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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Walking by the Spirit: Power for Bitter Warfare

Galatians 5:16-18

Last week, we began looking at these incredibly significant verses...

Today, I want to PLUNGE RIGHT IN and resume where we were when the time ran out

Galatians 5:16-18 points to the most significant warfare in human history: the internal, invisible battle in the heart of every Christian between the FLESH and the SPIRIT.

Though this battlefield is internal, and its ebbs and flows are invisible, yet the destiny of the world lies in the balance—as Christians conquer the flesh by the Spirit, they advance the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This battle is the essence of the INTERNAL JOURNEY... understanding it is the key to a fruitful Christian life.

Setting the context:

False teachers and their false gospel

Paul's authority to preach and to correct false doctrine (Galatians 1-2)

The theological centerpiece of the Epistle (Galatians 2:14-21)

The experiential proof of justification by faith (Galatians 3:1-5)

The scriptural proof of justification by faith (Galatians 3:6-4:31)

The call to freedom (Galatians 5:1-15)

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

BUT... freedom is not understood the way so many non-Christians understand freedom—the ability to pursue your fleshly drives without any external hindrance... to pursue happiness as you define it with no repercussions. No, freedom is not LICENSE TO SIN WITH IMPUNITY, as so many would understand it...

The true gospel flees the opposite extremes of legalism and license... legalism has been the focus of the letter up till now... now Paul addresses the concerns about license; that the gospel of God's grace means you can sin all you want and still get a free ride to heaven

Christian salvation comes in stages

Justification:

Sanctification:

Glorification:

Today, we will stare into the doctrine of the bitter warfare that every true Christian has with INDWELLING SIN... and in that, we will understand the gospel better than ever

I. Obey the Command: Walk by the Spirit (vs. 16)

vs. 16 So I say, WALK BY THE SPIRIT...

- A. The Holy Spirit: The Sovereign Power Behind Sanctification
- B. The Holy Spirit: The Third Person of the Trinity
- C. Having Begun by the Spirit, We Are Perfected Also by the Spirit
- D. Law vs. Grace... Self-effort vs. Spirit's power
- E. The Command: Walk by the Spirit
- F. Incomprehensible Mystery: God's Power AND Our Effort
 - 1. Two wrong extremes: We do EVERYTHING vs. We do NOTHING
 - 2. We do EVERYTHING... the essence of legalism

3. We do NOTHING: Bad ideas of sanctification
 - a. “Let go and let God...”
 - b. The “surrendered life”
4. The Biblical balance: co-operation in the sanctification... intense effort by Christians, but all of that effort empowered by the Holy Spirit
 - a. Extreme effort

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Hebrews 12:1 let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

- b. BUT all by the power of the Spirit!!

The “hard work” of this warfare is all done by the power of the Spirit... in ACTIVE CONSTANT RELIANCE on the Spirit

- c. Key harmonizing verse

Philippians 2:12-13 continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

G. The Spirit Leads Us to War

Romans 8:13-14 *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

1. Genuine Christians are AT WAR AGAINST THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH... the “misdeeds of the body”

Galatians 5:19-21 *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Every motion of these sins in us is a call to ARMS... to WARFARE!! Every time the flesh moves us toward sexual immorality, or toward hatred, or toward discord, or toward rage... we MUST PUT THAT TENDENCY TO DEATH BY THE SPIRIT!! Christians are not passive in this war... we are COMMANDED to put these things to death by the Spirit

II. Believe the Promise: You Will Not Gratify the Lusts of the Flesh (vs. 16)

^{ESV} **Galatians 5:16** *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

A. The Direct Result of Walking by the Spirit: YOU WILL NOT GRATIFY THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH

1. These two are diametrically opposed, as we will see
2. There is a 100% success rate for all who walk by the Spirit
3. The Spirit is completely effective in enabling us to live holy lives
4. Of course He is!! He is OMNIPOTENT GOD... think what He did for Samson with a physical lion...

Judges 14:6 *The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat.*

So the Spirit promises that, if we walk by Him, we will not gratify the lusts of the flesh!

5. This is a marvelously SWEET PROMISE

6. It also is a diagnosis after we sin: if we gratified the desires of the flesh, it means we were not walking by the Spirit

III. Expect Constant Warfare: Flesh vs. Spirit (vs. 17)

CSB Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.

A. What is the Flesh? And What Are the “Lusts of the Flesh”?

1. The “flesh” here is not merely the physical body... sometimes the Scripture uses this word for that... Jesus was FLESH and with FLAWLESS... without sin

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Luke 24:39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

It was Jesus' FLESH dead on the cross that saved us from our sins!

Colossians 1:22 But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him

2. The word “flesh” here refers to issues of the HEART... that spirit of arrogance and selfishness that claims God-like rights and privileges to do whatever it wants ... it's the remnant of SIN LIVING IN ME that draws us constantly to violate God's holy laws and to sin

Romans 7:14-20 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am made out of flesh, sold into sin's power. ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do

not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but it is the sin that lives in me.

3. The use of the word “flesh” so closely related to the body means that there’s a tendency for a normal, good, bodily desire to push beyond boundaries into wickedness
 - a. The drive to be loved becomes the drive to be worshiped and esteemed
 - b. The drive to eat becomes the drive toward gluttony
 - c. The drive for sexual pleasure becomes the drive toward sexual immorality of many kinds—fornication, adultery, homosexuality, promiscuity, pornography
 - d. The drive for pleasure of any type—soft clothes, comfortable living arrangements, a well-crafted automobile or wristwatch—becomes materialism and pleasure-seeking, yearning for “only the best” and luxury
 - e. The drive for productive labor becomes workaholism, seeking the praise of others for the excellence of the work you do
 - f. The love for any created thing becomes idolatry of that created thing—idolizing a spouse, a child, beautiful scenery, etc.
 - g. The desire for rest and refreshment becomes self-indulgent laziness, becoming the sluggard of the Book of Proverbs who can never get enough sleep
4. These are the “lusts of the flesh”... the Greek word “LUSTS” has to do with an overpowering desire... a magnetic pull... consuming your thoughts
5. These Lusts of the Flesh flow from the Mind of the Flesh that characterized us when we were lost

Romans 8:5-8 For those whose lives are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those whose lives are according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit

itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so. ⁸ Those whose lives are in the flesh are unable to please God.

B. How Are The Lusts of the Flesh Set Against the Desires of the Spirit?

^{CSB} *Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.*

1. The same Greek word is used for “desires” in reference to BOTH the flesh and the Spirit
2. The flesh “lusts” for evil things; the Spirit “yearns” for good things... but it is the same word for both...
3. The desires of the flesh and the Spirit are polar opposites... they are at WAR with each other
4. The Spirit desires to produce CHRISTLIKENESS in us... to conform us to Christ in every way... with the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT at the center of the character traits He yearns to see formed in us... meanwhile, the FLESH fights against all of them
5. Examples
 - a. The Spirit wants us to pray... He moves in us to get on our knees in our quiet times and lift up prayers of praise and confession and thanksgiving and intercession: the FLESH wars against that desire at every moment... complaining of boredom and wandering mind; making you think intensely about the physical aches in your lower back as you pray; making you worry about all you have to get done today so you don't have time to pray... PRAYER IS A WAR BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH!!
 - b. The Spirit wants us to go on a short-term mission trip... the FLESH fights against it... making you anxious about the money and time you will spend; making you anxious about your safety and health—what kinds of weird foods you will eat or the dangerous places you'll be sleeping in. MISSIONS IS A WAR BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH!!

- c. The Spirit wants us to EVANGELIZE... to trust in Him for courage and boldness to share the gospel with a lost co-worker; the FLESH fights against the drive... making you worry about the ramifications if you are bold and clear with the gospel; EVANGELISM IS A WAR BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH!!
- d. The Spirit wants us to attend church every Sunday, to feed your soul on the Word of God in BFL and worship services; to give your heart to corporate worship, and sing praises to God with all your heart; to listen to the preached word with deep interest; the FLESH fights against this at every turn, making you dislike church, finding fault with church leaders and members, making you bored and listless spiritually; CHURCH LIFE IS A WAR BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH!!
- e. The Spirit wants us to be generous with our money to the church, to missions, to the poor and needy; the FLESH is fighting against that at every moment, making you selfish, making you think about how to spend money on yourself; CHRISTIAN GIVING IS A WAR BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH!!
- f. CONVERSELY: the Flesh has a program for you as well... driving you to satisfy your lusts with internet pornography—the Spirit cries out “NO!!! You must be holy as I am holy!!” The Flesh wants you to overeat—to find your significance and pleasure and entertainment in a constant focus on food... the Spirit wants to set you free from living for your stomach; the FLESH wants you to act in pride, gossiping against a fellow church-member, or snubbing someone who was unkind to you in the past; the Spirit wants you to forgive and be gracious and humble

C. So you May Ask: Is Bitter Warfare Guaranteed the Rest of Our Lives?

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

1. Simple answer: YES IT IS!!! Get ready to fight at every moment
2. The rest of your lives you will have indwelling sin—the flesh—battling your every step
3. You must expect it and get ready to fight by the power of the Spirit
4. Warfare is of the essence of sanctification...
5. We WILL someday be freed... but only at death or the Second Coming of Christ... then, we will end our bitter warfare against sin. We will be free from all temptation, and will live in constant peace and holiness... but now, we must FIGHT!!

D. The Result: While We Live, We Will Always Be Divided... Never Wholehearted in Anything

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

1. Because of this warfare, this divided self, we are NEVER wholehearted in anything we do!!
2. We never WHOLEHEARTEDLY SERVE GOD and we never WHOLEHEARTEDLY SERVE SIN
3. Christians who are faithful to follow God by the Spirit still know that the flesh is holding them back from fullness of joy... like running in waist-high water with a small parachute tied around your waist... slogging it out in worship or evangelism or Christian giving or prayer
4. Christians who are faithful to follow God by the Spirit never sin wholeheartedly either... while you are watching some movie that is violating your conscience, you are feeling guilty and not totally immersed in sin...

E. Christians are Schizophrenic, Weird in the Universe... but Thank God It's Temporary

1. God is perfectly One... never divided within himself

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

James 1:17 ...the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.

2. Satan is perfectly evil... there's no schizophrenia in him... he ALWAYS hates God, always sins... his demons are the same! Demons hate God and fight against His loving purposes
3. Holy angels aren't deeply conflicted within themselves... they LOVE GOD and LOYALLY SERVE HIM ALL THE TIME, delighting in whatever delights Him
4. Inanimate objects like wind and water and gravity and rocks and dirt just do what God created them to do
5. Animals are not divided within themselves... dogs and cows and whales and crickets all do exactly what God created them to do... they are not deeply conflicted within themselves... EXCEPT SQUIRRELS when they are trying to decide what direction to go to escape getting run over!!
6. Reprobate unbelievers are not deeply conflicted within themselves... Romans 8 says they have the mind of the flesh and HATE GOD ALWAYS...just like their father the devil
7. Glorified Christians are not deeply conflicted within themselves... they are in heaven constantly praising God; they are radiant and holy and glorious ALWAYS... no evil, no sin
8. But Spirit-indwelt Christians are DEEPLY DIVIDED... sometimes we serve God, and sometimes we serve sin!! There is a weird war going on inside each of you...

James 3:9-11 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

But they do! Out of the same person flow BOTH holy actions and wicked actions... sometimes in the SAME HOUR!!

9. BUT PRAISE GOD, that deep division is temporary! Someday, Christ will finish our salvation at glorification, and the indwelling sin will be destroyed

F. The Best Success Plan Over Sin: Death by Starvation

IV. Understand Your New Status: Not Under Law (vs. 18)

A. Christians Have Come Into a Whole New Status

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

“Led by the Spirit” = born again, adopted, justified, under grace, in Christ’s Kingdom... all are true

A whole new status

B. “Under Law” = Unregenerate

1. Law is given for the wicked

1 Timothy 1:9-11 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-- and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God

2. Example: Christians don’t need to be commanded not to HIJACK AIRPLANES... that Law in my case is completely unnecessary! I have NO DESIRE to do that... but I do (apparently) need to be commanded to serve others in love, because I am not yet perfect
3. We will not need Law in heaven at all... we will be as pure as Jesus Christ Himself
4. Here on earth, we still need Law because we are not yet glorified...
5. In heaven, you will not need to be commanded to love God with all your heart or love your brothers and sisters in Christ!! YOU WILL

LOVE GOD AND OTHERS PERFECTLY!!! In heaven, you will not need to be commanded to hate evil... you will hate evil as much as God does!!

C. Discussed “Under Law” Last Time

1. Law is no longer the FBI, District Attorney, Judge, Jury, and Executioner like it was
2. Law told you what perfection was, commanded you to be perfect like God is perfect, and then stood back not lifting a finger to help you... when you had violated the smallest principle, it then moved out to condemn you to death and hell
3. That’s what it means to be “under Law”
4. Now, we are “under grace”

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

D. “Led by the Spirit” is a Whole New Way of Life

1. Instructed by the Spirit, we understand God’s Law
2. Transformed by the Spirit, we delight in God’s Law
3. Empowered by the Spirit, we obey God’s law

V. Wage War God’s Way: Led by the Spirit (vs. 18)

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

A. “Led by the Spirit” is Active... He Leads, We Follow

B. Romans 8 makes it plan: we are Led into Warfare

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

1. Clearly to be “led by the Spirit” in this context means to be led to MORTIFY THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH

2. It is not speaking of “being led” to marry this person, or “being led” to go on this mission trip, or “being led” to make this or that decision
3. Specifically, we are led by the Spirit into battle... every single day!!
4. Every day, the Spirit wakes you and says “Put on your spiritual armor... it’s time to go to war”
5. Every day, the Spirit warns you to be vigilant against temptations

C. John Owen’s Observations on Mortification of the Flesh

a duty prescribed: “Mortify the deeds of the body”

the persons to whom it is prescribed: “ye”

a promise annexed to that duty: “ye shall live”

the cause or means of the performance of that duty: the Spirit “if ye, through the Spirit...”

the conditionality of the whole (duty, means, promise contained): “IF...”

- i) the *uncertainty of the event*... thus the condition is absolutely necessary to the outcome
- ii) the *certainty of the connection*...

Illustration: saying to a sick man: “If you will take such a potion (medicine) or such a remedy, you will be well.”

Thus there is an absolutely certain connection between *mortifying the deeds of the body* and *living*

Only those who are mortifying the deeds of the body will go to heaven!!!

“The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.”

Definition: “The mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh is the constant duty of believers.”

The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depend on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.

“You must mortify! You must make it your daily work. You must be constantly at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work! **Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!** Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work”

“When sin leaves us alone, we may leave sin alone.”

Illus. Serpent on the path!!!

D. Battle Plan in General

1. Come to Christ by faith (only justified Christians can fight sin)
2. Understand who you are in Christ
3. Count yourself dead to sin but alive to God
4. Do not present your members to sin
5. Do present yourself to God... and your members to serve Him
6. Understand that indwelling sin will make you act insanelly from time to time
7. Kill indwelling by starvation!!! Siege warfare!!!
8. Expect to fight the rest of your lives!!

E. Battle Plan Applied... to the Sin of Proudful Anger

The sin described: you have a tendency to erupt in anger when your spouse irritates you or some stranger inconveniences you (like out on the road)

You know it's a sin... how do you mortify it?

1. Be certain you are a Christian... remind yourself that Jesus Christ is a powerful Savior, who died on the cross to forgive all sin for those who trust in Him; and who rose from the dead, showing victory over sin and death
2. Speak to yourself that you are a new creation in Christ, alive now by the power of the Spirit
3. Study the specific sin pattern... see that your anger has caused you much trouble in the past and that God hates it
4. Study specific Scripture about the problem

James 1:19-21 *y dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

Ephesians 4:31 *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

5. Begin your day with a good quiet time; ask Almighty God to fill you and empower you by His Spirit for the whole day
6. Pray specifically to be patient when wronged today; pray specifically that you will not get sinfully angry today; pray about specific scenarios that have made you angry in the past: when your spouse criticizes your appearance or something you've done or not done; when another driver refuses to let you in when you're trying to make a turn; when coworker is a little rude to you... whatever. Pray over it... humble yourself... acknowledge that the sin is PRIDE... you're acting like some King or Queen... Ask the Spirit to help you specifically be humble and not angry
7. Acknowledge that Christ is the key to victory in this are... He is the vine, and you are the branch... if you live in Him and His words live in you, you will bear fruit
8. Perhaps memorize one of those verses about anger

9. Get up from your Quiet Time and live in moment-by-moment fellowship with Christ through the Spirit
10. If you are tempted, pray immediately to be patient, humble, long-suffering... hold your tongue... DO NOT GIVE IN to the anger...
11. If you WIN and kill that specific temptation, praise God and give Him the credit... but be ready for more temptations to come
12. If you fail and cave in to the temptation, getting sinfully angry, immediately confess your sin to God and ask forgiveness. As needed, ask the other person for forgiveness; humble yourself and look at the sin... hate it all the more... but KNOW THAT YOU'RE FORGIVEN... then, get up and fight some more
13. The overall battle plan: death by starvation! The more you resist the temptation, the weaker it will get!! You're in it for the long haul!! Your goal: to be a truly humble, patient person who, like God, is very slow to anger... TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW!!!
14. This is the INFINITE JOURNEY... God is greatly glorified by any progress you will make

Galatians 5:16-18 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.