

FBC Service Sunday March 9, 2025, Galatians 5:16-17 Walking in the Spirit

Intro: Today, we gather to reflect upon the powerful words of the Apostle Paul found in Galatians 5:16-17: *"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants.*

And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions."

In our daily walk of faith, we are constantly engaged in an internal battle, a struggle between our sinful nature and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's message here is profound and urgent: to truly live a life that honours God, he says let the Holy Spirit guide us, to feel His power, and to allow Him to transform our hearts and minds.

Walking in the Spirit is more than just a casual stroll; it's a deliberate and continuous act of reliance on God's divine power.

It requires us to be vigilant, mindful, and open to the promptings of the Spirit, as He leads us away from the desires of our flesh and towards a life of righteousness and purity.

As we delve deeper into these verses, we explore how we can cultivate a life that is in tune with the Spirit's guidance, and how we can experience the victory over sin that comes through His empowering presence.

May this sermon inspire and equip us to embrace the Holy Spirit's role in our lives, so that we may live in a way that truly reflects God's love and grace.

Let's open our hearts and minds to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the most important passages on the Christian life in the New Testament. It answers a question often asked of pastors: Why is it taking me so long to be more like Jesus?

We've all wondered about that, haven't we? **For example.**

"I thought by now I'd have conquered temptation, my anger, my doubts, and my bad habits, but they still keep showing up. Why does becoming the person I want to be for God feel so far away?"

Many of us wish we had an answer to that question. We might assume that upon conversion, we would rapidly sprout wings and fly to heaven without ever having temptation or doubts again. But it doesn't happen that way.

God has ordained that even though we're being made like Jesus, it only happens a little bit at a time. **And sometimes that "little bit" seems very little indeed.**

Christians (even Pastors) don't always act like we think Christians should act. Inconsistency and temptation are something we all battle.

Paul shines a spotlight on this reality in just two verses. Verses that speak of a conflict that exists inside each of us that seeks to rob us of our joy in the Lord. He shows us a divine helper in the Holy Spirit.

16. *“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.*

17. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.

These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”

Paul tells us that if we walk by the Spirit; if we let the Holy Spirit direct and empower our lives; then the inconsistencies in our lives will fade. We will begin to live more the way God designed us to live. We will know more victories than defeats.

I can hear you say. That sounds good pretty good Alex but what does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”?

One of the amazing truths we learn from Jesus is that those who become His followers; those who really put their trust in Him; will be inhabited by God’s Spirit. In most translations “Spirit” is capitalized. That denotes that the “Spirit” being referred to is the Holy Spirit rather than the human spirit.

So here Paul isn’t telling us we need to “get more spirit!” **We already have the Spirit we need.**

God has given His children the Holy Spirit when they trusted Christ in saving faith and were born again by the Spirit of God. *“Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19)

He did not give us His Spirit so we would have the equivalent of our own Genie who could answer all our questions and meet all our needs. **The Holy Spirit does not work like Santa Claus granting wishes.**

The Holy Spirit’s job is to conform us to the image of God’s Son. To do this, He will nudge us, guide us, and illumine us.

The Holy Spirit will give us greater understanding of God’s Word and insight into the people and situations around us. He will equip and empower us to do the things God desires for us that are ultimately best for us.

Paul’s words literally mean, **“By the Spirit keep walking”**. It’s a moment by moment vital and attentive relationship with God.

Walking by the Spirit is not about having a **mystical** experience.

Walking with the Spirit is about journeying with the Spirit, day in and day out.

In Isaiah chapter 11, Eugene Peterson writes in his contemporary paraphrase THE MESSAGE, of the one who would come from Jesse’s stump **(He is talking about Jesus)**.

We’re told that He will be led by the Spirit. **Take a listen!**

A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse’s stump, from his roots a budding Branch.

The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him, the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,

The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength, the Spirit that instills knowledge and fear-of-God.

Fear-of-God will be all his joy and delight.

He won't judge by appearances, won't decide on the basis of hearsay.

His words will bring everyone to awed attention. A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.

Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.

That's what it looks like when we walk by the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, reverence and respect for God, and a relationship with others characterized by fairness, kindness and grace.

When we walk in the Spirit we start to look more like Jesus.

Surely this is the goal every believer in his heart is striving for.

Genuine born again believers want very much to honour the Lord by the way they live their lives. They want to reflect well on our Saviour and be led by the Spirit.

When we come to Jesus as Saviour, we're given freedom, but it's a freedom that we have to battle to maintain. **There's a Battle Going on Inside of Us.**

God's call to believers is to throw off the sinful self and the sinful way of thinking, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Always remembering, people and things are constantly trying to take it away from you.

Our freedom in Christ has been bought with a price. Our debt to sin has been paid. We're declared free from the very power of sin.

The flesh and the Spirit have competing agendas.

The flesh is concerned about pleasing self. The Spirit seeks to please the Lord.

The flesh is about the moment; the Spirit sees the big picture.

The flesh preys on the weakness of others; the Spirit celebrates the strengths of others.

The flesh sees freedom as indulgence, license, and no accountability; the Spirit sees freedom as walking with the Lord the way we were designed to walk.

This is what we're up against. Christ has set us free but the Devil and the world around us does not want us to live freely. They want us to fall in line with the values and behaviour of the rest of the world.

If we truly want to walk with Jesus; if we want consistency in our walk with God; we had better be ready for a fight!

If you want to find this consistency and godliness in your life, the first step is to make sure you're pursuing this goal in His strength rather than your own.

This is not about becoming a better person . . . **you must be a REBORN person.**

Tragically, and I have to say with great sadness, we have good people attending churches, striving to transform themselves into better people through attending services, practicing religion and good works, with no knowledge whatsoever of the saving grace and transforming power of the Holy Spirit of God.

As Paul writes to Timothy, *"they have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof."*

Week after week, they leave with renewed determination, vowing to 'do better this time.' Yet, by the time they return, they are still burdened by a sense of defeat, and unmet expectations.

This is NOT the message of the gospel. The message of the gospel is that you and I have a sinful nature. We needed an intervention. And that intervention has come by the work of Jesus on the cross. He paid our sin debt.

That's why Paul reminds us in Romans 8, *"those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit."*

It's my earnest hope that all of us will come into this place every week knowing our bumps, and bruises make us normal, not defective.

The fact that you come back every week says you're not giving up on the battle.

A soldier in war knows some days they will gain ground. On other days they may lose that same ground.

Victory is not in winning every skirmish . . . **it comes from winning the war.** We come here each week to meet with our Commander in Chief.

We remind each other that there are victories that make winning the war certain. We come here as soldiers off the front line for some brief R and R, relying on His strength rather than our own.

We don't come trying to earn God's favour. But we come in the words of a hymn we're going to sing in a few minutes.

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart, wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;

Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art, and make me love thee as I ought to love.

George Croly, a faithful evangelical pastor, offers a powerful prayer that is worthy to be repeated by us all. The words of this sung prayer are among the most passionate in the history of hymnody.

What a masterpiece!

Beloved, we need to learn to listen to God's Word. God speaks most clearly in His Word. You will have difficulty discerning the whispers of God's Spirit if you don't have a good grasp of God's Word. The Bible helps us tell the difference between the whispers of God, Satan, and our own desires.

I've been married to Wyn a long time now, and here's one thing I've learned over those many years.

I've learned that you can communicate sometimes with your spouse with just a word or a look. I know when I'm in trouble even if no one else in the room knows I'm in trouble. Why? Because you are so familiar with what you know those looks or words mean.

The goal we seek is to be so familiar with the Word of God that we already have a good idea what God is going to say without ever needing to search for an answer.

The goal is to walk so close to the Lord that we can distinguish His voice from all the others.

When you read Scripture, pay attention to the wider story that is being told. The wider story will help you understand much of what is being said. When you have heard what was written ask yourself what you are supposed to learn.

Is there a promise to embrace?

Is there a sin that needs to be confessed?

Is there a truth that makes you appreciate God more fully?

Is there something you are being nudged to do?

Is there a matter you need to stop and pray about?

If you read the Bible expecting to hear . . .you will.

We need to listen, (and it must be after we have turned our hearts to the message of God's Word)) for the nudges that come from God's Spirit.

There will be times when you feel like you should do something (call someone, stop in for a visit, have a conversation, begin a ministry or something.

More than ever, we need to listen to the Word, to the whispers of God's Spirit, but we need to listen with discernment. God's Spirit is not the only voice that will speak to us.

Satan will whisper to us, the world screams at us, even our own sinful inclinations speak to us. We need to train ourselves to listen to the right voices.

Here is a simple principle: What God says is wrong in His Word is NEVER right!

It's amazing how we can justify sinful behaviour. If we hold to this one principle we will keep ourselves from much error.

We need to know the gospel, we need to listen to the word, the Spirit, and those who teach, and we need to do what God says. Remember before God led the people, He always asked them to do something.

Moses needed to raise His staff before crossing the Red Sea, the priests of Israel had to step into the Jordan River before it parted, Gideon needed to send some men home.

Peter had to get out of the boat.

The disciples needed to see what people brought for lunch before Jesus fed the 5000.

Here's the point. If we want to know God's strength for living, we need to do what He tells us to do.

Quote Jesus and miracle at Cana.

Folks, let's not kid ourselves, we're in a battle. It's a war that rages inside of us. There will be victories and there will be defeats. Every day we need to be prepared and ready to fight to live according to the Spirit rather than the flesh.

We need to cheer for each other and pray for each other. Every inch that is gained draws us that much closer to the Lord, increases our joy that much more, and will allow us to just a little more effectively introduce the world around us to our great Liberator - Jesus.

Walking in the Spirit is not some mystical experience reserved for a few super-duper Christians. It's God's design for normal Christian living. It's nothing more than choosing to take tiny steps towards growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus.

Remember that our struggle is not sinful. God allows it so that we will look to Him for daily solutions instead of instant miracles. The struggle itself is evidence that you belong to God.

Paul writes, *"let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves."*

What does a Spirit-led life look like?

It starts with a life that's right with God and born again of His Spirit.

And when we love the Lord, an amazing transformation takes place in our lives.

We will also love His Word.

We will also love His Work

We will also love His God's People.

We will also love the place of Prayer.

We will also love to meet in corporate worship on the Lord's Day.

We will also love to be faithful to God with our tithe.

Walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, all these things will be exhibited in our lives.