

## ***“Live By The Spirit”***

### **Christian Liberty**

Galatians 3:16-26

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**Bruce:** Eternal Father strong to save, whose arms have bound the restless waves. We pray, Lord, that You would bind our nation and heal our nation, that You would draw us closer to Yourself. Bind the wounds of our adversity. Help us to lead a life that is pleasing to You. And may You open our eyes once again as we study Your word, to see You behind the pages of Scripture. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Let's open our Bibles, men, to Galatians chapter five, continuing our verse by verse exposition of this chapter on freedom in Christ, Christian liberty. Today we'll be looking at verses 16-26. We'll probably be in this for the next couple of weeks. There's a lot to cover here, and I trust that the Lord will be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold Him. I'll be reading from Galatians five from the English Standard Version, beginning at verse 16.

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

*“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Bruce:** Amen and Amen. Last week we did a little bit of a review and we again discussed what Christian liberty is, what freedom in Christ is. We also looked at what freedom in Christ is not. And then we also looked at the limitations we have with Christian liberty. There are certain limitations that Paul instructs us about in the book of 1 Corinthians, certain limitations we have. Just because we're free in Christ does not give us license to do everything that we want. There are limitations.

We gave you three principles of operation in making decisions in the gray areas of life. The first one is *the principle of personal progress*. Am I doing those things that are progressing my life in the direction that God would want me to move in? Am I cooperating with Him in the sense that I'm moving in the direction God has called me to? It's the principle of personal progress.

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The second one is *the principle of personal authority*. I have no authority except Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean you don't do other things like have a career or other things like that. You certainly can. But we need to be Christ-centered and to bring Christ's authority into all the activities of our lives because we have no authority other than Christ Himself.

And the third one was *the principle of personal relationships*. Just because I'm free in Christ and have liberty in Christ does not mean that I can do anything that I want, because I need to be somewhat concerned about the impact it's going to have upon weaker brothers and sisters.

Now it does not mean, men, that you and I are slaves to people's expectations. It does not mean that. But it does mean this: that I do need to consider the decisions that I make in my freedom in Christ and how they will impact the body of Christ. Yes, we have liberty to do that. But sometimes your answer might be “Thanks, but no thanks.” Now do we have any questions on any of those three principles we talked about last week that help us understand some of the limitations we have?

Next Paul says this as we begin our study today in verse 16. Paul's first admonition is to stand fast. He says, *“Walk in the Spirit.”*

Our standing in Christ determines our walk with Christ. The words *flesh* and *spirit* that we just read in this passage are each found about ten times in chapters five and six. Those who live according to the law depend upon the energy of the flesh. Those who live by grace depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit. We're going to see a significant contrast between living by the law and trusting your own resources, and living by grace and trusting the resources of the Holy Spirit.

Now the words “walk in the Spirit” means to have our daily lives under the control, and this means under the direction of the word of God. To walk in the Spirit means to have our lives directed by the Scripture, by the word of God, by the Holy Spirit. To be led by the Spirit means to be delivered from the life of bondage to legalism. When you're led by the Spirit you're free from the bondage of legalism. We are not adhering to an external code. The internal code now has been placed inside of us by the work of the Holy Spirit. To be led by the Spirit means that we are no longer limited to a bondage of dos and don'ts. There are a lot of things that we will do. But it's not earning God's merit or earning God's favor. You have that because you are standing in Christ. Remember this. Our standing in Christ determines our walk with Christ.

Now at the moment of regeneration or the new birth, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the soul of the believer and becomes the Source of power to the individual person. So you're either going to have the resources of your own life, the resources of your own human existence, or you're going to have the resources of the implanted Holy Spirit because of your regeneration, our new birth.

Now what is the command that Paul gives us in verse 16? He says, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit.”* Now that is a present tense verb. In other words, it means this. It's a present tense command, meaning “continue to walk in the Spirit.” This is not a one-time thing. This is not a once-for-all thing. This is not just something that happens once in your life. He says, *“Walk in the Spirit.”* To walk in the Spirit means to continue to be walking in the Spirit moment by moment, second by second, day by day. This is not a one-time thing

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or a one-event activity. It is something we are to do continuously in the whole direction of our lives.

Now we need to understand this, men, that sin is not necessarily a matter of not having the right information. It's a matter of not walking in the Spirit. The reason that we sin is because we do not walk in the Spirit and we're trusting our own resources to obtain God's righteousness. That's why it's so important that we understand this passage.

Now we need to know that the fulfillment of God's holiness comes by walking in the Spirit. When He comes into our lives He begins to exercise our freedom in Christ in such a way that we will never violate ourselves, violate other people or violate God Himself. The Holy Spirit becomes our Restrainer.

There are a lot of things that we want to do. We have Christian liberty. But not all the choices that I can make are going to put me in a position of progressing with God's direction in my life. The Holy Spirit becomes a restrainer. That's one of the things that we need to understand about His work in us.

The Spirit is mentioned seven times in Galatians chapter five. Paul is emphasizing that the Spirit subdues the flesh by granting believers power over it. He subdues the fleshly desires we have by giving us the power over it because that's the work of the Holy Spirit. And He does that consistent with our understanding of who Christ is. Our standing in Christ determines our walk with Christ.

Now we will check our lusts, we will stimulate our love for others and we will fulfill the law not by circumscribing ourselves to some external code, but by walking in the Spirit.

Now the word *walk* implies progress. It pictures a day-by-day, step-by-step existence in which the believer submits to the Holy Spirit moment by moment in his daily life. Every believer possesses the Holy Spirit. Everybody who is truly regenerate, born of God, possesses the Holy Spirit. And we have the Source of restraining power in us to prevent us from doing the things that we really want to do because of our human nature and motivating us to do the things that are glorifying to God in His holiness.

Look at Romans chapter 8 verse 9. *“You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”*

Now let me give you a little history lesson here if I can. Let me read you something that I came across some years ago about the misunderstanding of the walk in Christ.

“There was a group known as the Quietists who were late seventeenth-century mystics who believed that a one-time surrender to God would initiate a passive union with God. The Quakers were influenced by the Quietists. Even the Evangelical Bible Conference in Keswick, England was quietistic in emphasis. Hannah Whitehall Smith in *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life* and the sermons of Charles Finney both promoted the idea that a Christian needs to do but little but rely upon the Holy Spirit.

“Quietists believe that walking in the Spirit does not require any effort on our part. It is the ‘let go and let God’ mentality. And when there is effort, we hinder the holiness that God wants to accomplish through the Holy Spirit.

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“The concept of surrender and quietism is vital to living a virtuous holy life in their opinion. Some, but not all, believe that when one completely surrenders, he receives a second work of grace so that the sin nature becomes eradicated and the Christian supposedly never sins again.”

Well that’s very contrary to what the Scripture says, because 1 John teaches us that if you say that you have no sin, you’re a liar and the truth is not in you.

“Although we are indebted to many of the Quietists for their meditative emphasis, their teaching of a passive surrender to the Spirit is beyond Scripture. It raises the irreconcilable problem of who is at fault when you do sin.

“You can say, ‘It can’t be my fault because I was surrendered. I surrendered all. It can’t be my fault. And it can’t be the Holy Spirit’s fault because He wouldn’t do something like that. Therefore I must take back my surrender. And therefore I must surrender again.’” And you get into this situation where you’re just taking back your surrender and re-surrendering again. It’s like being on a treadmill.

“That would be a sin, too. Who’s fault was it, then? Walking in the Spirit is not as simple as it sounds, although the command itself is very simple. ‘Walk in the Spirit.’”

If holy living were entirely the responsibility of God, we probably wouldn’t need the command. We wouldn’t need it. Paul wouldn’t say, “But walk in the Spirit.” If we didn’t need that, if God could do it simply without our effort, without our fighting the fight, we wouldn’t need that command.

“Its presence implies that our own effort is involved in the process. What makes this command so challenging is the presence of the conflict that we have.”

Now the whole mentality of that, men, is this. The Bible doesn’t say, “Just let go and let God. He’ll do everything.” That’s what we would call *quietism*. It is a misunderstanding of what it means to walk in Christ.

So we need to understand the conflict that we’re involved in. We’ve seen the command. “*But I say, walk in the Spirit.*” Now we need to understand the conflict and how we can participate in this and be responsible believers.

First of all, Paul said to walk by the Spirit. And then he says that it’s going to be a tough thing to do because it’s going to be a fight. Our walk is not simple in practice. There’s a struggle involved. That’s why Philippians 2 teaches us “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.*”

Even though a Christian is a new creature,—2 Corinthians 5:17—and the Christian has been crucified with Christ—Galatians 2:20—we still have the capacity to sin. Because we have a physical body, we still bear the sin nature. That is why we wait for the redemption and glorification of the body. It needs to be redeemed.

Now we can recognize God’s will but we still have problems implementing it. We know God wants us to be holy. And He wants us to walk continually by the Spirit. Achieving these ideas is a life struggle because the flesh restricts the accomplishment of those high goals. That’s the conflict we’re in.

Now a nonbeliever doesn’t have that struggle. A nonbeliever can go on sinning and love it because he doesn’t have the work of the Holy Spirit. But a Christian has that struggle because the Holy Spirit is restraining the desires of our fallen human nature. We

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don't understand the degree of our fallen human nature. And the Holy Spirit restrains that for us. There's a battle going on.

The word *flesh* does not refer to the body, but to the fallen human nature that we have. It's described in the Scripture in different ways. Let me give you some different ways in which this flesh is described.

First of all, *it's the source of human weakness*. Galatians chapter 3, verse 3. *“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?”* Now Paul is saying here that the word *flesh* refers to the futile efforts to achieve holiness in our own strength.

How about Romans 7:18? *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”*—my fallen human nature. *“For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”*

And your options are human achievement or divine grace. Do you have the resources to fulfill the commands of Scripture in your own strength? Or are you going to walk in the Spirit continually, subjecting yourself to the work of the Holy Spirit, trusting Him moment by moment? It's a fight, men, it's a battle, it's a conflict, it's a struggle. That's what Paul is trying to teach us.

The flesh refers to the fallen human nature which is still in the believer. The body itself is not sinful. Paul is not saying that. Appetites are not necessarily sinful. He's not saying that. But the tendencies of the old nature are always downward. They're always downward.

Now take a look at romans chapter six. Paul spells out the conflict between the believer's two natures.

Immediately after conversion the Christian experiences several days or several weeks or several months of wonderful joy, wonderful victory. And then all of a sudden temptation comes and defeat comes. And then they become discouraged. Somebody should have told them that the human nature, the flesh, is going to rear its ugly head again and cause them conflict.

But notice the last phrase in Galatians 5:17. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.”* You see, in our evangelism we need to tell people that. This is going to be a struggle. Everything is not going to be copacetic.

I remember years ago when I was with FCA. (The Fellowship of Christian Athletes.)

**Bruce:** I mean, I made some dumb statements. I thought I was the coolest thing since the Cubs won the Series. (*Laughter*) I remember that once in a high school assembly I said this. “To be a Christian means that life is a bowl of cherries and somebody else has the pits.” Oh, isn't that wonderful? (*Laughter*) It was so profound! I thought that I was the coolest thing in the world!

You see, we need to tell people. Yes, when God gives you a new heart there's going to be a struggle. There's going to be a fight because the flesh is going to be against the Spirit who now indwells you, and the Spirit is going to be against the flesh. And the Holy Spirit is there to be a restrainer to restrain the fleshly impact of our fallen human nature. We don't understand the degree of our fallen human nature. And Paul reminds us that this is going to be a struggle.

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Now here in Galatians Paul spells out the conflict between the believer’s two natures. The phrase in verse 17 does not teach that the believer cannot get victory. That’s not what he’s saying. They should have translated this in a more profound way. *“So that you may not do what you would.”* Verse 17: *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. These are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”* Another translation would be *“so that you may not do what you would.”* The Holy Spirit is the restraining element in that conflict.

Now we need to understand this. Mere determination on the part of the believer will never control the flesh. Mere determination will never control the flesh. It won’t produce the fruit of the Spirit.

What’s the source of our struggle? We need to understand that so we can do battle correctly.

Go to Romans seven. In Romans 7 Paul gives a very clear insight into the struggle that the flesh can put up against the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Paul amplifies this theme when he shows that the believer’s determined efforts to please God in his own strength are futile.

Notice romans 7, verses 14-17. *“For we know that the law is spiritual. But I am of the flesh, sold under sin. 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.”*

You see, Paul is teaching us that there is a sin principle in our life because of our fallen human nature. And that’s the struggle we have. The command is to walk in the Spirit. It’s a simple command, but it’s a difficult thing to do because the flesh is warring against the Spirit, and the Spirit is warring against the flesh.

Paul is saying this. I have the desire, but I just can’t put it into practice. Did you ever get that feeling? Frequently we have that because that’s the struggle that we have.

Now he sums this up in Romans chapter 7, verse 25. After going through this litany of describing the conflict between the flesh, the fallen human nature, and the Spirit in the believer, he then says this. *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but in my flesh I serve the law of sin.”* There is a conflict.

Now the flesh refers to the spiritual part of us that offers ineffectual human effort. That’s what the flesh does. It’s ineffectual human effort apart from God. It’s the flesh where sin lands and does its work.

Do you see the word *lust* in verse 17? The word *lust* in your Bible means to desire strongly. It conveys the idea of a contest, a struggling to accomplish something. So the flesh is struggling against the Spirit to dominate the believer. That’s the conflict that we have.

Now it’s important for us to know ourselves well enough to know, men, what stimulates the flesh in your own life. I don’t know what that is for you, but I know what it is for me because I’m asking God to reveal that to me. You’ve got to know what things in your life stimulate your fallen human nature, the things through your senses. What do I see? What do I listen to? What do I eat? What do I taste? What do I touch? What do I

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read? What do I hear? You see, you’ve got to know yourself well enough to know your struggles, men. And I’ve got to avoid those things, because if I don’t avoid those things, it’s going to stimulate the fleshly desire in me, and you’re going to have a continuous struggle because the flesh is going to war against the Spirit in your life. So you need to know yourself well enough to know what stimulates your own sinful flesh. Yes, Don?

**Don:** Yes, Bruce. I’m kind of going where Jay was going last week when you were talking about all things being lawful. And yet you’re saying today that you should avoid those things that stimulate your flesh. I guess my question is, what does “all things” mean? I mean, how could pornography ever be lawful? How could rap music, or any kind of music that degrades women, is blasphemous, or whatever, how could that ever be lawful?

**Bruce:** Well when I say that all things are lawful, those are things that are not covered by the Scripture. That’s what it means.

**Don:** Okay.

**Bruce:** In other words,--

**Participant:** The gray areas.

**Bruce:** What are the gray areas? That’s what it’s referring to. In the gray areas, there’s no command in Scripture that says, “What do I do?” So that’s when you have to apply this principle of personal progress and the limitations of your liberty, because all things in that sense are lawful. The Scripture already outlines what is not lawful. These are things that are lawful outside of what the Scripture reveals to us. And we just don’t know what they are because they are the gray areas of life. That’s what I mean by that.

**Don:** Okay.

**Bruce:** The gray areas. Such things as what house should I buy? That’s a gray area. Now you need to apply those principles of the freedom in Christ to the purchase of that home. The same thing with your car, the same thing with your job. You see, those are the gray areas of what we’re referring to. And that’s where we have to exercise the limitations of our Christian liberty. Good question, Don. Thank you.

Take a look at Romans 8:3. *“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.”* Paul is teaching us that there is possibility for victory because of the Person and work of Christ.

How about Romans 8:26? *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought. But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words.”* So the Holy Spirit even helps us to pray. Sometimes the best prayer you may have may be “Aaah!” (*Laughter*) I just don’t know what to say.

I mean, there have been times when I’ve been in situations where I had no idea what I should pray. But I know this. Romans 8 says that the Holy Spirit is going to take those groans that I have and take them to the Lord and say, “Father, this is what he needs.” That’s the Holy Spirit’s work in us, you see. And we can trust that.

But we’ve got to realize that the flesh, the fallen human nature, is against all of that. And you’ve got to know yourself well enough to know your weaknesses and your limitations, as well as your strengths.

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Now while we deal with the flesh, Paul also shows that victory is very possible. Here is a parallel passage for us to understand that victory is possible in this battle of walking by the Spirit.

Look at Romans chapter thirteen. In this particular passage Paul deals with living a life of legalism as opposed to living a life by the Spirit. Romans 13, verses 13 and 14. *“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

What’s he saying there? To combat the desires of the flesh you must do what?

**Participant:** Put on the Spirit.

**Bruce:** Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put Him on! So many times Paul says, “Put on Christ.”

Now let me give you an explanation of what I mean by that. The fact that putting on the Lord Jesus Christ in that verse and walking in the Spirit both result in not fulfilling the desires of the flesh implies that they are essentially the same thing. Walking in the Spirit is the same thing as putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you put on Christ, what does that mean? It means walking by the Spirit and it involves saturating your life with the Person and work of Christ. You’ve got to saturate your life with Christ. That means the more you study the Gospels the more you’re going to understand who He is, what He was and what He has done for us. You’ve got to saturate your life, because walking in the Spirit is the same thing as putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Spirit’s work is to what? Point to Christ. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s not to call attention to Himself, but the work of the Spirit is to point to Christ. Walking by the Spirit means that we pattern our lives after His life. He is the pattern for our lives. He is the model for our lives. And the manual for our lives is the Scripture. That’s where we’re going to find how we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. When we study the Gospels and come to know Christ more intimately, the more the Christian life takes on the pattern of His life. He’s not only our model. He’s not only the means. He’s also the manual in the Scripture. And He’s the Person by which we model ourselves, because walking in the Spirit is the same thing as putting on Christ. That means this. The more you know about Christ, the more you’re going to have the freedom to walk in the Spirit, because the Spirit’s work is to call attention to the Person and work of Christ.

Now we’ve got to determine and submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit rather than our fleshly desires. And we do that by saturating ourselves with the Person and work of Christ moment by moment. That’s why I always ask you this question. What has Christ done? What has Jesus done? Ask yourself that question. What has Christ done for me? Look at the implications of His whole life and apply those to your own life. It’s not “what would Jesus do?” but “what has Jesus done?” He has paid for my sins. Go back and reflect upon the basics of the Christian life and saturate yourself with the Person and work of Christ. Think about Him and Him alone in those situations.

Here’s the way Paul says to do it. Practically, Paul says this in Romans 6:12-13. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present*



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*your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”*

Now while we trust in the Spirit and rest in the Spirit, that doesn't mean that we sit back and do nothing. We must be engaged in this battle and get into action. Here is one of the ways in which Paul says we get into action. He says, “Do not present the members of your body to be slaves of unrighteousness.” You want to present the members of your body to be instruments of righteousness.

Now that may mean this, men. You start with the top of your head and you say, “Lord, I want to give You my mind. I want my thoughts to become instruments of righteousness, not slaves of unrighteousness. I give You my mind this day, today. I give You my mind so I think correctly. Lord, remove those thoughts from my mind, because if You don't do that, I'm going to pursue the things of the flesh and my fallen human nature. It causes a struggle. You've got to do this. Restrain me from thinking that way, Lord. Restrain me! I give You my mind.” Become a slave of righteousness, not a slave of unrighteousness.

Then you go to your eyes. Job said, “Lord, I make a covenant with my eyes.” What do I want to look at? Do I know that if I look at certain things that it's going to stimulate the fleshly desires of my fallen human nature? So Lord, I want to give You my eyes. Let my eyes become instruments of righteousness, not slaves of unrighteousness. I want my eyes to look at the right things. When I see something that is wrong, help me to understand and restrain me from pursuing that. I give You my eyes.

And I give You my tongue, my mouth. What comes out of my mouth? What do I say? What goes into your mouth? Father, I give You my mouth. I give You my tongue to make it become an instrument of righteousness. I want to take in the right things. I don't want to do that. I don't want these wrong things to come out of me because I understand this. *“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”* I want the things that I say to be edifying, not derogatory, not condemning. I want them to be edifying. I give You my words today. Let them be instruments of righteousness.

That's how you battle the flesh. You've got to be engaged. This is a warfare. It's a struggle. It's a contest. And the Holy Spirit is our restraining element, the power in our lives. But you and I have got to do these things, men. We've got to give our bodies to become instruments of righteousness, not slaves of unrighteousness.

And I give You my hands. I give You my arms. I give You my legs. I give You my feet. I give You my sexual parts. Lord, I want those things to be saturated with the Person and work of Christ. I want everything that I do to become an instrument of righteousness. And Lord, there's a struggle. I've got to trust Your Holy Spirit to do that. And so I've got to know myself well enough to know which parts of my body that I need to give to Him moment by moment, when I'm saturating myself with the Person and work of Christ, because that's how you walk with the Spirit. It's a moment by moment fight. It's a moment by moment struggle.

And you and I have got to be engaged. Christianity is not sitting back and a passivity. We've got to be very, very active in our fight for the glory of God. Christianity is not a spectator sport. We must be involved.

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Now do you understand what I mean by going through Romans chapter six, the passage about the instruments of righteousness? That’s part of our struggle, men. Where is the sin stimulated in our fallen human nature? It’s through our senses. What do I hear? What do I see? What do I touch? What do I take into my mouth? What do I listen to? It’s the senses that stimulate our fallen human nature. And the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life has been given to overcome that. You don’t have to do this alone in your own strength. When are we going to realize that making New Year’s resolutions never works? They never work because you’re trusting in your own strength. You’re saying, “I’m going to do this. I can do it myself.” I’m not going to do this. The first time you fail, it’s over. When are you going to realize that making New Year’s resolutions never works?

You’ve got to be saturating yourself with the Person and work of Christ. You’ve got to put on Christ and walk in the Spirit.

We’ve been liberated at the cross, men, from being controlled by our fleshly desires. You’ve been liberated! That’s the whole theme of Christian liberty. You’ve been liberated at the cross from being controlled by your fleshly desires.

Look at romans 8:13. *“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Now let’s ask a very practical question here, men, to apply some of this truth. What is the best way not to feed the flesh? You starve it to death? The way that you don’t feed something is that you starve it to death. If you refuse to feed anything, it’s going to shrivel up and die. Walking by the Spirit is not passivity. It is actively not feeding the fleshly desires. That’s walking by the Spirit, actively not feeding the fleshly desires. You’ve got to starve them.

And Paul says that the way you starve them is by saturating yourself with the Person and work of Christ so that your thoughts become Christ-centered. And the way that you fight the flesh and your fallen human nature is that you starve it. You actively do not feed those fleshly desires. You’ve got to know yourself well enough, men, to know which things you need to starve. Is it your eyes? Is it your ears? I don’t know what they are. But you’ve got to know yourself, men, to know that so that you can starve it, because it will shrivel away when you do.

How about Colossians chapter 3 verse 5? *“Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires and covetousness, which is idolatry.”* Idolatry, men, is trusting someone or something to give you only what God can give you. Are you looking for satisfaction in your career? Is it a relationship to make you feel better? It may sound unfair, but that’s what idolatry is.

As I’ve told you before, I made my desire to be a father an idol. It used to be that all I wanted to do is to be a dad like my dad was a dad. The Lord in His providence and His sovereign grace has seen fit not to let that happen. I have stepchildren, but no natural children. All I ever wanted to do is to be a dad just like my dad was a dad to me.

And I made that an idol because I said this. “If I could just have a son! If I could just be a father, I’m going to be fulfilled!” That’s idolatry. It wasn’t until I realized that that I was set free from it. Probably for fifteen or twenty years I was under that bondage of idolatry just because I was desiring to be a father.

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And finally I realized that I had made an idol of something good. Fatherhood is something that is really good. But I made an idol of it! And it wasn't until I realized that this was sinful and an idol that I said, “Lord, You've got to take that away. I give that desire to You and I'm going to trust You. You're going to run my life better than I can. I give that idol up.” It was then that I was set free from it.

You see, I don't know what your idols are, men. But that's part of the struggle—trusting something or someone to give us only what God can give us.

So Paul says t5his: that Christianity is not a spectator sport. It's something you've got to get involved in. We must be involved. We must be engaged.

Let me give you some references to that. Yes, Bob?

**Bob:** Bruce, I want to go back to this starving. I personally have a problem, so I'll ask the question this way. Should we also starve pride?

**Bruce:** Oh, absolutely! Whatever it is that is feeding the fleshly desires, you've got to starve it. So don't feed it. When those things come up, just say, “Lord, remove those thoughts from my mind so that I will not be feeding those fleshly desires.” Certainly pride is one of the things we need to starve, because that's part of the conflict of the flesh versus the Spirit.

Men, let me give you some illustrations from the Scripture about our being engaged, that Christianity is not a spectator sport. How about Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1?

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* You've got to be engaged, men, in this battle of the flesh versus the Spirit.

How about 1 Corinthians 9:27? *“While I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”* It's a struggle, men; it's a fight. You've got to be engaged. It's not a spectator sport. But you're given the power of the Holy Spirit at your conversion and at your regeneration, to be the One who will permit you to offset the desires of your fallen human nature.

And lastly, how about 2 Timothy 2, verses 3-6? *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets involved in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”*

Walk in the Spirit. It's a command, a present tense command, something that you do moment by moment. And Paul has taught us now in this introduction that the way we do that is to saturate ourselves with the Person and work of Christ. The more we know about Christ, the more we pray to Christ, the more we understand Him, the more we discuss Him, the more we read about Him in the Gospels, the more we're going to understand Him. And you've got to saturate yourself with the mind of Christ. The Scripture says, “Have the mind of Christ.” Men, you're only going to do that when you saturate yourself with the knowledge of who He is. Is it the Jesus of your human imagination, or the Jesus of Biblical revelation?

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So that’s the command. We’ve seen the context. Now I want you to see the *contrast*. Note the contrast in verses 19-21. Now what a contrast there is between works and fruit! There’s a big contrast between works and fruit.

Fruit is the result of a living union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. A machine can produce works but it can’t produce fruit. Even the law produces works. But God calls them “dead works.” Hebrews 6:1. Christian character comes from within, men, by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit seeks to transform us into Christlikeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8 verse 29, and Romans 12:1-2.

**Transcriber’s Note:** 2 Corinthians 3:18. *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another.”*

Romans 8:29. *“For those whom He for knew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

Romans 12:1-2. *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God—what is good, and acceptable, and perfect.”*

**Bruce:** Now you and I could meditate for hours on the ninefold fruit of the Spirit, which we will do in the next couple of weeks. Note especially that *love* heads this list. Paul clearly states that no law could ever produce this kind of character. No obedience to law could produce that. All that people learn from making resolutions will never satisfy God’s desire, and it will never be fruitful for us. It will not bear fruit.

So if we live in the spirit, this is salvation. *“Being made alive in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”* This is sanctification, allowing the Spirit so to command and control our lives.

Now I want you to compare something. Would somebody read Ephesians 5:18-24? And then somebody read Colossians 3:15-19.

**Participant:** *“Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

**Bruce:** Great. Thank you. Now somebody read Colossians 3:15-19.

**Participant:** May I read that but add a few verses to it?

**Bruce:** Sure.

**Participant:** Because in chapter five it says, *“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality,”* and that list. Verse seven says, *“In them you also once walked.”* There’s your word *walk*. And verse eight: *“But now also put them all aside.”* And then in verse twelve it says, *“Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”*

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And in verse fourteen, *“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”* Do you want me to go to nineteen?

**Bruce:** Please.

**Participant:** *“Wives, be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.”*

**Bruce:** Thank you. Now notice. Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 have the same results. What are the results?

**Participant:** Doing everything in the name of the Lord.

**Bruce:** No, what are the results? Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, making thanksgiving to the Lord. The point is this, men. The consequences of being filled with the Spirit are the same thing as letting the word of God dwell in you richly. That’s the same thing.

So you want to be filled with the Spirit on a continual basis. Now that phrase in Ephesians chapter five does not mean a second blessing. It means continually being kept filled. It’s possessive. It’s always going on. The way you’re being kept filled is to let the word of God dwell in you richly because the consequences are the same. The results are the same. You saturate yourself with the Person and work of Christ.

Walking in the Spirit is not some emotional experience detached from everyday life.

**Participant:** Bruce?

**Bruce:** Yes, please?

**Participant:** Pragmatically, if we are going to lay aside our flesh, we have to put on love and be in the Word on a daily basis.

**Bruce:** Absolutely. Let the word of God dwell in you richly. That’s the process by which you saturate yourself with the Person and work of Christ. How do we do that? We do that by being in the Scripture. That’s why we’re going through this verse by verse, to help us understand how we saturate ourselves with the Person and work of Christ.

Walking in the Spirit is the daily experience of the believer who feeds on the Word, who prays and obeys what the Bible says.

I want you to notice one thing here. Look at chapter five. Notice that Paul uses three pleas as he beseeches Christians to live lives of holiness by the grace of God, three things.

Notice first of all that *God the Father has called them.* Verse 13.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Galatians 5:13. *“For you were called to freedom, brothers.”*

**Bruce:** *Jesus died for them.* Verse 24.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Galatians 5:24. *“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

**Bruce:** *And God the Holy Spirit dwells in them.* Verses 16-23. The third Person in the Trinity is assisting us in our battle against the flesh. What the Father ordained the Son

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accomplished and the Holy Spirit applies. That’s how we win the battle. Let the word of God dwell in you richly. And be being kept filled with the Holy Spirit.

What we must do, men, is saturate ourselves with the Person and work of Christ and starve the fallen human nature. We don’t feed it. May it be done for God’s glory.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Let’s pray. We’ll pick up examining the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit as we continue this next week.

Father, we just pray, Lord, that You would go before us now. Father, help our misunderstanding. Help our unbelief. May Your Holy Spirit, the Paraclete who comes along beside us, help us battle the flesh, because we know that the victory is found in Christ Jesus, not in our own efforts. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.” (*Applause*)