in front of you. that God chose you to be saved, not because you're a great person, but because of his grace in Christ.

That should make you joyful. That should make you sing when we sing songs. That should make you intently listening to the sermons because you want to learn more about the God who saved you. This is the kind of attribute that should be, the aroma of joy should be around us at all times, even in hard times.

[21:33] Joy in Christ is key. Then peace. In the midst of this war that's going on, I'm not taking anything away from the reality of the war, the battle, the day by day slog in the trenches Christian life that all of us are in.

We ought to have peace. Just peace with God because of what Jesus did. God is not our enemy anymore. He used to be. He's no longer our enemy.

We receive love from God, not wrath. We should also have peace about our situation in life, that we are in the hands of a sovereign God. That's where the next one comes in, patience.

Knowing that God is sovereign, trusting in his plan, that he is working all things together according to his will. Patience. Maybe you're single and you'd really like to be married.

Maybe you really want to have kids but you can't have them. Maybe you've got a terrible illness or just a lot of pain. All of that requires patience. All of that requires you to trust in a sovereign God who loves you, who has saved you.

[22:41] Patience is an attribute that we ought to be growing in day by day. Kindness. This is just simple goodness, sympathy, compassion towards other people.

You understand that God has saved you. You understand that other people are made in his image and because you don't live for number one, you're free to live for everyone else, as a servant of everyone else.

That flows into the next one, generosity. Understanding that God has lavished more grace on you, more favour on you, more forgiveness on you than you could ever, ever fathom.

Don't think that you had little sins forgiven in order to become a Christian. know you had massive God crucifying sins that God saved you from and he lavished generously forgiveness on you and so we ought to be the same towards others, generous with our money, generous with our time, generous in compassion, in mercy, in love.

What about faithfulness? This is not just faithfulness towards God, that's obvious, but I think the flavour also of it is that we should be faithful in our conduct.

[23:59] Jesus said, let your yes be yes and your no be no. One of the things Paul rallies against more than drunkenness and carousing in his letters is that kind of slipperiness that sometimes grows in us, that deceitfulness, you know, faithfulness ought to mark the way that we live.

We're true to our word. gentleness. Jesus said in Matthew 11, 29 that he was gentle and because he was gentle, people who were burdened, people who were broken could come to him and find rest.

That's the connection he made. I'm gentle, my yoke is easy, if you're broken, come to me and you'll find rest. And I think part of what it means for us to be gentle is that we can have people come to us and feel refreshed.

We're going to have broken people come to us and feel like things are a little bit easier because they've spent time with us. That our gentleness affords them to have their wounds healed.

It's the kind of Christian I want to be around when suffering happens. I want to be around a gentle Christian who can heal me, who can refresh me.

[25 : 15] That's what gentleness is about. And self-control. And this is one of the most important when we're talking about this resisting the flesh. What is it to have self-control?

This is what you might think it's about. This is what I've lived most of my life thinking it's about. It's that we have all these sinful desires. We want to fornicate, we want to get drunk, we want to carouse, we want to get angry, we want to do all of these things.

And so what we need to do is just white knuckle it and turn our desires away from that and start living these kind of things. I need to be more loving, joyful, peaceful and so on.

But it's not just about an act of the will, it's about being empowered by the Holy Spirit to be able to live that way. That self-control is not just about being disciplined and being a good soldier, though it is about those things, but we miss a vital ingredient in all of this if we fail to see that it's the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to kill our sin.

So many young guys I talk to are just bashing the head against the wall trying to get over these habitual sins and you won't achieve it on your own strength. You can't.

[26 : 33] You always tend towards sin. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit would empower us to live self-controlled lives, disciplined lives, lives of a disciple, a disciplined follower of Jesus.

If you don't have the power grounded by the Holy Spirit, then you will fail. You've already failed. And he says there is no law against such things.

So often people look at Christianity as a bunch of rules that we need to obey and if you just took this out of context you might say Christianity is all about rules. He's just saying don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, do this, do this, do this.

It's what I thought Christianity is just a rule book. But Paul the whole way through this book has been talking about the fact that there is no rule book.

There is no law that you need to fulfill. And what he's saying here is there is no law against such things and what he's really trying to say is that if you do these things, if you live this kind of life, if these things, these attributes are growing in you, then you will have fulfilled the law.

[27 : 49] Fulfilled the law a lot more genuinely, in a lot more godly way than any kind of Jewish ceremonial law. That if you live this way, you will be close to God's heart, that you will be fulfilling the law in the most genuine godly way.

Love God, love your neighbour as yourself. There is no law against these things. It says in verse 18 as well, if you are led by the Spirit, if you live by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

law. So what does it mean to live by the Spirit? I think it actually, quite apart from obeying a bunch of rules, is about living a life of freedom.

To live a Spirit-filled life, to live according to the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, is all about freedom. Christianity is about freedom.

For freedom, Christ has set you free. We're free to live life according to God's will. We are free to call on Him to empower us to live this kind of life.

[29 : 09] We're not subject to the law. We're not subject to a bunch of rules. We are free, the subject of none and the servant of all.

We need to see every opportunity, every day as an opportunity to grow more and more like Jesus. I tell you the prayer that I pray most often and the prayer I pray every time that Renee and I sit down together and do our thing, I always pray, Lord, please make us more like Jesus.

That's the kind of prayer you want on your lips every day. Jesus personified every one of those, I was going to say fruits, they're not individual fruits, they're just one fruit.

You can't pick and choose, you get all of them if you live by the Spirit. Jesus personified these things and we ought to be asking every day, Lord, make me more like your son, make me more like Jesus, make me more loving just like Jesus, to be as joyful as Jesus was, to have the kind of peace that Jesus has and so on.

That's the big idea, take away that piece of advice, please pray, God, make me more like Jesus. I tell you what I reckon, you should probably take a photocopy of this verse 22 and 23 or write it out even better and just use it as a gauge.

[30 : 36] Just use it to kind of question your soul, to say am I growing in love? Am I experiencing more joy? Do I have a kind of peace about me that is indicative of the trust I have in God?

Am I a patient person? Do I show kindness to others or am I more concerned with myself? Am I generous?

Am I faithful to God and to my brothers and sisters? Do I have the kind of gentle spirit that attracts people who are broken and needy and refreshes them?

Do I have self-control to resist temptation and Satan and the flesh? These are the kind of questions we need to be asking and if the answer continually and habitually is no, I'm not growing, I just keep stuffing up, I keep tripping over these things, then hear Paul's warning, you won't inherit the kingdom of God.

God, if you continue in these things, but also, rather than despair, use that as a spur to make war on your sin, make declare war on it and pray that God would give you power by the Holy Spirit to overcome those things.

[32 : 01] God, if you will, I'd love to pray for us now and ask God for his help.

It's easy to get up and preach about these things and it's really hard to live it out. War is never easy, battle is never anything but a struggle and a slog, but I'm going to ask and pray that God would help us to do these things.

Jesus, let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, we need your help to live day by day as a Christian.

We need your help not to interpret this as a bunch of laws to be obeyed, not to see it as an opportunity to earn our salvation. please help us to read this rightly please help us to shun sinful ways to shun living according to the flesh to embrace a life that's lived by the spirit Lord please give us power by your Holy Spirit to overcome all of our sins and particularly those that we find ourselves struggling with over and over again Lord please help us never to give up the struggle against our flesh to never stop persevering to never give up on the battle and give us encouragement together as one army together to keep fighting together in Jesus name Amen