

Holiness and the Holy Spirit

(The Secret to Living a Holy Life)

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

Introduction: This morning, we have the third message in our multi-week series which is a call to holiness entitled, "In the World, but Not Of It."

If you've been a believer for very long you know that as Christians, we live in a world-system that is not inclined to God.

"For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16)

Yet, God has not only called us to live in this reality, but to be holy men and women as we do.

"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:" (1 Corinthians 1:2)

The passage that we are looking at together this morning is key if we're to understand how this is to happen.

Before we get into it, I want to set the stage.

One of the main reasons why the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia was to counter the arguments of people known as Judaizers.

Paul called them "mutilators of the flesh" in **Philippians 3:2** because they insisted that those who had converted to Christianity fully submit to the Law of Moses, including being circumcised.

TODAY, WE CALL THIS "LEGALISM," or enforced obedience to a set of man-made rules in order to establish our righteousness before God.

Though this may have been in keeping with what the rabbis taught about the Law functioning as the means for making people holy, Paul argued that following a set of rules could never bring this result.

The Law wasn't given to make us righteous...

The law was given:

1. To make us aware of our sin.

"Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator." Galatians 3:19

I like the way The Living Bible translates this - "Well then, why were the laws given? They were added...to show men how guilty they are of breaking God's laws.")

2. To lead us to Christ.

Galatians 3:24 - "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith")

It's not that the Law was bad, just incapable of setting anyone free from sin (See **Romans 8:3**).

"For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh."

God provided a new moral guide -- His Holy Spirit -- who would empower believers to live a holy life by transforming us from the inside out.

This truly was good news for many who understood that they were set free from the burden of the law.

However, some unfortunately misinterpreted this teaching from Paul as permission to sin at will.

TODAY, WE CALL THIS "LICENSE," or the assumed freedom to sin knowing that it has been paid for by Christ's offering on the cross (See **Galatians 5:13**).

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh..."

So now the Apostle has to correct two erroneous points of view, legalism and license.

On the first issue, Max Lucado comments by saying, *"Legalism has no pity on people. It makes my opinion your burden, makes my opinion your boundary, and makes my opinion your obligation."*

This reminds me of the story by the great early 20th century preacher Donald Barnhouse, who in 1928 led a Bible conference in Montrose, Pennsylvania. One day two old ladies complained to him that some of the girls were not wearing stockings. Oh, the shame of it!

These ladies asked the preacher to rebuke the girls, because, as everyone knew, no respectable girl in the 1920s would dare to walk outside without them.

Barnhouse looked them straight in the eye and said, "The Virgin Mary never wore stockings."

The ladies gasped and said, "She didn't?" He answered, "In Mary's time, stockings were unknown. So far as we know they were first worn by prostitutes in Italy in the 15th century.

Later a lady of nobility scandalized the people by wearing stockings at a court ball. Before long everyone in the upper classes was wearing stockings, and by Queen Victoria's time, they had become the badge of the prude." Needless to say, nothing else was said about the stockings for the rest of the conference.

"Legalism has no pity on people. It makes my opinion your burden, makes my opinion your boundary, and makes my opinion your obligation."

Perhaps the other extreme, license, is best summed up by the man from French West Africa who had a conversation with D. A. Carson from Trinity Seminary.

In the course of their conversation this man, who was pursuing a doctoral degree in engineering from a university in Germany, confessed that once or twice a week he visited the red-light district in the town in which he went to school.

When asked by Dr. Carson what he would do if his wife did something similar, he replied, "Oh, I'd kill her." "That's a bit of a double standard, isn't it?" "You don't understand. Where I come from in Africa, the husband has the right to sleep with many women, but if a wife is unfaithful to her husband, she must be killed."

Dr. Carson objected, "But you told me you were raised in a mission school. You know the God of the Bible does not have a double standard like that."

With this the man smiled brightly and replied, "Ah, le bon Dieu, il doit nous pardonner; c'est son metier," which is translated, "Ah, God is good. He's bound to forgive us; that's His job!"

The freedom Paul talked about here in Galatians is not, like this man assumed, freedom to sin...Rather it is freedom to serve.

This was the entire message of the law...love your neighbor.

Any other kind of conduct was unacceptable and would result in their mutual destruction according to the Apostle (See **Galatians 5:14-15**).

"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

How was this to happen for these new converts to Christianity? The answer to this question is found in the next eleven verses under three main headings:

- Conquering the sinful nature;
- Characterizing the sinful nature;
- Contrasting the sinful nature.

I. Conquering the Sinful Nature (See Galatians 5:16-18).

The phrase "sinful nature" as it's found in verse 16 of the KJV, is literally translated "flesh."

It can mean many things in the original language. The best way to get our hands around this term is to look at the word it's contrasted with, "Spirit."

Here it refers to the Holy Spirit of God, the One who sets us free from the compulsion to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The "flesh," then, refers to our propensity to sin apart from the grace and power of the Spirit of God.

In the flesh we live an existence that is hostile to God and cannot hope to please Him in any way (See **Romans 8:7-8**).

“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”

We will never overcome the flesh by wrestling it into submission through more laws (legalism). God didn't design the Law with this in mind!

Neither are we to resign ourselves to give in to the flesh and satisfy its hunger for sin and simply trust that we're forgiven (license).

Paul says that our only hope is to walk in the Spirit!

The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with one another.

Only those who are led by the Spirit (who actively obey His leading) are capable of living a holy life.

Application: A while ago I was preparing to preach on this subject. A man who had been a believer for many years asked me, "Are you sure you want to tackle such a tough topic?" What he was implying was that the teachings about the Holy Spirit are complicated and only to be understood by the most advanced students of the Scriptures.

I know now that He was absolutely wrong! If the primary work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is to make us holy; and if Chuck Colson is right and "holiness is the everyday business of every Christian," then every one of us should be able to understand what it means to walk in the Spirit.

Otherwise, God has demanded of us something that most can't even comprehend, let alone do.

Walking in the Spirit is as simple as walking in the footsteps of Christ and trusting that the same power that enabled Him to please His Father (See **John 8:29**) is also at work in us for the same purpose. (See Illustration in **Luke 4:1-13 – Jesus tempted in the wilderness**).

II. Characterizing the Sinful Nature (See Galatians 5:19-21).

In order to help us better understand what he was talking about, Paul provides us with a sample list of those works that result from walking according to the sinful nature.

The implication is that you can know whether you are walking in the flesh or the Spirit by examining the fruit you produce.

Here the fruit of the "deeds of the flesh" fall into four broad categories.

A. Three fruits are associated with **sexual sin** (*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery*).

Since these are representative of sexual perversion it is safe to say that any intimate association outside of that which God designed for marriage is the product of the sinful nature/flesh.

In a few weeks I'm going to address this topic at length, so that's all I'm going to say about this for now.

B. Two are associated with **false worship** (*idolatry, witchcraft*).

We can define idolatry as intentionally offering worship to created things instead of the Creator.

Witchcraft is the Greek word "Pharmakeia" and originally meant the medical use of drugs.

Eventually it came to apply to the abuse of drugs for poisoning instead of healing. Then, finally, it took on the sense of witchcraft or sorcery.

This was very common in New Testament times in spite of the fact that it was a serious crime in Roman law (See **Acts 19:17-20**).

C. Eight are related to **conflict in human relations** (*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy*).

These words all have something in common. They represent unhealthy personal relationships. This was exactly what the Judaizers were seeking to promote among believers in Galatia.

They were hoping to gain support by creating seeds of discontent that would ultimately lead to the rejection of Paul's authority and instruction.

D. Two have to do with the **abuse of alcohol and its consequences** (*drunkenness, orgies*).

While the use of wine is in itself no sin (See **John 2:1-11 – wedding at Cana**), excessive drinking obviously is (See **Ephesians 5:18**).

Now let me say that I am not endorsing the consumption of alcohol. I think you would be much better off if you did not drink. There have been many terrible consequences from normally nice, kind people drinking, lowering their inhibitions and then doing something they would never do when sober under any conditions.

That's why "orgies" is listed in this category. It was a natural companion to drunkenness (See **Romans 13:13**).

Application: Note the strong warning from Paul that follows to anyone who sins freely:

“Those who routinely practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”

This is not implying that we are saved from the penalty of sin through good works, but rather, we are saved for good work (See **Ephesians 2:10**).

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Good works are evidence that God is at work in us.

Illustration: When I was growing up, I used to go apple picking with my mom and brother. While we were there, my brother and I...because we're stupid boys, would have apple battles where we threw big, ripe and juicy apples at each other with the intent to inflict as much damage as possible.

One time I got hit right between the eyes with one and it was "instant applesauce!"

Now when we would go to load up our bags with apples from the trees, we never once were surprised to find pears...or bananas or any other kind of fruit for that matter. Why? Because they were apple trees and apple trees produce apples.

It was their fruit that identified them. The same is true for those who walk according to the sinful nature.

They will be identified by their fruit.

III. Contrasting the Sinful Nature (See Galatians 5:22-23).

It was Paul's intent to completely expose the evil work of his adversaries by not only exposing the negative consequences of their actions, but by showing what was missing as well.

There was nothing in their deeds that even remotely manifested itself as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

These are the qualities that God the Holy Spirit works in us when we walk with Him.

Again, these are not the only fruits of the Spirit any more than the previous list covered all the deeds of the flesh (See **Acts 4:31** and 6:3-4 for other examples).

They are representative of the kind of fruit that marks a person as one who is walking with God in the power of His Holy Spirit.

Application: People come to me all the time and ask me to pray for patience, joy or one of the other qualities on this list. I've said in the past and I'll say it again. "I'm not going to pray that you will somehow be able to muster patience or joy or gentleness.

I'm going to pray that you will walk in the Spirit. Then, and only then will you be able to see this fruit reproduced in your life."

Do you want to be a more loving person this morning? Walk in the Spirit.

Are you looking to demonstrate self-control in an area of your life that has up to this point been impossible to conquer? Walk in the Spirit.

Are you unable to share the Gospel message with someone because you're afraid? Walk in the Spirit.

Do you lack the discernment and wisdom to make an important, life-altering decision? Walk in the Spirit.

Conclusion: The deciding factor in whether you will walk in the Spirit or in the flesh is not your circumstances or those impossible people that you have to deal with on a daily basis.

It is your choice, plain and simple.

On June 4, 2001, 12-year-old Little League pitcher Robert Knight pitched the game of his life. As batter after batter came to the plate for the opposing team in suburban Detroit, each player did his best to make his parents proud. Each tried and failed, again and again to hit a pitch off the 5 foot 3 inch, 100 pound Robert Knight.

Knight threw a perfect game, a truly perfect game. All 18 batters he faced in the six-inning game not only failed to get on base, but didn't even manage to hit the ball into fair territory. That's right! They struck out.

The final batter to face Knight worked the count to 3 balls and no strikes, but the pitcher battled back to strike him out to end the game.

"I could tell the other team didn't really want to come up to bat anymore after a while," said Mr. Perfect. As the last strike was called, everyone that rooted for his team ran out on the field to celebrate. Everyone, that is, except his parents. They were not at the game.

They had each made the choice to spend their time doing other things. When Mrs. Knight arrived to pick up her son, the coach said, "Oh, this wasn't the game for you to miss."

Don't you hate it when you miss out on something really good?

That's what happens to believers who choose to spend their lives walking in sin, when all the while they could have walked with God.

I urge you, make the right decision this morning to submit yourself to the rule and reign of God the Holy Spirit. Don't miss out on the best He has to offer.