

**GALATIANS - SERMON 25**  
**GALATIANS 5:16-17 — THE WAR BETWEEN SPIRIT AND FLESH**  
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INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:16-17

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

The Christian life involves conflict and struggle, which is related to the battle with the sin remaining in us.

Roman 7:21

*I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.*

Every Christian can empathize with Paul's sentiments. There is a great and continuing tension in each Christian. It provokes us to share Paul's cry *O wretched man that I am*. This conflict is not fully resolved until we get to heaven. Nevertheless, there is a remedy for our time here and Galatians 5:16-17 addresses that remedy, *walk in the Spirit*. . .

OUTLINE: Four questions

- I WHY IS THERE THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN US?
- II HOW CAN THIS BATTLE BE MANAGED AND WON?
- III WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT & HOW DO I DO IT?
- IV HOW CAN I DRAW NEAR TO THE SPIRIT AND DEEPEN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

CONCLUSION:

- I WHY IS THERE THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN US?

The reason is because our sanctification is progressive. We are saved from the penalty of our sins instantly, conclusively, and permanently at the moment of salvation. However, we are saved from the practice of our sins progressively, increasingly, and incrementally over the process of time.

Our justification before God is perfect and finished at the moment of salvation. At salvation we are justified and we are not held accountable for the penalty of those sins again. Our justification never can be nor will be improved upon. It is perfect.

However, our sanctification only begins at salvation. It is progressive throughout our life and completed only when we are resurrected to eternal life.

It is God's purpose to save us from the penalty of our sins immediately, completely, and conclusively (instantaneously). Likewise it is His purpose to save us from the practice of our sins progressively, increasingly, and incrementally over the process of time.

This is no denial of an immediate improvement with regard to our personal behavior when

we are saved. At the point of salvation the dominion of sin is broken, our new nature is oriented towards obedience, and we delight in the law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). There is a major shift in a new believer's behavior. Salvation makes a real difference. Nevertheless, perfection is not achieved then or ever, until resurrection.

The reason why we are far from perfect is because the new nature we receive at salvation is not perfect itself. The new nature with its new orientation still is able to choose wrong. Thus we still fall into sin. The remaining imperfection of our new nature suffers the appeals and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If these influences are not resisted by the assistance of the Holy Spirit the result will be a fall into sin.

Paul deals with the struggle with remaining sin in our passage and in Romans 7 and 8. Though the world and the devil are significant opponents it is our flesh that is our most difficult and troublesome enemy. We will find that our flesh is more difficult to combat than the world and the devil.

What is the flesh? The *flesh*, when the Bible uses that term, is nothing more or less than the imbalanced appetites of the human body. God gave us bodies at creation, bodies with appetites for certain things (sleep, pleasure, physical intimacy, and comfort, etc.). Those appetites are good and wholesome to the proper functioning of the body as God gave them originally (God called His completed work *very good*). However, with the fall into sin all the functions of man's soul and body became corrupted. The once good appetites of the body became imbalanced. The body itself became subject to decay and death. The mind became enmity against God and the appetites were perverted.

What is salvation? Salvation is the work of God in reversing the effects of the fall upon the soul and on the body. Salvation at the time of our regeneration involves the taking out of the old nature and the installing of the new (stony heart verses fleshly heart). In regeneration the effect of sin upon the soul is largely overcome by the implantation of the new nature. However, at salvation nothing is done to change the body or its imbalanced appetites. The change of the body and the imbalance of its appetites will not be remedied until the day of resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*

Our dilemma is that the resurrection has not yet occurred and so we still have the same bodies with that same imbalance of appetites that we had before we were saved. We will continue in this state until we die.

Our new nature is, therefore, in constant combat with our bodies and the imbalance of its appetites.

Romans 7:22-23

*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into*

*captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

Hence, the incredible struggle we find ourselves in.

This is the situation and this is why we have such a conflict.

## II HOW CAN THIS BATTLE BE MANAGED AND WON?

The answer is through the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God in conjunction with the new nature is able to control subdue the imbalanced appetites of the body. It is through the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13). This is the thrust of the passage in Galatians 5:16-17.

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

The new nature all by itself cannot subdue the body and its imbalanced appetites. But it is the Spirit of God operating in, with, and through the new nature as we apply ourselves to the means of grace that does subdue the body and its imbalanced appetites.

Notice, that there is no passivity implied here. It is not a 'let go and let God' mentality that is fostered by this passage at all. We cannot accomplish this end by personal effort and initiative without the Spirit. So it is neither by the Spirit apart from us nor our works apart from the Spirit's that accomplish the mortification of sin. The principle is a cooperative one. *Walk in the spirit and you will not . . .*

Note that the passage begins with an instruction *walk* (Greek - *you walk*). The imperative to believers is that they are to do something and that something is to *walk*. However, that walking is a walking *in the Spirit*. It is a combination of efforts.

## III WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT & HOW DO I DO IT?

A One cannot walk in the Spirit unless one has that Spirit in salvation.

Romans 8:9

*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*

The *Spirit of Christ* is that Spirit sent by Christ. It is not a reference to a different Spirit from the Holy Spirit.

When we are saved the Holy Spirit takes up a permanent residence in us. It is therefore possible to *walk in the Spirit*. However, if one is not saved he has not received the Holy Spirit and it is impossible for him to *walk in the Spirit*. Therefore, the subduing of the flesh for the unsaved is an impossibility because they have neither the new nature or the Holy Spirit. There can be no victory over the flesh in the lost. If the lost discontinue the practice of a sin, they ultimately only replace it with another. (e.g. the pastor cites Alcoholics Anonymous as an example of this. They give up alcohol in favor of idolatry - 'high power'.)

- B What is required of the saved man in order to *walk in the Spirit*?  
What does it mean to *walk*? The word *walk* is used figuratively by Paul often as a reference to personal conduct. To *walk* in a certain way is to conduct oneself in a certain way.

Ephesians 4:1-3

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

What is meant by the phrase ... *in the Spirit*? It means to walk or conduct one's life in relationship to the Spirit. The word used for *in* is in the dative case (Dana & Manty pg 84). The dative is primarily the case of personal relations. A personal relationship is described. To *walk in the Spirit* is to conduct oneself in an on-going relationship with the Holy Spirit. In so doing we will not fulfill the sinful desires of the flesh.

1 Peter 1:22

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. . .*

The Holy Spirit is that One who enables us to obey the truth. It is through the help of the Spirit the truth is obeyed.

2 Timothy 1:13

*Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.*

The point is that if we have a strong, close, and personal relationship with the Holy Spirit as a result of pursuing those things which make for such a relationship, then we will receive strength through that relationship not to give into to the flesh. But we have to work in this process.

#### IV HOW CAN I DRAW NEAR TO THE SPIRIT AND DEEP IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM? - FIVE POINTS

- A First, we need to pray earnestly for greater measures of the Spirit's influence and power. We do not need to pray for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for that comes with salvation. This is an overlooked practice which is recorded in the Scriptures.

Luke 11:9-13

*" So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

Jesus specifically encourages His disciples to ask for the Holy Spirit who is and was His gift to the Church. Is this only a reference to the Pentecost event?

Romans 15:13

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Here Paul prays for the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Here we have an example of praying for the power and benefit of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

Paul is praying that the *communion of the Holy Spirit* will be with believers.

Ephesians 1:15-18

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. . .*

Paul is writing to saved individuals who have received the Holy Spirit, yet he prays that they would have the *Spirit of wisdom*. This *spirit* of revelation and knowledge is requested for the believers. Though the believers have the Spirit, they do need a continual and increasing measure of the Spirit at work in them.

Ephesians 3:14-16

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. . .*

It should be plain, proper, and appropriate for the people of God to pray earnestly for increasing measures of the Holy Spirit's operation in their lives.

How do we *walk in the Spirit* - first we pray to that end.

- B Secondly, we draw near to the Spirit by listening to the words of the Spirit. In any relationship there must be listening. There can be no relationship if there is no listening.

How do we listen to the Holy Spirit?

- 1 by giving attention to His inspired Word.  
John 16:13

*"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

The apostolic writings are the words of the Spirit to us. To listen to the Holy Spirit is to listen to the Bible.

Romans 8:5

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

Revelation 2:7

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." ' (this phrase is repeated seven times)*

Ephesians 6:17

*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...*

This requires hearing the Word read, preached and memorized.

- 2 by giving attention to the Spirit as He speaks to us through our consciences.

Romans 9:1-3

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh. . .*

To not give attention to the Holy Spirit's voice in our conscience is to grieve Him, Ephesians 4:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

Hebrews 3:7-8

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness..."*

If we have not listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit in His Word or in our consciences then we must repent and confess those sins against the Holy Spirit. An offended and grieved Spirit will withhold His power and influence in us until we have repented and confessed our sins against Him. He does not withdraw His presence, but only His influence.

- 3 We draw near to the Spirit by listening to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us in the gathered Church.

1 Corinthians 3:16

*Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God (singular) and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Though we are individually the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are also corporately the temples of the Holy Spirit in the meetings of the gathered church. The local church is the place of the Holy Spirit's special presence. It is important to be in the meetings of the church.

Many of our blessings have come to us through the auspices of the local church.

Acts 4:31

*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

In the context of the praying corporate church that these believers received a fresh infusion of the power and influence of the Holy Spirit.

- C Thirdly, we draw near to the Spirit by cultivating an attitude of conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

There must be a sense of necessity about it.

Zechariah 4:6

*So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.'"*

The strong Samson became weak when the Spirit left him.

There must be a posture of humility and dependence upon the Spirit in us. If anything is accomplished it must be acknowledged that it is by the Spirit. God gives grace to the humble. One of the gifts of grace is an increasing measure of the Holy Spirit's power and influence.

- D Fourthly, we draw near to the Spirit by exercising faith in the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 11:6

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Without faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance and power, we shall not have it.

Matthew 13:58

*Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

Without confidence in the Spirit we will not have His benefit.

Philippians 1:19

*For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. . .*

Note the confidence of Paul in the Spirit. With much confidence we can know that if we *walk in the Spirit* we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. We must expect the help of the Spirit in time of need (Mark 13:11).

- E Fifthly, we draw near to the Spirit by discovering and exercising our spiritual gift.  
1 Corinthians 12:7-11

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

The Spirit of God gives gifts to every believer and expects us to discover and exercise those gifts. The gifts that God gives to His children imply and facilitate service to others. There are no spiritual gifts designed for the exclusive edification of the one to whom that gift is given. A spiritual gift properly exercised always profits and blesses others.

Those who will not serve, will not be sanctified to any great degree.

The saint who neglects the discovery and use of his spiritual gift should not expect the have from God the other wonderful gifts He supplies to His people. The additional benefit and filling of the Holy Spirit which blesses the believer cannot be expected to the same degree by the one who will not serve others by the implementation of his own spiritual gift.

The Spirit of God will not serve the saint who will not serve the saints which is a service to Him.

#### Conclusion:

As we do these things, we can be said to be led by the Spirit.

Romans 8:14

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

This is how we walk in the Spirit - by conducting ourselves in a way that maintains and deepens our relationship with the Holy Spirit. And as we do so, we will be able to affirm what the prophet Micah has written,

Micah 3:8

*But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.*

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*