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## *Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ*

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

*“A Battle Every Christian Must  
be About Fighting”*

**March 16, 2014**

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

**Scripture Reading:** rr

**Introduction-**

“For us, who dare not be wise above what is written, nor boast by other men's lives of what God hath not done for us, we say that indwelling sin lives in us, in some measure and degree, whilst we are in this world. We dare not speak as "though we had already

attained, or were already perfect," Phil. iii. 12. Our "inward man is to be renewed day by day" whilst here we live, 2 Cor. iv. 16; and according to the renovations of the new are the breaches and decays of the old.

Whilst we are here we "know but in part," 1 Cor. xiii. 12, having a remaining darkness to be gradually removed by our "growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. iii. 18; and "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would," Gal. v. 17: and are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light, 1 John i. 8. We have a "body of death," Rom. vii. 24; from whence we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies, Phil. iii. 21.

Now, it being our duty to mortify, to be killing of sin whilst it is in us, **we must be at work.** He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, doth but half his work, Gal. vi. 9; Heb. xii. 1; 2 Cor. vii. 1. 2. Sin doth not only still abide in us, but is still acting, still labouring to bring forth the deeds of

the flesh. **When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion.**

Sin doth not only abide in us, but "the law of the members is still rebelling against the law of the mind," Rom. vii. 23; and "the spirit that dwells in us lusteth to envy," James iv. 5. It is always in continual work; "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit," Gal. v. 17; lust is still tempting and conceiving sin, James i. 14; in every moral action it is always either inclining to evil, or hindering from that which is good, or disframing the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil. "The evil which I would not, that I do," saith the apostle, Rom. vii. 19. Whence is that? Why, "Because in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." And it hinders from good: "The good that I would do, that I do not," verse 19; -- "Upon the same account, either I do it not, or not as I should; all my holy things being defiled by this sin." "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would," Gal. v. 17.

And it unframes our spirit, and thence is called "The sin that so easily besets

us," Heb. xii. 1; on which account are those grievous complaints that the apostle makes of it, Rom. vii. So that sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting.

**Who can say that he had ever any thing to do with God or for God, that indwelling sin had not a hand in the corrupting of what he did? And this trade will it drive more or less all our days.**

If, then, sin will be always acting, if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures. He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance, will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish, in proceeding to the ruin thereof, can we expect a comfortable event?

**There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so whilst we live in this world.**

I shall discharge him from this duty who can bring sin to a composition, to a cessation of arms in this warfare; if it will spare him any one day, in any one duty (provided he be a person that is acquainted with the spirituality of

obedience and the subtlety of sin), let him say to his soul, as to this duty, "Soul, take thy rest." The saints, whose souls breathe after deliverance from its perplexing rebellion, know there is no safety against it but in a constant warfare. Sin will not only be striving, acting, rebelling, troubling, disquieting, but **if let alone, if not continually mortified, it will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins.**

Owen, John (2010-03-23). Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (pp. 11-12). . Kindle Edition.

I do not want us to move too quickly past this crucially important and vital section of Scripture that instructs the Christian in several very basic, fundamental truths about his life in Christ. It is a formula for discouragement and defeat and trouble if a Christian remains ignorant of these things. It is like being a soldier and going into war without first going through boot camp. You won't even recognize the enemy let alone know how to use your armaments against him.

First, let me emphasize once again that this Epistle to the Galatians is a very, very important section of the Bible in respect to understanding the progression of God's plan of redemption in Christ. That is to say,

the letter to the Galatians gives us the "lay of the land" when it comes to understanding the Old and New Covenants and thus, the big picture of the Bible itself from Genesis to Revelation. As we saw last week in the Sunday School class, the New Covenant is substantially different than the Old Covenant. It is a better covenant, as Hebrews put it. The Old Covenant has no part in it:

Galatians 4:21-31 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. (23) But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. (24) Now this may be interpreted allegorically: **these women are two covenants.** One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. (25) Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (27) For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." (28) **Now**

**you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.** (29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

And of course chapter 3 of Galatians contains even more information for us in regard to the role of the Old Covenant and how it related to the Promise made to Abraham, and how that Promise relates to the New Covenant. So you see, Galatians is a very, very important portion of Scripture.

But as we saw last week, it is also very important for the Christian in many very practical ways. This section in chapter 5 regarding walking by the Spirit and not yielding to the desires of the flesh is central to our life in Christ. Listen as we read it once more:

Gal 5:16-26 But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** (17) **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.** (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(19) **Now the works of the flesh are evident:** sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) 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.

(22) **But the fruit of the Spirit is** love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

(25) **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.** (26) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Christian, you must understand some things set out by Paul here, and you must not forget them:

1. You are led by the Holy Spirit who is in you. **This is who you really are.** You desire the desires of the Spirit.

2. Sin remains in you. Paul calls it the flesh. It exerts its desires in you, but its mastering power has been broken by Christ. **This flesh is NOT you!** *You must not let its presence discourage you. Hate it, yes. Fight it. But do not be surprised by it.*

3. Every Christian has the Spirit to enable them to more and more clearly understand God's truth and God's will.

4. The only way to conquer the flesh is to put it to death by the Spirit. That is to say, we choose to walk the way the Spirit is leading us and to think the truths the Spirit is showing us, and when we do this, our sinful flesh is defeated.

Remember this very true observation we heard last week from John Owen:

All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit. Men, as the apostle intimates, Rom. ix. 30-32, may attempt this work on other principles, by means and advantages administered on other

accounts, as they always have done, and do: but, saith he, "This is the work of the Spirit; by him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about." Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world. Owen, John (2010-03-23). Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (p. 5). . Kindle Edition.

We need to spend some more time considering these facts and thinking about their implications.

### **The Flesh – Your Flesh is Ugly**

As we said last week, your flesh is ugly. You have the capacity to behave toward me in a very ugly, disgusting manner – and I toward you. We need to admit this and not try to deny it. We must not exalt any of us to some level of holiness that precludes us from thinking that they (or ourselves) is really above ever acting in such an ugly, sinful manner. Or, at very minimum and more often than is visible in outward behavior, this ugly flesh is at work expressing its desires in us, trying to have its way.

Each of us, every Christian, has the desires of the flesh rising up within them, and sometimes it breaks out.

Christian – you must acknowledge this. We must not put on airs as if this is not true of us. And we must NOT create an atmosphere or culture in this church which imagines that such things just could not be true of anyone.

Do you see from our text here in Galatians 5 that this is most necessarily true? *“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit...”* Does that leave room for anyone to claim to be an exception? No.

And so we MUST be about putting this flesh to death by walking in the leading of the Spirit. Children, young people, us old guys – all of us must do this battle. We must acknowledge that this flesh is in us, that it is ugly, and that it wants us to do its deeds:

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Sensuality
- Idolatry
- Sorcery
- Enmity
- Strife
- Jealously
- Fits of anger
- Rivalries
- Dissensions
- Divisions
- Envy

- Drunkenness
- Orgies
- And on and on

Look around. Look at yourself especially. Do not conclude that there is anyone here who does not have this ugly sinful flesh in them. If you have never seen it in me, then it is only because you have not been around me enough. Or I am a good pretender.

This is where pride is sooooo dangerous. Pride denies these things. If we deny the ugliness and presence and activity of our old flesh, then we will not be putting it to death by the Spirit, and our happiness and that of our friends and family will inevitably suffer, as will the glory of Christ being shown in our lives.

The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh. Owen, John (2010-03-23). *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (p. 8). . Kindle Edition.

Here is Owen again:

...the choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling

power of sin. So the apostle, Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Whom speaks he to? Such as were "risen with Christ," verse 1; such as were "dead" with him, verse 3; such as whose life Christ was, and who should "appear with him in glory," verse 4. Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Owen, John (2010-03-23). Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (p. 9). . Kindle Edition.

This "walking by the Spirit" is surely the means of putting to death our sinful flesh, the same subject Paul dealt with in Romans 8.

Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work. And our Saviour tells us how his Father deals with every branch in him that beareth fruit, every true and living branch. "He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit," John xv. 2. He prunes it, and that not for a day or two, but whilst it is a branch in this world. And the apostle tells you what was his practice, 1 Cor. ix. 27, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." "I do it," saith he,

"daily; it is the work of my life: I omit it not; this is my business." And if this were the work and business of Paul, who was so incomparably exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, consolations, above the ordinary measure of believers, where may we possibly bottom an exemption from this work and duty whilst we are in this world?

Owen, John (2010-03-23). Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (p. 9). . Kindle Edition.

Sin is lawlessness. Notice that in regard to the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says (vs 23) "against such things there is no law." But the deeds of the flesh – there is another matter. There is law against every single one of those things in that list of evil. Consider this again – your flesh, that remainder of the old man in me – is capable of and in fact desires:

- Engage in the sexual sins and perversions we see so widespread around us in today's world. (Impurity and sensuality surely are closely related sins)
- In our sinful flesh is the desire to create and worship idols. To love false gods and to serve them. There is therefore in us a desire to embrace a false gospel and false religion that appeals to the

flesh. Thus the danger of legalism. It is fleshly and wicked. (Sorcery, a kind of worship of the devil is a form of this)

- Our flesh rises up and envies – it covets and wants what belongs to others. It is jealous. It wants. This is the worship of self.
- This envy and jealousy results in destruction of relationships and is the opposite of love. It creates enmity (regarding others as enemies), strife, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and when it is denied what it envies, it throws a fit of anger (murderous at times).
- Our flesh would have us indulge in drunkenness and debasing orgies of self-indulgence of the basest kind.

This is the thing in us. It is ugly and cruel. It works its desires in us, always opposed to the Spirit and to the things of God. And we must be about killing it. If we permit it to flourish and if we indulge it, we will see our relationships harmed and even destroyed. There is no love in this flesh. Marriages, families, churches – there have been many, many casualties to the flesh.

Here is the London Confession of Faith (LCF) –

*“This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man, yet imperfect in this*

*life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, from whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.*

## **The Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is in every Christian. He is leading every Christian to walk in the Lord’s way. This is the very nature of the New Covenant, unlike the Old. Listen to these OT verses (there are many more of them) in which the Jews were commanded to walk in the way of the Lord:

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. (33) You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

Deuteronomy 13:4-5 You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. (5) But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught



rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Judges 2:21-22 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, (22) in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not."

2 Kings 21:22 He [Amon] abandoned the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.

Psalms 86:11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.

Jeremiah 7:23 But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'

You see it? Over and over there is this command in the Old Covenant that obedience to the Lord would entail "walking in the way" that He

commanded. The very kind of language we have here in the New Covenant in Gal 5 and numbers of other places.

But here is the great difference – the Spirit. In the New Covenant, EVERY person in the covenant is indwelt by the Spirit (see Jer 31) and taught by the Spirit to walk in the way. And this huge difference was repeatedly announced even back in the days of the Old Covenant. For example, in addition to Jer 31 –

Isaiah 30:19-22 For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. (20) And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. (21) **And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.** (22) Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!"

Understand? THAT is what this walking by the Spirit is all about in the Christian. It is the “hearing a word behind us” saying “This way. This is it. This is the right way to go.” And when our flesh rears up and tells us to turn the other way, the Spirit says “no, go this way instead.”

That is why in the New Covenant, unlike the Old, the members of the Covenant (Christians) say to idols “Be gone!” rather than yielding to their worship as in Old Testament Israel.

Here is another one:

Isaiah 35:4-8 Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." (5) Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; (6) then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; (7) the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. **(8) And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass**

**over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.**

This is true of YOU! No matter how weak or new of a Christian you might be. This voice, this kind of auto-pilot system of the Spirit IS operating and the new YOU is in agreement with the Spirit.

What if this isn't true of a person? What if they habitually walk in the way of the flesh? What if their life is characterized by the flesh? What if, as Paul says, a person is simply not putting to death the deeds of the flesh because this voice behind them isn't there? Then they are not a Christian.

A brief point here and then we will move to our final one. *Faithful use of the means that God has given us to grow in Christ will necessarily cultivate the work of the Spirit in us. You might say, His voice will become easier for us to hear.* In contrast, neglect of these means of growth will necessarily strengthen the flesh and make it far more likely that we will yield to it.

- Regular and diligent study of the Scriptures
- Regular and real fellowship with Christ's people
- Regular prayer

- Faithful and regular observance of the Lord's Day in the worship of Christ and the observance of His ordinances

### Freedom From Bondage to Others

As we end, let's leave off with a very important fact that is a direct result of this indwelling and leading of the Spirit in us. Listen to the LCF once more:

Chapter 16, #3 - Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, **but wholly from the Spirit of Christ**; and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, **there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure**; yet they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

And-

Chapter 21, #2 - **God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men** which are in any thing

contrary to his word, or not contained in it. **So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience**; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.

Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. And we all need to get a firm hold on this. It means that while the Lord has indeed given His church pastors and teachers and so on for the growth into Christ we are experiencing, we can and should have a certain *confidence* in ourselves, or rather in the Spirit who is in us. That is to say, we do not walk by man. When we do, we get into trouble and bondage as these Galatian believers had done.

One typical mark and practice of a wicked person is that they try to control others, whom they have no authority over. These are the "shoulders." They lay their rules on us. They tell us what we were thinking and what our motives are. They tell us what God thinks of us. They tell us that our perspective on something or our observations of something are wrong.

But can you see that there is a real aspect here in living in Christ wherein the Christian can and should trust

themselves? That is to say, trust the Spirit in them. Trust that He is able to convict us when we need to be convicted. To teach us, to encourage us, to warn us. How many times is the Spirit's leading in us quenched because we doubted His leading and instead we listened to some person who was giving us contrary (and therefore sinful) advice?

Our dealings with abuse victims are filled with just such examples. For years and years a Christian had the sense that something was wrong, that some evil was dominating them, but other people fed them untrue information and pressured them so much that they distrusted what they thought was their own idea, when in fact it was the Spirit of Christ in them directing them into the truth.

Let me give you an example from my own life. Apologies, but then my own dealings with the Spirit are the only ones I really know!

A number of years ago I was being pressured to continue a relationship which, as I understand now, was unsafe and harmful to me. Lot's of pressure. So, I resolved that I would continue that relationship and that I would do whatever I needed to do to continue in it. There were some issues that needed to be addressed, and I decided firmly that I would address

them in such a way that all would be well. So I proceeded.

Within just a very few seconds of my conversation with the other party, while I had an intent to "fix" things, what I absolutely believe was the Holy Spirit impressed upon me with great clarity "Jeff, do not do this. Do not 'fix' this. This is not a good place for you to be." So with this confidence, I ended that relationship. I have no doubt at all this was of the Spirit's leading and that I walked in the way He directed me.

Now subsequently, I had quite a number of very controlling people turning up the pressure, accusing me and so on. And I finally told them: "The Holy Spirit in me is quite capable of convicting me of any sin, and He is very capable of leading me in the way I should go. I do not sense that He is agreeing with any of the advice and accusations you are laying on me, and you have no right to try to enslave my conscience. I have the right to make these decisions, and I can have confidence that they are correct because I know the Spirit of Christ is in me and directing me."

Christian, you can have that very same confidence to stand firmly in the Way that Christ is leading you. You need not yield to the enslavement that others will try to oppress you with.