

Walking in the Spirit

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 0 0] Two nights ago, as I was coming to church, I had a battle in my soul. I was running late. I needed a place to park. The garage was full, and the spots out back that are reserved for the church were filled with delivery trucks.

I confess, I cherished sinful thoughts in my heart. I thought about jumping into the Amazon truck that clearly was running and driving away and parking it somewhere else.

I thought about simply parking my van next to their truck and leaving it stuck. I actually thought about letting air out of their tires.

I'm not proud of this. The battle for my soul was real, and I sinned in my thoughts, if not in my actions. I wanted to be a better Christian. I wanted to think godly thoughts, but in my own power, I was struggling greatly.

Today, I want to talk about how we can actually live the Christian life the way God wants us to. Many of us here want to follow Christ, want to live lives that reflect Him, and sometimes we feel like we can fake it well enough to start to feel good about ourselves for a while.

[1 : 2 6] And yet, this is a struggle, is it not? There's a booklet that I used when I worked for Crew describing this condition.

It says this, people who trust in their own efforts and strength to live the Christian life will experience failure and frustration, as will those who live to please themselves rather than God.

How do we escape this failure and frustration in our Christian lives? This is what our passage this morning will bring us to, will help us to understand.

So, if you are reading along in the Pew Bibles, we are in Galatians chapter 5, verses 16 through 26. It's on page 915, 916 in the Pew Bible, and we're going to go ahead and read that passage and then pray together.

So, please follow along with me as I read God's Word. Galatians chapter 5, starting in verse 16. But I say, walk in the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[2 : 3 6] 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.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Now, the works of the flesh are evident in 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 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, gentleness, faithfulness, 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 walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Let's pray together. Lord, help us this morning as we look into this Word. Lord, as we consider what it is that You have called us to, and what it is that You have done to help us.

[4 : 0 0] Lord, we pray, O Lord, we pray. We pray for Your work in our hearts. Lord, that You would fill us with Your Holy Spirit, that we might walk in the power of Your Spirit each day.

Lord, I pray for Your help, that You would help me to speak as I ought this morning. Pray that under the preaching of Your Word, we would all sit, Lord, and that You would do Your work in us.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, if you were here two weeks ago, you will know that we've already preached on this passage. So, if you were here today and you weren't here two weeks ago, let me strongly encourage you to go to our website, go back and listen to the first sermon, which is an explanation of the whole passage.

And as I said two weeks ago, today is almost like a full-on application sermon. So, we're going to talk about what does this look like? What does it look like to live a faithful Christian life by depending on the power of the Holy Spirit?

Our key text that we're leaning into this morning is verse 25. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. What does that look like? What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

[5 : 19] And this is our outline. This is where we're going to go. First, we're going to talk about principles of walking in the Spirit. Secondly, we're going to talk about practices of walking in the Spirit. And finally, we're going to return to the question of power of walking in the Spirit.

So, that's where we're going this morning. So, we're going to start with principles of depending on the Spirit. There are things that I feel like we need to say before we get into examples about the broad understanding of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

Richard's going to put up a slide with a number of texts. We're not going to read all of them because we would be here till 1 o'clock this afternoon. But I almost never say this, but if you want to take out your phone, take a picture of that, or write down those texts while I'm walking through them, I'm going to give you six principles from these texts that you can then go back and read these Scriptures later to consider more fully.

So, here we go. First one is that the Holy Spirit's purpose is to glorify Christ as He comes into our life. This is what Jesus tells us in John 16.

It says, He will glorify me when He comes. So, the Holy Spirit is here to magnify Christ in our lives. The second thing we need to say is that all believers in Christ have the Spirit of God in them.

[6 : 42] So, Ephesians 1, 13 and 14 refers to all believers as sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. That is, that the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within every believer.

So, it is not something we need to get after the fact, but something we get at the moment of salvation. The third principle is this. Looking at Titus 3, 3 through 7, that is, the Holy Spirit comes to transform us.

That though we had old practices when we were enslaved to sin, through the washing and regeneration, that is, the giving of new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit allows us to forsake an old life and to take on a new life because we've been justified and saved by Christ, redeemed to be new people, God's people in the world.

The fourth principle is that the battle between the desires of our sinful nature, what we are apart from Christ, and God's Spirit in us as believers, the ongoing battle is real.

Let me refer to my sermon two weeks ago. Go back and listen to it. Galatians 5, 16 and 17 says, these desires exist within Christians and are in opposition to one another.

[8 : 00] And so this battle is normal. The fifth principle is that the process, the picture of growth for a Christian is to put off sin and to put on being more like Christ.

This is Ephesians 4, verses 20 through 24. And it talks about having a former manner of life that you forsake, that you'd get rid of. This is the same idea we talked about last week.

In 1 John, the end of 1 John 1 and the beginning of 1 John 2, that we can't say that we have no sin, but when we confess our sin, God is faithful and just, and we turn from that sin and repentance and turn towards a new life that God is able to give us because of the forgiveness that we have in Christ.

Finally, verse 6. The sixth principle in all of this as we think about is that the battle between our sinful nature and God's Spirit at its core is fought at the heart level, not at a behavioral level.

In Mark 7, Jesus reminds the people, it's not what happens on the outside of us that defiles us, but it's that our hearts are defiled and what comes out of us is what is truly the problem.

[9 : 20] And so when God comes to redeem us, part of what He says, remember the new covenant promise, He will give us a new heart, then we will know God's law and do it. He wants our hearts to be transformed, not simply so that we look like better Christians, but so that we are transformed people who love God and out of that love, display the characteristics of God more and more.

So it is about our heart transformation. Right? And so this is the big picture of what the Holy Spirit is doing, and that was my like five minutes of the doctrine of sanctification, sort of.

It's not even complete by any means, but it's a beginning of thinking about this. And part of what this passage that Paul is giving us in chapter 5 in the whole thing from 16 to 26 is to say, God has given you as believers the Holy Spirit.

Don't go back to living in your old way because He's given you the power to live in a different way. We are able to engage in this battle against our sin nature and not only engage in it, but we're able to see the fruit of the Spirit in increasing measure in our lives.

So as commentator Tom Schreiner says, he says, Christians should know that we have because of work of Christ a new quality of life that is the result of the Spirit's work.

[10:49] The old age no longer reigns over believers. The old Adam has been crucified with its passions and desires so that the flesh no longer enslaves believers.

In other words, believers enjoy a substantial, significant, and observable victory in their new life in Christ. Since believers live in the interval between the already and the not yet, perfection is not their portion.

And yet we should be living with hope that God is doing, God has done for us what is necessary for us to have a growing ability to show and display Christ-likeness in us.

And Paul's wanting to encourage us to do that, to say, you believer, don't give in to sin. Don't think that sin continues to control your life and you are helpless.

God has given you His Spirit so that you can not only fight this battle, but incrementally, but certainly have a trajectory towards Christ-likeness and away from sin.

[12:02] So that's the first point. This is what God is doing. These are the principles. So the practice, what does it actually look like? I'm going to give you a definition briefly and then I'm going to give you, we're going to spend a bunch of time on examples.

I'm hoping you guys will get a sense from these examples of what it might look like to actually fight this battle on a fairly granular level. Here's the definition. How do we fight this battle against sin? How do we walk in the Spirit? We walk by faith. And that means trusting in and depending on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to apply the Word of God and the work of Christ to transform us so that we might increasingly reflect the character and love of Christ in our lives. Okay? So it's a walk of faith, trusting and depending on God to do work in us through His Word focused on the work of Christ to bring transformation.

There's a lot there. I wish I could preach a whole sermon on that idea. But let's keep going. What does it look like? What does it look like? And here's the thing that I need you to hear from right up front.

[13:22] There's no three-step program. I love Crew. They created a great little booklet, but it's not a booklet that you can get through in eight pages and then go, oh, I know how to do this.

It's not. At one level, it's a much more dynamic reality of our relationship with God. And so I want you to hear me not giving three-step programs, but principles that you can apply.

In fact, I'm going to give you portraits and you can pick and choose and see what's going to be helpful for you as you think about this battle. So first, sexual temptation.

I raise this because it's in the passage, right, and because it's such a powerful part of our world today, right? And the sin here, the desire of the flesh, is that we engage in sexual immorality for selfish gain, right?

It is sexual action outside of God's covenantal structure of marriage where we end up actually using others to serve ourselves.

[14:28] And I just want to say this, even when it's consensual, it's still sinful when we do this to one another, when we engage in sexual activity in such a way that we dishonor God and His plans.

We dishonor God's good plan for sex because He made it and it is good. And it's an expression of a human desire for intimacy. And in the right context, it should be celebrated.

But in the wrong context, it has great destructive power. Now, here's the thing. We are rarely simply overcome with sexual temptation out of the blue.

We live in a world where we are saturated with it. There is a ton of external stimuli, whether it be in our movies or in our music, whether it be on the internet and the images that we see.

Our culture has an increasingly lack of modesty in our styles, in the way we live. And in fact, we exalt sexuality in all sorts of terrible ways.

[15:35] And there's even a appropriate, there's a lack of, growing lack of shame about this. In fact, these things are celebrated and it is unhealthily focused on.

You can't be human if you're not active sexually. But we know it's not right because God's Word tells us to. So this is the battle against sin.

So what do we do? The Bible commands us to flee it, to avoid it, to not indulge our lustful desires. Remember what I said last week. You can't keep the birds from flying over your head.

You're going to have these moments of temptation. You're going to see these external stimuli or you're going to have these moments where your desires just well up in your heart. That's going to happen. But you can keep the birds from nesting in your hair.

Right? When the external pull comes or the thought comes up, we need to fight the battle not to embrace or cherish or let that control us in the moment.

[16:34] but instead to walk in the Holy Spirit. Well, how do we do that? Some of this is walking in the Holy Spirit by preparing for those moments.

Right? By preparing to know that we will face those times and to seek to fight the battle ahead of time.

So that will be things like we want to avoid circumstances where we know we're going to be tempted. Right? If you're on a business trip and your colleagues are going out to a strip bar, it's probably not wise to go with them thinking, well, I'm a Christian.

I can be strong and fight that temptation. Right? That's not smart. It's also not smart if you have struggled with this to have a computer that doesn't have an internet filter on it.

It's not smart to hang out with your girlfriend late at night alone on a bed and think that you're going to avoid temptation. Right? So you want to do some wise thinking, spirit-empowered wisdom to avoid the circumstances where you may find yourself in temptation.

[17:47] The second thing is you're going to pray that God is going to give you the power like Joseph in the moment to at great cost to yourself flee from temptation, unplug your computer, run out of the room without only your robe on like Joseph did when Potiphar's wife sought to seduce.

Do what it takes to flee temptation. Right? Because we need to do it at that level because when we give in to these things, when we live in them all the time, then we have no sense of freedom to begin to pursue the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is choked out by our indulging the desires of the flesh. And so we need to do the right thing. But then we need to see a change of heart.

We need to see that underneath our cultural desire for sexuality everywhere is a desire to be known and loved. It's a desire for intimacy.

It's a desire for connection. And the Holy Spirit can work new patterns in our heart. And if we can give the space for Christ to invite us into intimacy with Him as we experience Him as the bride of Christ, the one who sings over us with His love because He delights in us, as we experience in healthy ways in Christian community intimacy with one another of friendship, of fellowship, of supporting one another, then this pull towards sex as the answer to those things becomes less as we are filled with godly patterns of intimacy in our lives.

[19:37] And the Holy Spirit will teach us that the love of God is better than sex. It will teach us that we can be delighted in and satisfied with God alone.

And friends, you know in heaven there won't be any more sex. There's no more marriage because we're going to have a greater intimacy with Christ, with God than ever before.

and knowing that and leaning into that independence on the Holy Spirit will help us fight those temptations in the moment.

Here's a really practical. I knew a grad student once struggled with this. He had to work on computers all day. He struggled with internet pornography. He found that when he was working really hard for a couple hours then he needed to take a break.

That was his moment of temptation. So do you know what he did? He took the Lord of the Rings with him to work and he put it next to his computer and when he stopped working he turned off his screen and he picked up this book because that book allowed him to remember the beauty and the glory of the gospel as it's expressed through this great fantasy story.

[20:58] Now you know I love Lord of the Rings. That's a great thing for me. It's probably not going to work for everybody but you see how he chose some practical example. He chose a very practical example of replacing something where temptation would be so easy to come in and control him he replaced it with something better.

Right? The great Puritan Thomas Chalmers wrote this great essay you should all read it The Expulsive Power of a New Affection because here's the thing all the internet filters and all the accountability and all the fleeing the right places will not save you from sexual sin.

it is the transformation of your heart that will wean your fleshly desires away from sin and towards something better.

The way that you defeat your desire for intimacy through sex is by finding a greater intimacy in the love of Christ. This is walking in the power of the Spirit.

The second example I want to talk about is anxiety because we live in an anxious world we live in an anxious generation right?

[22 : 12] And we live in this in all sorts of things and God says we are not to be anxious right? Philippians 4 says 6 through 7 says do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now I want to be careful about this but anxiety here is not to be confused by care. We are meant to care about things we are meant to be responsible there are things that we love and we will think about them and we will care for them right?

But anxiety is a response to circumstances that excludes God in the moment. We worry about our child who hasn't checked in and it's after curfew.

We worry about our job and whether we are going to be able to keep it or not. We worry about how we are going to pay the next month's rent.

We worry about these things because we feel out of control and we are fearful in the face of that uncertainty. And this is normal, right? We all say this is normal and it is normal but we need to recognize that our normal sometimes is actually sin.

[23 : 41] It's not good for us to be anxious and this anxiety when it controls us, when it shapes our action, it distracts us, it consumes us and it grips our heart.

But God says by the power of the Holy Spirit you can walk not in worry, not in anxiety, but in faith in these circumstances.

promises. Because the Holy Spirit can remind you in that moment that you are not alone in it and that God has not suddenly stepped off of His throne of sovereignty over the whole world, nor has He abandoned His goodness and His desire to bless you in His life.

Right? Our sin is that we've forgotten God and we're cherishing and cherishing not in the sense of, oh, I love you. We pray to Him and say, God, we are out of control and we're fearful and we're afraid and we can't do anything.

Please, Lord, be sovereign in this. And He steps in and He says, You are my child. I love you. I am with you.

[25 : 01] I am your heavenly Father. And sometimes that's a one-time prayer and we walk away and say, Okay, now I'm relaxed. Now I can do this.

And sometimes it is an ongoing, constant prayer. God, don't let me be anxious. God, don't let me be controlled. God, You are sovereign and we almost have to do it moment by moment.

We have to remind ourselves of the promises of God's Word that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds. That in Matthew 6, that your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask.

Therefore, seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. God's Word applied by the Spirit to our hearts in that moment allows us to not give in to anxiety.

His precious promises can help us. And friends, here's the thing. This isn't just the vagueness of God's sovereignty for us, but this is where the power of the gospel intersects with our fight against sin.

[26 : 11] Because where do we know that God really is in control and that He really loves us and that He really cares for us? He who did not spare His Son but gave Him up for us all.

Will He not also give us with Him all good things? That's Romans 8. We look at the cross and as we sit at the foot of the cross in the midst of our anxiety we think, God, if You have dealt with my sin, You can deal with my lost child or my joblessness or whatever the crisis is that You are facing. the Holy Spirit is able to change your perspective. And so you may need to learn, again, the practices of walking in the Spirit may be recognizing your sin, confessing it, turning to God's Word, having these things available.

Put this Word on your dashboard, on your mirror, on your Bible, on your kitchen, fridge, wherever you are. Put it on your screensaver, whatever it is. Let God's Word be the fuel that the Spirit of God

can apply to our hearts as we fight this battle.

It's not an easy battle to fight. And for many of us, it's an ongoing thing.

[27 : 41] And that's why the Bible tells us not to worry over and over again, because we like to worry over and over again. But God wants the fruit of the Spirit to include peace and faith.

Finally, last example, having a judgmental or a critical spirit. This was something that was true of me when I was a college freshman.

I had been a believer for a year. That summer, before I went to college, I finally woke up to, oh, that means I should live my life for Christ. And so, I got involved in a great Christian ministry called Princeton Christian Fellowship.

I was young, I was zealous, and I thought I had lots of ideas. And I came in and I saw within days, weeks, maybe months, all the weaknesses of this ministry.

Right? I was critical of it. I didn't think anyone was really committed to following Christ. So I created my own small groups because there weren't enough small groups for me to have fellowship.

[28 : 45] I did my own outreaches because no one was doing these outreaches. And I just thought they were a bunch of kind of lukewarm, half-committed Christians.

I committed, I accused the staff in my heart of being controlling rather than serving. I thought the upperclassmen were worldly, caring too much about their studies.

I thought I knew better and I was pretty proud. I was not patient.

And though I thought I was doing this to glorify God, I was in fact not depending on God at all. I didn't believe God was at work. I believed that God needed me to do things that He wasn't doing. and I did not trust that God cared as much as I did about His glory on this campus. My critical spirit excluded God and elevated myself.

[29 : 51] And the thing is that I justified it. I thought I was doing the right thing. I was going to fix it. I was going to revive this group.

I was going to save the campus. And they were exceedingly gracious with me. They were patient. They were loving. They confronted me at times.

They bore with me a lot. And the Holy Spirit convicted me. I wasn't seeking this, but God started to show me my sin.

He started to show how proud I was. He started to show me how critical I was. He started to show me how I justified, how my conviction that I saw things more clearly than everyone else was actually in defiance of Him.

And as I saw this sin, I realized I needed help. And I turned to the Lord. And I asked Him to teach me humility. It's a very dangerous prayer.

[30 : 58] by His grace, He broke my pride. With His kindness, He humbled me. He showed me and reminded me of the gospel that I had believed, that it wasn't because of good things that I had done or because I brought so much to the table that He had saved me.

but despite my rebellion, He saved me by His grace. He showed me that I had a plank in my eye and it was like a 10 by 10.

and He reminded me that His love for me was in the midst of that sin and I was able to see myself in God's grace.

And the fruit of humility grew in me a little bit. Friends, I'll tell you, it still lurks in my heart. I still want to be judgmental. I still want to think I'm right all the time.

But by God's grace, He saved me from that trajectory and from thinking that was right. So friends, here are three pictures of the Holy Spirit at work.

[32 : 23] Three portraits of how walking in the Spirit looks in different ways. The battle is real, but it doesn't look the same. And each one of you, as well as me, will have our own particular shapes of these battles.

Right? But each of us is called to walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit, knowing that we don't have any more than our salvation for our sanctification, the power to do what we most need done, which is for our hearts to be changed and transformed by His Spirit.

So this is then leading me to my last point. Again, Tom Schreiner says this, the Galatians are not called upon to work at being more virtuous.

They are summoned to walk in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit. Living in a way that pleases God is the fruit of His miraculous work, not the result of self-effort, though human beings are called upon to walk in the Spirit and yield to the Spirit.

Right? So where does the power come from to do this? Here's the hard part about this battle, you all. It's just like in our salvation in some ways.

[33 : 47] We have to choose. We have to make decisions. We have to move forward. We have to act. And yet, we recognize that none of that will actually bear any good fruit apart from God's work in us.

The power is not in ourselves. It is in God and what God does for us. This is why we have 2 Corinthians 12, 9 and 10.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He asked that it be taken away. God didn't take it away. Paul said, why haven't you taken this away? So that I can be free from this battle so I can go on and do great things for you, following through the great vision.

And this is what the Lord said to the Apostle Paul. But He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you for my powers made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest on me.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamity. For when I am weak, then I am strong. Friends, the reason why God designed our sanctification to be like this is so that we would continue to learn the lesson we should have learned at our salvation, which is that we have nothing and He has everything and it is only by His grace that He saves us.

[35 : 13] It is only by His grace that He sanctifies us. It is only by His grace that He transforms us. And He does this. Why? So that we wouldn't boast in ourselves.

This is the most ugly thing about Christians, isn't it, at times? When we say, look at what a great Christian I am. Look at me. God designed our sanctification differently so that when people look at us, they would say, what an amazing Savior.

What an incredible God that took that person and changed them to be who they are now. That's why God did this.

And that's why we walk not by self-effort but by faith. Minute to minute believing in the promises of God's Word.

Trusting in the finished work of Christ. Believing in God's empowering presence now and depending on it and turning regularly, daily, moment by moment to Him.

[36 : 20] Saying, God, I can't do this but please help me. Help me to do the right thing in the moment and change my heart so that I will love the right thing more and more.

And friends, we cry out to a Savior who knows us because He has been tempted in every way just as we are and yet was without sin. And when by faith we believed in Him, we have been crucified with Him and so we've crucified the sinful nature and so it no longer has controlling power over us. The Holy Spirit reminds us by bringing us back to the foot of the cross so that we can walk in the power that God gives us so that God can help me this Friday night when I'm looking for a parking space.

to trust Him, to know that He's in control, to know that I live in a fallen world and the van will probably be parked there again on Friday night, but that God will provide for me and He will care for me in the middle of it.

That I might display the fruit of the Spirit in the midst of that circumstance and many others and may it be true for you as well. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we confess our need to You this morning.

[37 : 56] Lord, I pray, I pray that You would teach us how to live dependently, trustingly, faithfully, increasing in godliness because of Your work in changing our hearts.

O Lord, be our help, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.