

Walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–26)

BIG IDEA: *Spiritual maturity is not achieved through human effort alone but through walking in step with the Holy Spirit, who transforms our character.*

WHAT IS TRUE & WHAT TO DO: The Christian life is a real battle, but not a hopeless one. The flesh is real, but the Spirit is stronger. Spiritual maturity does not come from legalism, self-effort, or pretending the struggle is not there. It comes through walking by the Spirit. Christ gives His Spirit to dwell within believers so that we may grow in holiness and increasingly reflect Christ's character. Though the Christian life is a daily battle between the flesh and the Spirit, **remember** that God has not left us to fight in our own strength. You should **identify** where your flesh still dominates. **Depend** daily on the Holy Spirit. **Put to death** the works of the flesh and **pursue** the fruit of the Spirit in every aspect of ordinary life.

CONTEXT: Galatians is a letter written to churches being troubled by false teaching. Some were being told that spiritual maturity came through law-keeping, especially by taking on Jewish ceremonial practices. Paul writes to defend the gospel of grace and to make clear that believers are justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the law. But Paul is equally clear that grace does not lead to sinful living. Freedom in Christ is not freedom to indulge the flesh. In Galatians 5, Paul has just warned believers not to use their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but to serve one another through love. So when we come to verses 16–26, Paul is showing how the Christian life is actually lived: not by the flesh, not by legalism, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is yet another mark of a mature believer.

1. WALKING BY THE SPIRIT IS THE BELIEVER'S DAILY CALL (vv. 16–18)

- A. **The command is clear: "Walk by the Spirit" (v. 16)**
- "Walk" refers to daily conduct and way of life.
 - The Christian life is not passive. We should be intentional in our walk w/Christ.
 - Believers are called to live in daily dependence on the Holy Spirit.
- B. **The promise is strong: the Holy Spirit gives victory over the flesh (v. 16)**
- "You will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh."
 - Victory does not come from self-effort alone.
 - God gives His Holy Spirit to set sinners free from the rule of sinful desires.
- C. **The conflict is real: the flesh and the Holy Spirit are opposed (v. 17)**
- The Christian life includes real inner conflict.
 - The flesh pulls one way; the Holy Spirit pulls another.
 - This battle explains why the Christian life often feels difficult.
- D. **The Holy Spirit leads believers beyond legalism (v. 18)**
- "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."
 - Paul is not dismissing holiness. Holiness is not produced by law-keeping alone.
 - The Holy Spirit changes believers from the inside out.
- E. **Application**
- Begin the day consciously depending on the Holy Spirit.
 - Do not be surprised by the battle, but do not surrender to it.
 - Stop trying to grow only by willpower; walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

2. THE FLESH PRODUCES DESTRUCTION, BUT THE SPIRIT PRODUCES CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (vv. 19–23)

- A. **The works of the flesh are obvious, and Paul lists them (vv. 19–21)**
- Sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar.
 - Some sins are public and scandalous. Others are more socially acceptable, but still deeply sinful.

B. The warning is serious: the flesh is not to be indulged (v. 21)

- Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- Paul is warning against a life dominated by the flesh.
- A life ruled by sin reveals a heart not genuinely transformed by grace. In other words, when sin is not just present but reigning—when a person consistently lives in it, excuses it, defends it, and shows no real repentance—that pattern calls their profession into question. Christians do still struggle with sin, sometimes grievously, but the difference is that a born-again person cannot live comfortably under sin's rule forever.

C. The fruit of the Spirit is the Spirit's work in us (vv. 22–23)

- The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Paul says "fruit," singular, stressing a unified Christlike character. The flesh produces "works"; the Spirit yields "fruit."

D. The fruit of the Spirit reflects the character of Christ

- Every part of this fruit is perfectly seen in Jesus. The Spirit is not merely making us nicer people. He is forming Christlike character in us.

E. Application: Identify where the flesh still dominates (anger, lust, envy, selfish ambition, bitterness, division). Do not only ask, "What sin am I avoiding?" Ask, "What Christlike fruit is growing in me?"

3. THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST HAVE CRUCIFIED THE FLESH (v. 24)

A. Union with Christ means a decisive break with the flesh

- The flesh is still present, but it is no longer master. Believers are no longer *slaves* to sinful desires. They may sin, but they're not enslaved to it.

B. The cross changes how we think about sin

- The old life has been judged in Christ. The Christian life is not about making peace with sin. It is about taking sides against it.

C. Crucifixion is painful but decisive

- Paul uses strong language on purpose. Sin is not to be managed politely, but put to death. We must deal seriously with what Christ died to free us from.

D. Application: Stop saying, "That's just who I am." Stop treating sin as inevitable and untouchable. Put sin to death decisively: cut off what feeds it, confess it honestly, turn from it seriously, seek help where needed

4. THOSE WHO LIVE BY THE SPIRIT MUST WALK BY THE SPIRIT (VV. 25–26)

A. The Spirit who gives life must also direct our steps (v. 25)

- The Spirit is not only the source of life but the guide for daily living.
- The Christian life must match the Spirit's work within us.

B. Walking by the Spirit requires ongoing alignment (Walk = Talk)

- "Keep in step" suggests consistency and intentionality. Spiritual maturity is not occasional enthusiasm. It is a daily, ongoing submission to the Spirit's guidance.

C. The Spirit-led life is humble and relationally healthy (v. 26)

- Paul warns against conceit, provoking one another, and envying one another. Spirituality is revealed in everyday relationships. Pride, comparison, and division are marks of the flesh, not the Holy Spirit.

D. Application: Ask: Am I keeping in step with the Spirit daily? Am I proud or teachable? Am I provoking others unnecessarily? Am I envious of others' gifts, blessings, or opportunities? Let the Spirit shape not only your private life, but your relationships. The Spirit calls believers to daily dependence. The flesh produces destruction. The Spirit produces Christlike fruit. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. Those who live by the Spirit must walk by the Spirit.