

Walk in the Spirit

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[0:00] Let's turn back to our reading in Galatians chapter 5. We're going to look at this section, verse 16, down to the end of the chapter. Just read again these words at the beginning of the chapter.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Walk by the Spirit. Have you sinned this week?

Or should I ask maybe, how often have you sinned this week? Because that's the reality of the lives that we live.

We all sin in so many different ways. And there's a phrase used nowadays about people who are continually in and out of prison.

It's maybe been used for quite some time now. It's those who maybe commit a crime, they're sent to prison, maybe they're only in for a short time. But before you know it, they're back in prison.

[0:59] And the phrase they use is repeat offenders. They are repeat offenders. They're released, but soon after re-offend. And this kind of cycle just goes on and on.

Unless there's something that will come in to break that cycle. But it's not just about those who are in prison in that sense of being put in jail that this can apply to.

You can apply it to the church here in Galatia. You could apply it to ourselves. The church in Galatia falls into this bracket because what we have as we read through this letter is a sense of being set free.

The people being set free in Christ. But then within a short space of time finding themselves falling back into what we would call the bondage of sin.

Sin just coming in. That repeat offending just going on and on. And you think, well, if they've been set free in Christ, surely that's the way that they will go on.

[2:01] That's the way that they will continue. But just look at our own lives as well, even as we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. How often do we find ourselves slipping back into the old ways?

Slipping back into sinning against God? It doesn't leave us. It doesn't go. And so often part of it is mainly our own fault, our own responsibility, because we are neglecting the things of God.

And that was true with the people in Galatia, as it is probably true of ourselves. But what can we do about this? Are you a real offender today?

I am. I know I am. Because God's word tells me. Even as you go through the end of this chapter, chapter 5, all you have to do is read through verse 19 to verse 21.

And there you're brought into the kind of the works of the flesh, as it's called there. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of...

[3:06] You know, the list goes on. And can you not go through that list today and think to yourself, oh man, I've failed. I've sinned. I know I have because I can see myself in so many of these things.

I am a real offender. I sinned before God. And that can give us a sense of feeling helpless. It can leave us feeling, well, what can we do?

How can we change? And is it about ourselves changing? Is it about what we do? Well, no. It's a reminder to us that there's only one who can make a difference.

And that is God. God through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And God through his Spirit, as we see in this passage. Walk by the Spirit, by the Spirit of God.

Because we all struggle in different ways. But God is there to help us. And the Word of God just reminds us of that.

[4:12] It's remarkable how you see these same struggles right throughout the Bible. So many people who you would think, oh, but they must have been so much better than us.

In chapter 4 of this letter, Galatians, Paul makes reference to Abraham and Sarah and Hagar. They're from the Old Testament, from the book of Genesis. And the struggles that they had. They struggled. And you think, Abraham, he was a man sent by God. He was a father of the faith. Surely, he didn't have these struggles. But yes, he did. He struggled to trust God with his wife, Sarah. That God could take care of every situation that they were in. And instead, they took things into their own hands. Just like us. Just like the way we live so often. That we will do things that God cannot take care of it. And you think of Paul himself, who wrote this letter. [5:13] He was a man who had a real past of many regrets, many sins. But was he completely changed? In many ways, you say yes.

But he still had struggles, as we read of in Romans chapter 7, which he wrote as well. And his words in verse 19. For what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing. How many times this week have you said something similar? How many times have you said, I wish I hadn't done that? How many times have you said this week, I wish I hadn't said that? How many times this week have you said, I wish I hadn't behaved like that? Again and again we can relate to these words. The good I want to do, I do not do. And so we are repeat offenders. It's a common struggle. [6:18] It's a real struggle. And it's a struggle that reminds us that we cannot overcome sin alone. We cannot overcome it by ourselves.

And that's where we are thankful we can turn to the word of God. Because as Paul says in Romans 7 verse 24, when he says, What a wretched man I am again. Have we said that this week? Have we asked the question that he then asked, Who will rescue me from this body of death? Well, he's able to say, Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is able to rescue us. And that's what we have a reminder of here in chapter 5 of Galatians as well.

Very similar to what Paul is saying in Romans. The struggle that is real. The struggle that is evident. I want us to think about it in two ways this morning. [7:20] First of all, we see the Christians' conflict. The struggle that is ongoing. The Christians' conflict. And then secondly, we see the Christians' harmony.

The way that we are able to find help. So the first thing we see is the Christians' conflict. Are you in control of your life today?

Are you feeling that sense of, I've got my plans, I've got my purposes? Are you winning in life, as many people would put it? Do you feel things are going well? Well, the answer probably depends on how you view life. And especially when it comes to thinking, Am I winning in the sense of walking with God? Someone once said that the Christian life is not a playground. It is a battlefield. Not a playground, but a battlefield.

[8:23] But how are you treating your life? How are you living your life? We've all maybe been in the playground. Maybe some of us are still in our younger days. We're in the playground. And there you think that life is fun.

There's this light-hearted nature to life. Not much as serious. But as you go on in years, and as you go on in life, you find it's not a playground at all.

It's a battlefield. It's a struggle. But have we or are we maturing in that sense? Are we growing in that sense of seeing life in all of its differences, all of its varieties, and all of its struggles? And recognizing that, hold on a minute. There's something serious about life here. It's not just frivolous. It's not just doing what I like, what I enjoy.

But there are consequences to things. Paul here is speaking to the Galatians about two different types of lives that they can live. The first, we all live.

[9:33] But the second, we can only live through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The first life he's speaking of here is the sinful life. The life, as he calls it, under the flesh, with the desires of the flesh.

The other is the life that we have through the Spirit. And they both have an outline of what this entails. There's lists for each of them.

If you are living a life of the flesh, he gives you a list of things that you are caught up in. If you are to live a life in the Spirit, then he gives you a list that is very different.

But what does he say about them? He's saying that they are contrary to one another. They are at conflict with one another. There is this battle going on, as he says there in the end of verse 17. 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. Similar to what Paul was saying in Romans.

[10:38] To keep you from doing the things you want to do. There's this battle going on. We are all born in sin. We are all born sinners.

And therefore, you could almost say we just sin in our very nature, in our very being. But the grace of the Lord Jesus is able to set us free.

That's what Paul says at the beginning of this chapter. Christ has set us free. But that's not just being free from the struggle of sin entirely.

That struggle goes on while we are in this world. We struggle with sin because we are repeat offenders. You see it time and a time again. Paul warns that we struggle in this freedom.

That we can easily fall back. And sin can so easily just take over our lives once more. He's warned of it at the end of that section. And in the beginning of this chapter, verse 1 to 15.

[11:38] The end in verse 15. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. There's this turning against one another. Don't be consumed by one another.

And so now he's going on in verse 16 to the end of the chapter to give us warning. To be on our guard against this sinful struggle that life entails.

And you could almost put it into four different categories. In verse 17. Now the work of the flesh are evident. And then he goes on to give a list of things there.

You could put it into four categories. Four problem areas in Galatians.

The days of Paul writing to the Galatians. And many other churches that he was writing to. But areas that we all struggle with. So many struggle with in our day as well.

[12:40] When you think of life of the flesh. As he is talking about here. And life of the spirit. Being contrary to each other. Against each other.

We are reminded of how Jesus spoke about there being two paths in life. Two ways that we can go. There is the broad road. And there is the narrow road.

And here initially we've got the broad way. The way that so many walk in today. And it's almost like we live in a world that says. If this isn't the way that you are walking.

Then you are not normal. But this is the way that everyone should live their lives. This broad way.

And think about the broad way that you see here. Paul outlining in verse 17.

He's talking there about the broad way of relationships. In verse 17 he says. The desires of the flesh are against the spirit.

[13:41] The desires of the spirit are against the flesh. For they are opposed to each other. But then if you are led by the spirit. It's to be different. But in verse 19 he says. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality. Impurity. Sensuality. These are all things related to relationships. Relationships. Relationships that we see our world saying. Just do what you want.

Live how you want. Be free to do what you want. Going against what God has given us. And ordained for us. But one man and one woman being together.

All of these kinds of things. The world says the flesh is. That doesn't matter. That makes no difference. But it leads us away to destruction.

And the same is true for all of these things. Think about the way of religion. He's talking there in verse 17. The works of the flesh are idolatry and sorcery.

[14:39] What has God said to us? He has said you will have no other gods before me. But yet here the works of the flesh are going down a way where we see. We can have many gods.

And any god that we want. It doesn't matter. Think of the broad way of society. We are told we can just live as we want.

You see it here when it speaks about enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy.

All of these things. How often have you struggled with that this week? How often have you sinned in these ways this week? Rivalry, jealousy, ambition.

Everything coming between us and the people around us and between us and God. There are so many struggles that we have there. The broad way of socializing we have here as well as Paul

warns against drunkenness, orgies and things like these.

[15:48] We think our own day, our own nation has its struggles with drunkenness and immorality and all of these issues. It's not a new thing.

It's been there for years. It was rife in the days of Paul. As he went round all these different places, this was a great problem. And he's saying these struggles are real.

So when you go through all of these things, ask yourself, are you in control of your life? Are you handling all of these things well? Are you not sinning in any of these areas?

We struggle. And if we struggle and go on struggling, he says you will not inherit the kingdom of God. There are consequences.

Broad is a way that leads to destruction. But he's not saying you will not inherit the kingdom if you have committed these sins at any time.

[16:51] He is saying you will not inherit the kingdom if you are going on sinning. If you keep on going in these ways. But if you are struggling with these things today, don't despair.

Yes, they can leave us feeling hopeless just like Paul. Wretched man that I am. Because there's a Christian struggle. But we see here there is also the Christian's harmony.

So instead of being in conflict, instead of just being struggling without any hope, we realize that there is a way to find hope even in our struggles.

And that is to walk by the Spirit. When we walk by the Spirit, there's this harmony then with the Lord and with others. As Jesus taught, there's another way, not just the broad way that leads to destruction, but there is a narrow path, and that road leads to life.

And only a few will find it. As Paul said in Romans 7 verse 25, Who will help me?

[18:01] Who will rescue me? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And that is our great hope today. That in all the struggles with our sins, in all the struggles with our fears, and our worries, and our anxieties, thanks be to God that we can have victory.

And it's through the Spirit we will find this harmony. As we see in verse 16, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Walk by the Spirit. This literally means, wherever you go, and as you go, walk with the Spirit.

Don't leave the Spirit behind. Don't leave the Spirit of God at a place outside a door that you go through and think, I'll do my own thing now.

I'll live my own way, and then I'll come back to the Spirit. This is saying, be led by the Spirit.

Because He is your helper. Have Him with you at all times.

[19:13] And that word, being led, is linked to having a helper. And you think of those who have been released from prison. They're not just left to go off their own way with no one alongside them.

Most of them are given a parole officer, someone they have to report to, someone to keep an eye on them. And this is for us as well, what we have here. We are repeat offenders.

We keep on sinning. But it's not that we don't have anyone to help. We have the Holy Spirit, the one who is called alongside, the parole officer, if you like. He is there to help us.

So if we walk by the Spirit, that we are helped to overcome the desires of the flesh. Through the Spirit and walking by the Spirit, we come closer to God and the one who is able to help us.

Because there is this ongoing conflict. You see it here in verse 17. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.

[20:20] For they are opposed to each other to keep me from doing the things you want to do. Martin Luther, the one who was used by God back in the 16th century to bring a reformation to the church.

You think of him. He must have been a godly man. He must have been so close to God. And everything was going well with him. He struggled. He struggled in life.

And it was this verse, verse 17 in Galatians chapter 5, that really helped him to see that struggle and where his help would come from.

He had the same struggle as Paul, for what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing. But when Martin Luther was suffering under this weight of guilt in his sin, a Christian friend of his called Johannes Staupitz said, Martin, quit looking at your sin and start looking at Jesus.

He was so focused on where he was going wrong. He was taking his eyes off Jesus. And isn't that great advice to you and to me?

[21:41] When we are seeing ourselves just caught up in this life of sin, feeling hopeless, stop looking at your sin and start looking at Jesus.

Keep your eyes on him. That is what Paul is saying here as he goes on. As he goes on to speak about walking in the Spirit. And he speaks then of the fruit of the Spirit in verse 22.

We are to be careful how we walk. But then he does give us ways to walk.

If we are to walk in the Spirit, how are we walking? How are we to keep ourselves in step with the Spirit? You maybe think there's going to be something dramatic, something powerful, maybe something only that a few people can do.

And yet as Paul is teaching here, there's a simplicity to it. There's a simplicity to these things, the fruits of the Spirit. And if we practice these things, we find ourselves then walking closely to the Lord.

[22:59] And that is what keeps us. That is what guards us. And just look at the list there, the fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

I'm sure if you look through the first list, the fruits of the flesh, if you like, you see yourself there and you're saying, I failed, I failed, I failed.

What about when you read the second list, the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, patience. Do you say again, oh, I failed.

I failed to show love. I failed to have joy. I failed to show patience. I failed to be kind. again, it can leave us feeling helpless and hopeless again.

But it's not there to make us feel worse. It's there to remind us what we have as we come close to God once again. Love.

[24:06] Love. Love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. We are to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourself.

We cannot do that by ourselves. We need God to help us. Joy. Joy. So often the fruits of the flesh are what the world will tell us.

This is where you will find joy. But there's no joy. But the fruit of the Spirit is joy. Real joy. True joy. The joy of the Lord as our strength, as it says in Nehemiah.

Patience. Peace. We so often feel that we're lacking peace. But walk with the Spirit. Walk close to God.

And He can give you a peace that passes understanding. Patience. We fail so often to be patient.

[25:07] But again, come close to the Lord. Walk in the Spirit. Trust in the Lord Jesus. He gives you a patience. Kindness.

This is what we are to do to those around us. Instead of jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, the fruit of the Spirit is the opposite.

Kindness. Goodness. Christian love in action. Faithfulness. An ability to trust God and obey Him.

Gentleness. A restraint. It's not a weakness. But it's more what you would describe as power under control.

Self-control. Refusing to do the things that you have in your power to do that you know are wrong. who can rescue me from these things?

[26:12] Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. So we have this list not to make us feel worse, but to bring us closer.

To recognize our sin in the list of the flesh, but to recognize the grace of God as we walk by the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

When you look to the list of the fruit of the Spirit, they're so opposite to the majority of life that we see around us. It's about pleasing ourselves, living for ourselves.

But as we looked at recently in our communion weekend, Romans 12 verse 1 and 2, we are to offer our lives as a living sacrifice.

And that is part of what our walking in the Spirit is. Giving ourselves over to God. It's not my desires that are first and foremost, but yours.

[27:20] Take my life, we see. let it be consecrated to them, given to God. So there's a reminder for us here to be faithfully living a life in the Spirit.

There's a sense of this almost being a quiet behind-the-scenes way of living. It's a call to be faithful, a call to be close to God.

And it's there for us, for every one of us. Not just for some, but for all. It doesn't look impressive, maybe, to the world.

Maybe it looks too simple for ourselves today. But it's there for our reason. It's there for our good. It's there because it's the narrow way that leads to life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we are to walk by the Spirit. How would you judge the success of an inmate who's been released from prison? How would you judge if it's been a success?

[28:33] Well, very often it's those you don't hear anything of again. they go back out of prison. They've turned from that way of life.

And they live a quieter, better way of life. they don't re-offend. We are repeat offenders ourselves. But what would be a success story in your life, in my life today? Would it not be just to go on quietly living, knowing that we sin, but not to go on seeing as that is the only way, but to see a better way and to seek to walk close to the Spirit, a life close to Him.

Because as we do, the fruit of the Spirit is then ours. And we can live in light of all of these things, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Come and walk with Him. That is the invitation of the gospel, to find your freedom in Christ, not to go on sinning, but to come and walk closely with Him, knowing that even then in our sin, we have one who is able to forgive us.

[30:05] But day by day, coming closer, walking with Him, learning and living in light of His Word. Let us pray.

Lord, our gracious God, we do thank You for Your Word that so often challenges us, it convicts us, for we know our sins that are many.

But we thank You too, Lord, that reminds us of Your mercy, Your mercy that's always more, Your mercy that helps us to overcome, and Your mercy that helps us to live more closely to You.

and we pray, Lord, that You would help us to know the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives, that that is how we would long to live and how we would long to walk, with that helper beside us, with that helper with us.

So teach us by Your Word and guide us through Your Spirit, as we ask all in the name of Jesus. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 56, the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 56.

[31:20] We'll sing from verse 10 down to the end of the Psalm, Psalm 56, page 74, the tune of Stuttgart.

In the Lord, whose word I honour, in my God, I praise His Word, I will trust and not be fearful, what can man do to me, Lord? We'll sing from verse 10 to the end of the Psalm to God's praise.

In the Lord's word I honour, in my God I praise His word.

I will trust and not be fearful, what can man do to me, Lord?

I have taken hours before you, to my God I will be true, sacrifice of thanksgiving!

[32:39] I will gladly give to you, for you kept my feet from stumbling, and from death you set me free, so that I may walk before you, and the light of life may see.

after the benediction I'll go to the door to my right, we'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more.

Amen.

Thank you.