



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 5:16-26

Galatians 5

"The Flesh and the Spirit"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're going to look this morning at Galatians 5. We're coming to the conclusion of our study of this great book. We're going to conclude the fifth chapter this morning, looking at verses 16-26.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 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. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desire.

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together. It's a beautiful day. We thank You for that. But even if it were a stormy day, it's a beautiful place to be, with your saints gathered here, where we worship together, we open the scriptures and read and study them together. This is what we need, Father. This is what You desire for us to come on the Lord's day, to be together, to worship together, and to study. It's how we are nourished spiritually, and so Father, we ask You to bless us with spiritual nourishment. May this be an edifying time together.

It's as we study the scriptures, it's as we see Christ in the scriptures, it's as we learn of your grace and we apply Your truth that we are built up in the faith and we become like Christ. We are transformed, as Paul tells us, from glory to glory. And that's what we seek this morning, to be transformed through the study of Your word, specifically as we consider this great struggle that we are all in, each of us individually, daily, this struggle of the flesh against the Spirit.

Teach us, Lord, how to prevail, how to walk by the Spirit, how to live a life of obedience and one that's pleasing to You and one in which we experience Your grace and Your mercy and the victory that You have for us in this life, that we might enjoy our walk, our life with You, and that we might in that way be a good testimony to the world of the saving grace that's in Jesus Christ.

Thank You for that grace. We thank You for all that we have in Him. We pray You'd bless us in our spiritual life this morning, but also in our material life. We have a long list of prayer requests, Father – people who are sick or recovering from surgery, some conditions very serious; those who are grieving and those who have a variety of problems, Father, and we pray for them.

We pray that You would bless, that You would give healing, that You would give encouragement. We pray for those who are without work, that You would open doors of opportunity for them and Your providence lead them to work. Give them diligence and wisdom about that. Those who are experiencing strife within the home, things of

which we have read and we will consider this morning, we pray that You'd give them peace.

May Your people who are in difficult times, whether it's in the home or at work, wherever, that You would cause them to bear the fruit of the Spirit and that they would exhibit and enjoy love and joy and peace and all of those virtues that are ours and that You desire to produce within us.

Father, we pray for our spiritual condition, that this time together would nourish it and build us up and we would leave this auditorium better people than we entered, and useful for You. We pray for ourselves in that way. We pray for our nation. We pray for your leaders, that You'd bless them with wisdom. Thank You for the blessings You've given this land, and we pray that You would continue to bless us, but most importantly, bless this land with spiritual awakening and use us in that.

We look to You now, Father, to bless us. Prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together, and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] A number of years ago I was given a tour of the New York Stock Exchange. It was brief, but very interesting. I was taken out onto the floor. It was covered with paper; met a broker and talked about how things worked. On the way out I was shown a bronze statue that's prominently displayed there that is the symbol of the Stock Exchange. It's the figure of a bull and a bear locked in a mortal struggle.

The bull, as you know, is the upmarket and the bear the downmarket. And as long as there is a market, that financial struggle will go on every day. But my guide pointed out what is important to notice is the position of the animals in the statue. The bull is on top prevailing over the bear, which reflects the optimism of Wall Street. I don't know how much optimism they had last week, but I've never met a broker that wasn't optimistic about the market.

Now, I thought of that statue as I came to our text this morning 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, not the human spirit, but the Holy Spirit, is stronger and is prevailing.

And Paul describes for us in this passage the Spirit's work in our lives as he fights the flesh and leads the believer. He 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. And I think everyone, as you consider that warning carefully, recognizes the wisdom of that, the wisdom of loving and not fighting.

But as you consider it, you must wonder to yourself how can we do that? Where do we get the strength to love when it's not natural within us to do that and to not fight when that is the thing that we really want to do? We don't always have the strength to prevail in such circumstances. No, we don't, but someone else does, and every believer in Jesus 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. We see it, for example, in Psalm 1, where David writes, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of the scoffers." Life is like a course. In fact, the Bible describes it, particularly in the gospels, as two ways: the broad way that's crooked and the narrow way that's straight. Both lead to two destinies and we're on a walk, so to speak. We're all on a path. We're traveling somewhere, and that's a way of describing the way we conduct our lives, the way we live.

And Paul's point here is let your walk, let your conduct, be directed, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Galatians were not doing that. They were trying to find their guidance from another source, from the

Law of Moses. But believers have something far greater than external rules and regulations for that. 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, not external law either can give us power. No external law can do what Paul is speaking of here. Give us a desire to obey; fill us with love.

Only an inner power can do that. Only a life within us can do that. And that's what the Christian has in the Holy Spirit – supernatural power, diving power, which is more than power. It's a person, the third person of the Trinity who produces love in our hearts, and it is love that motivates us to obedience.

There are really three ways to live: under the law, without law, or Paul's way, which is with the author of the Law. All three can be illustrated from three different kinds of dogs. Now this isn't my illustration. I didn't invent it, but I think anyone who owns a dog can appreciate the analogy.

One dog lives on a leash. Whenever it goes out, it must be on the leash. And as he goes out, he pulls against the leash. He resists it, doesn't like it. My dog doesn't like it and must be jerked back into line and put back on the path. Well, that's a person under the Law.

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

The third is the ideal dog. He comes out of his house with his master and without a leash. He goes about freely, but returns at his master's command. He is bound by love to his master. That is the person who walks by the Spirit He or she obeys out of love. That's the position of the believer in Jesus Christ.

So Paul says to these believers in Galatian, walk with him. Go on with him wherever he goes. Be under his control and guidance and the promise is "As we do, we will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Paul doesn't say a believer will not have any desires of the

flesh or lusts of the flesh. We do, of course, but the Holy Spirit makes victory over the flesh in all of those desires possible. It's possible, though, only to the degree that we walk by Him.

So the promise is a great one: victory over the flesh, not being controlled by its desires. And the way to achieving that is obedience, walking by the Spirit. That is Paul's lesson in our text.

The urgency of doing what he says, of following his instruction is made clear in the next verse, in verse 17, where he explains the inner conflict every believer has between the flesh and the spirit. The flesh, Paul says, sets his desire against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. They are in complete opposition to one another and they are locked in a constant struggle.

The flesh is not merely the physical part of us. Paul was not thinking like a Greek. The Greeks had this dualistic view of life in the universe: material, matter, the physical that was evil. The spiritual, the immaterial, that was pure and that was good. That was the mind of the Greek. Paul did not think like that at all. He recognized that the material is good. It is of God. It's His creation. It's to be enjoyed. It's not to shunned.

So the flesh is more than the physical. It's more than the body. It is the mind. It is the will. It is the emotions. It is all of man acting independently of God and against God in defiance of God. It is what we are apart from grace. The flesh produces what J.I. Packard called anti-God in the way of temptations and delusions and distractions that keep us from perfection.

So the outcome of this conflict is you may not do the things that you please. Meaning, you may not do as children of God the things that are right, the things that as God's children you desire to do, which are righteousness. We may not do that. The flesh frustrates that, and though we seek to live a perfect life, a righteous life, we so often fail.

Well, this is the conflict that Paul describes in more personal terms in Romans 7:14-25, where he describes his struggle, the struggle between the willing and the doing and the failure to achieve what is

good. As long as we are in this present life, we will be in this conflict. We can't escape it. We cannot live above it. We cannot live above the struggle, though many have tried to do that. People down through history have thought that if they could just get away from the temptations of this world, they could gain the upper hand and be able to prevail in this ongoing battle.

That's what a lot of the early monks. They left the urban areas to live in the deserts alone in caves and on mountains, away from the attractions and distractions of society. Jerome, one of the great scholars of the early church and a contemporary of Augustine did that. He followed the monks into the wilderness where the days are hot and the nights are cold – a very harsh climate. And there with only the scorpions and wild animals for company, he hoped to escape the lurid temptations of the city, but he didn't. He wrote that even there, living in complete isolation, he imagined himself among the dancing girls of Rome. My face was pale from fasting. My mind burned with passionate desires within my freezing body, he writes.

A man can take himself out of the fight, but he can't take the fight out of himself, because this is an inner conflict. It is the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. It goes wherever we go, and it is unrelenting. So the danger we face is either being complacent about it or thinking that we can manage it in our own strength by our techniques or by rules and regulations that we think up or we find in other places. The flesh is too strong for us and we may not do the things that we please.

Now that doesn't mean that we can never do the things that we please, that we are always doomed to failure, or that the battle is a stalemate. It's not that, as I have said. And it's not that because the Holy Spirit is greater than the flesh. And though we are always threatened by the flesh, nevertheless as we walk by the Spirit, we will prevail. We will win over the flesh.

But we can only do that by the power of God. We must understand that. We must understand the urgency of the situation, that

we are in a battle and realizing that, constantly look to the Spirit. This is the Christian life. It is lived daily in the spiritual dust and sweat of the battlefield. And to prevail we must walk by the Spirit.

But to do that we need a right attitude toward the Holy Spirit. We need to have a sense of complete dependence upon Him. And so to encourage that, Paul repeats in verse 18 the point that he's already made. He writes, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." The Law is not the means of producing righteousness in the believer. The Law was given to show the unbeliever that he has no righteousness. The Law doesn't have the power to produce righteousness. And it is helpless against the flesh. It results in bondage and condemnation for those who seek by the yoke of the Law to gain God's approval. Paul has made that very clear throughout this book.

But every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit. At the moment of faith, as Paul explains in Ephesians 1:13, at that very moment we are sealed permanently with the Holy Spirit, who is our protector and who is our guide. Not the Law that's our guide. It is the Holy Spirit a person directs and empowers us, so that by siding with Him, the Christian overcomes the flesh.

And remember, the one we side with, the one we walk with, is omnipotent, an omniscient, all wisdom and all loving. So by following Him we do overcome the desires of the flesh.

Now our relationship to His guidance is stated here in verse 18 in a passive voice, a passive form. We are led by the Spirit. We don't lead the Spirit; the Spirit leads us. So there's a passive sense about this. But the idea that Paul is conveying here in this passage is not that we are only passive in this leading.

We must submit ourselves to His leading. That's clear from verse 16. It's clear from verse 25, where Paul tells that we are to walk by the Spirit. So the leading of the Holy Spirit is a passive/active relationship. He takes the initiative. That's typical of God's grace. That's typical of His relationship with His creation. He always takes



the initiative. He opens us up to His life. He brings us into His fellowship. He guides us. He leads us. He always takes the initiative, but we must actively choose to stand with Him against the flesh and follow His direction. We're responsible to do that and we must be diligent in doing that.

Well, how does He give this, leading this direction? How does He guide us? He always leads according to the principles of the word of God. The leading of the Spirit does not take place in a vacuum. He is the divine author of scripture, of the Law, of the gospels, of all 66 books of the Bible. So His leading is always according to that. It is never arbitrary. It occurs in the heart of the believer. He works upon our mind and upon our will, first by renewing our minds in regeneration, and then renewing through sanctification.

He does that principally through the reading and teaching of school. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Through the word of God, through scripture, He enlightens us about the goodness of God and the wickedness of sin. In that way He creates within us a desire to oppose in-dwelling sin, gives us the power to oppose that sin, to react against it, and enables us to do that gladly, enables us to do that joyfully in obedience to God's commands. He enables us to do that, because that's not natural within us.

See in the beginning verses of Romans chapter 8, the conflict that the natural man is in. He is naturally hostile toward God, at enmity with God. There is this natural resistance to God, so the desire to obey, it's not natural within us. It's a product of the Spirit of God, who not only gives us a sense that we should obey, but gives us a desire to obey.

So as we apply ourselves to the word of God, we gain the mind and the wisdom of God and the Spirit then enables us to apply that wisdom, the wise principles of the word of God. He enables us to apply them wisely to the circumstances of life and make good choices.

The choices we make and the way we live indicates whether we are being led by the Spirit or following the flesh. And in the next

verses, Paul gives the evidence of these two kinds of life with contrasting lists of vices and virtues. In verses 19-21, 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. This catalogue of sins is more than a description of a flesh driven life. It is also a measure of a person's true spiritual condition and proves that where these things are the pattern of a person's life, characteristic of a person, that person is not a child of God.

Now I suppose we could give a sermon on each vice. I'm sure that's been done and I'm sure that's been a pretty difficult series of sermons to sit through. I don't think it's necessary. Paul begins by saying that the deeds of the flesh are evident, meaning they are obvious to all. We know what these sins are. They clearly come from a sinful nature and are obviously wrong.

The list of works or deeds Paul gives here is not a complete list. At the end, in verse 21, he says, "And things like these." So many more could be added, but the list is long enough. It's not easy to classify, but the sins Paul lists seem to fall basically into four groups: sins of sex, of religion, sins of society, and drink.

The first category, the sexual sins, include immorality, impurity, and sensuality. These are listed first, but not because they are the worst sins that are listed, but because they are the most obvious. The Greek and Roman world in which Paul lived was notorious for immorality. In fact, immorality was so common that unless it was carried to excess, it wasn't considered bad.

But the flesh is more than sexual desires. The flesh is a very broad term and we see that in the next three categories. The second category is from the religious realm – idolatry and sorcery. The third division is made up of social sins, the sins that we commit against one another in society – enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envying. These are problems that arise from pride and greed and selfish ambition.

The fourth group of sins is connected with alcohol abuse, intoxicants, drunkenness and carousing. We could add drug addiction, something like that in our days. It's broader than just drunkenness. These are the deeds of the flesh. What one writer calls 15 steps into the pit of depravity. They lead to destruction. That is the warning connected with them. But they don't all present themselves in that way. They don't all present themselves or advertise themselves as destructive. In fact, many of these are seen as the way to pleasure and power, to the good life.

And so they're very tempting. Madison Avenue understands that. It seized upon these sins to advertise its products and gain a following. But Paul says those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Now that doesn't mean that Christians don't practice these things at all. It doesn't mean that Christians cannot fall into any one of these sins. Christians do fall into these sins and others. In fact, we do that every day. That's the struggle that Paul is describing here. It's a battle that we are in.

But such sins are not characteristic of the Christian life. They are not the bent of our life, and that's the force of this statement who practice such things, because Paul puts that in the present tense, which indicates habitual, continual conduct in fleshly sins, not periodic lapses in sin. A life in which there's no real struggle against them. It's just the pattern of one's life.

That doesn't mean that we can look at a person's life when we see this pattern and determine whether he or she is a child of God or not. We don't have that ability and I don't think Paul is setting this forth here in order for us to take it upon ourselves to examine everybody's life and see who is or who isn't a child of God. As I say, we can't do that, but we can examine our own lives and we can look at ourselves in light of these two lists, these two groups of virtues and vices and see where we stand in light of that, examine ourselves. In

fact, Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to do that very thing.

But if we're a child of God, we'll see a pattern in our life that fits the fruit of the Spirit, because the salvation that Christ obtained is not only a salvation from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin. So a salvation, as Dr. Johnson once put it, that does not result in practical holiness is not His. That is, it's not Christ's salvation. Salvation He has obtained for His people has power. The power of sin's been broken.

Verses 22 and 23, Paul gives the contrasting list of virtues. There are nine of them and they are the evidence that we are being led by the Spirit. They are called the fruit of the Spirit, not the deeds of the Spirit. Deeds, or works, speak of what man can do, as with the works or the deeds of the Law.

And they can be mechanical. They can be thoughtless. In fact, the machine in a factory is said to work. It manufactures things mindlessly. But the fruit is different. Fruit must grow out of life and in the case of the believer, it grows out of the life of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and produces His fruit in and through us.

Paul describes it here in the singular. It's not fruits, plural, but fruit, singular, which stresses that all nine of these virtues are a unity. In fact, we might think of them as a cluster of grapes rather than separate pieces of fruit. They all go together.

So all of them, not just some of them, are to be found in the Christian. If one is missing, then we do not have the fruit of the Spirit. The first that is listed is love, and we would expect that, because God is love, 1 John 4:8. Love is the greatest of the virtues; Paul tells us that in 1 Corinthians 13. Love fulfills the whole Law, as he has just instructed us in the previous passage.

And it is the distinguishing mark of the disciple. That's what Jesus said in John 13. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." And so love naturally leads the list of the fruit of the Spirit. It is what the world is to see

preeminently in our lives as we act in love toward one another, and not only in love toward one another, but in love toward the world around us.

Most importantly though, love is directed toward God. It is the motivation for all that we do. It's private. It is characteristic of our personal relationship with Him, reflected in our life of study and prayer, and just the way we live.

So first and foremost, fundamentally it is love for God and it grows within us as we understand what God in Christ has done for us. 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, and that is joy.

It's been said that joy is the virtue in the Christian life corresponding to happiness in the secular world. There's a big difference between the two. Joy is reliable; happiness is not. Happiness is dependent on the circumstances. Joy is dependent on the Lord, who is above the circumstances and controls them for our good. In fact, that's the reason that we can have joy in the midst of affliction, because we know that God is sovereign. He rules over every aspect of life. He is King over this world and over our lives at every moment of our existence, so everything that comes into our life is, Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, is for our good. We may not understand it. It may puzzle us greatly, but we can rejoice in the midst of it, because by faith we know that the God who has allowed these things into our life, He's using them for our good.

And again we have joy because of what Christ has done for us and what He has obtained for us. Whatever pains or losses we have in this world, they're only temporary. They won't last. Heaven is real and eternal and it will be our possession shortly.

And so it is natural that we have peace, even in the midst of turmoil. That's the third virtue, joy and peace that go together. In fact, they've been called spiritual twins. They go together because we have

peace with God, we have peace within ourselves, and because we have peace with God and peace within ourselves, we have joy.

After these are patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All of these are fruit. And fruit, as you know, has seeds. So fruit 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 increases as we live under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And in that way it is in contrast to the deeds of the works of the flesh, which suggest labor and effort and toil. Spiritual fruit is not our work. It is a gift of the Spirit, and that's the main point. These virtues are a product of grace. We can't produce them in our own strength. We can't produce them by putting ourselves under some legal code. Only the Spirit can do that, and He does that. He produces this.

And for those who are being led by the Spirit, these virtues are as natural as fruit on a vine. So we have to ask ourselves, are we living under the control of the Spirit? Husbands, are you loving your wives? Mothers and fathers, are you being patient with your children? Children, are you being obedient to your parents? Do people look at us and say, "Those people have joy"? Is our conduct and way of life such that it would draw people to Christ? Are we kind to one another? Are we kind to those around us? When we go to a restaurant, are we kind to the waiter or the waitress? These little things in life are where the fruit of the Spirit are displayed. And they will be displayed if we're walking by the Spirit.

Well, this is what we need to ask ourselves and this is how we need to examine ourselves and this is what we need to pray for, for ourselves and for one another, that the Lord will produce in us His fruit. This is what we need to seek to emulate in our lives. This is truly the good life. It's the best life. It's the highest life, as Paul says, against such things there is no Law.

Now, he concludes the chapter in verses 24-26 with some exhortations to act upon the things that he has 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. Now that happened at the moment of faith, at our conversion. That statement, "have crucified," is an **aeros** tense, which means it happened at a point in time. It's that point in time when we believed in Christ as our Savior. At that moment we were joined to Him. We were justified. We were clothed in His righteousness. We are connected to Christ. And at that moment of being connected with Christ, a definitive break with the past occurred.

What Christ accomplished for us on the cross, when, as Paul put it in 2:20, "we were crucified with Him." That was applied to us through faith. So the death of the old man and the power of the flesh, which Christ secured for us through His crucifixion. Because at the cross, salvation was settled. It was accomplished at the cross and all of the benefits of it were secured for us, not just our justification, but our death to sin and death to the old man and the power of sin was broken there at the cross. That's where it was accomplished. But that became our experience. It became a reality in our life at the moment of faith and conversion.

As a result, we no longer belong to the flesh. We belong to Christ. Our desires are to be directed by Him alone, through the Holy Spirit. So the unexpressed command or instruction or exhortation that follows from this is the way that we find in Romans 6:11, where Paul writes, "Reckon yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." As you read through Paul's letters, you see a very definite and clear pattern. All through his writings he states doctrine and he explains that doctrine extensively. And only then, after he has explained his doctrine, does he draw from it an exhortation, does he give instruction.

That statement of Romans 6:11 is the first command given in the book of Romans. That means we have five and a half chapters of

doctrine before there's every a command or an instruction on behavior given. Now the implied exhortation here in what Paul has said is to reckon this crucifixion to have taken place in our lives, realize that we are dead to the flesh, consider that to be true, and live like it. Don't be mastered by the flesh. It's defeated. That's the implication of Paul's statement in verse 24.

Now the only way to do that is by the Holy Spirit, by submitting to the Holy Spirit, and that's what Paul encourages us to do in verse 25, where the exhortation is explicit. It is stated in the form of a condition. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." But the sense of that is not questioning whether that's true or not. The idea is since this is a fact, since we live by the Spirit, let us also 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 we've noticed the word "walk" throughout this passage. Well, earlier it was in verse 16. But this word for walk in verse 25 is different from the word 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 of marching in file to battle, of keeping in step behind the leader. The New International Version 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. And as we do that, the Spirit leads us through this life. He knows the way to go far better than we do. He's omniscient. He knows this world. He knows time. He knows what's coming. He knows what's passed. He knows the future as well as the past. He knows everything. And if we can imagine ourselves walking through this world like a spiritual battlefield with pitfalls and minefields, He knows where all the mines are. He knows where all the pits are. He knows the way and so we're to follow Him, we're to trust Him, and He will lead us safely. We do that step by step, moment by moment. that's how we live the



Christian life, by faith in this moment and in the next moment living by faith.

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 step is unsteady and the second step unsteady, you know that as a parent you have helped your children learn to walk and you remember how the first step was probably taken as he or she held onto a chair and then ventured out and took a step and then fell down. And what did you do? You helped him up, helped her up. You didn't scold him for not making that first step well.

No, we're patient with our children. We help them along. And in the same way, the Spirit of God works with us. He is patient with us, helping as a parent helps his or her child along. He takes our hand, just like we would have done with our children, and led them along. And He helps us along and encourages us to follow. He is not a hard master. He is gentle and wants us to learn to walk and to follow Him.

But we must do that. The child learns to walk by taking that first dangerous step and then recovering from that first fall and making that next step and recovering from the next fall, and so it is from us. We must follow. We must step. We must keep in step, as Paul says. We will never learn to walk by the Spirit if we don't take those initial steps, meaning if we don't act in obedience. We do that. We take those steps of faith by following the path of love, joy, peace, patience, and avoiding impurity, idolatry, anger, envy, all of the others.

The Galatians were struggling in their first steps. As Paul indicates in verse 26, they weren't avoiding boasting and envy. They were engaged in strife and fighting. The only way to overcome such problems and all of the deeds of the flesh is by following the Spirit, keeping in step with Him daily, moment by moment.

We are living in a spiritual warzone and we are each engaged in great personal spiritual battles. Every one of you have issues that you're dealing with. We're all going through battles. I don't know what's going on in your life. We don't know what's going on in each

other's lives, but there is a battle going on. We do that, because Paul sets that forth very clearly. 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 is not pitted against two equal opponents. The Spirit is stronger than the flesh and as we follow Him, He will lead us through 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. In it 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.'"

Well, that's what we are to do. Trust the Lord. Follow the Spirit's lead. Walk by Him and He will give us guidance and we will live well, and it will be confirmed that we are children of God and heirs of the kingdom of God. Well, may God help us all to do that. And if you are here without Christ, if you've not trusted in Him, we invite you to do that. Believe in God's Son who became a man and died for sinners. All who do that are saved. They are sealed with a Holy Spirit and they began at that moment a life in which they're led by Him, guided by Him. Now that life is a life of struggle, but it's also a life of victory. It is a clean life and the good life. It is the very best life. It's eternal life and it's in Christ Jesus, so look to Him. May God help us all to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for Your grace. We're reminded here of the great struggle that we're in, and we're aware of that and we're aware of our weakness and our failure. But we do thank You for Your patience, Your longsuffering, Your grace, Your guidance, and that You will never forsake us.

May we walk more consistently, walk by the Spirit daily we pray, and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.