**“WALK BY THE SPIRIT”**

**GALATIANS 5:16-26**

Did you all know that there’s a war going on? No, not out there. A war is raging over who will have control of your life. There's a real tug-of-war going on within each of us. As we’ll see in our text, v 17, the combatants are the Holy Spirit and our flesh. On one hand, God saved us and desires control over our thoughts and ambitions. The very moment we got saved God equipped us with the Holy Spirit. He gave us the gift of the Spirit to help guide and direct us. On the other hand, we have our flesh, the old human sin nature part of us. Our flesh carries with it self-gratifying desires of its own that are strong and want to be in control.

In Romans 7:15-19, Paul describes this conflict within himself this way: “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”

So if the great Apostle Paul had this internal struggle going on within him, it should come as no surprise that it goes on within each one of us. Even though we’re saved and have been justified in Christ and even though we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are still fallen creatures with a bent toward depravity. The good news is that as Christians regenerated by the Spirit we CAN have victory in the midst of this conflict.

So how do we resolve this issue? How can we be victorious over the sinful desires of our flesh? The answer to this question is found in God’s word, in our passage this morning, in Gal Ch 5 beginning with verse 16…

READ Galatians 5:16

“Walk by the Spirit” is God's clear command. So, what does this mean?

Another word for walk is “lifestyle,” the way you live, the way you conduct yourself day in and day out. Clearly we have the choice whether or not we will walk by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals sin to us and directs us down the right path. He instructs us which way to go and which way not to go. As we are obedient and yield over the various parts of our life to Him, we will grow spiritually. We become more discerning. We learn that we can trust God. Walking by the Spirit is a continual, daily process. If we follow the Spirit's leading we’ll be less apt to sin or to go down the wrong path. Babies don't come out of the womb and immediately begin to walk, do they? No. The physical process of learning to walk and eventually to run and to jump is a slow painstaking process. The spiritual process is the same way. It takes time and daily exercise to develop spiritual muscles.

The Holy Spirit helps us to live holy lives pleasing to God as we yield control over to Him. Living in a manner that pleases God applies not just to those things we do externally that others can see, but it also applies internally, to our thoughts and what we do in private. The key to holy living is to be filled with the Spirit. This would include Him in all of our thoughts as well as our actions. If He’s in control of our thoughts then we won’t have to worry about thinking and doing evil things. “Walk by the Spirit!” We must yield to Him and let Him do a work in our lives. If we will do this the end of verse 16 says the result will be that “you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” The NASB says, “you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

READ Galatians 5:17

So, here we see the conflict. We’ve already defined “the flesh.” It’s that part of us human beings that serves, that feeds our sin nature. The flesh and Spirit oppose each other because they have different goals. The flesh seeks to build up and glorify self. The Spirit seeks to build up and glorify God. Something has to give. Choices have to be made. Herein lies the conflict. The question boils down to “Whom will we serve? Will we serve ourselves, our flesh, or God?”

We cannot live the Christian life the way God intends in our flesh. Paul declares in Romans 7:18, which I just read, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”

READ Galatians 5:18

The purposes for the Law were (1) to show that man is a sinner, (2) to reveal man’s need for a savior, and (3) to give man guidelines to live by.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit accomplishes all the purposes of the Law in our lives as believers. So, if we’re being led by the Spirit, then we don't need the Law. That means that we need to be tuned into the Holy Spirit's direction, hear what He tells us and then do as He leads. We must discern the difference between our own feelings and His promptings. That sounds simple, right? It’s not, because the tug of the flesh is so strong. If fleshly desires were not so strong, then living the Christian life would be a whole lot easier.

READ Galatians 5:19-21

Paul lists the natural evil desires, which the flesh produces, what he calls “the works of the flesh.” This is by no means intended to be an all-inclusive list. In fact at the end of this list he adds, “and things like these.” In addition to the works of the flesh here, Paul mentions cheating, homosexuality, greed and stealing in 1 Cor Ch 6. John, in Rev Ch 22 mentions lying. They’re all sins. They can all occur in even a Christian’s life as a result of giving into the carnal desires of our flesh and not following the Holy Spirit's leading.

The rest of verse 21 is a warning: “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” At first this might sound as though Paul is saying that believers can somehow lose their salvation, but I don’t believe that’s what he means. The Greek phrase translated in the ESV as “do such things,” or in other translations as “practice” indicates continual action, a lifestyle that does these things. A lack of repentance, no confession of sins, no surrender to the Holy Spirit's control – these are red flags and indicate that a person may not really be saved. Now I’m not going to stand up here and pretend that I know for sure whether somebody is saved or not. I’m not the judge of whether a person who says they are a Christian but does the things listed in these verses here is or is not truly saved. God knows their hearts and He will ultimately judge them. All I can say is that the evidence of what a person truly is lies in what they do, how they live their life. I can stand up here all day long and tell you how much I love my wife. But the evidence of whether or not I truly love her is in how I treat her. The same is true about my love for Christ.

I heard a good analogy about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit. The idea is to yield the control of your life to the Spirit of God who permeates you and carries you along. Picture a sailboat. The invisible wind fills the sail and it billows out and the craft moves across the water as a result of the power of the wind. Christian brothers and sisters: be moved along by the Spirit. Be carried along by the Holy Spirit. Not only allow Him to fill your sails but let Him have control of the rudder of your life also. Submit to Him. Follow His leading.

We CANNOT keep resisting God’s will and expect Him to produce fruit in our lives. However, if we yield to the Holy Spirit, then look at what He will produce in our lives...spiritual fruit.

READ Galatians 5:22-23

So here we see what Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit.” I’m not going to take the time to go thru each one this morning. What I want to do instead is call your attention to the last part of verse 23 which says, “against such things there is no law.” If you have submitted control of your life to the Holy Spirit, you don't need the law. And why is that? The law restrains sin. The flesh produces evil while the law keeps it out. In the case of a Christian, the Holy Spirit produces those things mentioned in verses 22-23. But these are good things. They don’t need to be restrained. They need to be exercised, released.

READ Galatians 5:24

For those who are in Christ I have great news… Jesus dealt with your natural evil desires on the cross. We have been set free from sin's power over us and we no longer have to give in to it. We must daily commit our lives to God's control and depend on the Holy Spirit's power in us to overcome them. “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (1 Jn 4:4)

READ Galatians 5:25

We end up where we began back in v 16. If you’re saved, then walk by the Spirit, “keep in step with the Spirit,” follow the Spirit, yield your will to His will. If you do that then He will transform your entire life.

The last verse is really a segue into Ch 6…

READ Galatians 5:26

Ch 6 deals with our behavior so this verse goes right along with that and we’ll talk more about that next time.

In closing let me remind you that the Christian life is not a sprint to the finish. It’s a walk. Proverbs 16:9 says, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

I want to go back to v 25 **[next slide]** New Living Translation

We’re not individual islands each working to do the best we can for the Lord. Paul makes it very clear that one of our primary responsibilities is to encourage each other. As we “walk by the Spirit” we will find that our pride and personal ambitions are subdued. We’ll become more submissive to God and to His will for our lives. We’ll have a greater concern for others. This is what it means to be truly spiritual, to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives.

Thru the years I haven’t taught a whole lot of lessons centered on the Holy Spirit, so this morning has been nice. And there really aren’t a whole lot of hymns and choruses about the Holy Spirit, so let’s sing one in closing. You’ve heard it before… Sweet, Sweet Spirit.