

WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

Leader pages on pp. 124-127

THE POINT:
THE HOLY SPIRIT
LEADS US TO DISPLAY
THE FRUIT OF GODLY
CHARACTER.

GALATIANS 5:16-25

¹⁶ I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

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¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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MEMORY VERSE

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²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.** 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 keep in step with the Spirit.

KEYWORDS

Desire (v. 16)—Strong emotion or craving. This was the reason it was necessary to consciously walk by the Spirit in faith (v. 5).

Flesh (v. 16, et al)—Usually understood as the sinful nature of mankind that continues even after a person becomes a Christian.

Works of the flesh (v. 19)—This type of behavior as a pattern of life is enough to cause a person not to inherit the kingdom of God.

Passions and desires (v. 24)—Emotions that drive the flesh. The logical way to live is follow the Spirit and not the flesh.

WHAT QUALITIES DEFINE THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE?

It is easy to do! I know I have done it! You may be asking, “Done what?” You may have gone walking at the park, without trusting Him. The older I get my body reminds me that I need Him. Sometimes my feet may hurt, at other times it is one of my knees, and every now and then my back aches. It is at those times I remember that I need the Lord to walk with me!

Maybe you grew up in church listening to the older saints sing, “Walk with me, Lord! Walk with me, Lord! While I’m on this tedious journey, I need Jesus, to walk with me!”¹² From the simple to the complex, from the easy to the hard, from the mundane to the important, I need the Lord to walk with me! Why? Outside the physical limitations all of us will eventually experience, spiritually we need someone to help us overcome the flesh, the world, and the devil.

As we study Paul’s instructions to the churches in Galatia, remember it is easy to think you can do it by yourself or seek to prove to others that you can do it. As saints, let’s not forget our walking partner because it is easy to do.

We Put Aside Fleshly Desires

// Galatians 5:16-18

The key to godly character is to “walk by the Spirit.” Walking is often used as a metaphor for the Christian life. So walking by the Spirit suggests a life lived in communion with God through the Holy Spirit. As the disciples once walked with Jesus, now all believers can walk with Him through the Spirit.

Paul used four parallel figures of speech in Galatians 5. Just as we are to “walk in the Spirit,” we are to be “led by the Spirit,” “live by the Spirit” (v. 25), and “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25). The emphasis is on listening to the Spirit and following His direction. In contrast to strictly following the Jewish law, Paul emphasized having a relationship that motivates us to follow the Holy Spirit.

Only by walking in the Spirit can we hope to overcome “the desire of the flesh.” By flesh Paul meant more than the physical body. Paul used the word frequently in his writings to reference



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the sinful nature into which we are born (Rom. 7:5,18; 8:3-9; Gal. 3:3).

Consequently, the “flesh . . . and the Spirit” are at war within the believer. The desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are not merely different, they “are opposed to each other”—they are incompatible. The flesh will always lead us to sin, but the Spirit leads us to forsake sin and pursue the purity to which God has called us.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DAY-TO-DAY BATTLE BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT?

The last phrase in verse 17, “you don’t do what you want,” is interpreted by some to mean that, if you want to follow the desires of the flesh, the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do so. However, it’s best to interpret this from the perspective that you want to do what God desires, but your flesh entices you to fail, resulting in sin.

Paul wanted believers to know that we will continue to struggle with sin. As long as we live in this world, we will not be finished with sin. We will not have victory in the war with sin because we tried harder to control our flesh, but because of our life in the Spirit. It’s only when we are “led by the Spirit” that we avoid the failure of sin.

We Practice a New Lifestyle

// Galatians 5:19-21

Paul illustrated the difference between the flesh and the Spirit by offering lists of those actions and attitudes that characterize each. He began with “the works of the flesh” and noted that these works “are obvious.” Unfortunately, the “obvious” nature of sin is not always recognized in our society. We can divide these works of the flesh into five groups.

- **Sexual sins.** These included “sexual immorality, moral impurity, [and] promiscuity.” Sexual immorality is a general term referring to any illicit sexual activity. The word translated moral impurity literally means “unclean” or “dirty.” Paul used it to refer to moral filth. The word translated promiscuity can also be translated as “sensuality” or “lewdness.” Paul uses the three terms together to sum



DIGGING DEEPER SANCTIFICATION OF THE BELIEVER

Often when Christians think about being sanctified, they only look at the end results, which is a change in behavior. But sanctification involves the total person. The apostle Paul makes it clear that Christians need to think differently. It is seen in his prayers for increasing knowledge (Col. 1:10) and for our minds to be renewed (Rom. 12:2). Yet, even knowing what is right does not guarantee a change in behavior. A change of passions is also necessary. We must love the activities, things, and people God loves and hate sin like He does (Ps. 45:7). Remember John’s command “do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). Sanctification changes a saint’s will, volition, or desires. Paul states that God works in believers “to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

What is our responsibility in the sanctification process?



up the whole realm of sexual sins from premarital sex to adultery to pornography to lustful thoughts.

- **Spiritual infidelity.** When people commit “idolatry” and “sorcery,” they are looking to other things as their gods. Idolatry involved the worship of “gods” made by human hands. But Paul also identified greed as idolatry (Col. 3:5). Idolatry occurs when we place anything before God.
- **Relational sins.** These are sins seen in our relationships: “hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger.” Each of these sins creates tension with others, erects barriers between people, and destroys relationships.
- **Sins against the community.** These sins include improper leadership and divisions between people. Paul began with “selfish ambitions.” Ambition is not necessarily a bad thing, but it becomes so when personal drive or desires are placed before the needs of others. “Dissensions” and “factions” are two ways of dividing the community. “Envy” is also disruptive to the community.
- **Sins of decadence.** Paul warned against “drunkenness” and “carousing.” A lifestyle

of indulgence, including drinking and boisterous behavior, is inconsistent with the life of a Christian.

Paul concluded with one more caution against “anything similar” to stress that his list was not exhaustive. This list paints a clear picture of what sin looks like. When Paul said, “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God,” he identified in no uncertain terms the end result of “the works of the flesh.”

WHAT ARE SOME SIDE EFFECTS OF FOLLOWING SINFUL DESIRES?

We Are Passionate about the New Life // Galatians 5:22-25

We do not become godly by our efforts. It is the Holy Spirit who produces godly character in the lives of believers. As we pursue life in the Spirit, He grows fruit in our lives that reflect the character of our Father. Here we will look at the nine fruit “out of order,” but rather, we will lift them up in light of the five categories of sin we saw in verses 19-21.

The flesh seduces us to sexual immorality, but the Spirit produces “self-control.” The self-controlled person governs his passions, including sexual desires and compulsions in all areas of life.

The flesh tempts us to spiritual infidelity, but the Holy Spirit produces “faithfulness.” While Paul often used faith to refer to our trust, in this context, he was referring to our fidelity and loyalty to Christ.

The flesh entices us to relational sins of jealousy, strife, and anger, but the Spirit produces “love,” “patience,” and “kindness.” The Spirit empowers us to love as God loves. Patience means we are not easily offended by others. Kindness is the act of treating others as we want to be treated.

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The flesh lures us to sins against the community like selfish ambitions and dissensions, but the Spirit produces “peace.” Peace is much more than the absence of conflict. It involves inner contentment and tranquility between people.

The flesh calls us to decadent sins of drunkenness and carousing, but the Spirit produces “joy,” “goodness,” and “gentleness.” Joy is a sense of delight that comes from knowing God.

WHICH FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT WOULD YOU LIKE GOD TO INCREASE IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?

A group called the Judaizers sought to make all Christians live and act like Jews, placing the law on the backs of believers. In Christ, we are set free from the law, and Paul reminded us that, when it comes to the fruit of Holy Spirit, “the law is not against such things.” Clearly, the law was never opposed to traits like joy or goodness. When we walk in the Spirit, we naturally live as God desires. The law cannot make us good, but the Spirit dwelling in us has the power to change us.

DID YOU KNOW?

Galatians 5:22-23 states that the fruit of the Spirit is made up of nine qualities. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” As believers we should be exhibiting these qualities daily. One of the qualities is temperance. Temperance means we practice restraint. It will keep us from being complainers and grumblers, in obedience to Philippians 2:14, which states we should do everything without grumbling and complaining. When others see us; temperance should be evident in our lives. When we experience delays in traffic, long lines, difficult co-workers, unappreciative family members, and other situations, we must practice restraint—temperance. We would be great witnesses for Christ when others see how we respond in difficult situations. Let’s shine so that others can see Christians in a positive light. Let us walk and live in the Spirit.

How can believers cultivate temperance and other spiritual qualities?

LIVE IT

How can we more readily portray the fruit of the Spirit as a witness to Christ?

People may not like you because of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but your desires, behavior, and character should be above reproach. Are you a complainer and demanding your rights (Phil. 2:14-15)? Are your coworkers scared to say anything to you? Christians are called to shine as lights, but you cannot shine covered with sinful practices. Start today to represent Christ more and more each day.

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- **Acknowledge your sins:** It is time for Christians to remove the spiritual masks and acknowledge their transgressions. Find mature saints of the same gender and confess your faults one to another.
- **Make a covenant:** Job said that he “made a covenant with my eyes. Why then should I look upon a young woman” (31:1). Make a covenant and share it with those who will hold you accountable.
- **Put off and put on:** Change your clothes. Remove the sinful clothing of the flesh and put on the new clothes of the Spirit.

DAILY READINGS

1. IN CONFLICT // GALATIANS 5:16-17

In the world today, there are countries at war, families in conflict, and even churches at odds; yet Mark 3:25 states, "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." Houses are constructed with beams that support walls, but if these beams are placed at conflicting angles the house will eventually collapse. Beams are stronger together. Consider too, there is a conflict going on inside every believer. It is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. To be victorious we must choose to walk in fellowship with the Spirit. And when we stand with other believers, we can easily overcome the temptations of the flesh.

Walking with the Spirit and standing with others will give us power over the flesh.

2. NOT UNDER THE LAW // ROMANS 6:15

Believers are no longer under the law but under grace. When under the law, there were many restricted behaviors and various sacrifices that were necessary to atone for sins. But when Christ became the ultimate atoning sacrifice for sin, believers are no longer bound by the law. We have been given the gift of God's grace. The grace of God does not mean we are free to sin. Roman 6:15, states "What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Absolutely not." Paul strongly helped us to understand that we will not want to sin because of the goodness of God.

Praise God for the gift of His grace that we don't deserve.

3. FLESHLY LIVING // ROMANS 8:13

To live by the flesh means allowing worldly desires to take precedence in decision making and actions. People's natural inclination to accommodate the flesh can be seen in babies who want service on demand. A review of the list of fleshly behaviors in Galatians 5:19-21 reveals that these acts are

evident all around us. And Romans 8:13 informs us that practicing them will result in death. Not only is physical death at stake, but spiritual death is also at risk. That means those who practice these behaviors will be separated eternally from God.

We should allow God to use us daily to guide people from death to life through Christ.

4. EVIDENCE OF FRUIT // GALATIANS 5:22-23

As the Holy Spirit resides within us, others should see evidence of His presence by the way we live. A snail leaves a slimy trail wherever it goes. Christians, like the snail, need to leave a trail of goodness, which depicts the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Do people see these traits in your life? If not, what will you do to change that? No matter where you are and what you are doing, the world should be able to see spiritual fruit. It is a way of letting your light shine so that others will glorify God

Walk close to God through prayer and the spiritual fruit of your life will shine through.

5. IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT // GALATIANS 5:24-25

Jobs, schools, bands, and the military all require that people who are part of them be in step or adhere to the regulations that govern those organizations. In the same way, believers are expected to walk in step (agreement) with the Holy Spirit. Being in step with the Spirit requires aligning ourselves with the Word of God. When believers are out of step, that means we are moving in the opposite direction from our Guide. But God has provided a way to be restored. Confession and repentance are necessary to restore fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Glenn Burleigh's song, "Order My Steps," captures the idea of walking in step with the Holy Spirit.

As believers, let us continuously strive to stay in step with the Holy Spirit.