

HAVING BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT
August 27, 2017 Morning Service
Galatians 3:15

Often it's said that Charles Haddon Spurgeon was the most powerful if not the greatest preacher that ever preached the gospel in the English language. I don't know if that's true but he certainly was magnificent. I had the joy last year, a year ago this month, being at Spurgeon's tabernacle and seeing that great place where he preached. I read him about every week now, a sermon or a portion of one. I found this week an illustration from his life that really lays over on this third chapter of Galatians and I think really grips it. Spurgeon said he was visiting one afternoon to a very poor lady's house. She had passed the age where she could be active working and now she just lived in a little hovel of a poor place, loving Jesus, and waiting for her King to come get her.

The pastor said he visited and had a good visit. As he was leaving he said he noticed on the wall a little framed certificate. He asked her what it was and she said, "Well I'm not certain. Pastor, you know, I don't read real well but I worked for many years for a gentleman cooking, cleaning, and taking care of things at the home where he was. When he died they gave me this certificate and placed it on the wall. I'm not really certain, just knowing it was something I wanted to keep." The pastor looked at it and he said, "You don't understand. This man left everything he has to you. He's left the inheritance of all of his worldly goods which was a great sum to you." He took it to the bank and there they said, "Yes, we've been wondering about this account."

She did not realize what she possessed and I fear that we as the church when it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we do not realize what we possess and who possesses us. Paul speaks to that in Galatians 3, beginning in verse 1 where he says this and he asks several questions. *You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?*¹

Having begun in the Spirit, are you so foolish to think that your spiritual life can be perfected in the flesh? Beginning in the Spirit, perfected in the flesh. Who bewitched you? Who made you believe such foolish logic? Did it come by law or did it come by faith? If you started by faith you persist by faith. If your life begins in the Spirit, it goes on in the Spirit.

That lady who possessed wealth not knowing it. Sometimes I fear the church possesses the power of God through the third person of the trinity and we really do not

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understand and know exactly who lives within us. God has called the church to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. But for the most part we are living in the power of human flesh, of self-will, self-energy, and self-effort. You see, God wants you to be a living vessel in whom the power of the Holy Spirit is to be made manifest every hour and every moment of your life and He will enable you for such. Having begun in the Spirit we tend, all of us, to try to be perfected, to be matured, to grow up in the flesh but we can't do it. Having started in the Spirit, if you're going to come to maturation there must be a continuation of the Spirit life, not the perfection of the flesh.

So with that in mind and Paul's questions I want to just simply share four thoughts, principled thoughts and ask you some questions as Paul has asked all of us and then come to an invitation where I'm going to ask you to come down this aisle and get saved, to trust Christ. You say, "Preacher, I don't know if I can." Then I'm going to ask you to go to the foyer, to go to those tables we call Next Step Tables. You can do it there. You can do it here. Some of you to come and put your life in this church. He'll do it here, He'll do it there, but I want you to think not so much about an external as an internal today.

Four things. First of all, I just simply want to talk about the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Holy Spirit. Having begun in the Spirit. That's how you get saved, friend. It's salvation. It's a spiritual birth. You see, without the Spirit you are none of His. If you have not the Spirit, you're not a child of God. Everybody that's a child of God started with a spiritual birth. Now you've all been born of the flesh. I can tell that by looking at you. We all are of the flesh. We are physical. But have you then been born a second time of the Spirit? When you are born of the Spirit, that's when you receive the Holy Spirit.

Now, you see, Thessalonians says that you are body, soul, and Spirit. Paul prays for you to be sanctified of body, soul, and Spirit. We are physical. We got that. That's us. That's our physical wellbeing. Secondly, we are soulish, we are mind. We are mind, will, and emotion. We think, we choose, we feel. When you come into this world you get all of that. As soon as they lay you up on your mother's chest, abdomen, and they pick you up and they suction you out and they whack you on one part of your body, we know you're alive because you're drawing air and making racket. Yes, sir, but you are dead in your spirit. We are all dead in trespass and sin. You've been alive physically because you were born. You're alive psychologically when you come into this world but you are dead in your spirit. You must be born again. My children taught me that. My grandchildren are now teaching me that.

Little Kathryn, she's 4 ½. I sent her a card this week with a little money in it. She called me and said, "Poppa, thank you. I'm going to buy something really special." I said, "Well you do that. That's good." Then her parents gave her a tithing lesson. She said, "You mean I have to give it away? If I give it all in the church I can't buy something special." They said, "Well you don't have to give it all. You give a tithe. You give a tenth." She wasn't having that. They said, "Tomorrow when you go to big church you just put in what you want to give the Lord." She said, "I think I'll stay down in the

preschool tomorrow during church.” That’s where she is right now. She’s down there in the preschool.

You see, she’s not been born of the Spirit. She’s alive physically. Her mind, will, and emotion is working great. She’s got all of that but she does not see the spiritual sense that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. One day we pray that the Spirit of God draws her, she hears, she believes, and that she is raised from the dead.

As my pastor used to tell us and you’ve seen me share that illustration again and again. He used to lay his arm up on the pulpit and he’d say, “When God saves us He raises us from a dead level to a living perpendicular.” All the old people say Amen. I didn’t know what perpendicular meant. I’m sitting back there dead level lost. God’ll raise you to a living perpendicular. I said, “What is that?” Well I had to go to school to find out what perpendicular was. When God saved me He raised me up to a living perpendicular. That’s what God does when He saves you. He comes and in your spirit He moves in and you are literally raised from the spiritual death that you have from Adam and God saves you. Glory be to His name. That’s when you receive the Holy Spirit. If you don’t have the Spirit, you’re none of His.

So I want to ask you this morning. Do you have the Holy Spirit? If you’re saved, you do. We’ve not understood this. Somehow we think we get it then and we get saved by the Spirit. Then, okay, leave that alone and now let’s go over here to the flesh. No, no, friend. You’re not perfected by the flesh. You’re perfected. You’re matured in the spiritual walk.

The receiving of the Holy Spirit. Secondly is what I call the neglecting, neglecting the Holy Spirit. Do you believe that you can receive and begin by the Spirit but then be perfected by the flesh? No. You see, the flesh is seeking God in an external observance rather than in the inner man. A lot of people when they get saved they cry out to God. They squall and holler and get saved and say, “O God.” They’ll do anything for Jesus to save them and then they rise up and begin to think that external observances will do what only the Spirit can do in an internal way. Baptism. Thank God for it. For those that were baptized today, oh I had reminders when that sweet, little girl’s foot came up.

I used to baptize over there – that’s the reason we have that baptizing contraption that I invented up there now. I baptized a guy 6’6” over in Passmore Hall one time. I baptized him and he wore red socks. I put him under the water and both socks came up. Man, it was like flags waving over there. The place went crazy laughing. Embarrassed him and me. You never know, as Jon said.

Let me tell you, that external observance, you ought to do it but that is not – It’s your submission of the inner man that grows you. It’s not external observance. Some people take the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. We ought to take the Lord’s Supper but I’m telling you, those external observances will not do what the Spirit of God and God alone can do in the inner man. I Corinthians 3. I Corinthians 3:1. Listen to the word of

God. I Corinthians 3:1. *And I, brethren [Paul said], could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.* The reason I couldn't talk to you as grown spiritual men is because you're in the flesh and your flesh is just seeking the external rather than the internal.

We receive the Holy Spirit. Secondly, there's the neglecting of the Spirit. Thirdly, there's the lacking of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Lacking the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Now you've got your Bible open to Galatians 3. If you've got your Bible open to Galatians 3 say Amen. Alright. Now take it and turn two pages to Galatians 5 for most of you. Others it'll just be you've got to run your finger across and it'll go over to Galatians 5. Your iPad or your phone or whatever you've got. Galatians 5. I'll begin read in verse 16. This won't come up on the screen so you find it in your Bible. Galatians 5. Now Paul begins to deal with this issue. Now here we go. Galatians 5:16.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. [Now there it is in a nutshell. Walk in the Spirit and you don't carry out the desire of the flesh.] *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; [they oppose one another] for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident [and then he lists them], which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these [there are others], of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [Those are fleshly people.] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Look at verse 24. Read it one more time. *Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*

Listen to me, friends. Listen. The flesh, the Spirit sets itself at opposition and don't be so foolish as to think you can begin in the Spirit and be perfected in the flesh but the church does it so much. Saved by grace, Jesus alone, the Spirit, and then go do the best you can. No, friend, don't do the best you can. You've got to let Jesus do His best through you but you've got to get over you. Look at verse 24. Verse 24 says it as crystal clear as it can. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have improved the flesh? No. Taught the flesh? No. Trained the flesh? No. What did they do? They crucified it.

Your flesh does not need training. Your flesh does not need improvement. Your flesh needs to be slain. Dead to yourself. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me, Paul said in that classic passage in Galatians 2:20.

It's the exchanged life. It's the Spirit filled life. Some call it the deeper life, the higher life. It's the Jesus life. It's the Spirit life.

What makes the church different than any other organization? It's a spiritual organization. It's the inner man. Romans chapter 8, verse 1 and 2. Paul said it this way: *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* Amen. There is a law of the spirit and there is a law of sin and death. You've got to decide which law you're going to be under. Don't let someone bewitch you to think you can just do the best you can do. This is a spiritual journey. It is the inner man.

So we see that we receive the Spirit when we're saved but if we're not careful we'll neglect the Spirit and therefore we will not have the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace. Just begin with the first trilogy. Love. You have trouble loving anybody? There's some people it's harder to love than others. Amen. Why sure we know it's the truth. Joy. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost says the King James Version. That's what the kingdom is. Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Not joy in the flesh. A lot of things give you joy in the flesh but I'm telling you, it's joy in the Holy Spirit. It's the deep inner man. That's where your joy comes from. Love, joy, peace that passes all worldly, all fleshly understanding.

Sometimes we lack the fruit of the Spirit. We receive it but if we're not careful we neglect it. Then we'll lack but now I want to show you. You say, "Pastor, how in the world do we walk in the Spirit life?" Well there's a key word and that word is yielding to the Holy Spirit. We must come to the place of yielding. The Lord loves to fill His children with the Holy Spirit. It's a command in Ephesians 5:18 to be ye filled. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Look in Ephesians 3:14 and 15 where the word of God says: *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you* [Now look at this. Look at it. It's on the screen. He would grant you], *according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through* [The flesh? No.] *His Spirit in the* [Outer man? No, no. You're strengthened in the Spirit in the] *inner man.* The Spirit of God leads us to faith by driving us out of the self-confidence. Listen to me one more time. The Spirit of God leads us to faith by driving us out of self-confidence.

Now, beloved, you're looking right here at Grade A flesh. It's not the B team standing up here, alright? It's Grade A flesh. I've been to school. I've got a high school diploma. I've been to junior college. I've got a diploma. As a matter of fact, I got the most outstanding student award my sophomore year in junior college. I've got the trophy at home. It was a lean year at Northeast Junior College but the best we had, you're looking at him. Off to Samford University. Nobody in my family had ever gotten a college degree. I've got one of those. I went off to Southwestern. I got a Master's Degree. Shoot, I hung around and got a Doctor of Ministry degree.

I'm not stupid. I'm not. Two people agree with me. Amen. You see, I'm not the sharpest guy but I've honed my sword. I've tried to take my craft and do it and I've worked hard as I know how to work. But let me let you in on something. I've done this so long. Wayne will tell you. It's the truth. I've done this so long I can come preach to you next Sunday and never pray, not one minute. I can just throw the Bible open and say I'll take that text right there. I know enough expositional theological training to make a sermon, throw a little story in over here. I can move you intellectually. Not all of you but some of you.

Whenever I fall into that I always remember T.P. Germany. T.P. Germany was a deacon at a church. Not my home church but he came to my ordination. Brother T.P. was missing a finger. He put his arm around me at that ordination. He said, "Young man, I want to tell you something. Don't you ever forget this." I said, "Yes, sir, Brother Germany." He said, "Just remember. You got your burning before you got your learning." I said, "What?" He said, "You got the fire of the Holy Ghost before you ever get a diploma. Don't let the diploma lead you to forget the fire of the Holy Ghost." He said, "You got your burning before you got your learning." He said, "Now go to school." He said, "We have an ample supply of stupid preachers. We don't need any more. You need to go learn all you can learn and get it in your mind. Throw it out the window and go back and get on your face and say, 'O God, set my soul afire.'"

It's not either/or but I'm just telling you, the better your flesh becomes – you see, Southern Baptists used to do a better job with evangelism when we were a bunch of ignorant knot heads and now we know so much that we think we can plan it and figure it out. Who bewitched you to think that you could begin in the Spirit and be perfected in the flesh?

The last few days I've been coming over here early and walking around our campus. I walk outside and then I come inside and walk. I prayed today. I said, "Lord God, if you ever get in all this stuff we've got we're liable to have revival." It's easy to get caught up in external excellence and forget the internal power of the Holy Spirit of God. We must yield and come to the end of our self-confidence. I'm not telling you to throw away all your – you heard me say balance but it's just easy, the smarter you get the less you depend on the Spirit of God. Yes, sir.

You know God in a minute what He can do. You take old Saul of Tarsus. He's walking down the road. He's mean as hell. He is absolutely foaming blood and killing the church in persecution and the Spirit of God strikes him. In one minute he's cursing Jesus and killing the church and the very next breath he's saying, "Yes, Lord, speak." That's what God can do.

Alright now. I have entered into the conclusion of the sermon. Alright? So you know I've got an outline. I want everyone in here. I don't want anybody to leave. I want you to stand up. I want everybody to stand. You're going to stand up for just a few minutes because I want you to stand during this. We're not over. This is not time to grab your coat and run to the car. We have now entered the conclusion of the sermon.

That's a real part. In the conclusion I want to ask you three questions. I want to ask us all three questions. I want you to seriously consider these.

Number one. Have you been born of the Spirit? Have you been born of the Spirit? That's your salvation. That's your spiritual birthday. I didn't ask you if you were a member of Olive Baptist Church. I didn't ask you if you've been baptized. I didn't ask you if you joined a church. I asked you, have you been born of the Spirit? That is a moment in time when God stepped out of heaven and stepped into your inner man. He forgave your sin and He raised you from a dead level to a living perpendicular. You probably didn't understand everything that happened to you then but your sins were wiped away and God received you into the family. No matter what you did, God cast it as far as the east is from the west and He put His self, His Spirit within you. Have you been born of the Spirit?

Friend, if you have never been born of the Spirit I'm begging you. When Jon sings in a minute and I stand here I want you to come from wherever you are and join me. I want to talk to you this morning. One of our encouragers. After this service, I want you to go to one of those tables out there at next steps and I want you to talk to somebody so you can be born of the Spirit, saved.

Question number two. If you have been born of the Spirit, are you right now living under the authority and the power of the Spirit? Are you living under His authority? I'm going to tell you what happens when you begin to live under God's authority and power. You begin to obey what He says to do. For some of you that's as easy as joining this church and putting your membership here. You say, "I don't hear the Spirit of God." Well then don't come but if God's told you this is where you ought to be then you ought to come. Some of you it has to do with finance. For some of you it has to do with forgiving a brother or sister. For some of you it has to do with speaking up in a difficult circumstance and bringing the name of Christ. For some students it's going to mean standing for the Lord. We're living in a day where public education gets harder and harder for students as well as faculty.

You saw where the football coach in Bremerton, Washington was fired and then continued to be this week. All he did was after every game he would go to the 50-yard line and kneel down. They fired him. Some people say, "Why didn't he just quit?" Well that might be your counsel but if the Holy Ghost told him not to quit, he didn't have any choice. Well he had a choice but it was a bad choice. I don't know what God said to do or not do but that was simply being obedient. Are you living under...?

I had a deal. I've been wrestling with it for two months. I took action on it this week. I really believe I got clarity and I knew my wife wouldn't like it. So I did it, waited two days, and told her. I did. I just did it when what I sensed was the right time. I said, "Honey, I want you to know this is the action I've taken." She said, "Well, that doesn't just thrill me but if God told you that's what you ought to do then I'm in submission to my husband and our family and that certainly is under biblical guidelines. You've done the

right thing.” It was one of the tougher decisions I’ve ever made in my life. I believe God’ll get great fruit from it but I heard God.

Are you living under the power of the Holy Spirit? I’m not talking about living in perfection. I don’t live in perfection. I wrestled with that but when you know what God’s told you to do can you just say okay? As I’m standing here right now, when I know what I’m supposed to do, I do it.

Number three. If you’re not walking under the obedience of God, number three, are you willing this Sunday morning to be consecrated unto Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Are you willing to say I surrender all? What a great song the choir did. I love that old hymn. Were the whole realm of nature mine, it would be a present far too small to give back. He doesn’t ask for all of nature. He’s just asking for all of you. Are you willing to be consecrated unto the Lord? If you’ve never been spiritually born I want you to come get saved. Are you willing to live under the power of the Holy Spirit in obedience?

There was a girl that came in the first service and I saw her standing over here and my mouth just fell open. I couldn’t believe she came forward. I’ve been praying for her. Some of her family and I have been praying for her. She said, “My family’s not here today.” I said, “I know. I know where they are.” She said, “I was coming to church to this morning and I told the Lord, ‘I’m ready to get serious. I’m going to recommit my life to Christ.’ I walked in here and you preached that sermon.” She said, “I thought, I can’t go down there. They’re just going to think I’m playing games.” She said, “But, pastor, God spoke to me early this morning. I’ve been in the far country and I’m coming under the authority of God today.” Wow. I walked right up there and sent a text to her family members. I said, “While you were away, this is what happened this morning.”

Are you willing to be consecrated? Death to self. Oh, self dies hard, doesn’t it? It likes to rear its head. It says, “I’m right.” I’m not asking if you’re right. I’m asking you if you’re obedient. I talked with a family this week about finding a church. I told some people. They said, “Pastor, I don’t know. I don’t know if you want to do that or not.” They said, “Those folks said the first time they get their feelings hurt or you don’t do something they’ll just complain and bellyache. You may not want them to be around.” I said, “They’ll fit right in with our crowd.” “I didn’t get my way.”

Death to self. There’s a way to make an appeal about something that’s wrong but it’s not about you. When you’re dead to you, all is well. I am crucified with Christ. I said it when I was 17 the first time and then we’ll sing. “Lord, I’ll go anywhere, I’ll do anything, I’ll give up anybody, give up anything, Lord, to be in the center of Your will.” That was easy to pray at 17. I didn’t have anything, I’d never been anywhere, I hadn’t done nothing. But now I pray that prayer this morning. “Lord, I’ll go anywhere.” Really? “I’ll do anything.” Really? “I’ll give up anybody, give up anything in order to be in the center of God’s will.” That’s where you’ve got to be. You’ve got to lay that on the altar of consecration. Self must be slain for the Spirit to rule.