

## **Walking by the Spirit**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 5:16-26

**Study Texts:** Romans 8:1-8

**Sermon Recap:** In this week's sermon, Pastor Jeff highlighted the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. As he noted, when we learn to walk by the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of our flesh. This is seen in Paul's overall argument from all of the Galatian letter but specifically in this Sunday's text. Paul writes, "...*walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*" So, in one sense, we see that by being in the Spirit, we will reject the world; we will not live according to worldly standards, and will not have our ultimate hopes and trusts in the world. In another sense, we see that the Spirit works in us in particular ways, producing certain and distinct attributes. We call these the *fruits of the Spirit*. As we learn to reject the world and the ways of the flesh, we actively welcome the way of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christians walk by the Spirit.

**Sermon Connection:** It is always best to let the Bible provide commentary on the Bible. This means that it is always best to see how any one particular portion of Scripture fits with the whole of Scripture. Romans 8:1-8 provides a fine counterpart—a fine commentary—for our Galatians text. In Romans 8, Paul is in the middle of an extended explanation of God's primary role in the salvation of man. Specifically, Paul uses this portion to focus on the Spirit's role in the life of the Christian while also offering reliable helps for evaluating and distinguishing between true and false faith. We see that, for those who love God and have been set free from the law of sin and death, they desire to live lives of faithfulness. On the other hand, not only do non-Christians not live holy lives, they have no desire and no ability to do so. It is only by the Holy Spirit's work that men and women learn to walk with Jesus and live to His glory.

### **Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** By God's grace, Christ-followers live Spirit-filled lives that are pleasing to God.

#### **Lesson Points:**

**Point 1 - The Foundation of Our Freedom from Sin and Death** (vv. 1-4)

**Point 2 - Living in the Spirit vs. Living in the Flesh** (vv. 5-8)

**The Context:** In this section of Romans, Paul has just finished a lengthy explanation of the Christian's freedom from the law of death because of the gospel. He reflects on how the Christian is not only freed from the effects of sin and death but also how the Christian is freed to life in the Spirit. Thus, in our passage, we see him outlining both the foundation of life in the Spirit and providing insight into the Spirit-filled life.

**Opening Question:** What is something in your life that you are committed to? Hobby, pastime, pleasure, etc? How was it for you to think about those things? Why?

**Transition Statement:** The point is that thinking about (setting our minds on) what we love is not hard. Paul's point is to drive us to see this as it applies to the things of God. When we consume our minds with worldly things, we become worldly. But, when we consume ourselves with things of the Spirit, we learn to walk with God...

### **Point 1 - The Foundation of Our Freedom from Sin and Death** (vv. 1-4)

Does verse 1 start with a pronouncement rather than an explanation? How does this help us understand the grace of salvation?

Not exactly. We must always remember to understand the Bible in context. Nothing stands alone. 8:1 is not the beginning of a new thought but the continuation of a long God-centered point Paul is making. As we saw in the context, Paul has been expounding Christ's work in salvation and its effects. Upon all of this, he says, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" That phrase by itself is weighty, large, looming and theological. But, it is only the tip of an incredibly large iceberg.

Now, to our understanding of gospel grace...Paul's statement, "*There is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ...*" has tremendous Jesus-centered truth. Based on all that Paul has said in the previous 7 chapters of his letter, we come away with a deep understanding of the pure grace of the gospel. There is no condemnation for Christians only because of Christ; only because of their identity in and association with Christ via the gospel. This point sets the tone for everything going forward...

According to verse 2, what is the foundation of our new life in Christ?

Paul uses the phrase, "*...the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus...*" It is important to notice several things:

1 - We must note that we are truly free from sin in Christ Jesus. This perfectly compliments Jesus' words in John 8:36, "*...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" It further supports Paul's words in Galatians 5:1, "*For freedom Christ has set us free...*"

2 - We must see that it is only through the Holy Spirit's working new life in us that we gain freedom in Christ. The gospel of Christ is both a *pronouncement* of freedom from sin

(justification) and the *promise* of the Spirit's ongoing presence and work in our lives (sanctification). We see both realities in this verse.

How do we see the differences between "*the law of sin and death*" and "*the law of the Spirit of life*"? See also Rm. 7:5-6.

Paul is drawing a stark contrast between life in the Spirit (Christianity, holiness, etc.) and life in the flesh (worldly living, self-centeredness, etc.). On the face of it, it seems so elementary; it seems so clear; of course there is a difference between Christians and the world. The reality, however, is that so many struggle with this very issue. Many claim Christ but walk in the flesh; their lives proclaim enslavement to the flesh...and Paul is clear that Christians, by and through the power of the Holy Spirit, live the new life of faith and freedom.

How is Paul helping us see the God-centeredness of salvation and new life in verses 3-4? Paul is drawing our attention to God's work in the accomplishing of salvation. He states it clearly that man could not do it. The Law of God represents God's holy perfections and His righteousness. The Law, therefore, not only reveals God's holiness but reveals man's sinfulness (Rm. 7:7). In saying that the Law was weakened by the flesh, Paul is not saying man somehow prevented God's Law from being able to save. Rather, he is explaining that the Law was *never meant to be* a means of salvation. This is precisely what Paul has been explaining throughout Galatians. Only God can save; it is only through His grace; it is only through Christ's work, applied by the Spirit. Salvation, as we see, is entirely God-centered.

According to verse 4, what is a definite mark of a Christian? Does Galatians 5:16-26 support this?

Paul does not mince his words here. He plainly says that those in Christ—Christians—walk according to the Spirit. Another way to say this is, "They live lives of consistent faith." This is entirely in line with Paul's teaching in Galatians 5. In that chapter, Paul is outlining some of the defining marks of walking in the Spirit, including the fruits of life in the Spirit. Therefore, as we read Romans 8:4, we let Galatians 5:16-26 serve as further and more detailed commentary. We let the Bible interpret the Bible.

How do we see both the sovereign hand of God and the active role of man in verse 4? We can often get hung up trying to discern where God's sovereign control stops and our responsibility starts. This is an improper approach as His sovereignty extends to all things (otherwise it would not be sovereignty), but we also recognize our responsibility to live in faith. This verse, then, gives a glimpse into something that is somewhat baffling. In verse 3, Paul explains that salvation is fully accomplished through the work of God in Christ, and is applied to us by the Spirit. God did this "*in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us...*" But Paul goes on to say, "*who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*" Here, Paul is joining

together God's sovereign work in causing and directing salvation with the Christian's responsibility to walk in faith; to live in the Spirit.

**Transition Statement:** Knowing that God is the center and foundation of all things, let's see how Paul further extends this to our practical daily living; to how we set our minds...

**Point 2 - Living in the Spirit vs. Living in the Flesh** (vv. 5-8)

What is a theological purpose for Paul's distinction in verse 5?

In keeping with the flow of Paul's thought, this verse helps to see that there is a God-centered difference between Christians and non-Christians. As we evaluate our own lives and the lives of others, we must recognize that the Bible makes a distinction between Christians and non-Christians on the basis of their lifestyle. This does not mean that we earn our way to heaven by the way we live. Rather, what the Bible states over and over, and here explicitly, is that when God works and saves a person, their lifestyle changes. The way they view the world changes. Their values, commitments, hopes, dreams and desires...they all change because of the gospel. Therefore, the theological purpose is to further highlight the God-centered nature of Spirit-filled living.

What is a practical purpose for Paul's distinction in verse 5?

Practically, Paul is helping the Church understand the difference between true faith and nominal faith. It is a helpful point to know that true Christ-followers live in the Spirit, and therefore do not live according to the world. They are not seeking worldly things; their ultimate hopes are not worldly hopes. This is helpful as we evaluate ourselves and our Christian brothers and sisters. Hebrews states, "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...*" (3:12). This is one of the practical applications of such a truth.

In verse 6, Paul is pastoring/shepherding the Church. What is he saying, and how is he shepherding?

He writes, "*For to set the mind on the flesh is death...*" As a spiritual shepherd, Paul is to guide the Church into spiritual health and fullness. As a part of that, he must warn against harmful things, such as living according to and loving the world. It is just a clear, biblical fact: Christians are not consumed with the world; they see past it. He goes on to say, "*...but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*" Not only does Paul offer a correction to wrong behavior, He echoes the entirety of the Bible. True life is found only in God. Peace is found only in God (See Psalm 1). By guarding and warning against false hopes, Paul is protecting and guiding, and by pointing us to the true Hope—Jesus Christ—Paul is immolating the true Shepherd. Only in the Holy Spirit can we live consistent and genuine lives of faith. Only in the Holy Spirit can we have a peace that surpasses even our own understanding (Phil. 4: 7).

Consider further Paul's wording, "*The mind set on...*" What is Paul getting at with this idea?

As we have seen, Paul has robustly outlined the sovereignty of God in salvation, but he has also highlighted our responsibility to obey and live faithfully. He further highlights our responsibility to obey here. In using the phrase, "...*the mind that is set on...*" the implication is that we have a choice in how we live. By setting our minds on the things of the world—worldly hopes, worldly dreams, stresses, worries, etc.—we are choosing death; we are choosing life apart from Christ.

On the other hand, Paul says, "...*to set the mind on the Spirit is life.*" What a promise! Not only is God working to accomplish salvation in us, His people, He invites us to actively engage in that process; He is inviting us to live faithful, obedient, Spirit-filled lives. This is all built upon the foundation of His work, but as Paul notes here (and in Colossians 3:2), we have direct influence concerning the health and vitality of our spiritual walk with the Lord. By setting our minds on the Spirit, we partner with Him to accomplish our sanctification.

How do you see this play out in your own life, your day-to-day?

Allow time for personal reflection and response. As the spiritual leader of your Growth Group, consider leading the way by discussing how you struggle with living a consistent life of faith and your need for the Spirit's help and guidance.

How do verses 7-8 help us understand the difference between a Spirit-filled Christian and someone who is simply trying to earn salvation? Consider Galatians 5:22-26.

It should come as no surprise to us that there are many men and women who claim to be Christians but give no fruit; their lives give no evidence of the Spirit's presence and work. While no two Christians are going to look and act entirely the same, the Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit does certain and distinct things in the lives of God's people. In Romans 8:7-8, Paul says that the person who is not under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit cannot and will not do the will of God. Although many may claim Christ with their mouths, if their lives give no evidence of the Spirit's power and guidance, they hold a false hope (Mt. 7:21-23).

Therefore, we see that an evidence of Spirit-filled Christians—a mark of true salvation—is a desire to do the will of God. True Christians, under the guidance of the Spirit, will desire to carry out and uphold the Law of God. It will become a deep well of joy and delight (Ps. 119:16); it will steady their lives (Ps. 1); it will guide their living (Ps. 119:105).

What do verses 7-8 teach us about God? What do they teach us about ourselves?

These verses reveal the complete and utter holiness of God. He will never be pleased and honored by anything less than perfection. Only in Christ will God be honored and satisfied. As

for ourselves, this is a sobering reminder that without Christ, not only would we have no hope, but we would have no desire to hope. If God does not move upon us, we will never want Him, which is why we must trust Him entirely as we seek to live consistent lives of faith, and as we call others to do the same.

### **The Big Picture**

Our goal has been to see that by God's grace, Christ-followers live Spirit-filled lives that are pleasing to God. This week's sermon highlighted the fact that the Holy Spirit produces a particular type of lifestyle in Christians, dependent entirely on Him. But, we also see that this does not exclude the intentional and consistent holy living of the Christian. It is only by God's grace that we are saved and given a new heart and new desires, and it is only by His grace through the work of the Spirit that we learn to lead holy and faithful lives.

### **Application Questions**

- What are evidences of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- What are evidences of the flesh in your life?
- Knowing that you are set free from sin in Christ, in what ways are you embracing your freedom unto holiness? How are you living a faithful life?
- In what areas do you need to repent?
- How are you manifesting the fruit of the Spirit?
- Seeing that our mindset has a big influence, how are you setting your mind on the Spirit? In what ways are you setting it on the flesh?
- Are you manifesting fruit of the flesh? If so, what/how?