Galatians 5:16-18 | "The Power for Godly Living" Preached on August 22, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Good morning, please turn in your Bibles to Galatians 5, verses 16 through 18.

We finished up the book of 1 Peter last Sunday, and now what I want to do is to do a short, 3-week sermon series in the second half of Galatians 5.

After these 3 weeks, it will be time for our Apologetics Conference, and then after the conference, I will start a brand new study through a book of the Bible. *[pauseeee]*

Now you may be wondering why I chose this section in Galatians 5.

And it's because in this portion of Scripture, we find the principal way of living the Christian life: by the Spirit.

Each of us needs to be brought to the truth or even reminded of the truth of where we find the power to live the Christian life.

And so I've entitled this short little series, "Walking by the Spirit."

I'll READ THE PASSAGE for you. [pauseeee]

Let's say there was a Christian named, "Nathan".

This Nathan is not based on anyone I know, but simply a made up name for this illustration. *[pause]*

Nathan is a middle aged man, who has been a Christian since he was six years old.

He grew up going to church, and he considers himself a pretty religious person, but Nathan was frustrated.

Not because of his pastor, his spouse, his friends, or his job - Nathan was frustrated *with himself*. *[pause]*

You see, Nathan just kept giving into his sinful desires, I'm not talking about giving in here or there, but he gave in all the time, it felt like.

He has been determined to change, but he can't seem to change.

He has tried so many things in his own power to stop looking at inappropriate images online.

He has tried so many things in his own strength to stop angrily saying hurtful things to his wife.

He has tried so many tips and tricks, so many "5 steps to victory" articles on the internet, but can't seem to find the key to breaking the stronghold of these sins. *[pause]*

What has he done wrong? Why can't he seem to have victory? Why is *nothing* working?

Where does he find the power to live a godly life? [pauseeee]

Have you ever felt like Nathan?

Nathan's story is not unlike many others in our church or in churches all across the world.

His story goes right to the heart of the question: How is the Christian life to be lived? [pause]

Is it done by following a list of do's and don'ts?

Is it done by rolling up your sleeves and doing it in your own power?

Is it done by being guilted and shamed into doing what's right?

Is it done by seeking to gain God's favor through more and more works? [pause]

Let me ask you: Where do you find the power to live a godly life?

What do you do when you have those moments where you can feel your sinful desires rising up in you and you want to give in?

You feel the desire to get back at someone and you really want to.

You feel the desire to say that hurtful word, to give that attitude to your spouse, or to look at something that you shouldn't. *[pause]*

What do you do when you feel out of control, like your sinful desires need to be appeased?

What do you do when you are discouraged by the amount of times you gave into the same sin this past week?

How can you start to overcome giving into these sinful desires and to see them have less and less of a stronghold on your life? *[pauseee]*

These questions go right to the heart of our everyday lives, and how we live them.

And God will teach us this morning through Paul's letter where the power for godly living is found. *[pauseeeee]*

Now since we are kinda plopping right into a book of the Bible, we need to understand the context.

In Galatians, Paul has been focused on showing his readers that the gospel is all about grace.

The Gospel came from Jesus Christ, yet the Galatians were being swayed away by a different gospel.

This different gospel was claiming that you needed to do all of these other things in order to *truly* be saved.

But Paul emphasized that a person is only justified in God's sight through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works.

No one is made right by obeying the Law, for Christ rescued us from the curse of the Law, as he took the curse for us on the Cross. *[pause]*

And the reason we aren't saved by the Law is because none of us could keep it perfectly, therefore, the Law was there to show us our sin and need for Christ.

That's why Jesus needed to come, take on flesh, and be born under the law...

...So that he could free us from the curse of the law, which we were under, since we couldn't obey it perfectly, and we broke God's Law. *[pause]*

But now we are children by faith, who have received the Spirit.

Therefore, if we are children, then we shouldn't go back into slavery to the Law, for we are free. *[pause]*

So Paul, in the beginning of Galatians 5 pretty much says, "Don't try to make yourself right with God by keeping the Law, for when you try to live by the Law, you have keep the whole law.

And if you go this route, then you have turned away from God's grace, who offers you freedom in Christ." [pause]

So he wants them to know that they have been freed from trying to keep the Law.

And yet Paul knows what they might be thinking, 'Does this freedom mean freedom to sin and do whatever we want?'

No, for he makes it clear that this freedom isn't freedom to sin, but freedom to serve others in love. *[pause]*

But how can we do this?

How can we live in the right way, if not according to the Law? We need to walk by the Spirit.

And that's where our passage comes in, for Paul is showing us the prime way that we can live holy lives as Christians.

It's not through guilt and shame, it's not through pure effort alone, it's not through trying to keep the Old Testament Law - it's through the Spirit. *[pause]*

And so as we look at our passage, we see in verse 16 a promise, and that promise is this...

I. The Promise: When you live by the Spirit, you won't gratify your sinful desires. (16)

There's nothing like hearing an exciting promise from someone.

That promise can make you excited, but the truth is, promises from other people are not 100% sure things because situations can come up that prevent that promise from being fulfilled.

But God's promise here is not only something that is grand, glorious, and exciting, but it's also fully backed up by a completely faithful and trustworthy God. *[pause]*

When you live by the Spirit, you won't gratify your sinful desires. [pause]

What good news this is!

God is giving us a promise for godly living.

You don't have to keep giving into the same sins day-in and day-out!

You want hope?

Are you tired of giving into the same sins over and over again, it seems like everyday? Look right to this verse!

Discouraged Christian, God is giving you a promise, and this promise shows us the path and power to victory over sinful desires in our lives. *[pause]*

And God doesn't say that he *hopes* this will work against our sinful desires.

He doesn't say that this will work sometimes against our sinful desires.

He tells us that when we walk by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

In Greek, Paul uses a way of emphasizing the "not". It's like saying, "no, you will NOT." *[pause]*

This is a promise you can cling to in the brightest of days, when you are doing well in your Christian life.

But this is also a promise that you can hold dearly during those days when you have sinned against someone 5 times already and it's only 9 in the morning. *[pauseeee]*

This all sounds great, right? But where is the power found? In the Spirit. [pause]

The Holy Spirit is God, and he indwells every single Christian.

In Acts, we see that God pours out his Spirit on those who believe in Christ.¹

¹ See Acts 2, and then throughout Acts where even Gentiles receive the Spirit.

Even Jesus said that he would send the Spirit to be with us, comfort us, lead us to truth, and be a helper to us.²

So every believer in Jesus receives the Spirit at salvation, but we see in this passage that a believer can either walk by the Spirit or not. *[pause]*

We each have the Spirit, but we can grieve him³, and not live according to His power and guidance.

The Spirit doesn't just work automatically, if we are turning away from Him, but we must depend on him.

He's actually there waiting to be depended on and followed, but oftentimes we can follow our flesh instead. *[pauseeee]*

So now that we have understood what the Spirit is, what is this "flesh" that Paul talks about?

Well flesh can be used in different ways by the New Testament authors, so it all depends on the context.

But for our context, the flesh is not just your physical body.

The body isn't sinful in itself, for God created it good, so Paul must be thinking deeper here. *[pause]*

The flesh here means our fallen humanity, which is fallen because it's corrupted by sin.

It's that sinful aspect of us that desires sinful things.

You see, flesh is all about self, whereby we say, "I can do it myself." Or, "I want that, so I'm going to do it." *[pauseeee]*

So then what it comes down to is this: the flesh is always seeking satisfaction in things apart from God.

The flesh not only says, "I want to be in control, so I'm going to lie about this."

But the flesh also says, "I can earn God's favor by doing more works." [pause]

Do you see it? The flesh thinks it's king.

The flesh wants something, so it does everything in its power to get it.

The flesh wants something, so it's solution is to look inward and try to be satisfied by things other than God. *[pauseee]*

² See especially John 14:16-17.

³ See Ephesians 4:30.

That's the flesh, and so we see here the great distinction is between the Spirit and the flesh - the Holy Spirit and our sinful nature. *[pauseee]*

But God promises a path of victory! He shows us where the power is! It's through the Spirit!

The Christian doesn't have to live with a losing mentality, for God promises a way to fight off and not give into the sinful desires that rise up in you!

It's by "walking by the Spirit." [pause]

Simple, right?

Maybe you're thinking, "OK, I just need to walk by the Spirit...I can do that..."

But then as you think about it more, you're wondering, 'But what exactly does that look like in my day-to-day life?' [pause]

The truth is, you need to know what this actually means because what help is it if you know you need to walk by the Spirit, but you don't know what that means or looks like? *[pause]*

Well "walk" here points to how you live, your conduct, your habitual way of life.

So we could say "Live your life by the Spirit." [pause]

Paul uses other ways of saying this, when he says later on, to be 'led by the Spirit,' and also to 'keep in step with the Spirit.'⁴ [pauseeee]

So this walking by the Spirit involves a habitual lifestyle of following the Spirit.

It's not taking one step, and saying, "Look, I'm walking by the Spirit."

Rather, it's a whole life characterized as walking by the Spirit.

It's persistent and active following. [pauseee]

To walk by the Spirit, you need to get up off your figurative couch and walk!

Yet this isn't aimlessly strolling around, for you are choosing to follow a Leader, the Spirit. *[pauseee]*

So walking by the Spirit means that the Spirit sets the course, direction, and pace - not you.

You are to be walking by the Spirit.

The opposite of this would be to walk by the flesh, and let your sinful desires control and guide what you do.

⁴ See Galatians 5:18, 25.

Kinda like, "I want to get even, so I will." Or, "I want to make them feel bad, so I'm just going to say it."

But when you walk by the Spirit, you <u>aren't</u> walking by your feelings, your thoughts, your desires, your inclinations, or other people's.

You are living by the power, guidance, and influence of the Holy Spirit. [pauseee]

Once again, you may be wondering, 'Yes, I want to be led by the Spirit. I want to walk by the Spirit and follow his lead, but how?' *[pause]*

Back in Galatians 3, Paul brings out the fact that they received the Spirit by simply hearing the Word with faith.

And he makes the point that the Christian life isn't started by the Spirit, and then perfected by the flesh.

Rather, the Christian life starts with the Spirit, and continues with the Spirit's power, and this happens when we hear with faith.⁵ *[pauseee]*

The point is that walking by the Spirit entails believing God's Word in faith!

It's faith, it's dependence on Him!

It's hearing, knowing, and trusting the Word, for the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth.⁶ [pause]

When something in you rises up in impatience, you say, "God, help me. You promised to be with me and you are in control of this situation, so I trust You."

That's walking by the Spirit. [pause]

It's arranging our whole lives around the Spirit, and what he wants, for you are to be living <u>by</u> the Spirit. *[pause]*

You are asking questions like, "What does he say in the Word? How is he leading me here? What is pleasing to God?"

You always ask God for wisdom and direction regarding how to respond to everything you experience in this world. *[pauseee]*

When you're about to have a difficult conversation with someone, you're asking the Spirit for wisdom regarding how to respond in a godly way.

When you begin your day, you're asking the Spirit to help you to not lash out at your spouse or kids.

⁵ See Galatians 3:2-5.

⁶ See John 16:13.

When you walk into a store, you're asking the Spirit to allow you to interact with someone with the truth of God's Word.

When you sin, you respond to the Spirit's conviction by repenting to God, and by apologizing to someone that you sinned against.

When you sense God leading you to pray, give, serve, or humbly step out in faith, then you follow his lead.

When the Spirit places someone on your heart, you respond accordingly. [pause]

The truth is, this isn't some super dramatic thing where we hear an audible voice, but it's simple, everyday, moment-by-moment guidance. *[pauseeee]*

And it's important to know that the Spirit *will never* contradict the Word of God, but will perfectly align with it.

He is the Spirit of truth, he inspired the writers of the Bible, so you really think he's going to lead you to go against it? *[pauseee]*

Walking by the Spirit is depending on Him, his working, his power, his guidance.

We even see in Romans 8:5 that Paul says, "those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." *[pause]*

So walking by the Spirit means my mind is focused on what the Spirit values.

Meaning, I'm focused on: 'What does God say? What does God want? How does God view this? What does God value?'

You can't expect to walk by the Spirit if your mind is on the world, or on what you sinfully desire.

You can't expect to walk by the Spirit if you are filling your mind with not good things on TV or on the internet, rather than on the truth of God. *[pause]*

You need to be filling your mind with the Word of God, you need to be in connection with God in prayer.

And above all, you need to trust Him! [pause]

Paul says, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁷

So submit to Him, yield to what he desires. [pause]

⁷ Galatians 2:20.

When he is pricking your heart, like, "You know this is wrong, stay away from it," then stay away from it!

When he is guiding you to pray for that person, then do it!

When he says, "Slow down," you slow down.

When he says, "Let's go this way," you go that way.

When he puts it on your heart to help a certain person, you help that person. *[pause]*

Walking by the Spirit means you are reaching out to him in prayer, you are reading the Scriptures, you are living by faith, and you are obeying Him.

In each of these things, your mind is focused on what God wants, you are connected to God in faith and prayer, you are being filled with truth, and then you are living out what He wants in submission.

That's the way!

You are <u>not</u> living by your own power or wisdom, but you're guided and empowered by the Spirit, who is the main power, and you are just a railcar attached to Him. *[pauseeee]*

The Spirit's power, guidance, and working is available, but you must walk by it!

Submit to his control, and if you do - he won't outrun you, but he will lead you as you walk. *[pauseee]*

And what's the result of living this way? "You will not gratify the desires of your flesh." [pause]

Each of us has these sinful desires that rise up in us.

You feel that desire to get back, to lust after someone, to say something hurtful, etc.

These arise because of our flesh, yet God promises that if we walk by the Spirit, we won't gratify or carry out those desires.

We may feel them briefly, but we won't give in to them. *[pause]*

Have you ever had those times when you were really focused on what God wants, trusting His Word, and a temptation arises, but you don't give in at all?

This is because at that moment you are walking by the Spirit, and therefore, you wouldn't gratify that sinful desire.

Walking by the Spirit blocked that desire from being carried out.

It wasn't in your own power, but it was through the Spirit's power that you utilized by walking in step with Him. *[pauseee]*

What an amazing promise!

This shows us that nominal, lackadaisical, Sunday-only Christianity does not produce godly Christians!

If your faith consists of coming to church once in a while because you said a prayer one time or because you just feel like you need to, that's not going to do it.

If your faith consists of coming every Sunday, but then you rarely think about God or His Word throughout the week, that's not going to prepare you for the onslaught of sinful desires rising up.

You are cutting yourself off from the prime way to grow and be sanctified. [pause]

Rather, the Christian life is a life of faith, trust, submission, dwelling on the Word, continual prayer, and service.

That's what's going to grow you because you are walking by the Spirit, and the desires of the flesh will have less and less of a hold on you. *[pauseee]*

People wonder why they are embattled by grievous sins, and they neglect to look at their spiritual life.

They think that doing their duty of merely going to church will do the trick, but it takes a life of living by the Spirit.

It takes a consistent, habitual life governed by the Spirit.

There is no quick fix, no mere four steps to overcoming, but rather life-long steps of following the Spirit's leading. *[pauseeee]*

"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." - that's the promise, but what's the reason he can say this?...

A. The Reason: The Spirit and flesh want opposite things. (17)

What happens when you and another person come to a stand still where you both want opposite things, and won't budge.

Now that's when it really gets interesting.

Of course it all depends on the relational dynamics, right?

Is this your spouse? Your boss? Your friend? A random person?

That makes a difference. [pause]

But what happens when nations want opposite things? Sometimes it ends up in a battle; it ends up in war.

This is because they wanted opposing things, and neither was willing to move an inch. [pause]

Well did you know that there's a battle waging inside of you as a Christian?

It's true, and it's because the Spirit and the flesh want opposing things. [pauseeee]

The truth is, when we become Christians, we don't instantly have a sinless life, where we just live in perfection and never sin again.

Rather, we have a battle raging within us as we have these sinful desires that creep up still. *[pause]*

This means that whether you are a new Christian or have been a Christian for 80 years, you will still need God's message here in Galatians 5.

In fact, you will need this message until you die or until Christ returns, whichever one comes sooner. *[pause]*

So if there is a struggle against sin in your life that's not a sign that you aren't a Christian, but rather, that's a sign that *you are*.

Notice how I said struggle against sin, that's important.

So it's not the fact that you give into sin all the time, it's the fact that you are trying to fight sin. *[pause]*

This means if you find yourself in a battle with sin, this is a sign that you have the Spirit.

If it all comes easily to you, and you don't find yourself battling against sin, then you probably either don't have the Spirit or have extremely quenched the Spirit. *[pauseee]*

These opposing desires of the flesh and Spirit are exactly the reason why Paul can make a promise about walking in the Spirit and not gratifying the desires of the flesh.

Think of it this way...

Since the Spirit's desires are contrary to the flesh's desires, then when you're walking in the Spirit, you won't give into the flesh's desires because the Spirit opposes those desires. *[pause]*

This is good news because it means following the Spirit will never lead you to gratify fleshly desires.

The Spirit will never lead you to sin, but to godliness.

You cannot say, "The Spirit led me to stop going to church."

You can't say, "The Spirit led me to say those things behind your back to everyone else."

You can't say, "The Spirit led me to leave my wife."

This is impossible because this verse tells us that the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, so the Spirit will never lead you to do something wrong.

They oppose each other and will never give in to the other side.

They will never lead you to do the opposite. [pause]

There are two ways to live: you either live by the Spirit or by the flesh, which do you let control and guide your life? *[pauseeee]*

This battle between Spirit and flesh in the Christian teaches us, first, that no Christian is incapable of seeing victories.

If you are a Christian, defeat doesn't have to be written above you in your battle against certain sins.

You don't need to despair and give up because you think that you just can't help it, and that you will never beat this specific sin.

For you have a powerful method of fighting sin, and it's not found in yourself, but it is found within you in the Spirit, who resides in you.

Depend on Him everyday.

Call out to Him and say, "Lord, I can't do this in my own power, so I need You!"

Say, "Lord, I keep giving in to this sin, but you have promised the power to overcome through Your Spirit, so help me now to live by the leading of the Spirit as I go through this day." *[pause]*

Don't lose heart, dear Christian, for when you walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

And someday God will complete what he started in you. [pause]

I'm not saying that you won't be tempted, for your sinful desires will still rise up.

And I'm not saying that from time to time you won't give in...

...But I'm saying that if there's a specific sin that you just keep giving into regularly, the Spirit can work in you so that over time you don't give into it as much, and you will start to see victory in that sense. *[pauseee]*

No Christian is incapable of seeing victories because God promises that the Spirit opposes the flesh's desires. *[pauseeee]*

The battle between Spirit and flesh in the Christian also teaches us that no Christian is above experiencing a battle with sin.

No Christian can or should ever get to the place (this side of Heaven) where they feel like they have arrived in the Christian life and experienced a state of sinless perfection.

We may have been freed from the power of sin, but not the presence of sin, until Christ comes again or we die.

So don't act like, "I got this. I don't struggle anymore," for that's the moment when your fleshly desire will show its ugly head, and humble you. *[pause]*

So this should humble us, and this is actually a good thing because it pushes us to be more dependent on the Spirit, causing us to once more walk in step with the Spirit. *[pauseee]*

So guess what this means, brother or sister in Christ...

Mature Christians are not above this battle, but they face it everyday.

Even the most godly Christian that you know faces this battle. [pause]

We all feel sinful desires rise up, but the question is whether we will gratify them by living by the flesh, or won't gratify them by living by the Spirit.

So if every Christian faces this battle, then don't be afraid to admit that you face this battle.

Don't be afraid to reach out to people for help when it comes to your sin.

Don't be afraid to admit that you have these sinful desires, but seek the help of others, who can help you to walk by the Spirit and not gratify them. *[pauseeeee]*

Moving onto verse 18, Paul sort of summarizes what he's saying, and it's this...

B. The Summary: We live godly lives by the Spirit, not the Law. (18)

"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."

The Galatians had these false teachers, who kept insisting on keeping the Law as a Christian.

But Paul is refuting that by showing that the power to live a godly life isn't in obeying the Law, but in being led by the Spirit. *[pause]*

The reason is because the Law says, "Obey this!" but doesn't give you the power to obey.

It's simply showing you what's right and wrong.

But the Spirit gives you the power to obey and fulfill what the Law was saying to do. [pause]

In Ezekiel 36, God promises this about the New Covenant age, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."⁸

So it's clear that Israel kept failing to keep the Law in the Old Testament, yet God promised that His Spirit would be given to each, causing them to live the way they should. *[pause]*

Paul's point is that you are not under the Law, in the sense of trying to live according to your own power.

That's how it used to be before Christ came!

But now that Christ has sent the Spirit into each Christian, we have the power in the Spirit to obey. *[pauseeee]*

The flesh doesn't give you power to change, for it's not connected to God's power.

The Law doesn't give you the power to do right, for it just keeps telling you that you fall short.

The power comes from the Spirit! [pause]

Living a godly life is *supernatural*, for it comes from God, who works in us to will and work for his good pleasure!⁹ [pause]

We can see victories over sinful desires that rise up when we live by the power of the Spirit. *[pauseeeee]*

Being under the Law, says, "If only I could learn the rules, I could keep them!"

It also says, "If only I could keep them, I could be right with God!"

But doing the Law doesn't make us right with God, rather, when we become right with God through faith in Jesus, the Spirit helps us to live out the righteousness of the Law in fulfillment of it. *[pause]*

So this means that when you live by the Spirit, you actually don't need to be governed by God's law because you will be doing what God wants already!

As the Ezekiel passage showed us, the Spirit would cause us to walk in his statutes, and so we become governed by the Spirit to do what God wants. *[pauseeee]*

So let's get down to the truth that this shows us, and it's this....

Spiritual growth cannot be done through human effort alone, but through the Spirit's power. *[pause]*

⁸ Ezekiel 36:27.

⁹ See Philippians 2:13.

You can't think, "I just need to know what God desires more, and roll up my sleeves and work at it."

That's not going to do it, for that's like living under the Law in your own power.

Rather, you need the Spirit, and you need to walk by the Spirit's guidance to live a godly life - that's the key. *[pause]*

So what Paul is teaching us is that...

The power for living a godly life is found in being led by the Spirit.

You can strive your best to change, but it will be to no avail without the Spirit's power.

You can try to live in your own strength and fail time and time again, and this will only lead to discouragement.

That's because the true power for living a godly life is a life led and empowered by the Spirit. *[pause]*

So as you go through this week, what are you going to let control you? Your sinful desires or the Spirit?

Who will be the Leader? Yourself, your emotions, your thoughts - or the Spirit of truth?

Where will you look for the strength? Yourself or God? [pauseee]

As you go through the rest of today and each day this coming week, I want you to try something.

Keep this sentence continually in your mind, "I need to walk by the Spirit."

So everyday this week, as you begin the day, talk to God and say, "Lord, I keep sinning against you. Thank you for the forgiveness in Jesus.

Please help me to not lash out at my wife today." (Or whatever it is that you find yourself continually doing).

Then say, "I need You to work because I can't do it in my own power.

Show me how I should respond when I start to become frustrated. Please let me walk by the Spirit today."

And then as you go through the day, keep thinking on these things and praying to God, "Guide me, Lord."

When you can tell that you are starting to get frustrated, quickly pray, "Help me, Lord, to walk by the Spirit." *[pause]*

Think about the truth of what God's Word says to help you.

Remember commands like, "Speak the truth in love.¹⁰"

Remember how God calls us to be patient, gentle, loving, and kind - and how Christ showed these things to us on the Cross. *[pause]*

Follow his leading, not your sinful desires.

Trust His power, not yours. [pauseeee]

The truth is this: the best situation to be in to fight your sinful desires is <u>not</u> to get lackadaisical in your spiritual life OR to roll up your sleeves in self-dependence.

The best posture to be in is a posture that says, "God, you show me the way, and you give me the strength to do it. I need you, I trust you, and I will follow you." *[pause]*

Let's all seek to walk by the Spirit this week.

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:15.