

Walking in the Spirit

by Jack Abeelen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in the Spirit to live a life free from the bondage of the flesh and legalism, highlighting the transformative power of grace.

Duration: 56:26

Scripture: Galatians 5:16

Topics: "Walking In The Spirit", "Grace vs. Works"

Description

Jack Abeelen emphasizes the importance of walking in the Spirit as opposed to living by the flesh, highlighting the ongoing battle between our spiritual desires and our sinful nature. He explains that true salvation comes through faith in Christ and that our relationship with God is maintained by grace, not by works. Abeelen contrasts the characteristics of a life led by the Spirit, which produces love, joy, and peace, with the destructive behaviors that stem from living in the flesh, such as hatred and selfish ambition. He encourages believers to focus on their relationship with God and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide their actions, leading to a fruitful life that reflects Christ's love. The sermon concludes with an invitation for those who have not yet accepted Christ to open their hearts and receive the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

This is study number 03ID965. Father, thank you for gathering us together tonight. We praise you, Lord, for a good year as we look back.

And pray for a greater year to come, that more folks will come to get saved, and more will come to honor your son. And there will be more fruit, and much fruit, that would remain. And Lord, tonight, as we just commit ourselves to learning your word, I pray that your word would just come alive to us.

We would see it, maybe as we've never seen it. And we would just know you, Lord, like we should. And there'd be great hope in our hearts.

Lord, be with us tonight. We ask you to just bless our study, and give us ears to hear, and a heart that would see these things. And may you make them just easy to be understood for us tonight.

As we look to you now, Lord, teach us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, let's open our Bible tonight. Galatians chapter 5, verse 16. Galatians 5, 16.

As we wind down towards the end of the book of Galatians, we will not be doing chapter 6 until next year, but it's a good one. Paul wrote this book, maybe the first one in print, 51 or so AD, to a whole group of churches that he had founded on his first trip out with the gospel, amongst the Gentiles for the most part, and also amongst the Jews. But the challenge for Paul's gospel was that there were men around who really believed that faith in Christ wasn't enough.

And it really set the boundaries, I guess, for the battle for people's hearts for, you know, the next 2,000 years. Do you get saved by doing or by believing? Can your relationship with God be improved by your behavior in the sense that you can get God to love you more, care for you more, you know, honor you more, or is that a measure and a matter of faith? And Paul had gone out preaching the message that God had given to him, faith in Christ, salvation by grace. But those that followed Paul always brought along the works and the effort and the self-effort, if you will.

And so Paul wrote this first book to a bunch of these little churches that had just sprung up because the gospel brought life to say to these folks, look, don't go back now to trying to work your way to heaven when you found out Jesus will bring you there freely by grace. And the way that you get saved and then the way that you walk with God is the same. Now, in the first 15 verses of chapter 5, last time, Paul said in the beginning there in verse 1, stand fast in the liberty that you've gotten now as a Christian.

Don't go back to that legalism bondage. Don't let people drag you back down because if you're going to try to work your way to heaven, then you don't need Jesus. They're incompatible.

It's either all in Christ or it's nothing. He doesn't want to just be a part of the solution. He's either the entire solution or he isn't a solution at all.

But if you replace Christ with works, then you don't need Jesus. Either he died for your sins. He didn't, like, pick up 50% of the tab.

He didn't just cover the tip. He covered the whole bill. And if you can't serve him, then you really have to write him off completely.

He went on to say that if you're going to live by the law, man, you better keep the whole thing because one sin brings judgment. He talked about the false teachers, about them slowing down the running of the race and bringing words that weren't really from the Lord and contaminating the truth and attacking the messengers of the truth like Paul. And Paul finally ended up in verses 13, 14, and 15 last time by saying, look, if you live by grace and you're saved by grace, then you walk in love.

You've got no reason to try to compete with others or try to put yourself above others because grace kind of levels the playing field. Nobody can make it on their own. Everyone needs the Lord.

But the workers of the flesh, the workers of the law, the people who try to do it themselves, are always contending with others, trying to find folks less faithful than themselves, trying to find someone that doesn't perform as well as they do because with every failure of another, I gain the upper hand. So his contention was, you can always tell a person who's living by the law, trying to work his way to heaven, they're always talking to you about, well, did you make church every week? How many did you miss? I didn't miss any. How about praying? How often do you pray? I pray an hour a day.

How about half an hour a day? You see, I do an hour. There's constantly that war of performance. Paul said, look, man, if you've been saved by grace, use that freedom to love one another and be careful of the

gospel that's being preached by these other men, which is no gospel at all, which will end up causing you to devour and consume each other.

Tonight, beginning in verse 16, down through verse 26, Paul wants to contrast some of the obvious signs of whether you are living in that relationship of God by grace through the Spirit or are you still driven and dominated by a life of the works, the law, the flesh. He uses those words interchangeably. To live by the law means to try to perform on my own.

To live in the flesh means I'll do it myself. To live in the Spirit is just the opposite. I've died to myself.

I'm relying on the Lord to do the work in my life. And he sets the two in contrast, and he talks about them to say, look, these are the kind of things you see in the life of someone who's dominated by the law, by the flesh, by their own efforts. Here's the kind of things you'll find in someone's life who's been saved and the Spirit now works in their heart.

Great little pictures and portraits, if you will, general terms of the kind of things that you can expect to see when God begins to move in grace in someone's life versus the religious guy who's got it all up to himself and has to do it all himself. First of all, Paul says in verse 16, I say then, walk in the Spirit. You will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, for the flesh will lust against the Spirit and the Spirit will against the flesh.

These are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish, but if you are being led of the Spirit, then you are not under the law. Now, notice the lust of the flesh in verse 16 is equated to under the law in verse 18 and the battle between the two of them in our life. You know, when God made us, if you start at the beginning, man was created to have fellowship with God as a spirit.

God is a spirit, the Bible says. If you fellowship with God, you meet Him on the spiritual level. And when God made Adam and Eve, He made them spirit, soul, and body.

They were spirits. He breathed life into a container. But they were spiritual.

They were spiritual creations. When you die, your body dies, but you're a spirit. You continue on.

But that's where we have fellowship with God. There's a conscious awareness of God. There's a fellowship with God.

And in that sense, you're almost like the inferior trinity, you know? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You're a spirit that has a conscious awareness and live in a body. The problem is when man sinned, the Lord said, the day that you eat of this fruit, you're going to die.

What died when Adam and Eve sinned? Their spiritual relationship with God died. They lived for hundreds of years beyond the sin in their flesh. But that spiritual life was killed, was cut off, if you will.

If you go back and read about Adam and Eve, you read of Eve that she saw, that she desired, that she took, and that she ate. All of those fleshly responses, if you will, in direct disobedience to God. And from that day, man lost fellowship with God.

And something else happened. He became an upside-down kind of a creation. He now became body, soul, and spirit.

The body now became the great dominating force, didn't it? Now it was me eating, and me getting, and me collecting, and me succeeding. And my spiritual life cut off. I now was aware of my body needs constantly.

And in the world, until you come to know the Lord, that is still the criteria that drives man. They are body conscious. Dead to their relationship with God, but driven by the lusts of the flesh.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus about heaven, and seeing, and entering the kingdom of heaven, He said to Nicodemus, Look, you've been born, and you have a body. You need a spiritual birth. You've got to be born again of the spirit.

You need that connection with God reestablished. You need a new spiritual life. So you could be again what God intended.

Spirit, soul, and a body that just becomes a place of dwelling, rather than the leading indicator in your life. You need to be born again. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 2, he said of them, You know, God made you alive when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in the way that you used to walk according to the course of this world, and the prince of the power of the air, that spirit that is still at work in the children of disobedience.

Even as it worked in you to fulfill the lust of your mind, and the lusts of your flesh, but God found you in that condition, and rich in his mercy with a great love wherewith he loved you, while we are yet sinners, he dies for us. You see, while we were dead, Jesus came and brought a solution. And once we get saved, then God begins to work in us by the Holy Spirit, who now reestablishes this connection with God.

And I meet with God on spiritual terms. I'm now a spirit living in a body that will one day die, but I'm alive with God. I'm in touch with God.

My eyes are open. My heart is reachable. The sin is removed.

I'm saved. Paul says, the person who gets saved by the grace of God finds life as the Holy Spirit moves in and begins to work in my life. And my greatest job now is just to submit to God.

Whereas the man who walks after his flesh has a whole different set of circumstances. He has to revolt against sin through pain and through strife. Notice what Paul says here in verse 16.

If I walk in the Spirit, then I don't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. If I walk in the Spirit, I will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. How do you beat the flesh? You don't fight it, or stand up against it.

It's not the best solution. And the best solution is preoccupy yourself with God. Isn't that the best way to win? Walk in the Spirit.

Wait a minute. How about just saying no to drugs? Well, that's all right, but walk in the Spirit. If you walk in the Spirit, the flesh doesn't get a place to work.

The word walk, peripateo, is a present tense word here that means ongoing or day to day, live your life in such a way that you are listening to and being led by and interested in the things of the Spirit. And submitting to Him, the flesh will get crowded out. Sometimes when people are about to get saved or they've just gotten saved, they worry very much about reforming their flesh.

Well, what can't I do now? What can't I do? Is there a list of things I shouldn't be doing? What are the no's? What are the do's? What are the don'ts? What are the rules? And you say to them, hey, just start reading the Bible, man, and walk with God. And you'll be just fine. Well, what if I do something wrong? Hey, you walk in the Spirit, I guarantee your flesh ain't going to have a lot of room to work.

It cuts you off from those demands of the flesh. Some people are very preoccupied with their flesh. Oh, I'm always getting mad.

Oh, I'm always wanting things. Oh, I'm always, what do I do with this flesh? You say to them, hey, get preoccupied with the Spirit. Get preoccupied with the Spirit.

Get your eyes off of that and get your eyes on the Lord. And the best way is to turn to the Lord and the flesh gets starved out. Two times, I think, yeah, there's two, in Deuteronomy 9 and in chapter 10, Moses doesn't eat for 40 days.

Now, I don't know about you, but I've never done this. 40 hours would be ridiculous. 40 minutes is a new record.

You know what I'm saying? And he goes for 40 days twice. Why? To impress the Lord? No. Because he needs something really badly? No, because there's danger, there's pressing needs, none of the above.

He begins to worship God and he forgets what day it is. He enters into worship and pretty soon 40 days have gone by. He's so preoccupied with the Lord, his flesh doesn't even get to hear the dinner bell.

Go read Deuteronomy 9 and 10. So, I get saved and I begin to seek the Lord and look to God and people say, oh, man, I used to have a real drug problem. You know, how's the Lord going to help me? I said, I don't know.

I used to do a lot of drugs but when I got saved, I was just interested in Jesus. There wasn't even any contest. The Lord, the drugs, the Lord.

The Lord. It wasn't too hard, you know. And they don't always come that easy but that's how we are to go.

Walk in the Spirit. Preoccupy yourself and find victory because there is always going to be a battle according to verse 17 between that Spirit-led life and your old man, the old flesh. So much so, that there are going to be times when you have to struggle just to do the right thing.

Or even that sometimes you lose the battle so that you do not the things that you wish. There's always going to be a battle. It's an ongoing battle.

Now, you know, New Year's is just a couple of weeks away. Maybe you're working on your New Year's resolutions. But I tell you what, the vows you make and the slogans you take, you know, make sure that you add to the list Matthew 26, verse 41.

The Spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. I've got to live in the Spirit if I'm going to have a chance. Paul says you just walk in the Spirit.

You want to have a victory man, walk in the Spirit. Which is a great freedom for me. I don't have to try, I don't have to sweat, I don't have to struggle.

I just have to walk with God. What I can expect, according to verse 17, is as I begin to seek to do the things of the Lord, that my flesh is going to argue. It's going to be dissatisfied with the whole process.

What are you going to do now? Go to church? Yeah. It's Wednesday. You know, church people go to church on Sundays.

Well, I'm going Wednesday. Well, I don't think I like it. You don't ever get that? Or it's just me? See, I have to come.

But that don't mean I always want to be here. You don't have to be here. You have it even harder.

I don't even know if you're not here, some of you, if you sit in the back. My new nature, my new life, hungers for God constantly, but my old life doesn't, and there's great conflict. I want to pray, but oh, there's always something in the way.

And I want to serve, but there's always something else I've got to do. And I want to read, but boy, I'm so tired, my eyes just can't stay open. And I want to study, but I've been so busy all day.

And I want to witness, but you know, I'm a little worried about if I have the right words. And there's always something opposing my every spiritual move. And yet the advice is, walk daily in the spirit, and the flesh won't really have its way.

It won't really get its place. The problem for us is that we have redeemed spirits, born-again spirits, living in unredeemed bodies. These are the old bodies, aren't they? We've got new life in old containers.

One day we'll get new containers with hair, thin, good-looking, able to see. But for now, we're saved in these puppies right here. And the conflict is, you know, our bodies, in fact, what does Paul say in Romans 8? All of creation groans, laboring with birth pangs, as we, the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, that is, he says, the redemption of our bodies.

We're living in a container destined for death, and we're spirits destined for life. And there's conflict. Before we were saved, the only conflict with sin was your conscience, a gift from God to every man to keep you from completely falling over the edge right away.

But, according to the Bible, if you continued to sin against your conscience, it could eventually become, 1 Timothy chapter 4, seared or dead. You could so violate the restraints that God places in your conscience that pretty soon you can sin without feeling bad about it. You can do things that no man in his right mind you would think could approve of, but your conscience has been seared.

But that was the only resistance that you had. Maybe public pressure, maybe parental pressure, maybe some peer pressure, but for the most part, the only real struggle you had was with your own conscience. Now you get saved, and I'm telling you, immediately two very clear voices begin to speak.

The voice of God, the leading of the Spirit, and then that old man that always wants its way, you know. And there are always those two suggestions, aren't there? There's God pulling me in his direction. There's the flesh just opposing every... He's just a dead kind of weight, always having to be dragged along.

I go to Philippians and I read, it's God who will now work in me, not only to will to do, but to do of his good pleasure. And then I read in Romans chapter 8, you know, if we live according to the flesh, we die. So I have to reckon the old body dead and be led of the Spirit of God.

I have that constant battle, that whole struggle, you know. Paul said it in 1 Corinthians 9. You got to run to win, man. You got to hold yourself down.

You got to keep yourself under. You got to make the sacrifice because it's a race worth running. Paul says you got to walk in the Spirit.

To these men who wanted to be taught to walk by works, he said you got to live by grace. It's the same as walking by the Spirit. You're always going to be opposed, but, verse 8, if you'll be led by the Holy Spirit, then you don't need a law.

That's a great word, isn't it? It's the same injunction as verse 16. 16 and 18 are literally the same things. You know, there is victory over the flesh not in keeping the law or in seeking to do it in my own abilities, but by submitting to God and following the Spirit as He leads.

He'll change me. You don't need a law for those that are in love with God, filled with the Spirit. They will do that which is right.

What follows then is Paul setting some examples of both. The life of the Spirit, the lust of the flesh. And notice he changes the words lust of the flesh from verse 16 and the law in verse 18 to the words in verse 19.

Now, the works of the flesh are evident because that's his point. Whether you call it the law, the lust of the flesh, the work of the flesh, it's all that self work without grace. The works of the flesh are evident.

And here are some definable, recognizable characteristics of a life lived by or in the flesh. And then what follows is one that is filled with the Spirit where the Holy Spirit is reigning in the heart. When it is flesh, it is works.

Notice verse 19. When it is flesh, then it is works that it seeks to accomplish. The flesh, by definition, is that old nature.

Jesus said, Matthew chapter 7, whatever goes into a man doesn't defile him, but what comes out. What comes out comes from the heart. And so that life after the flesh, out of the heart of men come evil thoughts, fornication, murder, adultery, theft, covetousness.

He lists the whole thing there in Matthew chapter 7. The flesh is that old life driven by self and works and the law that is like a bad tree bearing bad fruit. No way can it do the right thing. We can wash it, excuse it, bind it up, clean it up, sanitize it, but the real issue hasn't changed.

The heart is still wicked. I remember one time hearing a guy say who lived on a farm that he took his pig and he put on a little suit on him and set him on the couch, gave him a little mint julep. The pig just made the whole place nasty in four hours.

He said he looked real good for a while, but he's still a pig. But we're still sinners. You can clean us up any way you want, but until the heart is changed, no matter what we dress up in, the heart is the wicked part.

This is the works of the flesh. And the list that Paul makes is designed to indicate to us here is a life not led by the spirit, but led by that old life, by the law followers, if you will, by the workers of the law. Today we have a lot of people telling us that sin really isn't a problem.

We want to blame the environment that people live in for turning out the way they do. Or we want to blame their parents. It's their upbringing.

Or it's the education department. If you're a racial minority, then it's the suffering that you suffer at the hands of others. And there are just so many reasons for sinful behavior.

And I'll grant you, a lot of those can certainly contribute to difficulty, but the issue is still the heart. Man needs to be saved. You want to look at a guy that came from a weird environment.

We just finished on Sunday night. Look at Joseph. Here's a guy that had a weird upbringing.

His brothers sold him into slavery. He lived for half of his life. Under someone else's bondage and power, he had a dysfunctional home.

He turned out to be, along with Daniel, I think, maybe the two greatest Old Testament saints to learn about and to learn from. It isn't an issue of the environment, or Joseph would have been really mixed up, but it was his relationship with God. In verse 21, after Paul gets done with this list, he writes the words, and the like.

Envy, murder, drunkenness, revelry, and the like. So this list isn't intended to be complete or exhaustive. It's one of those representative kind of samplings.

Here are some things that are fairly evident in the life of a person who is working by the flesh. And he gives us a three-category list, sexual, religious, and relational. In verse 19, sexual, four words.

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lewdness. Now, adultery is usually used in the Bible for sexual sin for married people, when they are sexually unfaithful and married. Fornication is oftentimes used to describe the sexual behavior of an unmarried person.

But by definition, the word pornea is a word that just means sexual sin in any category, and it's much broader than that. The word uncleanness is a medical term, meaning a sore that is oozing. And it is used in the Bible to describe people who confine sexual indolence and filthiness in almost everything.

You know, kind of like the dirty mind that sees something dirty in everything. What did Paul say to Titus? To the pure, all things are pure. But to those that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure.

Even their mind and their conscience is defiled. That's what this word uncleanness means. It's the sexual entendre.

It's the fodder for the comedy on TV, you know. And the little jokes that are always sexually motivated. Finally, this word lewdness is a word that in the Bible means to speak of the restraint of shameful indulgence.

Or literally, there is no longer any shame in behavior. I can go to the beach and take off my clothes and feel perfectly at home. Well, that's natural.

It's normal. It's, you know, it's spring break. That and six beers and I'm there.

It's that lewdness where there's no modesty anymore. Or there's no more effect on the life by public opinion. Or even conscience doesn't bear any more, you know, kind of an influence.

So, Paul says, look, you got to walk in the spirit and then the flesh doesn't win. But look, this is the kind of works that the flesh comes from. This is what the flesh produces.

Unfaithfulness, dirty thoughts, illegitimacy, lack of restraint. When it comes to religion, it produces idolatry and sorcery. The word idolatry is a very general word, but it means to place someone or something above or before the Lord.

Something or someone that takes the place of God, where God is second to it. That's idolatry. Maybe one of our greatest idols in our culture today is sports.

We worship sports figures. We really do. Now, you may not like to hear that, but there are folks that could tell you the statistics on batting averages and completed passes and wins and losses for the last 20 years for their favorite team who don't know 20 scriptures by heart.

Oh, yeah, he batted 368. He hit a home run just yesterday. Two days ago, went three for four.

Yeah, and what is the Bible? I don't know. I only got so much room for stuff, and it's pretty well filled up with fantasy baseball. We worship sports.

We will actually take our kids out of church to take them to soccer for months on end to tell them that soccer is one God that can displace the real God. That's one God worth setting aside for another. We have this tremendous love for those kind of things, and it becomes idolatry to us.

It's that which replaces God. So the flesh does that. What does it do? It seeks to put things before the Lord.

The word sorcery is not out of place here. The Greek word is pharmakia. We get our word pharmacy from it, but it was used at least in ancient times to speak of the kind of drugs that were used in much of the witchcraft and in the false religions that were being practiced.

So the occult and the use of drugs would often be linked together in the Old Testament, and you certainly find that to be so as well. So when it comes to the flesh, there is sexual perversion, unfaithfulness, and self-service, and then there is that replacement of God with something else. That's how the flesh works.

That's a typical outgrowth, if you will, when the flesh takes over. When it comes to our relationship with others, which is what all of these other words describe, it starts with the word hatred and then modifies that word in different sections, but all of them having to grow out of that issue of hatred. The word hatred is from the word in Greek, enmity.

It's a plural word. It's a general word that means any hateful attitude or action towards one another or just for the sake of dislike, a pushing away of that which is good. Jesus said that if you hate someone, you've murdered them.

It's the same equivalency. It's the attitude that, if carried out to the extreme, brings an action. So to him, it was the same issue.

It was a life of the flesh. It's a fleshy characteristic. If you look at the words that follow hatred, they are all descriptions of what hatred can involve.

The word contention means to argue or to fight. Whether it's physical or verbal depends on the context it's used. But the flesh will push folks to contend, to fight, to argue, to push for themselves.

That's not a godly characteristic. That's a fleshly one. Jealousy is that hatred that's brought out by the fact that somebody has something you want, A, and B, you don't want them to have it.

It's bad enough they have a pool. I want a pool, and I wish theirs would crack and leak. I don't want them to enjoy it, but I want what they have.

Selfish, driven flesh. That's not the Lord. That's the flesh.

This is the works of the flesh. These are the things you can expect. He adds to the hatred definition outbursts of wrath.

Great word. It means to have unrestrained kind of boiling over. That's not a control area of the spirit.

That's when the flesh has seen its end. I don't know how many of you play golf, but I used to play golf with a guy that would regularly buy clubs because he would throw the ones he was using that day into the tree. And he'd swing in the bog like this, and all of a sudden you'd hear, and you'd look, and sometimes I'd try to say, hey, next time you throw it, just give it to me.

I'll put together a bag, I'll bring it back to you. It'll be good, you know? Or he'd break them in half. And then I read in the paper just last year that the fella, I think it was in Washington, got so mad with his three-wood, and he hit the ground, and the thing broke, and shot right in his neck, killed him.

So I cut out this article from this buddy of mine that I play golf with, and haven't played with him since. I've still got it to show him. It's not the spirit, man.

It's the flesh. Outbursts of wrath. I've just lost myself.

Well, that's the flesh. No self-control. The word selfish ambition is the Greek word for strife.

But the implication is the flesh is always interested in only one thing, me, myself, and I. So whatever is going on, I want to work the situation out to gain for myself. I want to look good. I want to kind of come out on top.

I want to come out on the good end of the deal. It's always about me. That's what the flesh does.

It focuses on you. The opposite side of that is the dissension part here, this next word after selfish ambition, because it's the word for division, but it really means that I would divide from you if it means I'll get more. It's a pushing away of others for the sake of personal gain.

Heresy might look like it's out of place, but it literally means a belief system opposed to the truth of God. So it's that self-issue again. I believe certain things about the way things ought to be, and that's just the way they are.

You know, man-made, self-driven. The religion of Cain. Everybody has an opinion.

I have a new truth. This is what I believe. That's just the way we've always done it.

That's the way self is. It doesn't surrender itself to the Lord. It has its own program.

Paul said, here's the works of the flesh, man. This is how people live that don't have grace. These are the folks that are working by the law and trying it on their own and driven by the lust of the flesh.

Add to that envy and murder, and by the way, in most of the lists, they are always together. Seems to me that envy, which is another colder form of jealousy and murder, seem to always be listed in such a way that much of those things are expressed in violence. And finally, the one we probably can best relate to, drunkenness and partying, or revelry, if you will, but it's the word for partying.

You know, that's the weekend at the bar. And for most, a very vital part of must-have fun. I remember before I got saved, this would be the couple of weeks we'd be planning on where we were drinking and how much.

Because New Year's Eve was coming, and you certainly couldn't go into the New Year sober. The life of the flesh, wasn't it great? Sick, throwing up, we had a blast, we're going to do it again next week. And Paul just, I think, just got tired of writing stuff down, and he goes, well, and stuff like that, the life of which I'm telling you now, beforehand, just as I've told you in the past, those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, Paul wrote this in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul wrote this in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul wrote this in Colossians chapter 3, it'll be written by someone else, John in Revelation chapter 21, it comes up here in the letter to the Galatians, and the issue is always the same, if you find in the life of a person a constant life lived after the flesh, then you better wonder if you're going to heaven, because that kind of lifestyle practiced will not bring a life that was going to heaven. Now, the first response of people usually, we had a guy on the radio today, Paul asked the very same question, that sounds to me like legalism. You know, it's a whole book about grace, and you got all these rules.

No, this isn't legalism, this is revelation. This is literally an unveiling, because the works of the flesh will reveal an absence of a relationship with God, and the works of the flesh will show that the person isn't in fellowship with God. The key word here is practice, which is the Greek word *proso*, which means to be constantly involved with or carrying them out.

Look, this isn't written to the saint who struggles with his anger. For a guy who blows up and, I'm so sorry Lord, I don't want to blow up, that's the old me. Please forgive me, and I go to make it right with whoever I blew up towards, and I'm repentant in heart, and I want to do the right thing, but I'm a weak guy, and that's a big area of problem for me, and so I'm constantly on my knees with this issue before God.

That's not who this is written to. It's written to the person who practices these things, who finds himself involved in them constantly without any problem, who finds his life there, who looks for his way of life there, who is comfortable there, who accepts that way of life. To the one who would live like this without repentance or grief, that person has absolutely no assurance of salvation.

In fact, he has just the opposite. He's got all kinds of indicators. He's living a life in the flesh, and if you consist or continue in that, boy, you're in danger.

There's a vast difference between an act of sin and a habitual lifestyle of sin, and in all of the warnings that Paul gives to the saints, because these are written to Christians. He's just distinguishing for us what we should be able to find. Does that mean you're not going to lose your temper? No.

But it means that when you do, you're not going to like it, because you're going to recognize it as a work of the flesh, and you don't want to live in the flesh. I don't want to look with lust. I don't want to be hateful.

I don't want to keep a record of wrongs. I want to do the right thing. What's going to argue against me? Verse 17 says, My flesh will.

So that I don't even do sometimes the things I should. But that battle is going to be won as I walk in the Spirit. You've got to be careful you're not living in sin by choice and then clutching to grace as a way out.

That's the danger. And Paul said, I've told you before, I'll tell you again, I've told you before, if you practice these things, if you're living a life that way, what you're doing is revealing the fact that you're living by the flesh, by the law, by the lust of the flesh. That ought to be becoming less and less in your life.

We see murder and go, oh, that's horrible. But we're not so, we don't have such trouble with envy or hatred. I hate him.

Yeah, me too. Verse 22, Paul said, but, turning the corner, always like the butts in the Bible, they always turn you around. You know, here the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and long-suffering and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control and against such there is no law or literally, with these kind of things there's no need for a law.

I want you to make a couple of comparisons. Works of the flesh are plural, the result of the old nature and self-effort, but here in verse 22, fruit is singular. It is the fruit of the Spirit of God who has come to dwell in your life.

It is the outgrowth of His presence with you. The New Testament is filled, by the way, of definitions of fruit. For example, you will read that if you lead someone to Christ, that is a fruit of your ministry.

That if you do good works by faith, those are fruit. If you worship, it's the fruit of your lips. That you can give to someone and it's the fruit of God's work in your life.

But this is different. This is the fruit of the present indwelling of the Spirit in the life of a believer who now lives by grace. This is the result of a redeemed heart where the heart has been changed and as a result, so is the character traits becoming changed.

The fruit of the Spirit. There are nine of them, but again much like that word hatred there, this word love is the defining attribute of God's work. And then the words that follow, eight of them, modify that word love.

It is love and patience, and it is love and action, and it is love and self-restraint, but it is that love of God that dwells in you, changing the way you live and being that characteristic that defines you as a child of God. Paul's contention is those who work their way to heaven still live by the flesh. They're still struggling and trying and conniving and hurtful and lustful and consuming one another.

In fact, he'll say that again here in verse 26 and verse 25. And that to him was the difference. They were there destroying Paul and condemning Paul and speaking evil of him in the hopes of turning these people back to the law.

And Paul said, hey man, that's a real work of the flesh, that hatefulness. The work of the Spirit is fruit. Isn't it interesting? You can get a machine to do work, but it has to be a living thing to produce fruit.

How is the fruit developed in my life when I get saved? The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in my life. And he begins to produce this within me, starting with this word, love, agape. It's a very important concept to understand because this word agape is a New Testament God-defined word that you won't find in classical Greek before the New Testament.

It is a word that describes God's love towards man as found in his Son. And then found in the lives of the saints who have been saved. It is a love of choice.

It is a love that isn't defined by feeling, but a self-sacrificing kind of love. Love your enemies. How? I hate them.

It's not feelings. Choice. Action.

God loves you. God demonstrates his love towards you. How? While we were sinners, he died for us.

1 John 3.16, by this love we, by this we know love. How? Because he laid down his life for us so that we could lay down our lives for each other. It's a love of choice.

It's a self-sacrificial kind of love. And it becomes the mark in the Bible of God's dwelling in you because it's so opposite to what you are. Jesus said in John chapter 13, this is a new commandment that I'm going to give to you.

Love one another as I have loved you. Before it was just love one another. Now it's as I've loved you.

So love you one another. And then verse 34, verse 35, John 13.35 By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. How? By this agape love.

It is so unique, so different than the world's love, that it becomes an absolute sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. And, according to the Bible, it can be cultivated and grow. Philippians, I think it's chapter 1, verse 9 Paul says, I'm praying that this agape love in you might abound in you all the more as you grow in knowledge and discernment of God.

It's a love that begins to grow. And then it is defined in these characteristics of life. Joy.

Not happiness, but joy. A settled joy that is based upon spiritual reality or based upon knowledge, not based on outward circumstance. Paul wrote, I've learned in all things to be content.

You immediately say to yourself, well, contentment must have nothing to do with what I do or don't have. That's wrong. So with joy.

Joy is that contentment that comes because I know where I stand with God. John wrote at 90 years old in that epistle, I'm writing these things to you about the Lord so that your joy could be full. So what could be full? Your joy when you know where you stand with God.

Holy Spirit comes in. What does He begin to teach you? Your sins are forgiven. God's not leaving.

He's going to see you through. He knows what you need before He asks. He loves when you pray so your joy could be full.

You start to compile all this information. What happens to you? You're a pretty joyful guy. Well, I'm out of work.

I know. But man, the Lord's right there. I have great joy.

But you don't have an income. Well, I know that. And He knows that, which is why I'm so filled with joy.

I'm glad He loves me. I'm filled with joy. It doesn't depend on circumstance, but upon the awareness of the truth that you've been given.

It's a fruit of the Spirit. And as God opens your eyes and teaches you His ways, this comes out of your life. Just sow peace.

John 14, what is it? Verse 27. My peace I give to you, not like the world. So don't let your heart be troubled or let it be afraid.

The Holy Spirit comes in and teaches me that me and the Lord are fine, that He's forgiven me, that I have access to His throne. He's told me that all things work together for good. When I begin to worry, what sets in? His peace.

Where's the conflict now? That I don't believe God anymore. Isn't it? Now the battle with my flesh says, worry, man. If you don't worry, nothing will happen.

And then the Lord says, you don't have to worry. I got this figured out. And then your flesh says, oh, He doesn't.

If He had it figured out, He'd have fixed it by now. He's just stalling for time. And then the Lord says, no, no, I'm waiting for the perfect opportunity.

Isn't that what goes on in your head? It goes on in mine. Maybe there's something wrong with me. But the Holy Spirit brings peace.

Aren't you worried? No, no. I'm at peace. Then comes this other attribute, long-suffering, which by the way, by definition, is to endure the afflictions of others without responding.

When hurt, not to try to hurt back. No thought of reprisal. God is slow to anger.

He's plenteous in mercy. He's long-suffering towards us. And the Holy Spirit, when He comes in, does one thing.

He wants to make me more like Jesus. Right? He conforms me into the image of His Son. So Paul writes to the Colossians later on in chapter 3, as God's elect, holy and beloved, put on tender mercy and kindness and humility and long-suffering.

And the Lord, by His Spirit, begins to do that. Those of you that were used to fighting in the streets, settling everything in the back alley, take it outside, now find yourself going, oh, the Lord will handle it. And your flesh says, you little sissy.

And the Lord says, you man of God. And now you got this dilemma. Well, I don't have to be a sissy and you don't have to be a man of God.

Oh, the battle is on. But if you walk in the Spirit, what happens? The flesh loses. What does this show me? It shows me the Spirit has the upper hand in my life.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, next book, chapter 4, you should bear one another in love with long-suffering. The word kindness, it literally is a motivation, not an action. It's almost like the word gentleness.

It's an attitude of expression of love towards others, whereas the word goodness is more the behavior than the motive. It's the kindness kind of expressed in action. I do good.

I show myself to be kind. I'm selfless. The word faithfulness is so interesting.

It's not the word faith, as you might think, but it's the word for trustworthiness or loyalty. Isn't it interesting in the world? You get taught that you can't trust anybody. Everyone's out to get you, aren't they? You can't do a thing today, but you're afraid someone's going to hurt you by it.

You know, you can't buy something on the Internet. They'll steal my identity pretty soon. I won't even know who I am.

We're always worried. There's a warning for everything. There's a label on everything.

The coffee cup at McDonald's. The coffee could be very hot. Of course it's hot.

It's coffee. It's in a cup. But somebody burned themselves, sued them for millions, and now it's got to be on there, right? I saw an ad yesterday of a guy that's supposedly an attorney saying he'll help you.

On the bottom of the page it said, the attorney is not really an attorney. He's an actor acting as an attorney. Well, great.

That makes a big deal of difference to me. But somehow, I thought he was a real attorney. We don't trust anybody.

Everybody's out to get us. That's how we believe. That's how we live.

And then there's that faithfulness that God gives you. Your word can be counted on. You are dependable.

You stick to it. It's the work of God's Spirit in you. You're steadfast.

I love it. And it's an awesome work of God's Spirit in your life. Gentleness is the word for meekness, which is kind of a great Bible word you should really understand.

It means that there's a temper in your heart that accepts the dealings that come into your life as coming from God's hand, and so you accept them without dispute. Isn't that interesting? It literally means power under control like a horse with the reins. That's meekness.

You know, you can control this 2,000 pound animal with just a couple of reins in your hand. Same thing with meekness when it comes to you. You now have a life that's surrendered to the Lord, and so something comes into your life that you didn't expect and you don't particularly like and you wouldn't have really invited, but rather than fighting it, you just go, well, Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but I'm going to trust you to know what you're up to, and I'm going to let you have your way.

Meekness. I don't challenge. I don't dispute the ways of God.

I have patience in these things because I see this providential action of God. Work of the Spirit. Bad break, buddy.

Tough luck. Wrong place. Wrong time.

No, no, no. I'm saved. I don't have those anymore.

I only have now I'm supposed to be where I am, and God does what he wants. Meekness. A work of the Spirit.

Self-control means just that. Resisting both passion and appetite for the sake of God. You don't have a flesh that overcomes you.

You have a flesh that you rule over. What did Paul say to the Corinthians about running the race? At the end of chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, he said, you know, unless I run in vain, you know, that I beat my body black and blue, I don't want to have run in vain. I don't want to preach to others and end myself being a castaway.

Self-control. The characteristic of the Spirit of God living in your life, and then he adds at the bottom, against such of these things, there's no law, or no way the keeping of the law is needed, or useful. Because the result is this grace of God found in salvation in the lives of the saints.

Then Paul, at the end of this verse, or these last three verses, says exactly what he says in verses 16, 17, and 18. Or 15 through 18, I should say. But he restates the thing.

Those of you who are Christ's have crucified, put to death, the flesh with its passions and its desires. In other words, you have the grace now to do the right thing. You have victory over the flesh that someone who isn't saved can't have.

If we live in the Spirit, then let's walk in the Spirit. And let's not become what happens when you're living in the flesh. You become conceited, you provoke, and you envy those things of the flesh, which is exactly what he said back in verse 15.

Or verse 13. You have a liberty. Don't use it as an opportunity for your flesh, but in this liberty of grace, love and serve one another.

Because that's really what the law is all about. And if not, then you're going to bite and devour and be consumed of one another. So here's the battle.

We should, as God's people, live and walk in the Spirit. And so doing, rather than conceit and envy and provocation, will come love and good works. And the differences are obvious.

Look, the secret of life is found in John, I think it's chapter 15 verse 16, where Jesus said, You didn't choose me, but I chose you, appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father, He may give it to you. The secret of life is to bear fruit. Isn't it? To be a life that God can work in to bear fruit.

The secret of bearing fruit, though, is found in five verses or so before in John 15, is abiding. The way you bear fruit is you abide in Christ. John 15 10, If you keep my commandments, oh no, no, 15 5, I'm the vine, you're the branches.

If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much what? Fruit. So the secret of life is to bear fruit. That's what God wants.

But the secret of bearing fruit is to abide in Christ. And the secret of abiding in Christ is to obey Him. John 15:10 said, If you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

If you love me, you'll keep my commandments. So we obey, we do it in love, and we do it based on knowledge. God loves me, He loves me, because He first loved me, I love Him.

You know, it all goes around the block. If the Spirit of God lives in us and I'm living by grace, these things of the flesh are going to fall off. There's still going to be a battle.

But what's going to come to the forefront is the fruit of God's presence in my life. And it's going to show itself in love in every situation. The love for God, the love for others, even the love for self.

Gentleness, meekness, kindness, faithfulness, self-control. It's going to be that work of God that you don't need rules for. You don't need laws.

Who do you need laws for? People who live by them. But the people who live by them have to obey them all. Pretty forceful argument, I think, for Paul that he says, Look, you can find the folks that are living by grace and those that are living to do it on their own.

Just look at the characteristics in their life. These will show over time. In two weeks, we will finish Honestly, Chapter 6. So you'll have plenty of time to read ahead.

Father, thank you tonight for your word to us on this walk in the Spirit. And Lord, I pray tonight that we, all of us, would be that example of a life that is born again. No longer trying to work our way to heaven.

No longer trying to follow a set of rules whereby we can impress the Lord. But rather, Lord, just being those men and women who have hung on to you by faith and through the work of your Spirit in our lives have come to just rest in you and abide in you. That the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer is love.

We will be loving and joyful and peaceful and faithful as we just look to you to do the work in us. We thank you, Father, that grace removes from us all of that competitiveness and that hatefulness. That self-struggle and self-performance that the world has to rely upon in their religion.

That it delivers us from the works of the flesh, the struggles of man, the wickedness of sin. Driven by self. Driven by self-gain.

The difference is night and day, God, you've caused us to be born again of the Spirit. We have new lives. We're new.

Born of the Spirit now. We have a spiritual life. We live in this body, but it has no demands that have to be met.

We live on that spiritual level. We have spiritual ears to hear and the Spirit of God to move in our hearts. And Father, tonight as we sit together, I pray that that would just be our testimony.

The life that we live would show the Spirit within us. That He would be glorified in our life. Tonight, if you don't know the Lord, know this.

There needs to be this radical new birth in your life to be saved. The Bible doesn't teach you to clean up your act. To do better at following the rules.

To come up with a greater percentage of completion and obedience. Rather, the Bible teaches that you need to be born again. You need the Holy Spirit to come live in you.

You need to be saved because you're lost. You need to be bought with a price and paid for by the blood of the Lamb. And if you'll open your heart and accept Jesus, God will send His Spirit to dwell in your heart.

And God will come and dwell in you and you'll be born again. The light will come on. The Spirit will move in.

God's power will come to bear and the flesh will really have now a challenge it never had before. God will bring victory to your life as you seek to live for Him. If you haven't been born again, the prayer room's right up front on your left.

Come tonight and receive Jesus and open your heart to Him. Let Him in. Be the Lord of your life.

And go home filled with the Spirit. Praise the Lord, man, He can save you tonight. If you'll call, He'll answer.

If you come, then God will cleanse and make you new. Amen.

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