



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 5: 16-26

Summer 2021

"The Flesh And The Spirit"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Galatians. We're in chapter 5 and we're going to look at verses 16 through 26, so we'll finish chapter 5 this morning. And that Scripture reading from Romans 8 is very appropriate for our text, because we study this morning on the importance, the necessity, of having the Spirit of God within us. I'll begin with verse 16,

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice 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 Now 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 boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5: 16-26

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

(Message) A number of years ago I was given a tour of the New York Stock Exchange. It's very interesting. I was taken out onto the floor and this is at a time when it was covered with paper, (I don't think it's like that anymore). I met a broker and talked about how things work.

On the way out I was shown a bronze statue that is the symbol of the Stock Exchange. It's the figure of a bull and a bear locked in mortal struggle. The Bull, as you know, is the up market—it's good. The bear is the down market—that's bad. And as long as there is a market there will be that financial struggle—every day. But my guide pointed out what is important to notice is the arrangement of the animals. The bull is on top prevailing over the bear. And brokers are always optimistic, I'm sure, about the market.

Now I thought about that as I came to this text in Galatians 5, which is all about the struggle we are in as Christians between the flesh and the Spirit. It is a daily struggle, a mortal struggle; but the struggle is not a stalemate. The flesh, what we are by nature, is strong, but the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is stronger and prevailing. And Paul describes for us, in this passage, the Spirit's work in our lives as He fights the flesh and He leads the believer.

Paul has been speaking about the importance of love and how it fulfills the whole Law; and about the danger of not loving, of 'fighting and devouring one another.' That's how our text ended last week, with verse 15, "But if you bite and devour one

another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." So that was what was taking place in the congregation—now with these congregations throughout Galatia.

Everyone recognizes the wisdom of that—of loving and not fighting. But how do we do that? Where do we get the strength to do that?—Because we don't always have love; we don't always have the ability; in fact, I would say, we never have the ability to do that.

No, but someone else does. And every believer in Christ has Him—and that is the Holy Spirit. 'Follow Him,' Paul says, 'and you will love and not fight.' Verse 16, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." *Walking* is a common Old Testament expression for living—for 'conducting one's life.' And Paul's point is, 'Let your conduct be directed, be guided by the Holy Spirit.'

The Galatians were trying to find their guidance and their way from the Law. But believers have something far greater than an external set of rules and regulations for that. The Law can restrict, the Law can give direction to a person—like a yoke that helps keep an ox in line, but there's no power in a yoke. No external law can produce love within us. Only an inner power can do that—and that's what the Christian has in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. We have within us a person, a divine person, the Third Person of the Trinity, and so we have within us supernatural life, supernatural power, the Divine Person who produces love in our hearts which motivates obedience.

There are really three ways to live: under the law, without law, or thirdly, Paul's way, with the author of the Law. Dr. Johnson, in his series in Galatians illustrated this from three different kinds of dogs—and if you own a dog, you can appreciate the analogy. One dog lives on a leash. Wherever he goes, when he goes out, he must be on the leash. He pulls against it, he resists it, he frequently has to be jerked back onto the path by the leash.

I have had a number of dogs in my life. In fact, my married life of 44 years has 5 dogs in it. First was a boxer, big dog, Grendel. After that it was four Scottish terriers. And I can honestly say ... (mostly honestly say) ... that I never walked them—they walked me; they dragged me through the neighborhood. I had one in particular, Jack. He was the

fifth of the five. I loved Jack. But Jack loved cars. He especially loved to bite the wheels, (or he thought he did). And so whenever one would come by he'd bolt, and I'd have to pull him back and I gave him a lecture. I said, "Jack, my son," [Laughter], (the closest thing I had to a son). "Jack, my son, listen to me. This is a contest you cannot win. The car always wins." He didn't listen. Fortunately he was on a leash and that kept him from a sad end. Well that's the person under the Law.

The second dog lives without the leash. He wanders freely about the neighborhood without a master, without guidance, getting into trash, getting into fights, and he ends up in the pound. That's the lawless person.

The third is the ideal dog. He comes out of the house with his master and without a leash. He goes about freely. He returns at the master's commands. He is bound by love to his master. Now that's the person who walks by the Spirit. He or she obeys out of love.

Now that's the position of the believer. So Paul says, 'Walk with Him. Go with Him wherever He goes. Be under His control and guidance.' And the promise is, as we do, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh. Now Paul doesn't say that a believer will not have any desires of the flesh. His lesson is, the Holy Spirit makes victory possible, to the degree we walk by Him. So, "Walk by the Spirit."

The urgency of doing that is made clear in the next verse where Paul explains the inner conflict every believer has between the flesh and the Spirit; between the flesh and the Holy Spirit. "The flesh", he says, "sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." (vs17). They're in complete opposition to one another and locked in this constant struggle.

The flesh is not merely our physical part, but it's all that we are as a human being. It is the mind, it's the will, it's the emotions, as well as the body. It's what we are though, in the use of all of that, apart from the sovereign grace of God. The flesh produces, what J. I. Packer called, "anti-God energy, in the way of temptations and delusions and distractions that keep us from perfection."

So the outcome of this conflict is, as Paul says, "...you may not do the things that you please." (vs17b). Meaning the things that please us as children of God—righteousness; we're frustrated in that. That's what the flesh produces, this frustration. And as a result of its work within us, we fail.

Well, this is the conflict that Paul describes in Romans chapter 7, verses 14 through 25, where he describes in a personal way the struggle between the willing and the doing—and the failure that we have in achieving what we seek to achieve. Things I want to do—I don't do. The things I don't want to do—I do. It's frustrating. That's life for the Christian and as long as we are in this present life we will be in this conflict—we can't escape it.

We cannot live above the struggle, though many have tried to do that. People have thought that if they could just get away from the temptations of the world, get out of the city, that they would have the upper hand in this ongoing struggle. And that's what a lot of the early monks did, the *anchorites*. They left the urban areas to live in the wilderness, alone in caves and on mountaintops, away from the attractions of society.

Jerome, one of the greatest scholars of the early church, did that. He followed the monks into the desert where days are hot, nights are cold, and his companions were scorpions and wild animals. He hoped to escape the lurid temptations of the city. But he didn't. He wrote that even there, living in complete isolation, he imagines himself among the dancing girls of Rome. "My face was pale from fasting, my mind burned with passionate desires with my freezing body."

Well, a man can take himself out of the fight but he cannot take the fight out of himself, because this is an inner conflict. It's the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. It goes wherever we go. And it's unrelenting. So the danger we face is either being complacent about it; or thinking we can manage it in our own strength, by our own techniques and rules and regulations. The flesh is too strong for us, too strong for our techniques and rules. But the Holy Spirit is stronger. And as we walk by the Spirit, we will triumph over the flesh.

But we can only do that by God's power. And it's urgent. We are in an ongoing battle and we must constantly look to the Spirit. —That's the Christian life. So to prevail, we must walk by the Spirit. But to do that we have to have the right attitude toward the Holy Spirit. And what I mean by that is, we have to have a sense of complete dependence upon God to do that, the Third Person of the Trinity.

So to encourage that, this sense of absolute dependence upon Him, Paul repeats in verse 18, the point that he's already made, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." He is our guide. A Person directs and empowers us—not an inanimate set of rules, but a living Person within us directs us, guides us, empowers us; so that by siding with Him, the Christian overcomes the flesh.

Our relationship to His guidance is put in the passive, you'll notice, we are "...led by the Spirit." We don't lead the Spirit; the Spirit leads us. But we're not only passive in this relationship—and that's clear from verses 16 and 25 where Paul says that we are to "walk by the Spirit." So the leading of the Holy Spirit is a passive/active relationship. He takes the initiative but we must actively choose to stand with Him against the flesh and follow His direction—follow His lead.

Well, how does He give that? How does He lead? He always leads according to the principles of the Word of God. He is the divine author of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, He is the divine author. He's the author of the Law of Moses. He's the author of it all, so His leading is not arbitrary. It occurs in the heart of the believer. He works upon our mind. He works upon our will, first by renewing our minds. He does that principally through the reading and the teaching of Scripture.

Through it, He enlightens us about, oh, many things. But basically we could say, 'the goodness of God and the wickedness of sin.' He makes us very much aware of that. He gives us clarity about that. In that way He creates within us a desire to oppose indwelling sin, gives us the power to do that, and enables us to gladly, joyfully live in obedience to God's commands.

So, as we apply ourselves to the Word of God, we gain the mind and wisdom of God—and the Spirit then enables us to apply that wisdom in the circumstances of life and make good choices. He enables us to form correct judgment at every given moment.

The choices we make and the way we live indicate whether we are being led by the Spirit or if we're following the flesh. And in the next verses, Paul gives the evidence for these two kinds of life with two contrasting lists; one list of vices and one list of virtues. In verses 19 through 21, he gives the evidence of a fleshly life—one not lived under the control of the Spirit—with what he calls “the deeds of the flesh.”

Now this catalog of sins is a measure of a person's true spiritual condition and proves that where these things are the pattern of a person's life—that person is not a child of God. Paul begins by saying that, “the deeds of the flesh are evident”, meaning they are obvious to all. They clearly come from a sinful nature, and are obviously wrong. The list of *works*, or *deeds*, that Paul gives is not a complete list. At the end, in verse 21 he says, ‘and things like these’, so many more could be added to this—but this list is long enough. It's not easy to classify, but the sins Paul lists here seem to fall into basically four groups: sins of sex, sins of religion, sins of society, and sins of drink, (or alcohol).

The *first* category, the sexual sins, include immorality, impurity, and sensuality. These are listed first, not because they are the worst of sins, but because they were the most obvious of sins; particularly in the world in which Paul lived. The Greek and Roman world was notorious for immorality, and unless it was carried out to excess, it wasn't regarded as bad. It was just normal behavior—natural behavior.

But “the flesh” is more than sexual desires. It is broad in its meaning, and the *second* category is from the religious realm: idolatry, and sorcery, (and maybe we could add to that, reading one's horoscope in the newspaper.)

The *third* division is made up of social sins—sins that occur through just the relationships that we have. Relationships are always difficult and so maybe this is why there's such a long list of them, as opposed to the other groupings; but there's: “...enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

envying..." And all of these arise from pride; from greed; from selfish ambitions. (Some of those could be added to the list as well).

And the *fourth* group is sins due to alcohol abuse; drunkenness and carousing.

These are "the deeds of the flesh" and we could spend hours on all of them, I suppose, but the deeds of the flesh are evident. We really don't need to do that—we know what Paul is referring to here and the danger of all of this. But these "deeds of the flesh" are what Timothy George called in his commentary, "Fifteen steps into the pit of depravity." They lead to destruction. Now that's the warning that's connected with them.

But they don't present themselves in that way, do they? They don't present themselves as saying, "Come off the path of righteousness into the pit of depravity." No, in fact, many are seen as the way to pleasure and to power; to sophistication and the good life. So, that's why they are so tempting. They appeal to the flesh naturally; and they have this sense of, 'This is the way to happiness and joy.' But Paul warns, "...those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (vs21b). Can't be any clearer than that. If this is your life, then, it's not the Christian life.

Now that does not mean that a Christian cannot fall into any one of these sins. Christians do fall into these sins every day, and they fall into many others as well. We always, every day, are facing this struggle, engaged in this great spiritual struggle. But such sins are not characteristic of the Christian life. It's not *the bent* of our life—and that's the force of the statement, "who practice such things." There's no struggle here, not in that—not in those "who practice such things." That word is in the present tense, which indicates it's habitual; it's a continual conduct in fleshly sins. It's not periodic lapses into sin.

Now, this isn't an invitation to go about examining other people's lives to see if they're saved. But it does mean that we need to examine ourselves. We need to see ourselves in light of these things. The salvation that Christ obtained for us is not only salvation from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin. So, "A salvation,

as Dr. Johnson put it, "that does not result in practical holiness is not His", that is, is not God's salvation.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul gives the contrasting list, (from this list of vices), with a list of virtues. There are nine of them, and they are evidence that we are being led by the Spirit. They are called "the fruit of the Spirit." Not 'the deeds of the Spirit' or 'the works of the Spirit', *for* that would speak of something that man can do. We do *work*. We do *deeds*. In fact, a machine in a factory is said 'to work'; it 'manufactures' things.

But fruit is different. It grows out of life. In fact, just like fruit on a tree, the fruit of the Spirit is natural. It is the inevitable result of the life that is in us. And, in the case of the believer, it grows out of this life of the Holy Spirit, which is the life of Christ; that is in us through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us constantly and produces His fruit within us.

Paul describes it in the singular. It's not 'fruits', but *fruit*, which stresses that all nine are a unity. I envision it like something like a cluster of grapes. They are all connected, in a sense, together.

And all of these are connected. They're not separate pieces. They go together. So all of them, not just some of them, are to be found in the Christian. In fact, if one is missing, then it's not the fruit of the Spirit.

The first that is listed is *love*. And we would expect that because "God is love", 1 John 4, verse 8. Love is "the greatest" of the virtues. Paul tells us that in 1 Corinthians 13, verse 13. Love fulfills the whole Law and is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples.

Jesus said that in John 13, verse 35, in the beginning of that last evening that He spent with the disciples before being arrested and being crucified. What He had to say was of immense importance; and He said to them, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." And so love naturally leads this list of the fruit that the Spirit produces. It is what the world is to see preeminently in our lives

as we act in love toward one another—and toward the world; but certainly as we act in love toward one another.

Most importantly, though, love is directed toward God. It is the motivation for all that we do: Loving the LORD God. We can see one another; and that makes it somewhat easier to love one another. We don't see God—God is a Spirit. But that is the preeminent, basic act of love—and all of the other aspects of love come out of it.

And it grows within us as we understand who God is; the Triune God and what God has done for us. God the Father, in sending His son; and the Son willingly coming to die for us to purchase our salvation; and the Spirit of God coming to each one of us personally, in that time and place, to bring us to Him. As we reflect upon that, and who He is, and what He's done for us—and understand all of that in terms of grace, sovereign grace—then we grow in our love for Him; and it affects our relationships with one another and with the world.

Now that's why it's so important to take the LORD's Supper, often: Because it is a picture of what Christ has done, who Christ is, what He's done for us. And we're reminded of that—and we need to be reminded continually.

Well that leads, naturally, to the next virtue, which really grows out of understanding God's love for us and results from the exercise of love by us, (that is acting in love toward one another)—and that virtue is joy.

It's been said that joy is the virtue of the Christian live corresponding to happiness in the secular world. But there's a big difference between them. I think that's a good statement and a good comparison, because it brings out the big difference between them. Joy is reliable, happiness is not. Happiness is dependent on the circumstances. Joy depends on the LORD, who is above the circumstances; in fact controls the circumstances for our good—and for His glory.

And again, we have joy because of what Christ has done for us and what He has obtained for us. Whatever the pain of life, whatever the loss of life in this world, it is all

temporary. Heaven is real, heaven is eternal. And that's the glory we have before us awaiting us. That should give us joy.

So it's natural that we have *peace* in the midst of turmoil; that's the third virtue that Paul lists. "Joy" and "peace" have been called spiritual twins. They go together. Because we have peace with God, we have peace within ourselves, we have joy. After these are *patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. All of these are fruit.

Fruit has seeds. So it begets more fruit. And the fruit of the Spirit does that. Love begets more love. Joy begets more joy—and so on. It reproduces itself. It is living. It grows naturally, and it increases as we live under the control of the Spirit. And in that way, it is in contrast to the deeds, or the works of the flesh, which in themselves suggest labor, effort, toil.

The Spiritual fruit is not our work. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that's the main point. I don't want to say we don't exercise our will in this. That is what I'm urging—in effect. By implication we need to be diligent in these things, and seek and strive to love one another, and to know God, and to understand who He is and His love for us, and all of that.

But ultimately it's called *fruit* because it's not our product, it's God's product within us. He does it. These virtues are the product of the grace of God. We can't produce them in our strength. But the Spirit can, and does. They are as natural as fruit on a vine to those who are led by the Spirit.

So, we have to ask ourselves, are we living under the control of the Holy Spirit? Husbands, are you loving your wives? Are you being patient with your children? —That's Ephesians chapters 5 and 6. Do people look at us and say?, "Those people have joy. These are tough times we're living in, but they're joyful." Is our conduct and way of life such that it would draw people to Christ? Well, I think it will be if we are walking by the Spirit. I don't mean to say that we're always going to draw people, and the world is going to be attracted to what we are. The world may respond just the opposite, but they're

going to respond. If they're going to respond to us, it's going to be because they see something real and alive within us—that we're walking by the Spirit.

Well, this is what we need to ask for in prayer for ourselves and for others—that the LORD will produce in us His fruit, His virtues. And this list is what we need to copy in our lives. It is truly the good life, the best life, the highest life. As Paul says, "Against such things there is no law."

Now he concludes the chapter in verses 24 through 26 with some exhortations to act upon the things that he has just told them about; the Spirit/flesh conflict. He begins in verse 24 by reminding them, and by application reminding us, of our relationship to the flesh. That relationship is dead. Every Christian, all "...who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (vs24). We need to know that, and reckon that to be true—that we have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

That happened at conversion. That happened when we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. At that moment, a definitive break occurred between the old life and the new life. We became a new creation. We're new creatures in Christ. What Christ accomplished for us on the cross when, as Paul put it in chapter 2, verse 20, 'We were crucified with Him', that was appropriated by us. That life was appropriated by us, which He obtained at the cross in the crucifixion. It's appropriated by us when we believe.

So what happened 2000 year ago becomes ours in this generation, the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ. He obtains what Christ already bought for him. So the death of the old man and the power of the flesh, which Christ secured for us through His crucifixion, became our possession, our experience, at the moment of our faith and conversion.

As a result, we no longer belong to the flesh. We no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to Christ. Our desires are to be directed by Him alone, through the Holy Spirit. Now that's the implication of Paul's statement here in verse 24. But again, the only way to do that is by the Holy Spirit—by following Him.

And that's what Paul encourages us to do in verse 25, where the exhortation is explicit. It is stated in a form of a condition, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Now there's no doubt about that, and Paul isn't positing some doubt in this statement. So really, the sense of what he's says is this, 'Since we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit.' In other words, because the Holy Spirit gives us life and sustains us with His power, we are to be obedient to Him. —We are to walk by the Spirit.

Now the word for *walk* here, in verse 25, is different from the word *walk* in verse 16; so the command has a slightly different sense here. This word has the idea of 'walking in a line'. It's a military term. It's used of marching in file to battle, of keeping in step behind the leader. The New International Version, in fact, translates it, "Let us keep in step with the Spirit." He is our leader and we follow in His footsteps. So the idea is, "Take steps." He convinces us of truth—of what is right. He forms in us correct judgments, and we are to follow. As we do, the Spirit leads us through this life. And who better to have as our leader and our guide as the Holy Spirit, the omniscient Spirit of God. We can't do better than that.

So we're to trust Him, we're to follow Him. He knows the right way to go. He knows where the dangers are, He knows where the blessings are. He knows where the challenges are—and what challenges we need. We're to follow Him. And we do that step by step. That's the picture that Paul gives. And we do that the way a child learns to walk: by taking a first step and then a second step. And just as a child's first steps are unsteady, and he or she falls down learning to walk, we, too, fall and fail in the Christian walk—in the Christian life.

Our walk is always one with failures. That's the reality. But, and here's the good news, the Holy Spirit is patient, just like a parent helping his or her child to walk. He 'takes our hands,' so to speak, and He helps us along, and He encourages us to follow Him. He is not a hard master. But we must follow. We must keep in step. We will never learn to walk by the Spirit if we don't take those initial steps. We take those steps by faith, by following the path of love, joy, peace, and patience—and avoiding impurity, idolatry, anger, envy and the others.

The Galatians were struggling with their first steps. Paul indicates at the end of the chapter in verse 26, 'They weren't avoiding real problems.' They would have the Law, and they're trying to live by the Law, but it's not producing what they would hope it to produce. Instead it was producing boasting and envy. There was strife among them. But the only way to overcome that, the only way to overcome problems and all of the deeds of the flesh, is by following the Spirit, by keeping in step with Him, daily, moment by moment.

We are living, every day, living in a spiritual war zone. It doesn't let up. When we think it's letting up, it's not. We are each engaged in a great, personal battle. The flesh and the Spirit are locked in a mortal struggle. All around there are temptations and dangers. But the struggle is not a stalemate. It's not between two equal opponents. The Spirit is stronger than the flesh. And as we follow Him, by obedience, He will lead us through all the difficulties, the strife, and give us victory.

Back during the second world war, during the dark days of the German blitz when London was being bombed night and day, King George VI gave the Christmas broadcast. (The monarch would do that every year.) And in this particular address, he quoted a poem that began,

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may go safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God; and it shall be safer to you than any known way.' "

That's what we do. Trust the LORD. Follow the Spirit's lead. Walk by Him, and we will live well, we will live safely in the midst of conflict—and confirm, by doing that, that we are children of God, heirs of His kingdom.

May God help all of us to do that. We can only do it by His grace. We must look to Him, and ask Him to continually give us the desire for that, and the will for that. And if you've not trusted in Him, then we invite you to do that. That's the first step. Believe in God's Son, who became a man, and died for sinners. All who do, are saved, are sealed with the Holy Spirit at that very moment, and are being led by Him. That life is a

struggle, but it is also a life full of victory. It is the clean life; it is the good life. It is the very best life, and it is the life that is in Jesus Christ. So look to Him. May God help you to do that—all of us to do that.

Father, what a great truth that is. The wounds of Your Son that paid our ransom. We could not pay that ourselves. There was no other way of salvation except through the sacrifice of Your Son. Only that can purchase eternal life for us, and the forgiveness of sins. We thank You for that great gift.

We thank You for Your unconditional election; Why would You choose us? —But You did in Your grace. And the multitude, a multitude beyond counting; and Christ purchased them all. We thank You for Him. We thank You for all that He is presently doing for us.

We thank You that You've given to us, as believers in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, to empower us and to lead us through this very difficult and dangerous world. Thank You for all that we have in Christ.

Now, Father, we pray that the LORD would bless us and keep us. The LORD would make His face shine on us and be gracious to us. LORD, lift up your countenance upon us and give us peace. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)