

I think we're good on the mic. Turn with me to Galatians 5. We're going to read the whole chapter really just to set it up and then we're going to dive in specifically to verses 16 through 26. But Galatians 5 beginning in verse 1. For freedom Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look, I, Paul, say that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ. You would be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well, who hindered you from obeying the truth?

This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brother, still preach circumcision, Why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed.

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves. 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. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you were not consumed by one another.

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. Now the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, things like these. I warned you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, Self-control. Against such things, there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. So far, the reading of God's holy word. Let's pray. And now, Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts together always be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock. and our Redeemer. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'll skip the introduction and start with the main idea, with the hook this morning. In Christ we've been set free. The question then becomes, how are we using our freedom? We can't skip that part. That's why I had us read the beginning. Paul very passionately, devotionally, and worshipfully proclaims, for freedom, Christ has set us free.

He says again in verse 13, for you were called to freedom, brothers. But the question does immediately become, free from what, free to what, right? One of those verses that ought to get us every time in the scriptures is when the angel proclaims to Mary what's to become of her.

You all remember her response, don't you? Behold, the bondservant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your will. In that moment, she felt a greater sense of profound freedom than any time in her life, even though she had just proclaimed, I am your bondservant. You are my master.

So y'all, to begin with, we've got to just pan back and look and see. When we say we want freedom, We don't mean freedom from God. We don't mean that. Not if we have any sense. When we say we want freedom, what we mean is we want freedom from that cruel and tyrannical master who is Satan. We've been set free, but not unto ourselves. We've been set free unto the Lord. Again, I want to unpack this three ways again.

In verses 16 to 18, when it comes to eternal matters, avoiding conflict is never an option for us. In verses 19 to 21, what are some telltale signs that we're following the flesh? And then in 22 to 24, what are some telltale signs we're following the spirit?

You all have heard from different folks, different theologians, we've read there's no neutrality. There's no such thing as neutrality. If you're not for us, you're against us. The Bible is clear on that, right? There's the kingdom of light, there's the kingdom of darkness. Back to the antithesis, right? There's the seed of the woman, there's the seed of the serpent.

And Paul comes and rightly declares You have freedom, but in your newfound freedom, this is immediately the conflict you've been engaged in. Sometimes the problem in the Bible is not that it's not clear. The clarity itself is the problem because you read this passage and you're like, my life as a Christian, sanctification for me ought to be easy because the Bible and the spirit working in the word has given me everything I need.

And y'all, isn't that what's frustrating about life? Rarely, if ever, have I sinned in ignorance. The problem is I know exactly what I'm supposed to do and not do, and I do the opposite anyways. And that's hard, isn't it? Because what we want to do is go, it's just an intellect problem, right? If I get new information, that'll dictate new ways of living. And if I just get the right information, problem solved. And every one of us just have to chuckle and go, oh, if only it was that easy. Right, this is one of those simple, right? But I say walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh and everybody says amen and thank you for the check, I'm out. That is the answer. But that's also the battle lines. This is where the battle takes place.

Y'all, I was thinking about this this week, just thinking through. And I was thinking if I could get, I started out by saying if I could get them to understand, and then there was this very harsh reality of no Seth, if you could get you to understand.

If I could get Seth to understand, every time I'm tempted, if I could get Seth to remember that the same one tempting me wants to kill me. If every time I was tempted, I could remember, that joker wants to destroy me. He's out prowling around, wanting to destroy me. If we could always keep that visual imagery of this is who's tempting me in front of our minds, you know what we would do?

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, and run the other way. Y'all, when I was little, the story's told, I had my mom's old hair dryer that I'd play with and walk down the hall with it. They thought they'd cut it enough at the cord, but there was just a little piece of metal sticking out at the end of the cord. Well, one day I was walking by, and y'all, I put the end of that, just that little piece of metal in the electric outlet, and it shot me. And they said for the next year, year and a half, every time I walked by that outlet in the hall, I would stop and go, no, no, no. Because I remembered what the result was.

Y'all, how quickly we forget. Satan's so good at what he does, and we're the sap suckers that keep falling for the same mistakes over and over again. He redresses himself, and we're like, well, maybe this time it's a different source. Y'all, he wants to kill us. He wants to ruin everything we touch. And Paul's going, y'all have to see this.

You've been set free from sin and misery, set free from your father the devil. You have a new position, a new righteousness, a newfound freedom and power, but you have to understand, until you're in heaven, even though he is chained, he is still a formidable enemy in what he can inflict on us in this life. I'm embarrassed to say this, but again, I thought I had another perfect sermon illustration, and then I was like, Seth, here you go telling yourself again.

Two Wednesdays ago, I had to have some infected bone cut out of my toe. And people said, well, how'd that happen? Oh, I just decided I'd pick an ingrown toe now, and decided I'd let it get bad. And I got it treated once, and I was like, oh, it got better. Knowing full well it didn't get fully better, but I was like, well, it'll take care of itself. And so there I am, ending up in the hospital.

I have to get put down. I should be wearing a boot. I'm not. Why? I'm wearing a boot, but not the one they want me to wear. I've had to stay off my foot. I had to miss two beautiful Mississippi State baseball games last weekend. Even y'all have to admit, dude, your Noble Field's magical. I had to do all this stuff. And I thought to myself, there's the illustration.

You know what? Now that I've gone through this ordeal, I'm not going to mess with my feet. But y'all know what? The truth is, guess what happened three years ago? on the same foot. I didn't have to have surgery, but just short of it. I went in and it was infected. And they said, if you'd have waited another two days, it would have gotten in your bone then, too.

And I said to myself, how? How? My wife's looking at me. She's like, you're an intelligent person. They made you learn Greek and Hebrew. How? Do you not remember what your foot looked like three years ago? How? And I was like, oh, no. That really was the preparation for this talk. Oh, no. I forgot. I just forgot.

Y'all, it's not just Charismatics and Pentecostals that believe in spiritual warfare, by the way. Anybody that believes the Bible believes in spiritual warfare. We are in a battle, and we have an enemy who hates our faithfulness, and he'll do everything he can to prevent us from being faithful. And premarital counseling, I always start with union with Christ in marriage, and then the next week's always spiritual warfare marriage. And without a doubt, every time I do that, the sweet little couple smile at each other, googly eyes look at me like I'm crazy. Why are we talking about spiritual warfare in marriage counseling? And I just chuckle. I was like, get back to me in about six months, and you'll know exactly why. But it's true. It's true, y'all. And inevitably they will get back to me. Why does this happen?

Why do I feel like spiritual warfare has increased? Because Satan hates godly marriages. Because they point to Jesus' love for the church. And anything Satan can do to get rid of any picture of Jesus' love for the church, that's what he wants to do. Because godly marriages say to the watching world, we have a God who loves his people. So he attacks it.

Y'all, any of you who have served in the church in any form or fashion, officer or not, Satan will be quiet for a few days. What happens on Sunday morning around your house? Especially, my wife will come into me and she'll be like, you wouldn't believe it, your son did something he hadn't done in five years. I was like, of course, it's Sunday.

And by the way, I don't read too much into this, but I have been thinking, you know, in a week I had a pre-cancerous spot taken off my back. My toe thing happened, and then because I was walking funny on my toe, my right SI joint locked up on me. I'm only 41 years old.

Grace Prez in Starville is experiencing a flood of people hungry for the word. And I had two elders say to me, of course that's what's happening to you right now. We're in a battle, y'all. We've been set free from our sin, but we have not been excused from the battlefield. And there's no such thing as neutrality. We can't just avoid conflict. We're either going to walk by the Spirit, or we're going to gratify the desires of the flesh.

And again, y'all, this falls in that simple but not easy category. The reason why it's important we understand this from an academic and intellectual standpoint is because then we can at least have a framework, a point of reference to go, this is why what's happening in my life is happening. And because the practice is hard, it's important that we always acknowledge to ourselves the reality. It's important in our own Bible reading and our devotions that we always are aware of, again, We've been set free, and y'all, it's right to rejoice that Satan can't take our souls from us. It's right to rejoice that Satan can't rob us of heaven. But do you want to be the guy that looks up and says, well, I'm thankful I have heaven, but I've ruined my family because of this sin? Says no man in his right mind ever.

On Wednesday nights at church, I've been going through different kind of Revival slash conversion moments in the Bible and this last week out it brought me to David And y'all Samuel which by the way, God bless him. I can't wait to see him in heaven He looked at David and said you are the man knowing full well that that could have been the moment. He got beheaded if David would have responded poorly that prophets dead And you're reading the passage And this no doubt hits me more now that I'm a father than I would have before. And this amazing announcement's made. He's told, no, your sin has been removed from you. You will not die. But what does the prophet say next? But the Son will. But the Son will.

At some point in time, did David return to rejoicing? Yes, read Psalm 51. But in that moment, no part of David was like, well, I'm sure I'm glad the devil couldn't steal my soul. In that moment, his profound reaction would have been, it's my fault. It's my fault.

Y'all, never let the assurance of our salvation, never let the hope of our justification, my faith alone, we've already covered that this morning, never let that. distract you from the fact that we also, in our lives on this earth, want to glorify God.

We want to be a clear testimony to his love and grace. If we bear the mark of Jesus and claim this new identity, then what we must want is that as we're walking by the Spirit, that it'll be a clear sign to the watching world of our own righteousness. Well, that's crazy, no. But of a God who gives his people righteousness. So what are some telltale signs we're following the flesh then again?

All right, I'm going to get in trouble because I know just enough about farming for you all to laugh at me. But I think you all can appreciate this. You all, the spirit is RTK. The spirit is your guidance. And I know RTK is now outdated, but I figure maybe the older ones of you would know what RTK is and not some of the stuff he's got on this tractor now. The spirit is what makes sure that when you drive down the road, y'all never forget, I took Laura Lee a couple years ago for our anniversary when we went to the Alluvian for a night, and before we went up to McCarty and looked around, and all of a sudden she was just quiet for a minute.

She goes, Seth, how, look at those rows, look how straight those rows are. She said, I want to meet that tractor driver. And I just started laughing. I was like, well, there used to be a time when tractor drivers could do that. But I promise you, they're dead now. That ain't a tractor driver. She said, what is it? I said, it's called GPS. And she laughed. She goes, that's cheating.

And I was like, yeah. But you never want to be the farmer that farms beside the highway, do you? Never. Anytime I go around some farmers I can laugh and be like, what happened right there? That isn't 30 inches. That's about 33 inches. I didn't know we had 33 inch row spaces anywhere in the Delta. Spirit. The spirit will most certainly, certainly be your guidance. But y'all know how it is, right? This is the main difference between the farming analogy and scripture, if we're careful. In farming, what happens?

You don't know that that row spacing got messed up until all of a sudden you look up and you're driving down the turn and you're like, well, wait a minute, man. That was supposed to be skip row cotton, not skip-skip row cotton. What do we do? Or, I thought that sprayer was messed up. There's two rows of the yellowest, ugliest looking corn you've ever seen. But it takes a while to go, what happened? Or again, if you're putting Gramoxone out or something, wait a minute. There's a gap right there where the guidance broke. Look at the weeds coming up.

Y'all, the good news is in the Christian life, if we're paying close attention to our hearts and habits, we don't have to wait because the works of the flesh are evident. And so anytime we see our life in hearts leaning towards any of this long list, and by the way, some of these were like, you know, I'll start with the hard ones.

Lord, I just don't, I don't think you're going to take me out this week through orgies. Check. Lord, I don't think that's going to be the thing that takes me out this week. But you look a bit hard at that list, and you're like, but I'll tell you what, anger might. Jealousy might. Again, sorcery, that's never really been my thing. I was scared of Ouija boards before I knew I was supposed to be. I always was just like, no, no, no, no. They're like, it's not real. I was like, oh, yes, it is, realer than you think.

But y'all, if again, if we pay close attention to our hearts and habits, The Spirit gives us all these warnings, y'all. Again, I don't think, sometimes I've been surprised at how far I let sin get and how out of hand I let sin get, but I've never looked up and gone, well, that crept out of nowhere. I can always trace it back.

But what does that entail? Y'all, you need to understand, when we tell people to read their Bible, pray, and go to church, that's not just so we can feel good about that. We tell people to read your Bible, pray and go to church because our life depends on it. Because that is how we are aware when the flesh is taken over. Right? You don't have to wait for the yellow corn. You don't have to wait for the spot where the rows are off.

Immediately, if you are in the Word, if you're in prayer, if you're involved in the church and have submitted yourself to accountability in the church and you're constantly attending the means of grace, then the Lord has given you all of these moments to go, hey, the first sign of these things and you ought to be able to get right on it. You know at 41 there's some things I used to be critical of and some things I used to think that shockingly you look up and you're like okay now I know what he meant.

My first boss would say from the pulpit pretty frequently something along the lines of I like to say there's only so far you can backslide in a week so it's important we attend church. And y'all, the reason I was critical of it is because on the one hand, it's like, nah, I could ruin my life between morning and evening worship. I really could. If the Lord held his hand for a minute, I could ruin my entire life between morning and evening worship. And I still stand by that. But that's not what he was saying. He wasn't minimizing his potential to ruin his life.

What he was saying, and now I smile and I find myself saying it from the pulpit, shockingly. In God's plan, in his design, guess what Lord's Day worship is? Yes, obviously it's a command to worship Him. Yes, obviously it's a time to rest from our worldly labors, yes. But in relation to this passage, it's the spotlight shining on our hearts to go, is anything hiding down there?

What's in there? What happened this week? What voices were you listening to? What idols got more ground in real estate in your heart than they were supposed to? Where did you give way to the flesh for just a minute? Where did the guidance break this week?

If Sunday by Sunday you're coming back and availing yourself of the means of grace, and again to our talk an hour ago, and you really are internalizing and not faking it, and if you surround yourself by truth tellers who are also, you're mutually looking out for each other's well-being, then that pastor was 100% right.

If baked into our lives is a constant confrontation with the spirit working through the word, then when these things show themselves in infant form, we really can just get rid of them. We can spray them all before they ever pop up. But it really isn't rocket science.

When we find ourselves with a strange infatuation with sin, or when we find ourselves over here in the corner saying, Lord, just let me hoard this one, then we've followed the flesh. We've given life to something we're supposed to kill. Because again, y'all, we've forgotten it's desires to kill us. It wants us dead. It wants us to make a mockery of Jesus in His church. It wants there to be carnage. I should say He, Satan, wants there to be carnage.

So y'all, I don't know how we do the Christian life without daily devotion to the Lord and without weekly devotion to His church. I simply don't know how in the world we could even begin to do it. I don't know how we're ever going to be able to look at our own hearts and have enough introspection to go, okay, where are the dangers? Where are the dangers? But that has to be a process we go through on a daily, weekly basis. That has to be a work we are relentlessly committed to.

Because y'all, from an earthly, temporal standpoint, again y'all, Satan is so good at his job. He's so good at his job. I've said before, y'all, he tailor-makes temptations. You know that, right? Like, there are certain things, never say never, please hear me, but there are certain things I'm just telling you Satan's not gonna trip me up on. He wouldn't even try, because he just knows I wouldn't get any traction. No, no, no, he really is. He's not the Joseph Banks suit. He is that custom-made suit from cloth. He knows exactly where the chinks in my armor are, because he helped put them there. So we have to come back.

And we have to look at this list and say, anytime any of these things show the first sign of life, we gotta get rid of them. Y'all, if I would've gone to the doctor the first time I looked down and said, that toe's a little red, I wouldn't have had surgery. I really wouldn't have. Y'all, there's no such thing as a sin management plan.

See, y'all can farm this way. As long as the weeds are less competition than the crop, We'll be all right. Now, I'm not saying that's how you farm, but you can do that. This whole, you know, like spot spraying. No, no, no, no, y'all. When it comes to sin, we've got to burn down the whole heart every time. Lord, get rid of all of it. Get rid of all of it. The broom closet, the mechanical room in the garage, clean all of it. So y'all, again, it's not a matter of knowledge. It's not a matter of volition.

When we live the way we've been designed to live, when we pursue God in our own devotional life, in private worship, when we pursue Him in corporate worship, He will, He will point out our sin to us. The Spirit is great, is great at convicting us when we use the means He's given us to do it. So then what are some telltale signs we're following this spirit then? Y'all, we've talked about this before, but I never thought this would be a controversial statement, but sometimes I feel like even in my own circles, maybe this would be a controversial statement. A Christian is somebody who's becoming more and more like Christ. Full stop. Well, how do we know there's a Christian? You will see Christ's likeness. You will. Now let me pause again. There's no such thing as a cookie cutter approach to stuff. There's always a point of origin.

What might look like roughness and back slidness on the part of somebody might actually be a great work of the Spirit because we don't know where they began. You know, you hear some of these stories, I've heard some of these stories from Mr. Clayton when Revival broke out here, and he was like, oh, some of the people that were walking with the Lord were still rough, but you gotta realize something, they'd never darkened the door of the church 10 days before, of course they were still rough. So we have to be careful and go, your sanctification doesn't look like mine, are you a Christian? That's not what I'm saying we ever do.

But you do look at each individual and go, okay. Let's look at this here. What does mortification look like? What does dying to and living for look like? Where have you mortified? Where are you vivifying? What have you been able to look at and see these things have to immediately go from my life, but over on this positive side? Where's love or joy or peace or patience? Where's kindness or goodness or faithfulness or gentleness? Where's self-control?

Y'all, I did lose a bunch of weight in the last year and a half, but I didn't do Weight Watchers. But one thing I've always laughed at is like, with Weight Watchers, you really carefully track your calories, but then they're like, fruits and vegetables, zero calories, eat all you want.

That's the way Paul talks about the work of the Spirit here. These things that are from the flesh take no part in them. These things that are from the Spirit, oh, may they all abound. May He give us heaps Heaps of all these things and I want to make sure y'all understand something Do you know who has the most vested interest of anybody and seeing the fruit of the Spirit take root in your life? God himself You know who was promised from heaven and from all of his power and from all of eternity that his work And you will produce this God himself So somebody said one time I had to think about you know who the greatest cheerleaders for your sanctification The Spirit who's promised to sanctify you. Isn't that an amazing thought?

Notice that's not the language of this passage. Well, you're involved in spiritual battle, and you've been told to refrain from one thing and live in the other. Have fun, I'll check in later. No! Paul says gloriously, in the midst of all of this is the blessed Holy Spirit. And y'all, that's what's amazing. Do we always want to guard against self-righteousness? But of course we do. But do you know how incredibly satisfying it is to be able to stop and go, I know for a fact I'm a Christian because this is what the Lord has done in my life. The power of testimonies.

I was this, but now I'm this. I used to have a love and affection for this, but now I have a love and affection for this. I used to know nothing of self-control, but now my life is marked by self-control. I used to be given over to the flesh in this area, but now I've, by the Spirit, been able to mortify the flesh.

In the context of corporate worship, we know the answer to this, but somewhere in the life of our church, are we hearing testimonies? Somewhere in the life of our church, are we making sure, y'all, it doesn't have to be a pride contest or a beating your chest contest for the saints to sit around and say, let me tell you what the Lord's done in my life. Let me tell you how he set me free.

Because after all, the way we know we're walking according to the Spirit and not gratifying the desires of the flesh is fruit. It's fruit. And so, y'all, the most loving thing we can do with the people closest to us and the people we've committed to doing life with in the church is to point out when we see something going awry and is to encourage

when we see the Spirit doing what He's promised He'd do. We're not good at attaboys. We're too afraid we'll become conceited. We're not good at attaboys. Bebo had a sermon he preached for a while. And it was on the commendations given right there, 2nd, 3rd John. And it was an attaboy.

You read the pastoral epistles, and what does Paul begin most of his epistles with? Thank you that I hear a report of your faithfulness. I want us to get used to being in the habit of looking out and going, I've seen the Lord work in you, and I want to tell you. I've seen the Spirit working in you, and that makes my heart rejoice. We gotta be able to give out of boys, too. And somebody in the room will make sure that doesn't make your head puffed up. If you're married, your wife will, right? Somebody will. But Paul says, you've been set free. The Spirit has been promised you.

Y'all, don't you ever stop and think those poor Old Testament saints. David was sincere when he, back to Psalm 51, David was oh so sincere when he said, take not your Holy Spirit from me. And we're over here going, Lord, you've promised in the New Covenant era that the Spirit's ours and dwells us.

In my more sane moments, I'm always like, Lord, how did I do it again? How did I fall for the same trap again? And you stop back and go, you quench the spirit. Again, y'all, every sin I've ever walked into, the Lord was going, hey, man, let's not do that. And for God's own purposes and in his providence, the confession, you know when it says, for seasons, it gives us over, I'm like, oh, I wish that wasn't in there. I wish that wasn't in there.

I pray for my children all the time. And I have men in my life praying for me, Lord, give me a short rope and let me get caught quick. with any sin pattern. Don't let any sin pattern in my life take root at all. Because I might love it too much. I might love it too much. In fact, there's a high chance we will love it too much. Why? Because in the short term, I don't know anything more fun than sin. And then by the time you wake up, I don't know anything more dreadful and destructive than it.

If we live by the Spirit, Let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Again, justification, sanctification, how are they alike, how do they differ? The one thing I want to leave us with is please don't ever hear a sermon or sermon application on the call to be sanctified and walk out of here and think, I've got the to-do list to go conquer it. Instead, always walk out of here and go, I've got the Spirit's help and the promise of His work in me. Now let's go. Now let's go. A call to sanctification is not a call to self-sufficiency or independency. That can't be. We'll lose that battle every time. But it is a call to freedom in the Spirit, to struggle against the flesh, and to see the things that the Spirit promised it would give us abound.

And y'all, may we never forget what an amazing privilege it is that we get to say out loud, I get to be like Jesus. I get to be like Jesus. His desire for me is that I would look more like him. And again, if we're being honest, sometimes we're thinking, boy, Jesus got a raw deal. He did, he got a raw deal. Why would he want to share such glory, such excellency with the likes of me? But the beauty of the gospel doesn't begin in our glorification. The beauty of the gospel begins in what he's doing in us now to make him more like himself.

Oh, y'all, may we never despise the day of small things. May we never despise the day of small struggles. But one foot in front of the other, and little by little, may we use the freedom we've been given in Christ to serve him. May our declaration be, behold the bondservant of the Lord, Be it done to me according to your will. And if you walk by

the Spirit, we have a definitive promise from the authoritative word of God, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. That means he'll keep us safe all the way home. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen, let's pray.

Father, what a joyous time it's been together. I pray your blessings on these men. On this church. Own gospel witness in Yazoo City in Yazoo County and throughout the Delta even. I pray that you would use our time together this weekend to make us. Useful servants in your kingdom. And to bring glory to your name. It's our humble prayer and we ask it in Jesus name, Amen.