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GALATIANS 5:16-26

Today, we're going to see how Paul taught the Galatians and how he is teaching you and me today to walk in the Spirit. I believe **Galatians 5**, especially the section we're seeing today, is one of the most practical teachings in the Bible.

Verses 17-21...

The greatest battlefield isn't Gettysburg or Vicksburg or Shiloh. The greatest battlefield isn't Waterloo or Guadalcanal or Guam or Normandy. The greatest battlefield isn't Iraq.

The greatest war that has **ever** been fought is **still** being fought.
The greatest war ever fought is the war that goes on day in and day out in your heart and in my heart.

But, before we look at that warfare, I want us to think first this morning about the command that Paul gives us in **verse 16**.

1) The command...Verse 16...

See, the Judaizers had come along and they had taught the Galatians that if they would just keep the Law of Moses and just adhere to a long list of rules and regulations, including circumcision and feast days, then they would be right in the sight of God.

But, no amount of rule keeping and outside rituals and keeping feast days can change a man's basic sinful nature.

Man doesn't need to be changed from the outside in. He needs to be changed from the inside out.

And the only way that change comes is by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul gives a command in **verse 16**. The word "**walk**" in the Greek is in the **imperative mood** and this means that this is not a suggestion...this isn't just good advice and it's optional whether you and I take it or not, it is a command!

The word "**walk**" in the Greek is in the **present tense** and this indicates that Paul is speaking of **ongoing, continuous action**...a way of life.

And this tells us we're to make progress. When you walk, what do you do? You put one foot in front of another and you eventually get somewhere (unless you're walking on a treadmill)!

And as a believer walks by the Spirit, he progresses in his walk with God. He learns more and more what pleases the Father.

The Holy Spirit is the source of our **power** to walk...but it is the **believer** who is commanded to walk! In other words, the believer must learn to listen! We must learn to hear that still, small voice that tells us "this is the way, walk ye in it"...whenever we turn to the right or to the left.

And I want to tell you this...if we're not walking by the Spirit as Paul has commanded...if we're not being guided day by day by the Spirit as Paul has commanded, then we are not serious about being conformed to the image of God's dear Son!

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So, that's the command...let's look next at

2) The conflict...Verse 17-18...

First of all, let's think about the *participants in the conflict...*

Every one of us has been in this conflict and this conflict began when we came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no war **before** salvation because it takes at least two to fight, doesn't it? And before salvation there was no Holy Spirit of God living within us! Only the flesh lived there.

Sometimes Paul uses the term "**flesh.**" Sometimes he uses the phrase "**the old man.**" Sometimes we hear a reference to "**the old nature**" or "**the natural man**". They all mean the same thing.

Bro. Bob touched on this last Sunday night. We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and we have the Holy Spirit living within us. **But, we still dwell in unredeemed bodies.**

When you and I became Christians, we received a new nature...a **spiritual** nature. We weren't born with it. We were born **again** with it. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and will **always be** flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. **The fleshly birth cannot produce spiritual life.**

That's why the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." Even a "newborn again" babe in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit!

There are some who believe the moment we're saved the **old nature...the old man...the flesh** disappears and never bothers us again. Don't you wish that were true?

Those of you who are never ever bothered by the desires of the flesh... please stand up...or at least raise your hand!

I believe we would all agree that we have a war going on inside of us today. The conflict is between our flesh and the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell us.

So...those are the participants in this conflict...**the flesh and the Spirit.**

Let's think about the **reason for this conflict.**

Verse 17...

Warren Wiersbe says, "If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit; but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the desires of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh have different appetites, and this is what creates the conflict."

Listen, **unbelievers** don't have this conflict. Only **believers** have this conflict. Now, an unbeliever may regret it when he does something wrong...but there's really no **conflict** going on within him. Why? Because there's no Holy Spirit living within him.

So often we're appalled at the things unbelievers do. But we shouldn't be amazed, surprised or appalled, should we? I mean, what do we expect from unregenerate man? Why should we expect them to follow the teachings laid down in the Bible?

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Paul says in **1 Corinthians** that the natural man does not understand the things of God...in fact the things of God are foolishness to the natural man. Why? Because the things of God are spiritually discerned.

Verse 17 tells us that the reason this conflict goes on is that believers may not do the things they please.

Believers don't always do what they want to do. There are times in our lives when the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Thank goodness, the Spirit often stops us from satisfying the flesh, but there are also times when the flesh often stops us from following the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Listen, if the **great apostle Paul** had a problem with this...how much more do **you and I** have a problem with this? This is what the entire seventh chapter of Romans is about. Paul said, **"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"**

I believe the key to all this is the question, **"What pleases you?"**

If you are pleased more by the things that your flesh desires, then you're going to lose this conflict to the flesh. But, if you are pleased more by the things of God, then you have a powerful ally on your side. And you won't always win the battle, but you always have the potential to win.

Every believer has the indwelling power of God's own Spirit to do battle with his own weak and sinful flesh, in order that he may not do the things that please his flesh. The Holy Spirit of God empowers the new inner man for victory over his flesh.

The Holy Spirit gives every believer the ability **not** to sin! When we sin, we do so over the objections of the Holy Spirit! When we sin, we do so because we would rather yield to our flesh than to the dear Holy Spirit of God!

Paul tells us in **verse 18** that if we are led by the Spirit we are not under the Law. Why? Because when we're under the Law that means we're **doing and doing and doing** and all that **doing** is empowered by our flesh...but when we're led by the Spirit we're **doing**, but it's the Holy Spirit who is **enabling** our doing and **empowering** our doing and **inspiring** our doing!

John Bunyan's classic book, **PILGRIM'S PROGRESS**, is an allegory of the believer's life as he walks through this earth day by day, with his ultimate destination being Heaven. An allegory, of course, is a story where one thing stands for or symbolizes something else.

The main character of the book is a man named Christian. Christian is making his journey to the Celestial City. And on his way to the Celestial City, Christian stops at a house owned by a man named Interpreter. Let me just read to you a couple of paragraphs from this grand old book.

"Then Interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him into a very large Room that, because it was never swept, was full of dust. Upon inspecting it for a while, Interpreter called his servant to sweep it. When he began to sweep, such a cloud of dust arose that Christian almost choked. Then Interpreter told a young woman who stood watching, "Bring some water in here and sprinkle the Room." After she had done so, the Room was easily swept and cleaned.

"What does this mean?" Christian asked.

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“This Room is the heart of a man who was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel,” answered Interpreter. “The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled his entire person. The one who first began to sweep is the Law, but she who brought water and sprinkled it is the Gospel. Now remember you saw that no sooner had the first begun sweeping than the dust made such a cloud that the Room could not be cleaned by him...and you were almost choked by it. This is to show you that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart from sin by its works, revives and adds strength to sin. Even as that soul sees and tries to get rid of the sin, it has been granted no power to overthrow it.

“Again, you observed the young woman sprinkle the Room with water so that it could easily be cleaned. This is to show you that when the Gospel comes into the heart with all its sweet and precious influences...even as you saw the young woman still the dust by sprinkling the floor with water...sin is vanquished and subdued. The soul is cleansed through faith and is consequently fit for the King of Glory to inhabit.”

What a word picture of what Paul is teaching in the *Book of Galatians*! All the Law can do is to stir up the dirt in our lives, and make us more and more aware of it. Only the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can wash it away! Hallelujah!!!

Well, so far, we've seen the Command, the Conflict, its participants in the conflict and the reason for the conflict...

In the next six verses we see

3) The Contrast...verses 19-24...

Paul first lists the deeds of the flesh and he then lists the fruit of the Spirit.

This list can be categorized this way...remember I've read from the NAS...

Sexual sins: Adultery, impurity, sensuality

Religious sins: Idolatry, sorcery

Social sins: Enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings

Personal sins: Drunkenness, carousings

We'll not take the time to go into each one of these sins. Suffice it to say these are sins that no one in this room would want to be a part of, but if we were truthful, we would all have to admit that we all have committed some of these sins in the past.

You may not have ever committed adultery or fornication, but let me ask you...have you ever **envied**? You may not have ever dealt in sorcery, but have you ever put anything or anyone before God? If you have, then you have committed the sin of **idolatry**.

I think you get the picture. Paul is saying Christians are not to be governed by the flesh because if we are then we're going to commit the deeds of the flesh! This list isn't an exhaustive list of the deeds of the flesh...they're merely a representative list.

But, at the same time, because this list touches on so many areas of life, this passage of Scripture have caused folks to doubt their own salvation.

They've looked at this list, and said, “Paul said that those who practice such things **shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**”

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The key word here is “**practice.**” In the Greek the tense of this verb is a **present active participle** and it indicates **ongoing action...or a lifestyle.**

The Bible always evaluates the character of a person based on the way he behaves **as a rule...as a lifestyle...habitually.**

People who **habitually** indulge in sin show themselves to be enemies of God, whereas those who **habitually** do good show themselves to be His children. The unsaved person occasionally does good things. The saved person occasionally falls into sin.

But the habitual lifestyle of the unsaved is to practice the evil deeds of the flesh and the habitual lifestyle of the saved person is to bear the good fruit of the Spirit.

And this leads us to the **other side** of this contrast. Every contrast has **two sides**. One side of this contrast is the deeds of the flesh which we’ve just seen. The other side of this contrast is the fruit of the Spirit.

We need to understand that the **deeds of the flesh** are done *by one’s own efforts*...and it makes no difference whether that person is **saved or unsaved**. But, you won’t see the fruit of the Spirit in an **unsaved person’s life**. The fruit of the Spirit is found only **in the lives of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells**.

By the way, before we get to the fruit of the Spirit, let’s look down at **verse 24** where Paul tells us that our flesh has been crucified. Well, if this is so, why are you and I having so much trouble with it?

We need to understand that some things are true for Christians **positionally** and not true for us yet **practically**. **Positionally**, my old nature, my old flesh, my old man is already dead. But, **practically** this death has to be appropriated every day in my life.

Paul said, “**I die daily.**” And I want to tell you if Paul died by crucifixion as he says in **verse 24**, and if we die by crucifixion...we can’t do that to ourselves. **Crucifixion cannot be done to one’s self**. We have to have help. And the help we need is the Holy Spirit.

Positionally, Jesus did this for us. **Practically**, the Holy Spirit does it for us every day of our life if we will just yield to Him.

Verse 25 says we must live by the Spirit, and we must walk by the Spirit. The word “walk” in this verse simply means walk by trial and error. It’s a picture of a child learning to walk.

A baby doesn’t go a conference or seminar to learn to walk. We don’t show him videos that teach him how to walk.

No! He takes a step and falls down...takes another two steps and falls down again. He stumbles and falls over and over, but one day he learns to walk on steady feet, and then he learns to run and you can’t keep up with him.

Will you fall? Of course! Every time you take a step that’s not controlled by the dear Holy Spirit, you have fallen. But, you just get up, brush yourself off and start over.

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God does a work **in** us because He desires to do a work **through** us! And the way He works through you and me is by enabling us to live in the Spirit and walk by the Spirit, and when we're really living in and walking by the Holy Spirit, **we're going to exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit.**

The **first characteristic** of the godly fruit produced in the believer's life is

Love...and this is agape love...unconditional love...a love that doesn't spring from our emotions, but from our will.

In other words, we don't love someone because they're necessarily easy to love, but we love because we're commanded to and the only way we do that is to by an act of our will yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

The **second characteristic** of the godly fruit produced in the believer's life is **Joy**... This isn't happiness...this is joy in the face of circumstances that are pleasant and in the face of circumstances that are not so pleasant.

The supreme example of this is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that for the joy set before Him Jesus endured the Cross.

The only way we can have joy in spite of our circumstances is when we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit!

The **third characteristic** is

Peace... We are to be **anxious for nothing**. We are not to let our hearts be troubled. We are to allow the peace of God which we cannot understand guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus!

How do we do this? By the power of the Holy Spirit!

The **fourth characteristic** is

Patience... This is a picture of a person who is longsuffering and tolerant when being unjustly accused or persecuted.

The **fifth** is

Kindness...relates to a tender concern for others. It has to do with the desire to treat others with kindness because that's the way Jesus has treated us.

Then there is

Goodness... We would have to say with Paul, "In my flesh dwells no good thing"...There is no good in me except the Holy Spirit. **The only goodness you will ever see in me comes from Him!**

Then there is

Faithfulness... This is a forgotten trait in our world today, isn't it? I mean, we don't often see folks who are truly loyal and trustworthy, do we? But, again, that shouldn't surprise us. The only true faithfulness we will ever possess...is the faithfulness that is lived out in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The **eighth characteristic** of the godly fruit produced in a believer's life is

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Gentleness... (meekness)...

This isn't weakness. This is an attitude of submission, even when wrongly accused...free from the desire for revenge or retribution.

And the last characteristic of the godly fruit is

Self-control...

This refers to restraining our passions and our appetites.

Did you notice that this fruit is **singular**, not **plural**? It's not "fruits of the Spirit" - plural...it's "fruit of the Spirit" – singular.

It's not like going to the Farmer's Market at the Agri-Center and seeing all the cantaloupes and watermelons and peaches and plums and saying, "Well, I'll take two cantaloupes and one watermelon, but I really don't care for any peaches and plums today."

No! Paul is talking about **one fruit with nine characteristics**. If we say, "Well, I have love, but I really don't have patience"...that's unacceptable. I mean, God doesn't grade on a curve. **If we're walking in the Spirit, we'll exhibit all nine of these characteristics!**

Does this seem impossible?

I love this illustration that I first heard from Dr. Ron Dunn a number of years ago. Some illustrations just stick with you and this one stuck with me.

Have any of you ever pruned a tree? Or have you ever watched someone prune a tree? When you prune a tree, what happens to the limb that you've cut off? It dies, doesn't it?

Did you ever just leave the limb on the ground and then come back several weeks later to find that the leaves were still clinging to that dead limb?

We have a lot of pecan trees and pecan trees love to drop limbs to the ground. Sometimes these limbs are alive when they fall and sometimes they're dead. Sometimes these limbs don't make it to the ground. They're caught on their way down by another branch.

Well, winter comes and all the leaves fall off all our pecan trees...but we might look up and see a branch...a limb that has been caught by the other branches on its way down. And do you know what we notice? We notice that limb still has its leaves. On all the other limbs on that tree the leaves have come off, but that limb still has leaves clinging to it. WHY?

Because leaves don't fall off trees. They're pushed off! As the sap begins to fall in that tree, it pushes off those old dead leaves...and they fall to the ground! But there's no life in a limb or branch that is separated from the tree. It has died!

Now, you know, when you think about it...this is a great plan! I mean, God is really smart! What if it didn't work that way? What if this fall, Gloria and I had to get some great big tall ladders and when the leaves turn brown in the fall on our pecan trees, we have to go out there and begin to pull off the leaves?

We have 35 pecan trees or maybe 34, since we've taken one out. But, do you know how long it would take us to pull all those leaves off all those trees?

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I have a feeling God would say to us... "What in the world are you doing?" And we would say, "Well, Father, we're pulling off all these old dead leaves so there'll be room for new leaves next Spring."

And He would say to us, "My children, all you need to do is to make certain the tree is alive and healthy and that life is flowing and it will, by itself, push off all the old dead leaves and make room for the new leaves."

Let me ask you...Have you wasted a lot of your time trying to pull off dead leaves? Have you lived a lot of your life saying, "Oh, I've got to do this and I've got to quit doing that..." **Well, I want to tell you on the authority of God's precious Word that you don't have to do that!**

All you have to do is to make sure the Holy Spirit is flowing through you and filling you and you know what...He will push off the old dead leaf of hate and in its place put the fruit of love. And He'll push off the old dead leaf of doom and gloom and in its place put the fruit of joy...and so on...

See, we don't have to follow a bunch of rules and regulations to avoid the deeds of the flesh we've seen today. Following a bunch of rules and regulations is a deed of the flesh itself!

All we have to do is be yielded and submissive to the dear Holy Spirit of God! And the fruit of the Spirit...all nine characteristics of it will be exemplified in our lives!