

Walking in the Spirit Galatians 5:16-25

As we near the end of our series through the book of Galatians I would like to remind you of something I pointed out in the beginning. In this letter to the liberated Paul addresses two critical issues for all believers: *what* we are to *believe* and *how* we are to *behave*. Beloved, those two go hand in hand. If you behave right but don't believe right, your Christianity, so called, is insufficient. If however, you believe right but don't behave right than your Christianity is at least inconsistent. To be a Christian requires believing certain things.

Now, you are free to believe anything you want, but you cannot believe just anything you want and be a genuine Christian. By the same token, if your faith in Christ has not produced a change in your life, so that you are becoming and more and more Christ-like in your attitudes and actions it is unlikely you have truly been born again.

How do we know for sure if we have been born again, born of the Spirit of God? Paul reminds this morning that one of the surest signs that you are a true born again believer in Jesus Christ is that you are walking in the Spirit.

1. The CONFLICT (Galatians 5:16-17)

Look at verse 17. *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”*

Very soon after you come to be a Christian you make a rather startling discovery. You discover that there is a battle going on. You are saved. You have trusted the Lord as your Savior. But now you find that as a believer you have some enemies.

The Bible teaches that the child of God has three main enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. We have an external enemy, that's the world. Paul is not talking about the material physical world, he's talking about a philosophy of thought, a system that is organized against our Lord and his Christ and headed up by the devil himself. And then we have an infernal enemy, that's the devil. Listen folks, the Devil is real. He is not a figment of someone's imagination. He is very real, very powerful, and he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Thirdly, we have an internal enemy, the flesh. Now, when Paul speaks of the flesh here he's not talking about our physical body, he is talking about our old sin nature. All of us are born with a propensity to sin that we have inherited from our father Adam. The truth is, if the world were to disintegrate and the devil disappear, you and would I would still have a disposition to sin.

I am of the opinion that of those three great enemies every believer battles the flesh may be the most difficult to deal with. As Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Go stand in front of the mirror if you want to know who the enemy is.

Every born again believer has two natures -- the old nature which is dominated by the flesh, and the new nature, which is controlled by the Spirit of God. That is what Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus when He said, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6).

Paul goes on to point out here in verse 17 that these two natures *“are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”* The new nature rebels against the old nature. They are in constant conflict with each other. It’s this very problem that Paul discusses in Romans 7 when he writes *“I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. ... When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway”* (Rom. 7:15, 19, NLT). Can any of you relate to Paul’s frustration with himself? I know I can.

When you repent of your sins and by faith receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you are born of the Spirit. You become a new creation in Christ. You become a new person with a new nature. However, you still have that old nature of the flesh, and beloved, you are not going to get rid of that old nature in this life. That creates a conflict. The flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit wars against the flesh.

There is a great old hymn we sometimes sing entitled "Come Thou Fount" by Robert Robinson.
Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

In the last stanza are these words:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;

As a child of God we have a new nature that loves the Lord and longs to obey Him and worship Him and serve Him. But we also have a nature that is prone to wander, prone to rebel, prone to leave the God we love.

II. The CONTRAST (Galatians 5:19-23)

Beginning in verse 19 Paul shows us the difference between a life that is dominated by the old flesh nature and a life that is lived under the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He begins by describing the works of the flesh.

First there is *“Adultery”* which is illicit sexual relations between married people. *“Fornication”* generally refers to the same type of sin among unmarried people. Another word for this would be promiscuity. *“Uncleanness”* means a filthiness of heart and mind. *“Lewdness”* is close to our word debauchery. It means sin without shame. It means open, bold, defiant sin; wickedness without constraint. *“Idolatry”* is simply putting anything above or beside God. Anything you love more, desire more, honor more, revere more than God is an idol. Furthermore, anything you love as much as God, or desire as much as God, or honor as much as God, or revere as much as God is an idol. *“Sorcery”* is from the Greek word *pharmakeia*. Our English word pharmacy comes from this word. It’s a word that refers to the practice of witchcraft or the occult. Then there is *“hatred, contentions, (strife) jealousies, outbursts of wrath, (uncontrolled anger) selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, (factions) envy, murder, drunkenness, and revelries”* (carousing).

You say, “Whew, he didn't get me with any of those sins.” Well, wait a minute. Before you begin to feel too pious and proud I want you to look again at verse 21. Paul adds, *“and the like.”* That takes in every other kind of sin. That includes you and me. All of these sins and every other wicked work like them are what the bible calls the works of the flesh.

Now, notice how Paul concludes verse 21. *“Of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* What is Paul saying here? Does this mean that anyone who has ever committed any of these sinful acts can never be saved? Is Paul saying that if you are a Christian you will never, ever be guilty of any of these works of the flesh? No. Paul is not talking about an occasional *act* of sin, but a continuous *habit* of sin. Paul says that *“those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* If these works of the flesh are a description of the way you normally lead your life, then the Scriptures says it is evidence that you have never truly been saved.

Jesus gave the illustration of the Prodigal Son who got down in the pig pen, but he didn't stay there. The only ones who stay in a pig pen are pigs. A child of God may fall into the pig pen of sin once in awhile but he won't live there. Listen, if you can continue to live in sin and not be convicted about it you are not a child of God.

In stark contrast to the works of the flesh, in verses 22 and 23 we see the fruit of the Spirit. Now, let me point out a couple of important facts about the fruit of the Spirit. First of all, while the works of the flesh are something we do all by ourselves, the fruit of the Spirit is completely the work of God. We produce the work, we only bear the fruit. It is the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit in our lives.

Second, the fruit of the Spirit can be best understood as a reproduction of the character of Christ in the life of the Christian. So when we look at this list of the nine graces of the Holy Spirit what we are seeing is a picture of what the Christian life is intended to look like.

The fruit of the Spirit fall into three basic categories. The first three express the God-ward aspects of the Spirit controlled life. Paul begins with *“love”* because all of the other fruit is really an outgrowth of love. This word for love is *agape*, which means divine love. The love of God poured into our hearts and reproduced in our lives. After love comes *“joy.”* After you have experienced the love of God in your life by trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior you are filled with His joy, *“joy unspeakable and full of glory.”* And then God's love and God's joy together produce *“peace,”* the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

The next three express the outward aspects of the Spirit controlled life. First there is *“patience.”* How many of you have a problem with patience. When the Holy Spirit is in control of your life you are patient with other people. And then there is *“kindness.”* Kindness has to do with how we treat other people. And then *“Goodness,”* which basically is just being a good person, a good friend and neighbor.

The last three express the inward aspects of the Spirit controlled life. *“Faithfulness”* means dependable or trustworthy. *“Gentleness”* means power under control. And *“self control.”* The word translated “self control” was used to describe athletes who disciplined their bodies as they were preparing themselves for competition.

3. The CONQUEST (Galatians 5:24-25)

Let me tell you what it takes to gain victory over the flesh. First of all we must learn to crucify the old fleshly nature. Look at verse 24. *“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* What does that mean? To crucify is to put to death. We must put to death that old sinful nature.

How do we do that? By making no provision for the flesh. Romans 13:14 says, *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”* In other words don't keep feeding the flesh the things that it enjoys. If watching certain TV programs feeds your flesh then stop watching. If certain types of music feeds your flesh then stop listening. If reading certain types of books or magazines feeds your flesh then stop reading. If hanging around certain kinds of people feeds your flesh then find some new friends to hang around with.

Illus – “The one I say sick-em to!” Don't encourage that old fleshly nature.

It's not enough to crucify the flesh. If we really want to gain the victory we must learn to cultivate our relationship with the Spirit. Look at verse 25. Paul says, *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”* To walk in the Spirit literally means to "keep in step with the Spirit." How do you do that? It requires fellowship (repentance) and faithfulness. We must repent of our sins everyday if we want to live in fellowship with God.

You have to spend time with the Lord everyday. You have to read, study, and meditate on God's Word everyday. You have to commit yourself to prayer everyday. And you have to ask the Lord to fill your life with His Spirit everyday.

Conclusion and Invitation,

William Wallace asked the right question. If you saw the movie Braveheart, you know the story of the Scottish patriot. Mel Gibson directed and starred in the 1995 movie about the Scottish revolt in the 1400's. At one point in the movie, Wallace prepares a rag tag band of rebels for battle. They must face a larger and better-armed English army.

His says to his men--"I am William Wallace, and I see before me an army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. You are free, free from badges, free from flesh and free to love. What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight?"

A tall soldier near the front eyes the huge opposing forces arrayed across the valley and then answers, "Fight against that? No, we will run, and we will live."

Wallace responds, "Ay, fight and you may die, run and you'll live. At least a while! And dying in your beds many years from now, you would be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom."

What will you do with your freedom?