

Life in the Spirit

Text: Galatians 5:25-6:10 (ESV)

Dear saints of St. John's,

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Word of God for today is from Galatians chapters 5 and 6, with this for meditation, **"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."**

Let us pray,

May the Words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Have you noticed it with your close friends or family? Have you noticed when they go through life-changing events such as becoming married or being blessed with children? They change! Sometimes you can't even remember what they were like before. These events completely change their mindset, their attitudes, or even the way they live. Yet, these events cannot even compare to the matter of our text today. Greater than the mystery of marriage or of parenthood is the life-changing event of receiving God's Spirit. What you were before you received the Spirit of God (your attitudes or the way you lived) is not how you are today.

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, God breathed his life-giving Spirit into the nostrils of Adam. This Spirit of God was meant to keep Adam within the life of God, within his love and within his truth. Yet, when Adam and Eve were disobedient and rejected God's Word, this Spirit was taken away. Yes, God continued to make more men and women; the human race multiplied. But, these men and women were made in the image of Adam, not in the image of God. They received a body and soul which was going to die, without the intervention of God. For, without the Spirit of God these lives were a production of a dying flesh. Yet, through the promises of God, the promises of a coming Savior who was to restore them to his graces, the Spirit of God was given to bring man back into the life of God. When the Spirit of God comes through the Word of God, this Spirit changes man. Just as marriage changes the individuals to become one flesh, or children change the person to become a parent, the Spirit of God changes man to now have the life of God and become a child of God.

Yet, our whole body and soul is not changed into perfection in an instant. Until our death, we still have that dying flesh clinging to us. As a consequence, within the people of God there is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit, between the old life and the new life. As St. Paul spoke of last week, **"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". The desires of the flesh show itself in certain ways. Paul gave us a laundry list: sexual immorality, idolatry, enmity, strife, jealousy, etc. When you see these among men, you can be sure that the dying flesh is at work. On the other hand, the work of the Spirit is also obvious: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. While these can be modeled by people who do not have the Spirit of God (e.g., I can see an unbeliever joyful or see him being kind to someone), these qualities are the possession of God's people throughout all seasons of their lives and shown even to one's enemies.

Where last week's readings wanted to make it plain what life the flesh lives versus what life the Spirit lives, this week St. Paul explains some principles which flow out of life in the Spirit. He begins our text with the foundation: "**If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**" Paul wants to move from what is true, to the way things should be. If you say you live by the Spirit of God (which is true, you have received Him), then you follow that Spirit, that is you seek to demonstrate those fruits of the Spirit. If I say you are an honest person, then I'd expect you to tell the truth and not lie. These things go together. Same also with having the Holy Spirit and keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.

You should not expect to immediately know how to walk with the Spirit. First, you need to reflect on your own life. You should be able to think, "How have I been acting as a father, mother, son, daughter, wife, or husband? How have I been acting as a teacher or student, as a worker or boss, as a preacher or hearer of God's Word?" How else will you be able to judge whether you are in step with the Spirit or in step with the flesh? Second, when you begin to think like this, you require a measurement, a ruler, for what you accomplished.

What are you judging your actions against? This is where God's commandments enter in. God's will is the ruler for my life, the ruler for life walking by the Spirit. St. Paul last week warned us what falls short of God's kingdom (what is in step with the flesh) and he showed us what fulfills the work of the Holy Spirit. Let these be the guide to your lives. Let these be what you use to reflect on your life in the Spirit. To be able to use them as a ruler, you need to actually know them. Take Galatians 5:19-23, either write them out yourself, or print them off. Find some way of keeping them within reach, where you will use them to reflect. I would suggest somewhere where you can think and look back on the day. Keep a bookmark in your Bible which is on your nightstand. Even better than having them within arms-length is to have them in your heart, ready to be recalled at any moment. Memorize them and treasure this Word of God! Then, when you go through these lists, the list of the flesh and the list of the Spirit, think through how you have acted. What I might do is think, "How have I acted as a father today? Did I do things strife-minded? Was I harsh and bitter towards my family? Did I have fits of anger? Did I have self-control in my actions?" Another example for myself is to reflect on my role as a vicar, or whatever duties of life God has placed me in.

Once we have this mindset, the mind of living in the Spirit of God, then it will color every way we act, little by little, especially how we act within the community of believers. St. Paul continues with four different applications within the life of the church. He takes the principles which he described last week (life according to the flesh, and life according to the Spirit) and applies it to the congregations of Galatia. He takes the ruler and measures how the Galatian Christian live.

First, he warns against seeking false glory. He says, “**Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**” There are two consequences which flow out from this looking for vainglory, from becoming conceited. When you think you’re more than you actually are you cannot let that be kept to yourself. Others might notice how you force your way into conversations or responsibilities which really aren’t yours. You start inciting anger or resentment in others. People won’t like to be around you. And if you notice that people aren’t treating you as you “deserve” then your envy will start to show. “Why don’t I get the recognition I have earned?” But the life following in the step of the Spirit, it is really like that humility talk I mentioned last month. Maybe you really are the smartest or best fit for this or that job. Maybe the congregation is really missing out on your leadership. Keep it to yourself, do what you are asked, and let someone else recognize the skills and abilities God has granted you. And if others don’t recognize you correctly, let it go, let God be the judge.

Next St. Paul speaks of gentleness towards those who stumble, “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**” Yes, Christians will sin, even sin in ways known by everyone. For example, when St. Paul was writing to the Corinthians, there was someone in their midst who had an inappropriate relationship with his father’s wife. Not only was that against life according to the Spirit, but it was against Corinthian social morals. Paul asked the Corinthians to restore him by first rebuking his sin and then offering forgiveness when this man acknowledged his sin. This same spirit of gentleness should lead you towards restoring those Christians who have been caught. We know that the fight between flesh and Spirit rages within all of us. Therefore you should have sympathy for those that fall, especially if they recognize their guilt and shame. If you start to think someone else’s grave sin would be impossible for you yourself to commit, think again. You need to pray continually that God would keep you from these temptations because all of us carry around the same flesh.

Restoring those who have fallen really requires you to be on the lookout for others, to be concerned over others. This should be true when your fellow Christians mess up because of their own sins and temptations.

St. Paul continues, “**Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**” You are called to bear each other’s burdens. Eliminated here is any thinking that a Christian can be a Christian only to himself. Removed here is the thought that what only matters is my relationship with Jesus. Yes, you need personal faith in Jesus

Christ. But your life is a life *in Christ*. You are a member of Christ's body. One of many members. One of at least 600+ here at St. John's. You get to be concerned over all these other Christians and their lives' with Jesus. An ear cannot be a whole body by himself; neither a toe or an elbow. The ear needs that toe and that toe needs that elbow so that they may be one body all together. When this care is accomplished, Christians bearing each other's burdens, then the law of Christ is fulfilled, the law of love.

Lastly, St. Paul is concerned for the gathering of the saints together as we do regularly around God's Word. He says, "**Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.**" How else will someone be brought into the life of the Spirit than through the Word of God? How else will the Word of God be among us if there is not someone to teach it? Since there must be teachers, there must be pastors in Christ's congregations, the hearers of the Word should share in the things necessary for that teacher to remain there. Where there is God's Word taught in many ways, whether here from the pulpit, or in the Sunday school classroom, or in Bible study, there the Spirit of God is working to lead us in faithful lives.

With these four specific examples St. Paul wants to help apply the ruler of life with the Holy Spirit. He shows that it will take some effort to keep in step with the Spirit. Because of the flesh you carry around, the life of the Spirit does not come to you like a snap of the finger. It is like a battle between flesh and Spirit, a tug of war over your soul. Your Christian life is on the side of the Spirit, pulling with all your might; but, the true anchor on your team is the Holy Spirit. He is doing the work.

With all this commanding, explaining, and expectations, God also gives encouragement and the drive to begin to accomplish these things. St. Paul ends his encouragement with this thought: "**For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.**" Everything you do has meaning. Everything you do in this life is preparing for the next. That is why we are not careless about what goes on in each other's lives. There are only two options with everything you do: you sow to your flesh or you sow to the Spirit. You either serve sin or you serve God. You prepare for punishment or you prepare for reward. There will come a time for reaping. Those who spent their whole lives seeking their own evil, selfish desires won't have anything to harvest! They will come out empty handed. Yet, you who have the Spirit of God, who tries to keep in step with the Spirit, you are sowing for the future. Just as a seed will take time to germinate and sprout, so it is with your lives in the Spirit. You will not see the harvest right now. But, it is coming! What will you harvest? You will reap eternal life! You will reap the glories of heaven. Your small and arduous work at the moment will turn into a never-ending harvest. One temptation is to become weary of all this work. Either it seems like nothing is happening (where is the good for the children of God?) or all the trouble is not worth it (what's the point if I will keep falling?). Do not give up! Your work is seen by your Father in secret. Even if it doesn't seem like He is

rewarding you in this life, He sees our hearts and promises to reward us in the life to come. Jesus says to his churches in the book of Revelation, “**Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.**” He wants us to keep working, working through the power of His Spirit, until the day of eternal rest. If you become weary, if you start sowing again to the flesh without abandon, then there will only be corruption harvested. That is why Paul says, “**for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.**” Be strengthened in our Lord Jesus! Your labor is not in vain, for everything you do in step with the Spirit is done within your life in Christ.

We have all seen big changes in life. Even if we haven't all experienced the same life-altering events, I know we share this one: beginning the life in the Spirit. Whether you were brought to faith as an infant or as an adult, life doesn't seem quite right except as a believer in Jesus. Life is incomplete without following in the steps of the Holy Spirit. Take great care with this walk. Do not give up on the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. Use your time of sowing wisely to reflect how you live. Compare your daily actions against what St. Paul describes in Galatians 5:19-23. Seek the fruit of the Spirit. Take care especially with the relationships here within the body of Christ. Harvest time is near! Our God in his tender mercies will not let your labor in Christ be in vain. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.