

Walking by the Spirit

Scripture: Galatians 5:16–25

Code: 90-34

INTRODUCTION

In Galatians 3:3 Paul writes: "Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

A. Spiritual Folly

We are as foolish as the Galatians when we begin our salvation in the Spirit and then try to live in the flesh. Yet this is an old error. Jeremiah 2:11-13 is God's indictment of Israel when they similarly defected spiritually: "'Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate,' declares the Lord. 'For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.'"

1. Israel Forsook the True God

Israel forsook the true God, the source of everything. In John 7:37-38 Jesus says, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" He was referring to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the divine resource who provides all that a thirsty soul could need. Just as Israel forsook God, the "fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13), the church today has forsaken God the Holy Spirit, who remains the provision of all we need.

2. Israel Sought a False Substitute

Israel turned from God to substitutes that could not help. They turned to broken cisterns that held no water, which promised everything yet provided nothing. The church commits the same folly today when it turns from the Holy Spirit--the stream of living water--and seeks answers in the empty buckets of psychology, pragmatism, and humanism.

B. Spiritual Wisdom

1. The spiritual issue

Salvation is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual life is also His supernatural work. The Galatian sin was believing that what is begun in the Spirit can be perfected in the flesh.

2. The Spirit's initiative

As Christians we came into spiritual life through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin and brought us to repentance. He produced in us the faith we needed to respond to the preaching of the gospel. He similarly brought us into submission to the lordship of Christ, and we were regenerated by Him--recreated into new life. The Spirit of God indwelt us, baptized us into the Body of Christ, gave us spiritual gifts, sealed us for eternal life, and separated us from sin. That monumental work of the Spirit lifted us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). Ours is a spiritual life--we are not of this world though we are in this world.

REVIEW

We have previously seen that the Spirit offers believers all the perfecting resources they need. He provides access to God, where all spiritual resources are found. He illuminates the Scriptures so that believers may know exactly what they are called to do. He strengthens believers in the inner man

and glorifies Christ as the authority and example of Christian practice. He personally guides the consciences of believers to do God's will. He ministers strength and correction to believers through other believers, and intercedes for us so that all things work together for good in our lives. Those are the ministries that the Spirit of God offers every to bring about spiritual maturity.

We are to live on the spiritual level. Conversely, we must cease doing what we are warned against in Scripture.

A. 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Do not quench the Spirit." We quench the Spirit when we seek solutions apart from His leading. We put out His fire, push Him aside, and treat Him with indifference when we deny His power.

B. Ephesians 4:30: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." The church today is both quenching and grieving the Spirit by refusing to respond to His leading and engaging in sin and disobedience. We must begin to move in the power of the Spirit if the church is to stop offering human solutions to spiritual problems.

LESSON

In Galatians 5 Paul tells us that the key to Christian living is a Spirit-controlled life. Our problem is our fallen flesh, and only the Holy Spirit can harness it. Every wrong action, reaction, word, idea, emotion, and attitude is from the flesh. The Bible says we've been changed in the inner man by salvation (Rom. 8:10). Some day we'll be changed in the outer man and will be perfect forever. When our bodies have been redeemed, the flesh will no longer be a problem.

I. THE COMMAND (v. 16)

"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

A. The Problem

Christians are clearly commanded to subdue the flesh. Subjection of the flesh is the foundation of the Christian life. When a Christian is walking in the Spirit, the desires of the flesh are not carried out. Since all our problems are caused by the flesh, the means by which the flesh is overcome is the solution to everything. That is not an oversimplification but the truth according to God's Word.

B. The Meaning

The word translated "walk" is a present-tense command. It could be translated "keep on continually walking." Paul used a very picturesque metaphor to describe the Christian life--we're to take one step at a time under the control of the Holy Spirit. The Christian walk is a habitual pattern.

As Christians we possess the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:9). In fact our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). As the Spirit moves and leads, we are to respond moment by moment, step by step, and day by day, relying on His power and direction.

C. The Application

1. What to do

Walking in the Spirit requires two things: studying the Word of God so that you can know the mind of the Spirit, and communing with God so you can know the will of the Spirit.

a. Ephesians 5:18-20--"Be filled with the Spirit, ... singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." b. Colossians 3:16--"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Being filled with the Spirit is the same as letting the Word dwell in you richly because as the Word dominates your thinking, it dominates your actions. As the Word moves through your heart and mind, the Spirit of God directs your life. As you spend time in the Word and as you spend time in prayer, communing with the living God and building an intimate relationship with Him, you are in a position for the Spirit to move you down the path of God's choosing.

2. Why to do it

The Bible does not teach the eradication of sin in this life or a second work of grace whereby a person becomes perfect and never sins again. The spiritual walk is accomplished moment-by-

moment and depends on our submissiveness. Anyone who says he has no sin makes God a liar (1 John 1:8-10). But while we can't overcome sin totally in this life, by walking in the Spirit we can overcome it as a pattern of life. We must cultivate spiritual thinking by communing with the living God in constant and intense prayer, and feeding continually on the Word so that our thoughts are God's thoughts. That's why Paul said "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). Every day we are to die to self and walk in the Spirit.

3. How to do it

The Christian life is a daily yielding to the Spirit of God. "Walk" is a general term that describes the Christian life.

- a. Ephesians 4:1-2--"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness."
- b. 1 Corinthians 7:17--"As the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk."
- c. 2 Corinthians 5:7--"We walk by faith, not by sight."
- d. Ephesians 2:10--"We were "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
- e. Ephesians 4:17--"Walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind."
- f. 2 Thessalonians 3:6--"Keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life." We are to walk separate from sin.
- g. Ephesians 5:2--"Walk in love."
- h. Ephesians 5:8--"Walk as children of light."
- i. Ephesians 5:15-16--"Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil."
- j. 3 John 3-4--John wrote, "You are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." For a Christian to walk in humility, purity, contentment, faith, good works, separateness, love, light, wisdom, and truth, he or she must walk by the Spirit. Only the Spirit can produce those virtues.

4. The result

All the commands of the New Testament can be reduced to the necessity of walking by the Spirit. When you do that you will not carry out the lusts or desires of the flesh. Your flesh wants to control you--your actions, thoughts, and feelings. It wants to create anger, hostility, bitterness, jealousy, envy, and strife. It wants you to fear, doubt, and hate God. It wants your life full of guilt, your marriage destroyed, your home wrecked, and your relationships ruined. It wants to make you useless to God. The only hope of overcoming the flesh is to walk by the Spirit. Human solutions cannot solve what are fundamentally spiritual problems. The use of pragmatism, human methodologies, psychology, and other human efforts to solve fleshly problems will fail to overcome the compelling lusts of the flesh. Victorious Christian living is achieved by walking in the Spirit.

II. THE CONFLICT (vv. 17-18)

"The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."

It's easy to articulate a principle, but it can be difficult to live by it.

A. Explaining the Problem

A conflict is assumed in verse 16. Paul indicates that our flesh desires to harm us and that the only way to overcome it is to walk by the Spirit. He gets more specific in verse 17: the flesh is opposed to the Holy Spirit. That's why there is conflict in the life of a Christian. It's a conflict that doesn't exist in the life of a non-Christian because he doesn't possess the Spirit. Christians are different people.

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17--"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

2. Galatians 2:20--Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

We are new creations--new people. In Christ we are created for good works that God has before ordained (Eph. 2:10), yet we still sin. That's because we are a new creation incarcerated in unredeemed flesh. Until our unredeemed flesh is destroyed and we are glorified, we will always have to battle the flesh.

B. Defining the Flesh

What is the flesh? The Greek word *sarx* (often translated "flesh") is a very important term in New Testament teaching.

1. The body

Sometimes the word *sarx* refers to the physical body. In Luke 24:39 Jesus says, "A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Here Jesus referred to body tissue.

2. Human effort

Sarx is also used to refer to human effort. That is how Paul used it in Galatians 3:3: "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" As we've already discussed, that is an obvious reference to man's effort to accomplish the supernatural by natural means.

3. The unredeemed nature

The primary significance of *sarx* is its reference to our unredeemed nature. When so used, it refers to that part of a Christian that hasn't yet been redeemed (Rom. 8:23). The flesh is where sin resides in us. The word refers not only to sin's residence in the body, but also to its effect on the mind. Scripture refutes the philosophical dualism that says spirit is good and material things are evil. *Sarx* in this sense encompasses your material body, your feelings, your thoughts, your mind--any part of you that is tainted by sin. Paul illustrates that concept of *sarx* in Romans 7: "I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (v. 15). He explained he was in that state specifically because of the sin within him (v. 17), describing its residence as the flesh (v. 18). In salvation, one's spirit is changed and made new. But that new man remains in an old house. In Galatians 5:17 Paul's message is that the flesh of a saved person is not in harmony with that person's spiritual state. The unredeemed flesh and the Holy Spirit are engaged in conflict. Verse 17 notes that that conflict is of a kind that sometimes doesn't allow you to do as you'd prefer. You may have noticed in your own spiritual walk that sometimes you don't do what you ought to do or you do what you never should have done in the first place. That's the battle of the Christian--what Paul describes in Romans chapter 7. Unbelievers do not participate in this battle because it is a war between the flesh and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

C. Dealing with the Flesh

Human solutions are the products of the flesh because the flesh affects all human effort. Psychology and pragmatism represent fleshly human answers to spiritual problems. Those methodologies are the products of natural effort that is independent of God, weak, helpless, and sinful. When we have spiritual problems and turn to human solutions for answers, we are attempting to snuff out fire with gasoline.

The flesh "sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (v. 17). The Greek word translated "desire" (*epiqlumia* [*epithumia*]) refers to a strong compulsive yearning. The flesh desires to conceive and bring forth sin, whereas the Holy Spirit desires to prevent sin from happening altogether.

The flesh is the beachhead where temptation lands. Evil desires move the flesh in a battle against the Holy Spirit to dominate the Christian's life. The power of the flesh is great, but the power of the Spirit is greater. When we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. When we pursue fleshly solutions to problems, we feed the flesh.

D. Compounding the Problem

1. The mistake examined

In verse 16 Paul says we're to walk by the Spirit and thereby not carry out the desires of the flesh. In verse 18 he says that when we walk by the Spirit, we're not under the law. Paul equated attempts to live by the Mosaic law with the desires of the flesh. The Mosaic law was a collection of rules given to man by which he was to control himself. If a man kept the whole law he'd be a perfect man. The flesh would be completely controlled in such a man. But no one can keep the whole law. In verse 18 Paul is saying that when we walk by the Spirit, we are not under the law of human effort. Human effort is

connected with the flesh, while spiritual effort is connected with the Spirit. Operating under the law means to be operating by works--by human effort, using human solutions, agendas, wisdom, and methodologies. That only feeds the flesh. Human effort is pointless when it attempts to deal with the spiritual dimension. The law, which is good in and of itself (Rom. 7:12), is unable to control the flesh. The problem with human methods like psychology is that they are of human design, are far inferior to the design of God's law and tend to heighten the desire of the flesh.

2. The mistake illustrated

In John Bunyan's classic *The Pilgrim's Progress*, there is a scene in what Bunyan called "The Interpreter's House." The parlor in the house thick with dust. Christian, the main character of the book, saw someone come in and start to sweep the dust. But it just billowed into a cloud and gagged everyone in the room. Then it fell right back down where it started. The Interpreter explained to Christian, "This parlor is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel: The dust is his Original Sin, and inward Corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep...is the Law" ([Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979 reprint], p. 26). All the law can do is stir up the dust of sin--it cannot cleanse anyone. Pragmatism, psychology, and other methodologies can do no better because they are inferior to the law. The flesh requires a spiritual solution.

3. The mistake exposed

The folly of human effort is that God set an impossible standard to begin with. He wants us to look to Himself. Add to that Satan, who is a very strong foe, and the flesh, which is very powerful. Man will never be able to keep the divine standard, overcome Satan and dominate the flesh by human means. Every problem in life comes from the flesh. Every solution comes from the Spirit. As Christians, the encouraging truth of 2 Corinthians 6:16 ought to be embedded in our minds: "We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them.'" God lives in us. He is walking with us and leads us. The Spirit of almighty God is in us. We are to follow where He leads, which is the only way we can conquer the flesh.

III. THE CONTRAST (vv. 19-23)

A. The Deeds of the Flesh (vv. 19-21)

"The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these... Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

1. Sin associated with sex

Immorality, impurity, and sensuality all relate to sexual behavior. The Greek term translated "immorality" is *porneia* [porneia], meaning "illicit sex" or "fornication." "Impurity" (Gk., *akatharsia* [akatharsia]) means "uncleanness." It refers to pornographic thoughts that lead to pornographic activities. "Sensuality" refers to lascivious conduct--living for pleasure without restraint. A contemporary term to describe all these is "sexual addiction." Sexual addictions are not caused by a lack of self-esteem or a poor relationships with your mother or father. They are produced by the flesh.

2. Sin associated with religion

Verse 20 lists the category of self-effort in religion, and labels it "idolatry." Idolatry is as much a work of the flesh as immorality. It means worshiping or being preoccupied with anything other than the true God, such as a false god, a false religious system, self, money, career, prestige, a house, or a car.

3. Sins associated with drugs

The Greek word translated "sorcery" is *farmakia* [pharmakia] (meaning "drugs"), from which we get the English word pharmacy. Drugs were used in Paul's time in the practice of magic and sorcery. Because people regularly took drugs as a part of occult practices, the term [farmakia pharmakia] came to be associated with sorcery and witchcraft. However its root idea related to drugs.

4. Sins associated with relationships

The flesh produces "enmities" (hostility), "strife" (quarreling), "jealousy" (anger toward another's good fortune), "outbursts of anger" (uncontrolled temper tantrums), "disputes," "dissensions," "factions," and "envying."

5. Sins associated with alcohol

The flesh produces "drunkenness" and "carousing," along with the wild parties and immoral activities associated with such vices. All problems that people have in this world are all produced by the flesh. Compulsive sexual behavior is a product of the flesh (v. 19). An obsession with the things of the world is a product of the flesh—it is "idolatry" (v. 20). Drug addiction is a product of the flesh (v. 20). Bitterness, hate, family conflicts, self-pity, jealousy, lack of fulfillment, temper problems, drinking problems, envy, discontent, unhappiness, anorexia, and bulimia are all the products of the flesh. Paul did not provide us with an exhaustive list. That's why he said, "things like these" (v. 21). Paul warned that "those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21b). Those who continually practice the deeds of the flesh are the unregenerate. If the things which Paul listed are the unbroken patterns of your life, then you're not a Christian.

B. The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23)

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

1. Its meaning

Paul affirms that there's only one way to dominate the flesh. In contrast to the products of the flesh is the fruit of the Spirit. The law doesn't deal with those things because it deals only with human effort. The fruit of the Spirit is produced not by human effort, but by the power of the Spirit.

2. Its power

A lack of love is a lack of the fruit of the Spirit. Depression and despair is a lack of joy, which is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Inner conflict and fear is a lack of peace, which is also a part of the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit produces patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in place of distraction. He gives self-control to those who are out of control.

3. Its simplicity

The principles that Paul gave for the resolution of spiritual problems are simple. The only one who can overcome the flesh is the Spirit, so it makes sense to walk by the Spirit. But we often think we are so clever with our human solutions and end up bewitched into trying to cure fleshly problems with human solutions. What we end up with is a sick church.

IV. THE CONQUEST (vv. 24-25)

A. God's Part (v. 24)

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

The flesh has been put to death. It is part of the past. But some of us are foolish enough to carry the dead corpse around. We let its rotting decay effect our lives more than it needs to. Paul's instruction is that from a factual standpoint before God, the flesh is dead. The power of its desires is broken.

B. Our Part (v. 25)

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

1. Biblically delineated

The only source of spiritual transformation is the Holy Spirit. The only way to live spiritually is in accordance with the way in which we entered spiritual life. We began in the Spirit, so we must live in the Spirit.

2. Experientially applied

a. Toward your marriage Do you want to have a happy marriage? Walk in the Spirit. He will give you love, joy, and peace. If you are having terrible conflict in your marriage, it isn't because you haven't had good counseling; it's because you're not walking in the Spirit. b. Toward yourself You may be

experiencing personal problems such as dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and depression. One human solution is to claim that you've have problems because your parents stuffed you in a closet and left you there for two hours when you were four. While circumstances do complicate our lives, they do not cause spiritual problems. The reason you're not enjoying the fruit of the Spirit is that it is a product of those who walk in the Spirit.c. Toward your familyThe flesh wars against the Spirit. I am often asked, "What's the key to raising your kids to love the Lord? What's the key to having a happy home?" The answer is simply to walk by the Spirit and He will produce His fruit.

CONCLUSION

Walking in the Spirit is hard to do on our own. It is a day-by-day yielding to the direction of the Spirit. That is why Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass [because he didn't walk in the Spirit], you who are spiritual [walking in the Spirit], restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ [the law of love]." Christians need help from each other. That's one reason the church exists. We're not to forsake assembling together, and are to stimulate each other to love and good deeds when we do meet (Heb. 10:25). Because all of life's problems come from the flesh, we must help one another to walk by the Spirit.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was the sin that Paul wrote the book of Galatians to combat? How does it relate to Israel's past?
2. The key to Christian living is a _____ ?
3. What is the source of our spiritual problems?
4. What picturesque metaphor did Paul use to describe the pattern of the Christian life?
5. What two activities are essential in the life of a Christian?
6. Do believers ever become perfect in this life? Why or why not?
7. List some of the ways in which Scripture describes the walk of the Christian.
8. What does the flesh desire to accomplish in the life of a believer?
9. What different meanings does the Greek word *sarx* have in the New Testament?
10. What is the problem with trying to use psychology, pragmatism, and other humanly conceived methodologies to solve the problem of the flesh?
11. Was man ever able to solve the problem of the flesh by trying to fulfill the law? What does that imply?
12. What kind of a solution does the problem of the flesh require? Where does a Christian go to find that solution?
13. What are the deeds of the flesh?
14. How does one conquer the deeds of the flesh?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Galatians attempted to accomplish spiritual ends by methods of their own devising. The Puritan writer Abraham Wright stated, "The cause why our oppressors prevail oft against us is, because we trust too much in our own wits, and lean too much upon our own inventions; opposing subtilty to subtilty, one evil device to another, matching and maintaining policy by policy, and not committing our cause to God" (cited in *A Puritan Golden Treasury*, I.D.E. Thomas, ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977], p. 294). Peter said that Christians were to humble themselves under God's mighty hand knowing that he will lift us up in due time, casting all our anxieties upon him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:6-7). Yet in our pride we turn from God's ways and prefer man's diagnoses and solutions instead of the remedies God so richly supplies through the indwelling Holy Spirit. How

are you going to seek the Spirit's supply and direction to meet your own need for spiritual strength?

2. Many in the church have adopted the idea that Christianity is merely a philosophical system for dealing with life. We often act as though we are ashamed of the gospel, forgetting it is "the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16, NIV). The Puritan William Bridge wrote that "faith tells a man that God is come near to him, and he is come near to God; and therefore faith certainly is the great remedy and means against all discouragements that can arise" (A Lifting Up for the Downcast [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979 reprint], p. 267). If you are a Christian, are there problems in your life that you're attempting to solve in your own strength? Rely on the Spirit instead. If you do not know Christ, are you now willing to give yourself to Him who promised, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29)?

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