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Title: "Life in the Spirit"

Key verse: John 14:16-17 (NASB) – Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you."

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. I have been doing a sermon series on the Christian doctrines outlined in our church's Statement of Faith and last month I presented a sermon here on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Afterwards, I felt that there was more I ought to say on this crucial topic of the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives. My message three weeks ago stressed doctrinal issues, but I didn't have time to include some aspects of how we live out the Christian life with a conscious awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in our daily lives. So, this is what I would like to speak about today. The title of today's message is "Life in the Spirit."

By way of introduction, I have to review a few of the things I said last month. The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three members are distinct persons who have the same essence and the same eternal existence. As we think about God, we have a certain image of God the Father, who created this world and who acts in human history. And we have a certain image of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who became man and lived among us human beings. But many of us have a rather fuzzy image of the third Person of the Trinity. We aren't sure how to picture the Holy Spirit.

Why is that? Well, for one thing, we have God the Father's words and actions written down for us in Scripture. And we have that for the Son as well — the Lord Jesus Christ, who actually walked on this earth among us. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit ... well, He is with us as a spiritual presence, but usually not in a physical sort of way in front of our eyes. Sometimes, there is a visual manifestation of the Holy Spirit, such as when He descended upon Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove, or when He manifested Himself as a rushing wind and tongues of fire at Pentecost. But, usually He doesn't manifest Himself to us in a visual sort of way. He is somewhat in the background. And, in a sense, that is the way it is supposed to be.

Let me read for you Paragraph 4 of our church's Statement of Faith, which I discussed in my sermon last month:

We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and during this age to convict men of sin, regenerate the sinner, indwell, guide, instruct, and empower the believer for godly living and service. John 16:7-14.

This is what we learn from the Christian Scriptures: that the ministry of the Holy Spirit, first and foremost, is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to exalt Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit does not call attention to Himself, but wishes us to focus our eyes on Jesus. That's why a moment ago I said maybe one reason we don't have a clear visual image of the Holy Spirit is because His task is to draw mankind's attention to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paragraph 4 of our Statement of Faith cites a Scripture passage: John 16:7-14. Let's read verses 13-14 (NASB) – “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose it to you.”

The Holy Spirit doesn't speak on His own initiative, but He speaks what He has heard from God the Father and God the Son. And look at verse 14: the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus.

In the first chapter of the book of Acts, Jesus says this to His disciples just before He ascends into heaven: Acts 1:8 (NASB) – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us. The purpose of this empowerment is to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

When God the Son took on human form in what is known as the Incarnation, He did many good works, but He could only be in one place at one time. But, now that the Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to earth to indwell every believer, Christian ministry can be performed by thousands (by millions) of us every day all over the world. This notion is behind the statement made by Jesus in John 14:12 (NASB) – “Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I am going to the Father.” The works that the followers of Christ will do will be greater in scope than what Jesus did in Judea and Galilee during His time on earth.

The words of Jesus which I just quoted for you come from His long discourse to the disciples after the Last Supper, on the night before His crucifixion. Here are some more words from that long discourse, from John 14:16-17 (NASB) – Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.”

Because Jesus will be departing from this earth, He promises to send the Holy Spirit in His place. And the Spirit will be with each one of Jesus's followers throughout our life. Verse 17 goes on to say that the Spirit will remain WITH us, and He will be IN us.

Before I proceed further with my message today, I would like to review the main points that I have shared with you so far about our life with the Holy Spirit.

First, since Jesus is leaving, He will send "another Helper" (another Comforter/Advocate) in His place – that is the Holy Spirit.

Second, the main ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ by empowering Christians for godly living and Christian service.

Third, the Holy Spirit indwells us believers. This Spirit dwells inside each one of us who has been born-again.

Next, let me give you an outline of some additional points, which I will describe in greater detail during the second half of today's message.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a "seal," a pledge that He will protect and preserve us until we receive our inheritance in heaven.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live godly lives, and it is a very serious matter if you live for self and sin instead of living according to the Spirit.

Sixth, each member of the church has been given a spiritual gift to use for building up the church.

Seventh, our lives are to be characterized by the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Let me now describe in more detail that fourth point that I just made. Let's look at Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV) – "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a seal signifying that we are children of God. He is the evidence that we are born-again. And having the Holy Spirit is also the guarantee that in the end, we will receive our inheritance: life with God forever.

There are many exhortations in Scripture that instruct us to forsake our old sinful habits and live God-honoring lives. I won't read those today. But I do wish to read some passages that give us a warning or an exhortation not to resist the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is possible to be a born-again Christian, but also to fail to live up to the standards God has set for Christian behavior. Today I would like to share with you some of those warning passages that I just mentioned, because in my own experience, these passages helped me to return to

God after moments of failure and maybe they can help some of you as you ponder how to return to a place of following God more consistently and successfully.

The first of these passages is Ephesians 4:30 (NASB) – “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (The day of redemption means the day of Christ’s return).

When I ponder these words, I think what an awful thing it is to bring grief to the Holy Spirit. If you look at the context in which this verse appears – in the second half of Ephesians chapter 4 and also the beginning of chapter 5 – you see exhortations to forsake various sins that characterized unsaved people. To grieve the Holy Spirit is to engage with those sins which you ought to know go against God’s standards. By engaging in those sins, you grieve the Holy Spirit and you damage your Christian walk. Various kinds of sins are listed from verse 19 onwards – sins such as indecent behavior, various kinds of impurity, greediness, deceit, anger, and theft. Verse 20 says “But you did not learn Christ in this way.” This is not the way of salvation. It is an anti-Christian path. When Christians engage in any of these activities, you sorely grieve the Holy Spirit. He is your seal of salvation, your guarantee of life with God forever, so how can you bring such sadness to Him? How can you damage your Christian walk and your Christian testimony?

Here is another verse that is hard-hitting for any Christian that might be tempted by sins of the flesh: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NASB) – “Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

This verse and others like it (for example, Ephesians 5:3-5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8) kept me from engaging in serious sexual sin. Some sins are “outside the body,” such as theft or lying. But improper sexual behavior is sin using your own body ... sin against your body. And that body is a temple of the Holy Spirit: it is a sacred place! The Holy Spirit who sealed you for the day of redemption dwells in you. Don’t damage the Holy Spirit’s home, don’t damage your body, don’t damage your Christian walk and your effectiveness in Christian ministry. This is a terrible thing. And let me mention one more thought we find in this passage: your body doesn’t belong to you. Verse 20 says, “For you have been bought for a price” – Jesus paid the penalty for your sins on the cross ... what a price He paid for your salvation! Please respect that, please remember to honor God in your life in your body. “Glorify God in your body.” Flee from sexual temptation – run away from it. If you are engaging in sexual sin, give it up. You honor neither yourself nor God nor that person you’re involved with if you keep on engaging in sinful behavior. And your effectiveness in the Christian life is brought to nothing. The Apostle Paul exhorts us to flee from this sin.

Romans chapter 8 has been called one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. I would like to read some verses here which touch on the topic of living by the flesh versus living by the Spirit. We need to set our minds on the things of the Spirit rather than setting our minds on the pursuit of fleshly indulgence. And when I say fleshly indulgence, it is not just sexual sins that I'm referring to: it could be other inappropriate appetites, such as excessive indulgence in food or alcohol or other things like pride (puffing up your ego).

Romans 8:5-14 (NASB) – “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace ...”

Life and peace. Let me tell you from personal experience that when you forsake indulging the flesh, you can have peace of mind. Peace of mind and a more productive life.

Let's continue reading at verse 7 – “... because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God ...”

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Even good deeds done in fleshly power rather than the power of the Spirit do not please God and ultimately do not produce much benefit.

Verse 9 – “... However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him...” Wow. That's pretty serious. True Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Let us live according to the Spirit. I know that we all sometimes fail to live up to God's standards, but may we always strive to repent from past mistakes and to live our lives according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh.

Continuing at verse 12 – “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

Here is the Christian ideal: to be led by the Holy Spirit. This is a big topic all by itself. Much could be said about how to be led by the Holy Spirit, but I will share just a few thoughts with you. First of all, as we see in verses 13 and 14 here, the first step in being led by the Spirit is to “put to death the deeds of the body” – that is, forsake the sinful cravings you have, throw them off, get rid of them entirely from your life so that they are dead to you. This takes some discipline and some concerted action on your part, but you have the Holy Spirit's power to help you do this. He wants to help you – that's part of His job. Let Him help you.

One of my favorite verses is 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB) – “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

No temptation is so strong that you have to be defeated by it and fall into sin. God helps you – in fact, He won’t allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to handle. You always have the opportunity to overcome it. In fact, God provides the way to escape from it. I have clung to this verse many times and have taken advantage of the way of escape God provides.

Returning to Romans 8:13-14, we are able to put to death the deeds of the body and be led by the Holy Spirit. This involves some discipline ... it involves escaping from temptation ... and I think another thing that has helped me in the past has been to saturate myself with the Bible: to be reading it daily and thoroughly. When temptation arises, or when I find myself embarking on a wrong path, several verses will come to mind to help me through that challenging time. It is so important to fill your mind with God’s Word.

A pair of verses that has been foundational to the way I have lived my life is Psalm 119, verses 9 and 11 (NASB) – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word... ¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”

Well, there is more I could say on the ways God helps us forsake sin, but it is time for me to move on in my message today. We are looking at Life in the Spirit, and another crucial aspect of the Christian life are the various gifts that the Spirit gives us so that we can minister to people – here in church and also reaching out to people in the world. We call these “spiritual gifts,” but it is not only the Holy Spirit involved in bestowing these to us – in fact, each member of the Trinity is involved.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NASB) – “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

There are a variety of spiritual gifts which God has given to His people, and each of us has one or more of these gifts. I won’t be outlining them today. The main thing I want to say today is that the Holy Spirit empowers each of us for service in the church and has given each of us one or more gifts. Look at verse 7 – each of us has a spiritual gift for the purpose of using it “for the common good,” for the good of the community. Do you know what your gift is, and are you using it for the benefit of the community? If you don’t know what your gift might be, go ahead and volunteer for one of the ministries here and see if you have some

proficiency at it. If you don't, then try another area of ministry. Each of us has a gift, and the community is benefitted if you use your gift in service to others.

Don't worry if your gift seems small. Every gift is important. Verses 20-23 (NASB) say: "But now there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable..." You might feel your gift is small and insignificant, but it is not – every one of us has a part to play in the church body, and each part is important even if it may seem small to you. Please exercise your gift so that we all can benefit from your involvement.

I would like to wrap up my message today with a passage that touches on several of the themes I have discussed today. Galatians 5:14-26 (NASB). Verse 14 says, "For the whole [Old Testament] Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love is the centerpiece of our relationship with our fellow Christians and should mark our relationships with all our fellow human beings.

Verses 16-17 – "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

I spent a large section of today's message urging you not to follow the ways of the flesh but instead to walk by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:1 (NASB), Paul says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Live your life in a manner that honors God and honors the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back to Galatians chapter 5. Verses 19-21 give a list of deeds of the flesh, but I won't read those for you today.

[Unread: Gal 5:19-21 – "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.]

Let's read verses 22-25 – "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. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

When you let the Holy Spirit guide your life and your Christian growth, the fruit listed here will be manifested in your life. By the way, you see draped on the front side of this podium a

quilt which pictures the fruit of the Spirit. We have had this quilt decorating this podium for more than ten years.

Let's look at the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in this passage. How are you doing? Do these features characterize your life? Love ... joy ... peace ... patience ... kindness ... goodness ... faithfulness ... gentleness ... self-control.

I will admit to you that I fall short in several of these areas. But hopefully, as you keep on walking with the Lord, this fruit will be manifested in your life.

Verse 24 – we who belong to Christ must crucify fleshly impulses. A few minutes ago, I read Romans 8:13 which tells us to put to death the deeds of the flesh. We must get serious and kill those fleshly passions that would lead us to sin. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps us do this.

Verse 25 – If we are truly born-again and made alive by the Spirit, then let us walk the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the message I have for you today: walk the Christian life in the power of the Spirit.