

FOTS - Wk 1
"Flesh vs. Spirit"
8/15/21
Gal 5:13-25

Intro to Series

Tim. Pastor. **Galatians 5**. Gonna take me a minute to get there.

We are starting a brand new series today called **"The Fruit of the Spirit in a Time of the Flesh"**.

We are building out a framework here at Citizens for our discipleship to Jesus, or our following of Jesus, that is centered around three phrases: **Be with Jesus, Become Like Jesus, and Do what Jesus Did.**

And we're spending time each fall over our first three years as a church breaking down these phrases and giving us a vision for what it looks like in our lives.

So last fall - **"Rhythms and Formation"** - where we talked about various spiritual practices - Bible reading, prayer, sabbath - that help us be with Jesus. Spend time with Him, sit in His presence, hear from Him, or to use the Bible language for it - abide with Him. And we said this was the first key in the Christian life - that before we get busy doing anything, we first have to learn how to be with Christ.

And as we learn to be with Jesus - the Holy Spirit transforms us more and more into his image - we become more and more like Jesus. Which is our next part of the framework we're tackling in this series - **Become Like Jesus.**

Well then that means we have to ask the question - "What is Jesus like? What are the markers of Christ/What does it mean to be like Christ??"

It means to have a life marked by the Fruit of the Spirit, the fruit we see in this passage - Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are not simply random qualities that the apostle Paul pulls out of thin air → They are evidence of the nature of Christ - Christ is love. Christ is joy. Christ is peace. This is the fruit of a life in the Spirit that looks like Jesus.

If you are a follower of Jesus, your mind, your heart, and your life should be marked by this fruit, and should do so in increasing measure as you live out years and years of following Jesus.

Intro to Sermon

Here's the problem → **Becoming like Jesus is not easy.**

A Battle. Have you ever stopped to consider how much of the Christian life feels like an internal ongoing war? It's like you're living in one of those cartoon movies where a little devil pops up on this shoulder and an angel on this shoulder and they're like "ooh do it do it do it." And the other one is like "Nope. Bad idea. Not gonna go well" You ever feel like that?

I do all the time → Like there's this battle between living out a robust discipleship to Jesus - and doing whatever it is that I want to do instead in the moment.

- I want to be sacrificial and generous towards those in need, and yet when I have a tangible opportunity to go out of my way to serve someone my heart closes up.
- I want to be patient and kind, and yet I still find myself all too easily frustrated with my family.

- I want to be at peace with God and others, and yet I still find bitterness and resentment in my heart.
- I want to be faithful to King Jesus and live for Him alone and yet I find myself compromising for the approval of others.

There's these two competing forces in my heart creating a gap between who I want to be in Christ and who so often I am. This is all of us right?

If you feel this inner war, you're not crazy - **you're experiencing exactly what the Bible says you will experience in the Christian life.**

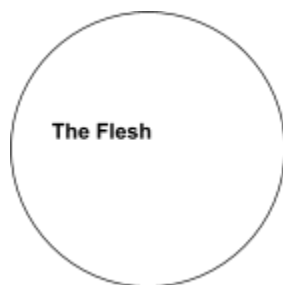
This is the internal war of a follower of Jesus. And it plays itself out in a variety of different battles we'll address through the series - love vs. selfishness. Peace vs. anxiety. Patience vs. Hurry....but my goal this evening is to lay the groundwork for us to understand the larger war going on between what the Bible calls the **Flesh** and the **Spirit**.

The Flesh

With that, let's get into **Galatians 5** and see what we can learn about this war.

Galatians 5:13 - 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

*Let's talk about the **Flesh**:*



The word translated as "flesh" in the New Testament is the Greek word, "**sarx**". And it can sometimes be translated as our bodies or our physical desires, but that's not what Paul's getting at in Galatians 5 when he says "flesh". Paul's not anti-body or anything like that.

Here in this passage "**the Flesh**" refers primarily to **our nature as humans apart from Christ**. Some translations instead of flesh actually say "sinful nature" which I think is really helpful.

New Testament scholar Timothy George defines the flesh this way:

"Flesh refers to fallen human nature. The center of human pride and self-willing....The Flesh is the arena of indulgence and self assertion."

It's your sinful nature. So this is not just some bad stuff you do. This is not something outside of you or other from you. The flesh is an **entire operating system** and way of life that keeps you in **rebellion** against God and living life **independently** from God.

Another way to describe the flesh is **“Disordered Desires”**.

- They can be disordered in desiring the wrong thing - desiring someone you're not married to, desiring to be rich above all else, desiring to gossip or grumble or complain.
- They can also be disordered in desiring the right thing the wrong way. Making things like approval, power, security, comfort, control our number 1 priority in life and then seeking those things apart from God.

And the Bible teaches that all of humanity, all of us, operate with the flesh as our default apart from Christ. So humans were originally created by God and declared very good. Adam and Even rebelled, sin entered the world and now everyone who is born is born corrupted. (Rom 3:9 - “All are under sin”)

Flesh vs. Law

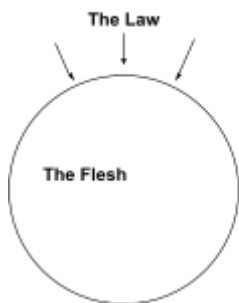
Now, what does this have to do with freedom?

Galatians 5:13 - 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers.

What's Paul talking about here? Well to understand this bigger argument he's making, you have to understand the context of the church in Galatia. AD 46/47 - house churches in region of Southern Galatia

But shortly after Paul left, a group of **Judaizers** infiltrated the church. Judaizers were both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians who were teaching a sort of **“Jesus-and”** type of gospel. They were spreading this false teaching around the churches that it wasn't enough to simply put your faith in Jesus, you also had to obey the Old Testament Jewish laws as well - specifically the laws surrounding circumcision, food, and the sabbath. So you aren't a Christian just through faith, you have to follow these religious rules and customs as well.

And this really, at the heart of it, was their attempt to deal with the Flesh.



They're aware of this flesh, this internal operating mechanism within them pulling them away from God. If they can follow these commands, get their flesh/sinful nature under control - their life will glorify God and He will welcome them in. Really at the core this is what we could call **legalism** - **working to try to earn God's approval.**

But “Jesus-and” rules, works, deeds is a false gospel. And Paul doesn't take this lightly. He writes them this letter - what you have in your Bibles as Galatians - just railing against this false doctrine. Says if anyone is preaching a gospel other than faith alone in Christ Jesus alone they should be cursed by God (1:9).

That's why Paul is clear:

13 For you were called to freedom....

You are called to live in freedom - freedom from the law. Freedom from works-based righteousness. **Freedom from legalism.**

That's the whole argument in the book, and particularly his argument in 5:1-12. You are saved only through faith in Jesus. You can't earn God's love, you can't win God's approval. It's not Jesus + some rules. It's not Jesus + some religious acts. It's Jesus. That's it. Only through faith in Christ is how you're saved. The law can't save you.

But the Galatians are worried. Surely they need all these rituals, these rules. If you take away the law won't people just run around doing whatever they want?

So Paul urges them in v13 - **13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity** [or a launching pad] **for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**

You see, this freedom is not just a freedom **from** (which is how we think about freedom in our context - freedom from authority, control, rules, outside forces telling you what to do) but it's also a freedom **towards**. Namely, towards love for God and love for our neighbor.

We reject **legalism** - adding works to our faith in order to be saved.

But we also reject **license** - using the gospel of grace as an excuse to do whatever we want.

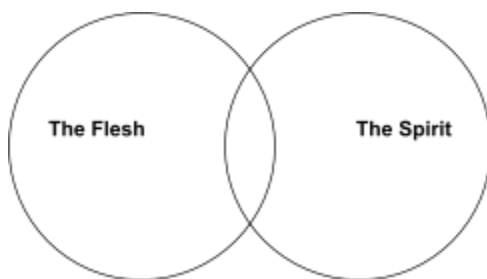
But if it's not the law which helps us become more like Jesus, that keeps the flesh at bay, that shapes us away from these disordered desires and towards God....then what is it?

The Spirit

Skip down to v 16:

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Paul points them to the Holy Spirit.



The Holy Spirit. The third member of the Trinity. Equal with God the Father and God the Son. He is the great Helper. He's all over the place in the Christian life.

- When you were God's enemy, in rebellion in Sin, it was the Spirit who moved your heart to respond to the Gospel and believe.
- When you open up God's Word, it is the Spirit who brings understanding and moves us to apply God's Word to our heart and lives.
- It is the Spirit who unites us together as the family of God - brings us unity and oneness.

And when you become a Christian, when you put your faith in Jesus (by the power of the Spirit) God actually puts His Spirit inside of you, He dwells within you. And the Holy Spirit begins to sanctify us (1 Peter 1:2) and make us more like Jesus.

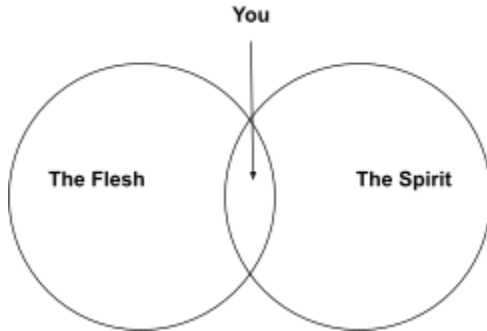
Flesh vs Spirit

Paul continues:

17 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 Flesh and the Spirit are two completely different operating systems for life. They have different motivations. They have different visions for the good life. They have different needs and manufacture different kinds of desires that lead to different practices in our lives.

And we are right here:



That's the war going on inside of all of us who are followers of Jesus. The flesh pulling us away from God, the Spirit pulling us towards God.

Works of the Flesh

Paul then continues, and he shows us how contrary they are by giving us evidences of both.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

You break down this list into four categories, the first two I think are a little more obvious for us:

Excesses

Drunkenness and orgies - this kind of unbridled desire. Rowdy/boisterous/crude behavior. This sort of going after what I want when I want to the extent that I want.

Sexuality

He says "sexual immorality" (The word there for "sexual immorality" is the Gk word "porneia" it's where we our english "pornography". Seeking any kind of satisfaction in sex outside of God's design.) He also says "impurity, sensuality."

**These are the more typical sins we think about when we think about the flesh - these sins of the body, these physical cravings. But notice the other categories he associates with the flesh. Things we don't often think about:*

Religion

Idolatry is not just the little carved wooden statues - it's anything we put our ultimate hope or trust in. Idolatry is all over our world today - people aren't actually less religious, we just call those religions different things. We put our trust in politics, in science, in the economy, in social structures. The flesh says "something other than God will get me through life and is what I need most."

Relationships

8 out of the 15 in this list are about how we treat one another. Enmity or hatred, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, division - our interpersonal relationships are a huge battleground for the flesh vs the spirit. How we treat each other.

Fruit of the Spirit

Then he contrasts this with the fruit of the Spirit:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

A few things you need to see about this list:

First, the word "fruit" is singular. And that's important. It's nine different facets of one thing - spiritual maturity/Christ likeness. It's easy for us to only grab onto the ones that come more easily to us based on our personality or wiring - some of us lean more patience, more faithful, more self-controlled. But we can't just take a few and dismiss the others. It's one fruit the Spirit is wanting to produce within us.

Second, do you see how the flesh and the Spirit are opposed?

- Instead of discord and dissension, there is love.
- Instead of fits of anger and jealousy, there is kindness.
- Instead of drunkenness, sexual immorality, there is self-control.

There's no option for spirit and flesh. They are opposed, opposite, contrary to one another. You can't love and gossip about someone at the same time. You can't be full of patience and division at the same time. They are contrary. One has to win out.

SUMMARY - So Paul says:

- You've been set free in Christ - free from the law - having to work and do things to earn God's love, forgiveness, acceptance.
- But that freedom isn't freedom to just run around and do whatever your flesh wants. The Spirit of God now lives inside of you working to shape you and mold you into the image of Christ and produce this fruit within you.

But as we said at the start, we live so much of life stuck here, feet on both sides, in this war within us. And the goal is that more and more as you follow Jesus the flesh has less power and we learn to live more and more in the Spirit.

But how do we do this? How do we learn to more and more say yes to the Spirit and no to the Flesh?

That's the war! Great. Thanks for telling me how hard this was gonna be...what do I do? ***What hope is there for us in this war?***

Crucified with Christ

Look at vs 24-25:

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit [That's a rhetorical question. We do live by the Spirit. A lot of folks translate it as "Since we live by the Spirit] , **let us also keep in step with the Spirit.**

When you become a Christian two distinct acts happen - **you die with Christ and you are raised with Christ.**

Your old way of living, your old desires, your old vision of the good life, your old habits and rhythms and routines - all of that the Bible calls your old self. And when you put your faith in Jesus that old self dies. It is nailed to the cross with Jesus. It's done away with, it's no more. Your flesh - has been crucified. It's passions and desire have been crucified.

So who died on the cross? Jesus did. But who died with Jesus when He was on the cross - everyone who puts their faith in Him.

BUT remember - Jesus didn't stay dead. So not only is your old self, your flesh - crucified with Christ, but just like Christ rose from the dead to newness of life, so do we rise with Him and live with Him. We have a new heart, a new self - we are given the Spirit of God who is now our life.

Or to put it plainly → The flesh has been killed. It's dead. Out of commission. And now we live by the Spirit. So while this may sometimes feel like an even tug of war - flesh vs. Spirit. It's not even close. The Bible says the flesh has died. We're not a slave to sin anymore. The Spirit has won and is winning and will win.

One of my favorite ways to sum this up. Through Christ:

- We have been saved from the penalty of sin.
- We are being saved from the power of sin.
- And one day (when Christ returns or calls us home) we will be saved from the presence of sin.

So then → **We must learn to live in the freedom and power over sin available to us through the Holy Spirit.**

Paul says it so clearly in **Romans 6:12-14**

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Or, to use the language of Galatians 5:

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

For us to become like Jesus we're going to need some **Grace + Grit.**

Garden. The easy metaphor for this is a garden right? If you've ever tried to plant a garden you understand this idea first hand. Growing a garden takes a tremendous amount of grit. It's slow work. It's labor intensive. It's a lot of little by little energy and work and exertion. The process is gradual.

But then you also know you need a lot of grace. You can do all of the right inputs - water correctly, plant at the right time, tend to it well - but without the hand of God nothing is going to grow.

If you don't have grit and put in the work - it won't grow.
If you don't have grace and God's hand - it won't grow.

The same is true of life walking in step with the Spirit.

It takes a lot of GRIT - We're going to need some long-term perseverance to stay on the path even when the going gets tough. We've got to put in some work over the long haul - to do the spiritual practices that help us abide with Christ. We have to put in the effort and put in the energy. We've got to tend the ground.

Our job is to agree with the Spirit, surrender to the Spirit, abide with God and create an environment and system of living in which the Spirit can manifest this fruit in our lives.

It's this all of life mentality. To have a lifestyle of the Spirit. As one pastor put it - **it's learning to have the ecosystem of our life built around the presence, power, and gifts of the Spirit.**

You have to do some things. This isn't legalism or moralism. This is the Bible. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort.

Romans 8:13 - Put to death the deeds of the body.

Romans 13:14 - Make no provision for the flesh.

Some of us are going to need to take some drastic steps over the course of the next 9 weeks. We have some specific things in our lives - maybe outright sinful, maybe just unwise, probably some of both that are keeping us from walking with the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit. That are holding us back from the Spirit producing within us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness....And we've made provisions for the flesh to hang around and we're going to need to confess some stuff, have some grit, make some changes.

- Seek some accountability
- Set up some good Godly boundaries in regards to what you consume or partake of
- Commit to spiritual disciplines

But you need to understand the goal of this series is not to do a different version of the exact same thing Paul is so adamantly opposed to in the book of Galatians. The goal is not a bunch of rules or simply behavior modification. We can't just say - during these 10 weeks we're going to stop doing this stuff and start doing this stuff and everything will be better and you'll look more like Jesus.

Did you notice the specific words Paul uses for flesh and spirit in this passage? It matters.

He says *works* of the flesh and *fruit* of the Spirit. That's because the flesh are actions we take, things we do but the fruit is something the Spirit does in us.

We work hard, we cultivate a hospitable life for the Spirit to work, we don't quench the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, get in the way of the Spirit. We gotta have some grit.

But we have no hope for fruit without the grace of God. Without the work of the Spirit.

It's the Spirit who brings the fruit. It's the Spirit who grows us, matures us, shapes us, forms us. The life we live we live in the Spirit.

Do you feel the tension here? The both/and of our becoming like Jesus?

- That sounds like I have to work really hard if I want to become more like Jesus. **Yep.**
- That sounds like the Spirit is the one who does the work and makes me more like Jesus. **Yep.**

Somehow in the beauty of God's design there's a tension that both are true.

- Do we do the work? **Yes.**
- Does the Spirit do the work? **Yes.**

We work under the power of the Spirit to cultivate a life hospitable to the work of the Spirit to make us more and more like Jesus.

In those moments of battle - flesh or spirit. Flesh or spirit. What do you need in those moments? You need to preach the Gospel to yourself - "My old self is dead. My old self was crucified with Christ. Holy Spirit help me to say no to the flesh and yes to your work in my life, your fruit in my life."

FOTS in a TOTF

That's the war. Spirit vs. Flesh. We know one day the Spirit will win. One day we will be glorified. But right now we need some grace and some grit for this side of eternity to grow to become more and more like Jesus.

And so over the next 9 weeks we're going to look at these smaller battles we fight.

- **Love in a Time of Selfishness**
- **Joy in a Time of Despair**
- **Peace in a Time of Anxiety**
- **Patience in a Time of Hurry**
- **Kindness in a Time of Bitterness**
- **Goodness in a Time of Brokenness**
- **Faithfulness in a Time of Compromise**
- **Gentleness in a Time of Roughness**
- **Self-Control in a Time of Self-Fulfillment**

And we're going to put some things into practice to tend to our gardens, have some **grit**, and we're going to seek the **grace** of Spirit's work and power to change us and shape us more and more to become like Jesus.

Pray.

Communion.