

GOD'S PROVISION FOR AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK  
Galatians 5:16-26

Intro: My text tonight is in Galatians 5, but before I turn to that I want to remind you of a situation that the Apostle Paul found in Ephesus about 7 years before he wrote his Epistle to that church.

In Acts 19, verse 1, we are told that Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus where he found "certain disciples." And he asked them,

Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?  
(Acts 19:2).

And in the same verse we have their answer:

We have not so much as heard whether there be any  
Holy Spirit.

This was one of those special times in the history of the early church when the NT ministry of the Holy Spirit was just beginning. It is not about that that I want to direct your thinking, but to the fact that they were totally ignorant of the Holy Spirit.

These quite evidently were disciples of John because they have been baptized "unto John's baptism," as they said in Acts 19:3. Paul remedied that situation, and then stayed with them for two years teaching them.

It is quite surprising that they could have been John the Baptist's disciples and yet not have heard of the Holy Spirit because a vital part of John's message was,

I indeed baptize you with water;  
but one mightier than I cometh,  
the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose:  
he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire  
(Luke 3:16).

I have often thought of that statement in connection with the situation in the Lord's work today. Probably most Christians have at least heard about the Holy Spirit, although I have heard some speak who obviously have not recognized that the Holy Spirit is a Person, just like the Father, and just like the Son. To them He has been more of a powerful influence coming from our Lord, and/or possibly from the Father.

But there are comparatively few, in spite of the rapid growth of the Charismatic Movement, who really look upon the Holy Spirit and depend upon the Holy Spirit in accordance with the teaching of Scripture.

Nothing can convince an open-hearted Christian any quicker of the importance of the Holy Spirit than an examination of just

a few of the passages which speak of Him.

For example, in John 16:6 we see how grieved the Apostles were when the Lord spoke to them of leaving them. They still did not understand all that the Lord meant, or all that He was going to do, but He said something to them in the 7th verse of John 16 which all of us should contemplate until the truth that the Lord expressed really gets into our understanding. This is what the Lord said:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth;

It is expedient for you that I go away;

for if I go not away,

the Comforter will not come unto you;

but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

I doubt if any one of us here tonight could think of anything that would be better than to have the Lord Jesus Christ physically present with us here on the earth. And yet the Lord said that "it is expedient for you that I go away." We ask, "How could that be?" And then, as we think about our Lord's words, we also ask, "What does 'expedient' mean?"

What does it mean?

He meant this: "It will be more advantageous for you, more profitable for you, if I go away and send the Holy Spirit to you, than if I stay on the earth and leave you without the Holy Spirit."

That ought to give us something to think about. Why is it, then, that so many of us as the Lord's people can live day after day, can do whatever we may be doing by way of serving the Lord, and yet either have false ideas of what the Holy Spirit came to do, or ignore Him altogether. Why is it?

I want to suggest two answers:

- 1) One is that there is a glaring ignorance of Scripture among the Lord's people today.
- 2) The other is that we are living in a time when methods and programs of various kinds have all but replaced the Scriptures, programs for which the Holy Spirit is not necessary.

This is becoming increasingly true in our seminaries and Christian schools. It is true in the hundreds of psychological workshops and the many programs that are being sold to Christian people to enable them to do the Lord's work better. And we must assume that the promoters of such workshops believe that you can serve the Lord better with their materials and their methods than you can if all you have to rely upon is the teaching of the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Very, very few Christians today

really believe in **THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE!**

We need to ask ourselves questions like these:

- 1) Are there many different ways that we can live for the Lord, or does the Bible teach one way?
- 2) Are there many different ways of winning people to Christ, or is there one way?
- 3) Are there many different ways of getting people to understand their Bibles, or is there one way?
- 4) Are there many different ways of serving the Lord, or is there really just one way?

I am not asking if we all have to do the same thing in the same way using the same words. What I am asking is, Is there any way of living for the Lord, or winning people to Christ, or of teaching the Word, or of serving the Lord in other ways, WHERE WE CAN POSSIBLY DO WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT? IS THERE SOME METHOD THAT IS BETTER THAN TRUSTING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT? IS THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MAN BETTER THAN THE WORD OF GOD? OR IS IT STILL TRUE THAT WE DESPERATELY NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THAT NOTHING OF LASTING VALUE WILL EVER BE DONE IN THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE IF THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF IS NOT AT WORK IN US, AND THROUGH US?

And what about the movement that seems to be gaining ground among evangelicals right here in Portland where DOCTRINE is set aside for the sake of UNITY? Is this the way the Holy Spirit works?

God has given us several impossible tasks:

- 1) One of them is that of winning people to Christ.
- 2) Another is the task of teaching the Word of God to people with the limitations of the human mind.
- 3) And still another is the task of living holy lives in a world like this world is--and like to always has been since Adam's fall.

There is not one of these tasks which can be accomplished if the Holy Spirit is not at work with us.

Why was it so much better for the Lord Jesus Christ to go away, and for the Holy Spirit to come? Because now, according to the plan of God, the Holy Spirit indwells each one of us 24 hours each day, is with us all of the time, and He can and will make us His instruments for seeing the will of God done in every area of ministry where we are to work.

Now look at Gal. 5:16. Here is a very, very important command (and let us call it a command), and an equally important promise.

One reason that Paul was so greatly exercised about the

legalism in the Galatian churches was because their legalism had caused them to forget the Holy Spirit. What they needed was to learn to "walk in the Spirit."

## I. WHY?

Obviously the first reason is:

A. Because the Word of God says so.

What a lot of trouble we would save ourselves if we would only go by the Scriptures.

B. Because of the sin that is within us.

Read the context. (The flesh vs. the Spirit, and the Spirit vs. the flesh.)

C. Because of what God wants us to be.

Cf. verses 22, 23.

D. Because of the world in which we live, and because of the one who is the god of this world.

But let me ask another question, a very important question:

## II. HOW?

That is, How do we "walk in the Spirit"?

We have learned over and over again recently that to walk is a Biblical expression for the way we live. So to walk in the Spirit is to live in the Spirit. It means that we are depending upon the Holy Spirit to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, or for others. If we are walking in the Spirit, it means that we do things the Spirit's way, not our way. It means that we look to the Holy Spirit to make us His instruments. Walking in the Spirit means not that the Holy Spirit is working with us, but that we are working with the Holy Spirit--and there is a lot of difference between those two things. The Holy Spirit does not wait for us to make the plans, and then He helps us. The Holy Spirit is the One Who is in charge, and we get our guidance from Him!

Now let me give you one safeguard that many of you know, and all of us need to know. It is this: We know from other passages of Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the Author of the Word of God. And there is one thing that you can always be sure that the Holy Spirit will do: **HE WILL ALWAYS LEAD YOU ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.** It

would be just as possible for the Holy Spirit to forget or to work contrary to Scripture as it would be for God the Father to commit sin. God will never sin, nor will the Holy Spirit ever work outside of the teachings which He Himself has given us.

So if you want to know HOW to walk in the Spirit, trust Him to lead you step by step, and day by day, in a life of obedience to the Word of God. It is a life of faith and a life of obedience.

What will be the result?

### III. THE RESULT.

What is the promise? "And ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

That is our problem when it comes to living a life that is pleasing to God. Or taking a step before that: that is our problem when it come to being what the Lord wants us to be: "the lust of the flesh." That is a power far too strong for any person to conquer. That is where modern psychology falls flat on its face.

You see, walking in Scripture does not just mean doing outwardly the things we ought to do. A hypocrite can sometimes do a fairly good job of pretending. Walking in Scripture means being and doing. That is the reason it is impossible to walk in the Spirit until you have been born by the Spirit. The new birth must precede a new walk.

I think that most of you have heard me talk about a double negative in the Greek language. We have a double negative in Gal. 5:16. A literal translation would go something like this: "Keep on walking in the Spirit, and you will not not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

What did Paul mean by "no, no," or "not, not"?

He meant to intensify that negative promise. It means not at all, by no means, surely not, in no wise, according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon (p. 461). Arndt and Gingrich say in their Lexicon that this is "the most decisive way of negating something in the future" (p. 519). And that is what Paul was doing. He was saying that the child of God who walks in the Spirit will not be living a life in which he is satisfying the lusts of his flesh. This is what sinners need to know, but this is what Christians need to know. I repeat: There is a woeful ignorance today and neglect of the Holy Spirit

among those of us who claim to be the people of God.

Concl: What is this impossible task that I have been thinking about tonight?

It is the task of living for the Lord in a world like this, being the kind of people we are--sinners saved by grace, to be sure, but saved sinners who still have the flesh within.

Have you been ignoring the Holy Spirit in your life? Have you been seeking His blessing so you can be what the Lord wants you to be, and what you want to be? Or are you struggling with the problems we all have, but doing it on your own? By the grace of God, now is the time to change your ways so that the promise of God here in Gal. 5:16 can become a reality in your life.