

Live Free in Spirit
August 10-11, 2013 Galatians 5:16-18

Introduction/Recap

- How many of you have heard of the Odyssey? **PP** It's an ancient Greek epic that tells the story of Odysseus as he tries to return home from the Trojan War. As he travels with his crew, he faces many trials. One of those obstacles was the beautiful singing **PP** of the sirens.
- The sirens would sing out across the sea with enchanting voices **PP** and would entice their hearers to come closer until they crashed their ships on the rocks.
- Odysseus knew of the danger and had his men plug their ears with bee's wax so that they wouldn't be tempted. **PP** However, he had his men tie him to the mast of the ship so that he could hear the singing, and show his men how intoxicating the call was so that they would keep the bee's wax in their ears.
- As they passed the island of the sirens, **PP** Odysseus heard the beautiful singing and screamed out to be freed from the ropes that tied him...but his men ignored his cries and sailed on until the siren's call could no longer be heard.
- The sirens' call isn't much different than the call of our flesh....the call of our passions and desires...especially when those lusts are enticed and enflamed by the hedonistic and indulgent world around us.
- Unfortunately, many believers approach the siren call of our flesh the same way Odysseus did, we tie ourselves up in a legalistic approach to our faith – religious rules and activity – and we're agonized as we continue to hear the alluring and intoxicating desires of our flesh calling out
 - But unlike Odysseus, those legalistic bonds often times don't hold us and we end up giving in to the call and crashing into the rocks.
 - And that is what bondage does, it eventually leads to destruction.
- In Galatians chapter 5, Paul has been teaching us what it means to live free, **PP** what it means to be released from the chains of legalism, deception, and selfishness and to truly have freedom. Last week, we learned how our selfishness can ensnare us as we live to love ourselves by taking license to indulge in whatever we want to do **PP**, instead of living through the love of God and serving others.
- Today, we are going to see that Paul goes one step further in his writing and shows us that the way to overcome our selfishness, our flesh, and to live a life of true freedom is by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit **PP**.
 - Now, before I really get into this scripture can I just say that the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives and His importance to our daily walk can't be overstated.

And I think the importance of the working of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives is sadly under-taught and underemphasized in many churches today.

- **Francis Chan**, in his book *Forgotten God* **PP** put it this way, “If I were Satan and my ultimate goal was to thwart God’s kingdom and purposes, one of my main strategies would be to get churchgoers to ignore the Holy Spirit...Without Him, people operate in their own strength and only accomplish human-size results. The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit.”
- If that doesn’t get your attention, then I don’t know what will. So let me encourage you to pay close attention to what scripture has to say about the paramount place the Holy Spirit has in living free, and as you turn with me in your bibles to **Galatians 5:16-18**, let me pray.
- **Galatians 5:16-18** **PP** “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

The Command (v.16a)

- Now, remember, in the first 15 versus Paul has been railing against the ideas of legalism and license. Legalism says that I have to follow a strict set of rules to be free (like Odysseus tying himself to the pole) while license says that because I have God’s grace I can go and live however I want.
 - Paul has shown that both of these man-made approaches to freedom lead to destruction **PP**...crashing on the rocks...and don’t allow anyone to truly live free.
- That’s why Paul begins this section of scripture with the words “But I say” – we’ve heard how the world says to live free, now Paul tells us how the Lord says to live free
 - And he tells us that true freedom comes through the Holy Spirit, not our own efforts or indulgence, when he says “walk by the Spirit”
- The Greek for walk **PP** (*peripateō*) literally means...get this...to walk. But metaphorically, the concept of walking referred to all aspects of a person’s lifestyle and thoughts.
- “By the Spirit”– meant to do that walking – to live your entire life – **PP** through the strength and power of the Holy Spirit...not by my own power, not my own comfort, intelligence, understanding, control, but by the power of the Spirit.
- The Greek construction of this sentence is also noteworthy:
 - First, its written in a way that means **PP** we, personally, need to make a choice to walk by the Spirit...it doesn’t happen automatically to us
 - Every single Christian has the Holy Spirit living within them, but that doesn’t mean we’re allowing the power of the Spirit to empower us... **PP (just text)**

- As one writer put it “Every Christian has the Spirit, but the Spirit does not have every Christian”
- Second, it’s written as a command **PP** – walking by the Spirit is how we’re supposed to live the Christian life.
 - The obedient believer seeks to live their life by the power of God, not their own power
- Third, it’s written in a tense that means we need to rely on the power of the Spirit over and over.
 - Anyone here see the movie Finding Nemo? **PP** Remember Dory the fish...in one of the scenes in the movie, they get lost while they’re looking for Nemo and she starts singing the song “Just keep swimming” to encourage them to keep on swimming. Just keep swimming....now I got that song stuck in your head, right? Well, Paul is like Dory here...**PP (just text)** he’s saying just keep walking, just keep walking, just keep walking by the Spirit.
- So if we put this verse together with all of that stuff in mind it might say something like this: **PP** “Every obedient Christian must actively and consciously choose to continuously live all aspects of their life depending on the power of the Holy Spirit.”
 - And the concept of dependence is key here.
 - That’s what that little word “by” is in there for...we depend on the Spirit for the strength to do the walking.
- You might be thinking, that’s nice Paul how do I do that? How do I live my life by the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Well, there really isn’t a secret formula to it, there’s no clear guidelines that we can follow. The reality is that I can’t just teach you how to magically live your life according to the power of the Spirit...it has to be something that you learn experientially as you do it more and more in your life. About the best I know how to do is to give you some practical examples of how it might look on a daily basis:
 - First of all, we need to depend on the Spirit to resist temptation **PP**...when that Siren call starts to overcome my thoughts and I feel myself being pulled, in that moment we need to actively ask the Lord to give us the strength to overcome it, and then either remove the temptation or remove ourselves from the temptation.
 - Or how about when you read the bible. **PP** Instead of just diving in and reading it like a magazine, take the time to ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and reveal the truths of scripture to you
 - Or when you’re going through a trial... **PP** a difficult circumstance that is stretching you to the breaking point. Instead of trying to overcome that trial

through your own strength, ask the Spirit to give you the power and the right attitude and expectations as you trust in the Lord's plan and purposes for your life.

- Or how about when you're serving someone **PP**...when you have that person who is rubbing you the wrong way and you just want to ignore them and hope they go away. We rely on the power of the Spirit to love that person with God's love and serve them in the strength of the Spirit.
- Or maybe you have a really tough decision **PP** to make and the bible isn't giving you a black and white answer. Ask the Spirit to show you the right direction and give you a peace about which decision to make and He will do so.
 - And with all these things, it's not just going to the Spirit one time and that's it...it's a continuous lifestyle of depending on the Holy Spirit for your strength
- The key is to continuously be intentional about living all aspects of your life through the power of the Holy Spirit... Really, we need to have our minds set on the Spirit at all times and when we do that, we will rely on His power and not our own.
 - Paul wrote in **PP Romans 8:5-6** "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."
- But not only do we need to be mindful and intentional about living by the Spirit's power, we need to be intentional about not living by our own power or understanding **PP**.
 - For most of us, it's far easier to do things ourselves and just get it done...but God gets no glory in that.
- This past week at our soup kitchen ministry one of our guests approached me and asked for some money. He didn't tell me what he needed it for, he just said he really needed to run to the dollar store and get something for his fiancé but he had no cash on him. I didn't detect any dishonesty in his request and it would have been easy to give him the money and move on with things. But in the moment I asked the Lord for wisdom and direction and I just felt like the Lord wanted me to go with him to the store. So he reluctantly agreed and we walked to the dollar store together....it was literally a walk by the Spirit.
- On the way there we started talking and he began to ask questions about how someone accepts Christ as their Lord and savior. So I explained things to him, and he explained it back to me and understood what Jesus Christ has done for him and the need for his repentance and then he decided that he wanted to accept Jesus as his Lord and savior.

Amen. If I had just given him the money I never would have had the chance to tell him about Jesus and explain why he needed Jesus to save him.

- But that's not the end of the story...when we got there, he sheepishly told me that the reason he needed the money was because his fiancé needed some feminine hygiene products. So there I am standing in line at the dollar store with a box of tampons and after we buy these things and walk outside a woman makes a comment about how she was glad I was confident enough to buy these things for my wife. So I explained to her that it wasn't for my wife, it was for this guy's fiancé. This intrigued her and she asked more questions, and, long story short, I was able to tell her about the work that the Lord is doing at the soup kitchen and how Jesus is meeting the needs of people in very real ways. This touched her and she said she was glad that there were Christians who were actually living out their faith and that maybe she'd check things out some time.
- Well, I have no idea if she'll ever check things out, and I don't know if that guy was truly saved, but I know God is working in each of their lives, and in both circumstances God glorified Himself. Amen.
 - I was able to be a part of that merely because I was intentional about living by the power of the Spirit and not relying on my own ability or understanding to solve the situation and just give the guy the money he asked for. I was willing to go on a walk by the Spirit.
- So we see that walking by the Spirit not only requires a mindful dependence, but it also requires active, intentional obedience and submission. And when we do this, we begin to live free and glorify God as the siren call of our flesh loses its power over us.

The Consequence (v.16b)

- That's why Paul says in the rest of this verse that if you walk by the Spirit **PP** "you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." That's pretty straightforward. "Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh"
 - The consequence of our yielding to the power of the Spirit is that we don't yield to the desires of the flesh **PP**those passions and lusts and sinful tendencies that war against God and entice us to love ourselves instead of loving others – that's our flesh. They're the inner sirens calling us into the rocks.
- Now, when we walk by the Spirit this doesn't mean the desires disappear; the sirens don't just stop singing. We simply don't fall victim to them because the power of the Spirit overcomes the call of the flesh. Our minds are set on the Spirit and not on the flesh.
- And I really want to stress the order of things here...**PP** *first* we walk by the power of the Spirit *then* the result of that is overcoming our selfish desires.

- Some believers approach this process backwards. They reason that if they're not fulfilling the lust of the flesh, *then* they can walk by the Spirit. So they try with all their might to overcome their addictions and lusts, but they do it in their own power and their effort eventually fails.
 - Paul's point is that we can never overcome our sins by ourselves. We must come to the point of full surrender to Jesus Christ and the Spirit, confessing our sins, and yielding ourselves to Him so that by His grace we can walk in the Spirit and overcome the flesh.
- Trying to change behavior is fruitless unless it's being driven by our pressing into the Lord. We won't see changed behavior unless we seek God first and foremost.
- I mean, how many times have you struggled with something and tried to change it...only to fall back into it again? In my own life, I had a video game addiction...it may sound silly to some, but I was consumed by the world of video games and would often play for hours upon hours. I might try to stop for a while but eventually I would be sucked back in.
- Finally, the Lord woke me up and made clear that nothing would change until I was consumed by Him and His Spirit...and when I made that my focus – not changing my behavior but pressing into the Lord with all my heart – that is when the hold of my fleshly desire for video gaming was eventually broken – praise God!
- Overcoming the flesh is a consequence of relying totally on the Spirit. The more we allow our life to be filled with the power of God, the less influence the flesh will have on us.

The Conflict (v.17)

- Why is that? Well, Paul explains why in verse 17 when he writes **PP** "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."
- Paul says that the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to one another, they are in conflict.
- In the Greek **PP** "are opposed to" (*antikeimai*) literally means to line up opposite to something, and was a word used to refer to armies approaching each other in battle
 - So Paul is saying that the Spirit and the flesh are at war with each other...which means that Christians are a walking war zone with an internal battle raging within them between the Spirit and flesh
 - Of course that battle takes place in our minds, which is why we are to focus our minds on the Spirit
- The reason for this is that when we are born again by putting our faith in Jesus Christ and recognizing that we are messed up people in need of a savior, we receive a new

nature through the Holy Spirit. However, our old sin nature isn't removed; it stays with us.

- It's this old nature – our flesh – that constantly pulls at us and tries to get us to fall.
 - This is why we can't simply remove ourselves from the world and experience victory over the flesh. Unlike Odysseus's crew who could simply plug their ears with bee's wax and not be phased by the siren's call – our old nature entices us from within and battles against the working of the Holy Spirit within us.
- Many early Christian orders were founded on this idea of leaving the world and thereby removing the call of the flesh. One of the early church fathers was Jerome. Listen to what he wrote after he went into the desert in an effort to remove himself from the call of his selfish desires **PP**:
 - "O how often, I imagined that I was in the midst of the pleasures of Rome when I was stationed in the desert, in that solitary wasteland which is so burned up by the heat of the sun that it provides a dreadful habitation for the monks! I ... often thought that I was dancing in a chorus with girls."
- What this means practically speaking is that we can't get away from the conflict raging within us, raging within our minds. In fact, for those of us who regularly have these struggles, we need to hear this...**PP** struggle is the normal state for the Christian.
 - Don't be discouraged just because you have internal struggles with your sinful desires. Instead, press deeper into the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome them!
- Many people don't want to hear this truth because they want a Christianity that proclaims that all their problems will be solved if they put their faith in Jesus. They'll have prosperity and no struggle.
 - But that's neither realistic nor biblical. The bible says **PP** we're called to fight the good fight of faith (**1 Tim. 6:12**), putting on the whole armor of God (**Eph. 6:11**), standing firm in the evil day (**Eph. 6:13**) and taking captive every thought (**2 Cor. 10:5-6**), enduring hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (**2 Tim. 2:3**), not allowing sin to reign in our mortal bodies (**Rom. 6:12**), and being filled with the Spirit (**Eph. 5:18**) so that we no longer obey the passions of the flesh.
- The reality is that God could very easily have removed the fleshly nature from believers at the moment of their conversion, but He chose not to do so. Why not, do you think?
 - I believe He allowed that sinful siren call to remain because He wanted to keep us continually reminded of our own weakness and dependence on Jesus Christ; to keep us humble and continually praising the Lord for our freedom through Him; and to give us the opportunity to continue to choose to follow Him and not yield to our sin nature...to live a life of freedom.

The Conquest (v.18)

- And that's the message that Paul leaves us with here...that when we are controlled by the Spirit we have conquered the flesh and are living in freedom.
- Paul writes in verse 18 **PP** "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."
- Paul has already used the command to walk by the Spirit, which dealt with relying on the Spirit's power, now he changes his verbiage slightly and says "but if you are led by the Spirit"
 - So we not only need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit but we need to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit as well.
- The Greek here **PP** for "are led by" (GK. *Agō*) means to be directed by something and it was used to describe a shepherd herding his sheep or the wind filling the sails of a ship
 - Like the command to walk by the Spirit, this word is written in a tense that means we're to be continually directed by the Spirit....think Dory the fish again.
 - However, there's an important difference with the command to walk by the spirit: while the command is written in a way which means that we ourselves have to actively rely on the power of the Spirit, the phrase led by the Spirit is written in a way which means that it is the Spirit that leads us, it's an action that is done to us by the Spirit
 - We can't make ourselves be led by the Spirit; while we're responsible to submit to the Spirit's leading, we can't follow the Spirit on our own – the Spirit himself needs to lead us.
- Think of it this way, if I take my kids to the store I don't just walk around and guide them through the store and expect them to follow perfectly behind me. **PP** Instead, I grab them by the hand or I put them in the cart and I lead them through the store. I actively direct their path. Now, they can go kicking and screaming **PP** or they can submit to my leading them.
- And if they kick and scream enough times, after I discipline them and try to teach them to be led, eventually I just leave them home. Well, that's the same situation with the Spirit. He wants to grab us by the hand and actively direct us. He doesn't just walk on ahead and expect us to follow. But we can't be the kicking and screaming children...we have to want to have our hand held and directed. And if we don't, if we continue to resist, He's just going to move on without us.
- **John MacArthur** put it this way, **PP** "Don't expect the Spirit to miraculously make you holy. Holiness is a joint effort: The Spirit leads, but you must follow. Scripture teaches that we are involved in the growth process....As you are led, remember to follow."
- Because the reality is that this is a conditional statement...Paul says *if* you are led by the Spirit...just because you're a believer doesn't mean you're submitting to the leading of

the Spirit. And just because you've living by the power of the Spirit doesn't mean you're listening to what he's telling you to do.

- When we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, we live free. But if you're not submitting to the leading and empowerment of the Spirit then you're submitting to the flesh and falling victim to the siren's call.

Conclusion

- And you know, the Odyssey was not the only famous Greek epic that dealt with the sirens PP. In their search for the Golden Fleece, Jason and the Argonauts PP also had an encounter with the beautiful enticement of the sirens. Unlike Odysseus's crew, the Argonauts didn't stuff their ears with bee's wax and were lured in by the beautiful voices calling to them PP. But there was one Argonaut who wasn't enticed.
- You see Orpheus was a brilliant musician and he knew an even more beautiful song than the one that the sirens were singing and as the crew began to row to their doom, Orpheus took out his instrument PP and began to play a song even more pleasing and beautiful than that of the deadly sirens.
- When the crew heard the song of Orpheus, they no longer paid attention to the call of the sirens and they were able to sail onward, safely avoid the rocks that they were about to crash into.
- And you know what, that is exactly how we overcome the calling of the flesh, we listen to the far more beautiful and fulfilling song of the Holy Spirit.
 - When walk by His power and submit to His leading we can ignore the siren's call of our flesh, avoid the rocks of destruction and live free. PP
- So let's live free in Spirit. Amen. Amen.