

Living By the Spirit

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- [0 : 00] Before I hand it over to Jesse, I just want to wish him a happy birthday today. Yeah. How old are you? 42. Yeah, it's an old goat.
- Anyway, I'm actually older than he is. But Jesse, I just want to thank you so much for your sacrifice, your leadership, your love for this site and One Harbor Church. You guys, you and your family are just outstanding, and I'm honored to be a part of this team with you, man.
- Love you, brother. Thank you. Thank you so much, Bear. Man, I feel like I don't deserve any of that.
- I feel like I don't deserve any of you. You guys are a huge gift to me, and this church is a gift.
- That I get to serve you guys is a gift. That I get to love you guys is a gift. That I get to be your pastor is just a huge gift. And we're continuing in our Galatians series.
- [1 : 10] And right before I was getting up here, I kind of had a different intro in mind, but God put this on my heart. And the beginning of Galatians, it's written to a church, and it opens up this way.
- Grace to you, and peace from our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And I just want to say that over you guys, man.
- May the grace of God come to you today. May his peace come to you right now as we open up his word, as we speak. And may he use that grace and peace to make you feel more connected to him and more connected into his body.
- So we're in Galatians 5, verse 16. We're going to start from there. It says this, Now, the works of the flesh are evident.
- I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- [2 : 42] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
- Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.
- Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. What this passage is getting at, what it's telling us, is the essence of Christian living.
- What is our life in Christ until we die or Jesus returns? This is what it looks like. Jesus said that his disciples live in this world, but we are not of this world.
- Which doesn't mean that we're aliens from another planet, right? Even though sometimes we act like that. It just means that we were once people who belonged to this world.
- [3 : 47] That is what the flesh is referring to when he's talking about the flesh here. It's not talking down about our bodies as if they're inherently bad or evil. See, God made this world and he made us and he made them good.

He said over at creation, this is good. But when the first human being sinned, it ushered in a new age. Which is the age we currently live in and will live in until Jesus returns and brings his kingdom down from heaven to this earth.

But until then, we are surrounded by sin and we are filled with sin. Everything in this world is under the corruption of sin. And that's why death is a reality.

But not only death is a reality because of sin, but so are evil works, right? And we're given a laundry list of those in verses 19 to 21. The works of the flesh are evident, right?

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, adultery. It goes on and on and on. And when you look around today and read history, this is what people do. This is what you and I do.

[4 : 53] And it's not even hidden. It's often celebrated. But these sinful acts aren't just happening out there, right? It's not like everybody else's problem.

Man, it's in here. It's in me too. It's in us too. You know, we look at that long list and you know what? Some of us, like me, we've checked all those boxes and then some.

Some of us, maybe only a few. But here's the thing. Being righteous before God isn't having less boxes checked than the other guy. It's about none of them being checked.

So whether you're a Christian or not, the reality is we all sin. We all do these works of the flesh. And the penalty of having just one box checked is divine punishment.

Jesus taught this too. There is an eternal death awaiting those who practice these works of the flesh. Paul says here in verse 21, I warned you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things, which a better translation is those who make a practice of such things, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[6 : 06] And what does that mean? What is not inheriting the kingdom of God? Well, it's being outside of the kingdom of God. And Jesus said that's what this looks like. It's forever punishment, pain and suffering and darkness. And that is what Jesus came to save us from.

He stepped into this world of the flesh, but he never sinned. He never lived according to the flesh. In fact, he lived a spirit-filled life.

He was full of the spirit, it says in Luke. And he showed us what a life lived full of the spirit and by the spirit can look like. Then he died to pay the punishment for our sins so that we can be forgiven.

That forgiveness isn't just for your past sins, it's for those you haven't even committed yet. He took all of them on himself on the cross in that one moment. Every sin you've done, every sin I've done, everything we've done according to the flesh.

All of those, yours and mine, they became his. And he died in our place and by his blood. All those check boxes, they're erased.

[7 : 19] By faith in him, all those check boxes are erased. It's a beautiful thing. And when God looks at you, he doesn't see any of the works of the flesh that we do.

And you know what? He never will. The Bible says we are hidden in Jesus by faith in him. Which means that God sees us through his son. When he looks at you and me, he sees Jesus.

He sees Jesus' righteousness. And that's it. Now, you might be thinking, wow, Jess, that sounds a little too good to be true. I grew up thinking that way.

Grew up in church. My dad was a pastor. So what I ended up doing, I thought it was too good to be true. So I constructed my own version of salvation. It was Jesus plus my own works.

So every time I sinned, I believed that sin box was checked again. And if I was to die before I repented and God had the chance to scrub that out, oh my goodness.

[8 : 19] I was outside the kingdom. I was doomed. Eternal damnation forever. You know what that did? That put all the pressure on me to be perfect.

And I strove to earn my salvation. And before long, it just became too hard. I was tired of failing. I'm not a very good Christian as far as like being perfect goes.

Not at all. And so, you know what happens when you get tired and you want to give up? That's what you do.

And my personality was, if I'm going down, I'm going down big time. I'm just going to go for it. Maybe that's you. Maybe you're here today and that's you. You know you need to change.

You feel this necessity to be different and be perfect. But you believe it's up to you. Guys, that's a real danger. It's a real danger. Because we don't save ourselves. We don't begin salvation by our own works, by our own effort.

[9 : 20] And we don't continue in our salvation by our own works. And we're reading these verses today because the churches in Galatia 2,000 years ago had forgotten this.

Look, Paul says this in an earlier part of this letter, Galatians 3, verses 2. He says, let me ask you this, church. Let me ask you this, you believers. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, by your own effort, or by hearing with faith?

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you all of a sudden being perfected by the flesh? What Paul is saying is that our only hope for change is the Holy Spirit.

Not mostly our hope for change. No, no. Our only hope for change is the Holy Spirit. And you know what? Here's the good news. God isn't stingy with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit isn't what pastors get or the really spiritual people get who really practice and read their Bible every day and pray for two hours and yada, yada, yada.

[10 : 29] And he is Jesus' gift to every one of his disciples. He is the abiding presence of God in the church and over the church.

And his abiding presence is what makes the church more than just another social club. And here's the thing, guys. There is no other way to be a Christian than to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to abide in his presence.

Anything that we do that looks like Jesus, smells like Jesus, talks like Jesus, walks like Jesus, thinks like Jesus, that is the Holy Spirit at work in us.

That's it. So when we want to love and serve others, that's because of the Holy Spirit. When we worship God and when we worship, we are so moved with wonder at his glory and his goodness, that's because of the Holy Spirit.

When we face the trials of life with the perspective, you know what, God? Use this suffering to make me more like Jesus. That's the Holy Spirit at work.

[11 : 40] But the flesh, the desires, the motives, the patterns of this world, of this passing age, it can't think and act that way.

But the Holy Spirit, man, he's ushered in this whole new way of living. And it's not just a better way. It's not just a few little tweaks and adjustments he makes to our life.

No, it's a totally new way. And a big part of that means we don't purposefully go on sinning. God's grace is amazing.

It forgives us of our sins all the time. We don't have to earn our way back into forgiveness, right? But that shouldn't make us think, hey, you know what?

Sweet. That's a pretty good deal. It doesn't matter what I do now. Jesus erased it and he will erase it. So you know what? I'm just going to do whatever I want. This passage doesn't make room for that. See, in verse 16 it says, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[12 : 43] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. And the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

And here's the thing. You and I can live by the flesh or by the Spirit, but we can't live by both. But we sure try to live by both, right? We want to keep a foot in the world, and we want to keep a foot in our religion, right?

We want the best of both worlds, like Hannah Montana Christianity. We want to be forgiven. We want the eternal life and the blessings of the world to come, but we want to pursue all the pleasures and vanities of this world too.

As Mark Sayer puts it, We want the kingdom, but we don't want a king. We want the kingdom without the king. But Jesus said you can't serve two masters.

You and I can't. You'll either love one or hate the other. And trying to live in two opposing worlds is just going to make you schizophrenic. It's not going to make you happy. See, the flesh, the Bible tells us, and all Paul's writings says, and Jesus says, this flesh, this age that we live in now, it is passing away.

[13 : 59] The world with its corruption and sin is on its way out. But Jesus' kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit is here to stay and will one day come in its fullness.

And that is why Jesus sent his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the evidence and the future, the evidence and the experience of the future kingdom that is to come. He is proof that this gospel message that we believe in isn't a sham.

One of the great theologians on the Holy Spirit, Gordon Fee, he puts it this way. The Holy Spirit demonstrates to the believer and the church that this certain future has already been set in motion.

When we look toward heaven, when we look to the coming kingdom and what that looks like, when we pray, Lord, your kingdom come and your will be done, man, that isn't something that we're just like, man, I wonder what that's like.

Let me see. Let me just make that up myself. Man, we have a foreshadow. We have a foretaste of that because of the reality and the experience and the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life and in the church.

[15 : 11] This is where we live as Christians. We're in the world, but we're not of the world. Think of it this way. Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension is like D-Day in World War II, right?

After that moment, that victory, that battle, it ushered in a new reality. The age of Nazi dominance in Europe and Nazi dominance over the war was done.

It was over. And in many respects, the end of the war was determined, but the war was not yet over. The victory, you could say, was now, but it was also not yet.

There were many more battles still to be fought. And as allied forces marched into German territory, they were in Nazi land, but they were not of the Nazis.

And in the same way, the flesh and the spirit, what we see in this passage, they're two kingdoms at war against each other, right? One is on its way out.

[16 : 10] The other is on its way in. And as Christians, here's the good news. We're on the winning side. But that doesn't mean everything's rosy. That doesn't mean we're on easy street for the rest of our lives and we're not going to have any problems.

We can't be ignorant to what the flesh is all about. Here's another example in World War II, that World War II series, Band of Brothers. There's this powerful moment when they come upon this Nazi concentration camp.

And by this time, they had fought many battles. They carried with them the wounds and the scars of war. They were tired. They were weary. Man, they wanted this thing to end. They felt like, man, I just don't know if we could do this anymore.

But when they see that Nazi death camp, when they see it with their own eyes, the genocide that was there, the surviving prisoners that were emaciated and had been treated worse than animals, they were reminded afresh why they were fighting.

They were reminded afresh what they were fighting for. And in the same way, the Holy Spirit's convictions open our eyes to the wretchedness and the brokenness of sin.

[17 : 18] Like that list in verses 19 to 21, the works of the flesh are evident. They speak for themselves. And here's the thing about sin, guys. It's always coming for you and me.

You can't make peace with it and hope it is going to leave you alone. It wants to imprison you in its concentration camps and ultimately kill you. One old Puritan pastor, John Owen, puts it this way.

Be killing sin or it be killing you. And that's what living by the Spirit means. Living by the Spirit means we fight sin and we win.

Sometimes, hey, temptation to sin comes on so strong, right? I'm sure all of us can share in this. Sometimes, temptation comes off so strong, man, we feel overwhelmed and we feel defeated.

And oftentimes, we give into it. But we must never believe the power of sin is too great for God. Galatians 5.24 says, Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

[18 : 23] Jesus nailed all sin, all ways of the flesh, to the cross. It was dealt a mortal blow. Sin is still very real, but it no longer has any power and authority over you.

If you're in Christ Jesus, that is so true. And when it feels like we are facing sin and we feel like we can't fight sin and win, look to the cross. Remember that sin has been crucified.

Cry out for the Holy Spirit's help. He will help us in our weakness. The Spirit helps us fight. And He fights for us.

Which means two important things. You never fight alone. And God never puts you in a fight you can't win. 1 Corinthians 10.13 says this, No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful. And He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

[19 : 25] Here's the thing. When we sin, it's not because the Holy Spirit was too weak or God abandoned us. But we also shouldn't give our sin a nod and a wink like it's no big deal.

See, when you and I sin, it's like a GI switching sides to be a Nazi for a day. It's a lot like that. It's a big deal. You might be thinking, come on, Jess, that's a little too far.

No, no. Sin is that evil and then some. And here's the thing. If you minimize sin, you also minimize grace. Because no sin is too big and too ugly for God's grace to forgive you or restore you.

You know, one of the greatest gifts God gave me when I was a young man was to show me how ugly a particular sin in my life was. I was in my early 20s before I met Haley and I had a girlfriend and I started coming back to church and taking my walk with God seriously.

God was doing some amazing stuff in my life in that period of time, but I didn't want to give up sleeping with my girlfriend. Then in a moment, God showed me my sin like he sees it.

[20 : 39] He opened my eyes. It was like looking at that concentration camp. And that shattered my heart. But then I also knew God's forgiving and renewing grace had a different level too.

And in that moment, I was both so thankful for God's grace, but also never wanted to sin like that again. Am I still tempted?

Yes, absolutely. But my soul has been marked by that moment. It was a good traumatic experience for me. Life in the spirit means we can fight and win against sin.

And if that sounds amazing and you're like, man, Jess, that's awesome. I am sold on this life in the spirit. Let's go for it. Wait.

There's even more. There is more that happens with life in the spirit than just winning our sin battles. Good stuff fills us and comes out of us. Galatians 5.22-5.23 says, But the fruit of the spirit is love and joy and peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[21 : 48] Against such things there is no law. You think of fruit of the spirit. What is fruit? What does that mean? Fruit is when the hidden inner life pushes up and out.

We will always be bearing some kind of fruit in our lives. Yes. And living by the spirit means we begin to look and act more like Jesus. But here's the thing, guys. It's a process.

It's not like we get the Holy Spirit, God snaps his fingers, and all of a sudden we are this tree full of spiritual fruit. Right? And you know what? God's patient.

He doesn't come with a deadline saying, you know, Jess, I need three bushels of spiritual fruit by Friday, or it's back to sitting in the corner in the kingdom, you know? So, producing fruit isn't in our power.

You don't have the power to produce fruitfulness. I don't have the power to produce fruitfulness. And here's the thing. If you focus on trying to produce fruit, you're going to be a very anxious Christian.

[22 : 53] You're going to be a very insecure Christian. See, our job isn't to try, with our effort, pop fruit, pop out fruit in our lives, right?

We're not walking around as Christians just going like, love, right? We just look constipated. We don't do that.

So then what do we do? Here's the thing. And I think the Bible is very clear from beginning to end on this. You don't focus on fruitfulness.

You focus on faithfulness. If you are faithful, you will be fruitful. Our job is to faithfully abide in the Spirit.

Faithfully live by Him and walk with Him. The thing about doing this is that it's going to take time. Fruit doesn't grow overnight, right?

[23 : 51] If you have fruit trees and that season comes around, it's not like, oh, sweet. The springtime hits and all of a sudden it's like you had nothing on your lemon tree and then there was like full-grown lemons the next night, the next day.

That doesn't happen. It starts small and it slowly grows. And in the same way, the Holy Spirit's power that's at work in us, it's doing this same thing and it starts to push up and out of our lives in small measured ways.

And sometimes it's quicker in some ways than others. And some of the ways it happens over a lifetime. And in the next few weeks, we're going to unpack each of these fruits in more detail.

But today, I want us to walk away with this understanding. Salvation from beginning to end belongs to God alone. He goes before us every step of the way.

And that's why Galatians 5.25 says, If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets the pace and the direction for our lives.

[24 : 56] Jesus sent his church the Holy Spirit because that is all we need. He didn't give us a rule book. He gave us good news and the Holy Spirit.

That's what we got. The Holy Spirit is a person we get to have relationship with. He's not an energy. He's a person.

And this relationship isn't scurrying from one religious activity to another. It is walking in step with him. It's not running ahead of him. It's not running too slow.

It's letting him set the pace. And he doesn't run too fast for us. But he also isn't a spiritual couch potato. He walks.

And he calls us to walk with him. I'm going to have the band come up. How do we respond to this? If you're here and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, man, we want to say we are so glad you're here with us.

[26 : 00] And you got to hear this message today. And what I want to tell you is that you don't need another guru. You don't need another self-help person telling you how to save yourself or become a better version of you through your own effort.

Man, God is calling you to something better. He's calling you to his grace and his peace. And it's calling you to give up on that. Stop doing it on your own.

Only Jesus can erase those check boxes of sin. Only the Holy Spirit can change you and give you victory over sin. But all of this starts with one step of faith.

One step into faith. And I want to call you, if that's you today, I want to invite you, man, take that step. It's so worth it. If you're here in a Christian, if you're listening to this in a Christian, we start in faith, right?

We take that first step of faith, but every step after that is also taken in faith. It's not Jesus plus my works or my effort. And the question for you today, the question for me today is this.

[27 : 14] Is the Holy Spirit a current reality in our lives? What are the things that you and I cling to? What are the things entangling us that keep us from walking in step with the Spirit?

And what Jesus is calling us to do is surrender it to him and give it up to him. Stop clinging to it.

It's interesting that the ascension was followed by Pentecost. And at the ascension, the disciples are kind of holding on to Jesus and they don't want him to go.

And they're looking up and they're like, okay, what's going on? Is he going to come back? They were clinging to him. They were clinging to this idea of like, no, no, no. Jesus needs to stay here and be with us and bring in the kingdom of how we feel like it should be.

And they had to let that go. And in our letting go and releasing, surrendering these things to Jesus, the Spirit comes and fills those places. Jesus said, unless I go, I can't send you the Spirit.

[28 : 21] And you know what? I'm going to use a J.D. Greer quote here. The Spirit inside you is better than Jesus beside you. That was Jesus' purpose.

Let's pray. So, Heavenly Father, we are, man, we are so, so thankful for your grace and your peace to us. We are so, so thankful that we don't have to be perfect.

We are so, so thankful that you forgive us our sins. That you've washed us clean. There's no check boxes. You see us through your Son, Jesus Christ.

And we're so thankful that we live by your Spirit. That you've given us this amazing gift. God, the Holy Spirit, who is also almighty.

Who is perfect and good and loving. Who counsels us and leads us. Who calls to us and sets the direction and the pace of discipleship. And what it means to follow Jesus.

[29 : 24] And he was transforming us to be like you, Jesus Christ. And I pray that now, man, we would be reminded of this. We'd be thankful for you, Holy Spirit.

That we would press into life in you. And what it means to live by you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.