Walk in the Spirit

Galatians 5:16–25 · John 3:1–18 · Acts 16:30–31 · Romans 10:9–10 · Romans 5:12, 8:1–4 · John 16:7–13

Ministry — March 5, 2023

Galatians 5:16–25

Who Is This Written To?

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5:16: 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.' The works of the flesh are manifest: fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousies, angers, contentions, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revellings. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such there is no law.

To whom is this written? It was a letter written by Paul to those who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ in Galatia — to Christians, not to the world at large. That distinction matters for everything that follows. But before going further into what Paul is saying to believers, there is a prior question that must first be answered: what does it mean to be a Christian in the first place?

John 3:1–18

Born Again: The New Birth

Nicodemus was a Pharisee — a ruler of the Jews, deeply knowledgeable in Jewish doctrine, a very religious man. He came to the Lord Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.' The Lord's reply goes straight to the heart of the matter: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

Nicodemus objects: 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?' The Lord answers: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' The new birth is not physical — it is the receiving of divine life from God Himself, accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God is three Persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God — and the entire Godhead is interested in man.

John 3:16–18 gives the heart of it: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And verse 18: 'He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' What a solemn thing — to be condemned already, because God gave the free gift of His Son and one refuses it.

Acts 16:30–31 · Romans 10:9–10

How to Be Saved

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi for preaching the gospel. An earthquake struck. The prison doors opened. The jailer — facing execution under Roman law if any prisoner escaped — found to his

astonishment that all had remained. He fell down before Paul and Silas and asked: 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' The answer was immediate and simple: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' The Lord delights to bless entire households.

Romans 10:9–10 states the same thing plainly: 'That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' Why the resurrection? God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead as His own declaration that He was completely satisfied with the price His Son had paid for our sins.

The physical sufferings of the Lord Jesus were utterly horrible — the crown of thorns, the beating, the nails, the cross. But those were not the most important thing that happened at Calvary. At noon on that day, the sun was darkened for three hours. In those three hours, unseen by any human eye, God laid upon the Lord Jesus every sin of every sinner, and dealt with Him in judgment for those sins. When it was finished, the Lord Jesus cried out, 'It is finished!' — and then voluntarily gave up His spirit. He did not die of suffocation. He gave His life. And God raised Him from the dead three days later.

When the soldiers came to ensure the crucified men were dead, they broke the legs of the two criminals, but found the Lord Jesus already dead. A soldier thrust a spear into His side, and blood and water came out — supernatural, since a dead heart does not pump. The blood of the Lord Jesus is what cleanses from all sin. There were two problems facing every sinner before God: guilt, and defilement. The blood of Christ addresses both. 'You have to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You have to confess Him as your Lord and Savior, and believe that God raised Him from the dead. And then you will be saved.'

Galatians 5 (continued)

The War Within: Flesh Against Spirit

Coming back to Galatians 5, Paul is writing to people who have already believed and been saved — who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. His admonition is: walk in the Spirit. The very fact that he says this shows that it is possible not to walk in the Spirit. A believer has two natures — the old fleshly nature and the new nature received at new birth — and these are at war with one another.

The works of the flesh are not things that only unsaved people do. Murder, drunkenness, jealousy, anger, strife — born-again Christians are capable of these, if they walk according to the flesh. Walking in the Spirit means letting everything you do be according to the direction of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you. Little children must think about what is pleasing to their parents — parents train them to ask first. As an adult I no longer answer to my parents, but I answer to the Lord. I can either walk in the Spirit or in the flesh.

The motivation for walking in the Spirit is love for the Lord Jesus. He paid the price for my sins. If I walk in the flesh, I am effectively saying: I am glad I am not going to hell — now I will do what I want. What a horrible state for a believer to be in. And yet we are all capable of it. The fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control — should characterize my daily life. Is that what those who know me would say? It should be, because those are the things the Holy Spirit produces.

Romans 5:12 · Romans 8:1–4

Sin, Condemnation, and Freedom

Romans 5:12 establishes the foundation: 'As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Death is the proof that sin is in this world — the wages of sin is death, and everyone dies. But death is not the end of the story. Those who have not received the Lord Jesus will stand before the great white throne of judgment, and all whose names are not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire — a place of conscious, eternal torment, where the conscience never stops. Those who refuse the Savior will remember forever the day they heard the gospel and turned from it.

But Romans 8:1 says: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.' Now — not eventually. For those who believe on the Lord Jesus, condemnation is removed entirely. In those three hours of darkness at Calvary, God dealt with His own holy Son for the sins of every one who would believe. No man saw it. But God was there, and He dealt with His Son, and His Son bore it — because He was holy, a perfect sacrifice, whose blood was sufficient. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission, and all the Old Testament sacrifices only pointed forward to the one perfect sacrifice.

Verse 3 continues: 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Man could not keep the law. But Christ condemned sin in the flesh, and now those who walk after the Spirit find that the righteousness the law demanded is fulfilled in them — not by striving to keep commandments, but by yielding to the Spirit of God who indwells them.

John 16:7–13

The Comforter: The Spirit of Truth

The Lord Jesus said in John 16:7: 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.' He sent the Holy Spirit when He ascended, and this Spirit now indwells every true believer. The Spirit reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment — He works in the heart of every one who comes to Christ, as He worked in the heart of Nicodemus.

And once indwelling the believer, the Spirit guides into all truth: 'When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak.' The Spirit of God will never guide a believer to do any of the things listed as the works of the flesh. If I get angry with someone, that is not the Spirit in me — that is my old fleshly nature. If I do any of the works of the flesh, I grieve the Spirit. But the Spirit is in me, whether I feel Him or not. The Lord Jesus said He sent Him, and He never told an untruth. He is the Spirit of truth.

We cannot walk in the Spirit in our own strength. We need to be daily reading the word, daily in prayer, daily dependent upon Him. Whenever David sought the Lord and prayed, even the most difficult things worked out. When he did not, they did not. The circumstances of life may not always change — sickness, financial difficulty, family trouble may remain. But walking in the Spirit, we can walk through all of it with Him. There is nothing more important in this world than believing on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, and then to walk in the Spirit with Him for His glory and honour.