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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“Walking in the Way of the Spirit”

March 23, 2014

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:16-26

Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 12:1-24

Introduction-

“Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.”
[John Owen]

We have been considering this vital principle from Galatians 5, “...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” And its parallel found in Romans 8, “...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

We are lingering on this principle today because it is so fundamental and important to our life in Christ. This is really the very power of the New Covenant –the Spirit in us. It surely is the thing Paul speaks of in this manner to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, (13) for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Let’s call on John Owen once more to help us understand more about this business of walking by the Spirit and thereby putting to death the flesh. These quotations you will recall come

from Owen's classic book, *The Mortification of Sin*.

First, some of his reminders to us regarding the crucial nature of this fight:

“There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so whilst we live in this world. Sin will not only be striving, acting, rebelling, troubling, disquieting, but if let alone, if not continually mortified, it will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins.”

“Not to be daily mortifying sin, is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who hath furnished us with a principle of doing it.”

“The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.”

A Christian who is not walking by the Spirit is, to that degree, inevitably going to be quite miserable. Your peace, your joy, your happiness and contentment all rely upon this business of walking by the Spirit as He leads and directs us. Christian, He IS in you and leading you. You must realize this, and you must follow His lead. *A Christian by his very nature simply*

cannot be joyful and content while permitting the flesh to have its way. Love, joy, peace, patience...these are the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, here is Owen again. Listen to him remind us that according to Scripture the ONLY way to put the flesh to death is by means of the Spirit. We heard these quotes last week, but I am purposefully repeating them as they are so vital:

"This is the work of the Spirit; by him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about." Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.

“This is the general mistake of men ignorant of the gospel about this thing; and it lies at the bottom of very much of that superstition and will-worship that hath been brought into the world. What horrible self-macerations were practised by some of the ancient authors of monastical devotion! what violence did they offer to nature! what extremity of sufferings did they put themselves upon! Search their ways and principles to the bottom, and you will find that it had no other root but this mistake, namely, that attempting rigid mortification, they fell upon the natural man instead of the corrupt old

man, -- upon the body wherein we live instead of the body of death.

Neither will the natural Popery that is in others do it. Men are galled with the guilt of a sin that hath prevailed over them; they instantly promise to themselves and God that they will do so no more; they watch over themselves, and pray for a season, until this heat waxes cold, and the sense of sin is worn off: and so mortification goes also, and sin returns to its former dominion. Duties are excellent food for an unhealthy soul; they are no physic for a sick soul. He that turns his meat into his medicine must expect no great operation. Spiritually sick men cannot sweat out their distemper with working. But this is the way of men who deceive their own souls;

Now, here are some statements by Owen regarding the workings of the Spirit in the Christian to mortify sin. I will just read through them and recommend them to you for serious consideration this week:

“How doth the Spirit mortify sin [Owen suggests 3 ways. Here is the first] - By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh and of

the Spirit: "The fruits of the flesh," says he, "are so and so," Gal. v. 19-21; "but," says he, "the fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary, quite of another sort," verses 22, 23. Yea; but what if these are in us and do abound, may not the other abound also? No, says he, verse 24, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." But how? Why, verse 25, "By living in the Spirit and walking after the Spirit;" -- that is, by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. For, saith the apostle, "These are contrary one to another," verse 17; so that they cannot both be in the same subject, in any intense or high degree. This "renewing of us by the Holy Ghost," as it is called, Tit. iii. 5, is one great way of mortification; he causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.”

This battle requires our active participation, even though it is the Spirit working in us:

The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills,

consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.

Understand? Just as Php 2:12-13 says. God is at work in us so that we *will and work* according to His good pleasure. The Spirit is leading us to will, to understand, to desire – and it is then up to us to exercise that will, that understanding, and that desire. Christian, *be who you are!* This new creation is YOU. You are no longer the old man whose remnants lie in your flesh.

Here now, Owen observes once more regarding the happiness of the Christian being dependent upon this walking by the Spirit:

“As sin weakens, so it darkens the soul. It is a cloud, a thick cloud, that spreads itself over the face of the soul, and intercepts all the beams of God's love and favour. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption; and if the soul begins to gather up thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them: of which afterward.

...Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them in

our hearts to grow. The life and vigour of our spiritual lives consists in the vigour and flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts. Now, as you may see in a garden, let there be a precious herb planted, and let the ground be untilled, and weeds grow about it, perhaps it will live still, but be a poor, withering, un-useful thing. You must look and search for it, and sometimes can scarce find it; and when you do, you can scarce know it, whether it be the plant you look for or not; and suppose it be, you can make no use of it at all. When, let another of the same kind be set in the ground, naturally as barren and bad as the other, but let it be well weeded, and every thing that is noxious and hurtful removed from it, -- it flourishes and thrives; you may see it at first look into the garden, and have it for your use when you please. So it is with the graces of the Spirit that are planted in our hearts.

Now, finally, let me just read to you some of the beginnings of the very practical section of Owen's *The Mortification of Sin* to perhaps whet your appetite to pursue this subject further. He begins with the consideration of a person in a predicament we can all identify with:

“Suppose a man to be a true believer, and yet finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin, leading him captive to

the law of it, consuming his heart with trouble, perplexing his thoughts, weakening his soul as to duties of communion with God, disquieting him as to peace, and perhaps defiling his conscience, and exposing him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin, -- what shall he do? What course shall he take and insist on for the mortification of this sin, lust, distemper, or corruption, to such a degree as that, though it be not utterly destroyed, yet, in his contest with it, he may be enabled to keep up power, strength, and peace in communion with God?

In answer to this important inquiry, I shall do these things:-

I. Show what it is to mortify any sin, and that both negatively and positively, that we be not mistaken in the foundation.

II. Give general directions for such things as without which it will be utterly impossible for any one to get any sin truly and spiritually mortified.

III. Draw out the particulars whereby this is to be done; in the whole carrying on this consideration, that it is not of the doctrine of mortification in general, but only in reference to the particular case before proposed, that I am treating.”

And then he begins by considering *what the mortification of sin is not:*

I. (1) To mortify a sin is not utterly to kill, root it out, and destroy it, that it should have no more hold at all nor residence in our hearts. It is true this is that which is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished. There is no man that truly sets himself to mortify any sin, but he aims at, intends, desires its utter destruction, that it should leave neither root nor fruit in the heart or life. He would so kill it that it should never move nor stir any more, cry or call, seduce or tempt, to eternity. Its not-being is the thing aimed at. Now, though doubtless there may, by the Spirit and grace of Christ, a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any sin be attained, so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it, yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should not be, is not in this life to be expected.

(2.) I think I need not say it is not the dissimulation [to hide under a false appearance] of a sin. When a man on some outward respects forsakes the practice of any sin, men perhaps may look on him as a changed man. God knows that to his former iniquity he hath added cursed hypocrisy, and is got in a safer path to hell than he was in before. He hath got another heart than he had, that is more cunning; not a new heart, that is more holy.

(3.) The mortification of sin consists not in the improvement of a quiet, sedate nature. Some men have an advantage by their natural constitution so far as that they are not exposed to such violence of unruly passions and tumultuous affections as many others are. Let now these men cultivate and improve their natural frame and temper by discipline, consideration, and prudence, and they may seem to themselves and others very mortified men, when, perhaps, their hearts are a standing sink of all abominations.

Some man is never so much troubled all his life, perhaps, with anger and passion, nor doth trouble others, as another is almost every day; and yet the latter hath done more to the mortification of the sin than the former. Let not such persons try their mortification by such things as their natural temper gives no life or vigour to. Let them bring themselves to self-denial, unbelief, envy, or some such spiritual sin, and they will have a better view of themselves.

(4.) A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted. Simon Magus for a season left his sorceries; but his covetousness and ambition, that set him on work, remained still, and would have been acting another way. Therefore Peter tells him, "I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness;" --

"Notwithstanding the profession thou hast made, notwithstanding thy relinquishment of thy sorceries, thy lust is as powerful as ever in thee; the same lust, only the streams of it are diverted. It now exerts and puts forth itself another way, but it is the old gall of bitterness still."

A Sober Warning

"...I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." [5:21b]

In some ways it would be easier for me to speak to you now about what I am about to say if I were Arminian in my doctrine! But I am not. I believe in the perseverance of the saints, as stated in our confession: [boldfacing is mine]

Chapter 17: Of The Perseverance of the Saints

1. _____ Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto

immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; **notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them**, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

(John 10:28, 29; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 2:19; Psalms 89:31, 32; 1 Corinthians 11:32; Malachi 3:6)

2._____ This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the

certainty and infallibility thereof. (Romans 8:30 Romans 9:11, 16; Romans 5:9, 10; John 14:19; Hebrews 6:17, 18; 1 John 3:9; Jeremiah 32:40)

3._____ **And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves**, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

(Matthew 26:70, 72, 74; Isaiah 64:5, 9; Ephesians 4:30; Psalms 51:10, 12; Psalms 32:3, 4; 2 Samuel 12:14; Luke 22:32, 61, 62)

What I want to speak to you about is the danger of carelessness in respect to this walking by the Spirit. This working out our salvation with fear and trembling. This putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit. Carelessness in this regard will not result in merely the commission of the

sins of the flesh, which is evil enough in itself, but will reap a harvest of misery and ruin, *even for the Christian*. Consider again the descriptions of the sorry state that a Christian can regress into:

- The awareness of the light and love of God can become so obscured it seems that He has cast us off,
- The commission of grievous sins *and continuance in them*, wreaking the destruction of those sins upon oneself and upon others,
- The terror of a violated conscience,
- The cold seeming deadness of a hardened heart,
- The harm of others and the bringing upon ourselves temporal judgments of God.

And though by His work of keeping our faith alive and sustaining us and preserving us safely into His kingdom, God will never lose a single one of His elect, yet the Christian who neglects and is careless about this walking in the Spirit, this putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, can experience grievous ruin and can bring grievous harm to others in this life.

King David, a man after God's own heart, is a prime example.

The Apostle Paul here in 5:21 is, of course, warning the Galatians against the false gospel of libertinism. People who claim to be Christians, yet walk and live in the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. We would say that such people were never regenerate in the first place. Lutheran theologians would say that they may have been, but because of their unrepentant sin they are now lost.

But one thing Reformed theologians and Lutherans theologians are agreed upon is this: *careless neglect of walking in the Spirit, indulging the desires of the flesh, has dangerous and even eternal consequences*. And so the sober warning I want all of us to consider this morning.

Christian, your flesh is ugly. Given its head, it would have you renounce Christ, embrace an idol, and destroy those you love. Your flesh is not satisfied with short-term victories. It wants all of you.

There are many, many people who once professed Christ and seemed to start the race well. Some of them were apparently the most diligent Christians with a fervent love for Christ and a renouncing of the world. And yet, today, they are apostate. If not by their words, certainly by their actions they deny Christ. You would

not recognize them to be the same people you once knew.

The very same thing can happen to every single one of us. All we need do is grow careless, indulge the flesh, disregard the leading of the Spirit, and the sin that so easily entangles us will do its evil work.

What would you have thought of King David if you had met him in that space of time when he stayed home from battle and called for Bath-Sheba? And then you saw him lying and covering up and treating Uriah as he did? Where did it all begin? Apparently even prior to his decision to stay at home instead of going out to battle.

Is there a kind of allegory or illustration here for us in respect to the battle we must wage each day by the Spirit?

2 Samuel 11:1-3 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. **But David remained at Jerusalem.** (2) It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very

beautiful. (3) And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

Have you known people like this? I have. I know marriages and families that are devastated and broken, that years ago the husbands and wives and moms and dads and children were tracking and growing in the Lord and serving Him in their churches. Now, utter devastation in their lives. They have become people you wouldn't even recognize, and who they would never, ever would have imagined they would become. Are any of them really Christians? I don't know. They don't know. And that's the problem.

Let me close off this section (5:16-26) with its closing verses:

Galatians 5:25-26 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (26) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Self, you see. Notice that what Paul concludes with is really an admonition and warning against perhaps the very chief of sins – *pride*.

- Conceit
- Provoking others
- Envy

All rank manifestations of self – of the flesh. All incredibly destructive. The flesh is all about me, myself, and I. The Spirit in contrast leads us to love God and to love our neighbor, denying self.

The Holy Spirit will NEVER lead us into pride. He will never lead us to be self-serving, envious of others, or conceited.

Conceit = excessive appreciation of one's own worth or virtue

Diotrephes was conceited (3 John) – and thus he loved to be first. This is really the abuser's mentality as we have learned many times: *entitlement*. The abuser is conceited, he has an excessive appreciation of his own worth and thus he sees himself as *entitled* above everyone else.

That is what King David got all caught up in. He grew careless and indulged his flesh. That flesh is conceited. In it, he believed that he was entitled to Uriah's wife and justified in doing whatever he needed to in order to get it. He failed to walk in the Spirit and thereby put that conceit to death. Ruin was misery was the result.

Christian, have you been walking in pride? If you have, then the Spirit has been leading you to turn from it. Listen

to Him. He will bless you and give you peace and joy and contentment.

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

The Lord is for the humble. He is against the arrogant. He exalts the humble. He lays low the prideful. If we would expect his blessing, then we must walk in humility and that means walking by His Spirit.

Here is one final warning about this matter of the pride of our flesh. I believe that the elders – and many of you – would agree that over the years we have had to deal with far more professing Christians than we would like who were caught all up in pride. And let me tell you what we have learned.

A person walking in pride will not listen to warnings or admonishments nor will they receive correction. This is why pride is so dangerous. It brings us to a place from which we cannot be rescued until broken humility comes.

That is to say, if I allow myself, through careless neglect of the Spirit's leading, to get snared in my pride, there is nothing you can do for me until the Lord breaks and humbles me.

And the same is true for you. There was no talking sense to the Prodigal son until he came to his senses in the muck. Pride makes us a fool who rejects wisdom. Pride blinds us to a true evaluation of ourselves and makes us think too highly of ourselves. It leads us into sins of self. Self-indulgence. Self-righteousness. Self, self, self because pride says we are entitled to these things. This is the flesh. This is what it does.

And if you allow yourself, through careless heedlessness of the Spirit's leading, to indulge the pride of your flesh, you will be out of your mind. No one will be able to speak truth to you so you will listen. You will do things that you never would have thought you would do, and you will not turn until the Lord humbles you.

And that humbling can be rather traumatic and painful. Sometimes, in this life, the consequences of pride are without remedy. I do not EVER want to have to sit down along with the elders, ever again, and have to deal with a member of this church who has chosen to walk in pride. I do not want to have to watch as another marriage is destroyed. Or watch as a young person grows up professing Christ but then turns away from that faith. But pride will do it. Pride is a ruin.

Daniel 4:(27) Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity." (28) All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.

(29) At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, (30) and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (31) While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, (32) and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (33) Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like

birds' claws. (34) At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; (35) all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (36) At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. (37) Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; **and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**

Walk by the Spirit. And none of this will happen to you.