



## *Freedom to walk in the Spirit*

### **Main Point:**

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul explains how the disciple of Christ is called to live in the freedom that Christ obtained for us. We are no longer to be held captive to sinful desires, but rather are to walk in the freedom of the Spirit of God, so God's fruit grows in our lives.

### **Main verse:**

"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."

(Galatians 5:15-18 New Living Translation)

### **Intro |**

As some of you know, the last three weeks has been like running an emotional marathon for me. It seemed like just when I'd managed to climb over one hill, the next one loomed before me. By the end of the week, I was exhausted. And, if you are anything like me, when I become tired, it is much harder to fight against temptation.

Now, your ears have perked up, asking 'Oh, I wonder how she was tempted?'

No, it wasn't to have too much of my bottle of wine, nor was it sneak over to the church and steal more of Rosemary's yummy slice ...

I was tempted to give into a spirit of discouragement and frustration that seemed to wash over me.

The question that kept pulsating in my mind was,

'Why does being a disciple of Jesus need to be so hard? I mean, after living the Christian life for most of my life, why aren't I better at it by now?'

I think all of us get frustrated with ourselves from time to time.

If you've struggled with anger, you may say to yourself, "I thought by now I wouldn't struggle so much. Why does it still take all my resolve to not explode?"

OR, "I still get so critical of others. When will I be able to show more grace?"

Or, "I come to church every Sunday but I still feel my faith is so weak. When will I be free from these nagging doubts?"

Or, "Inside I'm filled with bitterness about something that happened years ago, even though I cover it up most of the time. Why is it taking me so long to let go and forgive?"

Many of us wish we had answers to these questions.

Despite our best efforts, and God's promise that little by little we are being made to be like Jesus, it sure feels like that "little bit" seems very little indeed!

We have days when we feel like, 'hey I'm really changing!' But then we wake up the next morning, and we're faced with another temptation.

It is this struggle that Paul knew from his own life (Romans 7), the believers at Galatia were facing.

So let us turn to chapter 5 and look at how Paul suggests we tackle these moments of vulnerability.

**Point 1 | For the follower of Christ, struggle against temptation and sinful desires is a normal part of life, and proves we are God's children.**

While I was at Cursillo, we were invited to choose the books off the bookshelves we wish to take home. The temptation was too great for me to pass by, so I brought a few for our church library. One which took my eye was a devotional entitled, "More than a conqueror." This book is named after Romans 8:38, "... we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Now, as much as I want all of us to live in victory in our Christian life, unfortunately, the popularity of this verse is often prompted more by a desire to be free from problems in our lives, rather than how to faithfully endure them.

Too often we want a guarantee that all our problems will be solved if we follow a certain spiritual formula.

But, as we see in our passage today, that is not an honest way of viewing the life of faith.

The life of faith in Jesus, is described as a 'good fight', in which we will need to put on the spiritual armour of God, be determined to stand in the time of testing, and endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

That's why in verse 17, Paul talks about everyone of us having two opposing desires at war within us.

The desires that arise from our sinful state, in the New International Version, are called the "flesh."

The other is called "the Spirit."

These two desires are constantly at war with each other.

Paul uses the term 'the flesh' to describe the seed of sin passed down to every person because we are descendants of the first human who sinned, called Adam.

That seed of sin embedded within us is hostile to God, self-seeking, and ultimately contrary to God's nature.

When we place our trust in Jesus Christ, and our hearts are washed with his purifying blood, we become new creations and the seed of the Holy Spirit is implanted in our hearts (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

However, even though Jesus has indeed set us free from our bondage to sin, so that we are free not to sin, the temptation or pull toward evil remains with us.

How is this 'war' expressed in our lives?

- With the same mouth we express praise to God on Sunday, then speak rudely about someone on Monday.
- From the same heart we love God yet hate those who have hurt us.
- With the same hands, we serve others and then steal what is not ours.
- With the same ears and eyes, we listen and read God's Word, then we watch movies we know won't edify us.

And so it goes.

The manifestations differ, but all of us feel the struggle in one way or the other.

But, let's turn this struggle on its head!

We can in fact praise God for the war we experience within.

For, the struggle between our sinful desires and God's Spirit is one sign that we are children of God.

It is the Spirit's work in our lives that makes us want to please the Lord.

It is the Spirit's work that makes us hungry to know Jesus and love him.

It is the Spirit's work that drives our desire to live a holy life, even though we struggle to attain it.

Despite our personal failings, our struggle against sin is evidence that God's holy Spirit is at work within us.

And we know, that if we are genuinely saddened when we succumb to temptation, Jesus' offer of forgiveness is available to us, so we are once again right before God.

### **Point 2 | Our struggle against sin produces tremendous benefits in our spiritual life.**

But why, if God loves us, does He not rescue us from our struggle against sin?

I believe it is integrally connected to our ongoing spiritual growth.

Strange as it may seem, we need to struggle because that's the only way we can grow in grace.

Our struggle against sin:

- kills our pride and arrogance, revealing our inherent weakness.
- It humbles us again and again, driving us to cry out to God for help.
- It reveals the uselessness of human effort apart from the Spirit's strength.
- It causes us to love the Saviour who delivers us from sin.
- It leads us to a life of continual repentance.
- It propels us to lean on our brothers and sisters to support us.

### **Point 3 | God desires we walk in the power of the Spirit**

So, is that it? We are destined to a life of struggle and constant defeat?

Actually no! While we will indeed always struggle against sin, Paul never refers to the struggle as a pointless, defeated battle.

Rather, in verse 1, Paul writes,

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*(5:1)

We are called to be free. So how are we to use our freedom?

We walk out our freedom by allowing the Spirit of God to bear the fruit of God's nature in our lives.

When we walk in the power of the Spirit, we will no longer desire to indulge in desires that are not consistent with God's nature.

Sure, we'll be tempted to give into feelings of anger, criticism, greed, hatred ... but our conscience will convict us, driving us to return to our Saviour's forgiving embrace.

### **Application |**

Paul tells we are free to "walk by the Spirit." (5:16) Let's consider this.

Last week at Community Dinner Church three women who live in the same village arrived at dinner a bit late. They tumbled in with news that there had been a blackout where they lived. When they walked in, they were so grateful to have a hot meal, warm heating, and a room full of light!

It was quite funny, they burst in saying 'we have no power', which I gleefully answered, 'well, you've come to the right place, we've got stacks of power!'

What is it like to 'walk by the Spirit'?

First, walking by the Spirit means rather than falling over obstacles that sit in your way, you hold up the light of God's word and allow it to guide your path.

Second, walking by the Spirit means rather than attempting to push your car up a hill by sheer grit and determination, you jump inside, turn the ignition key, and allow the Spirit's power to carry you.

Third, walking by the Spirit means rather than getting confused navigating life by reading a printed roadmap, you ask the Spirit of God to be your personal tour guide.

Walking in the Spirit is not some mystical experience reserved for a few special people. It's God's design for the follower of Jesus Christ.

With the power of God's Spirit within us, we are free to pursue the life of faith.

And what do we do when the struggle against sin gets the better of us?

- 1) Stay totally dependent upon God's grace and forgiveness.
- 2) Fix your eyes in worship of Jesus, this keeps our focus on the One with the power to sustain us through the season.
- 4) Follow the light, by take little steps towards the light every day.
- 5) When you fall, get up, ask for forgiveness and keep moving toward the light.

Day by day, as we resist the sin, let us be reminded of the promise Jesus made to each one of us:

*We can be "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6)

And because the Spirit is at work within us and is being completed by our faithful heavenly Father, we can rely on it without a shadow of a doubt. **Amen.**