



“The Prohibitions in the Gospel”

Galatians 5:16-18

Theme: Christians are enabled to live uprightly by means of the influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

Introduction:

I. THE ADMONITION RE: THE SPIRIT – **5:16A**

A. The Command re: the Spirit

1. The ability to live the Christian life is based upon something other than human effort and accomplishment.
2. When a person fails to know the power of God’s Spirit because of their indulgence in their flesh, the default response is to seek to recover a sense of spirituality through legalistic performance and conformity.
3. In this section of Galatians, Paul is arguing for the way that the Gospel works itself out practically in a person’s life.
4. It is not through putting oneself under the bondage of the Law – but rather the blessing of the Spirit of God using the Word of God to direct one’s life – cp. v. 5.
5. Now Paul comes to the essence of his point – an admonition re: the Holy Spirit and our obligation to rely upon the resource provided by God whereby we can live supernatural lives – *“But I say, walk by the Spirit ...”*
6. *“walk[ing] by the Spirit”* is the alternative to living by the Law – and the more a believer attempts to force himself to live by rules and regulations, the more he quenches the Holy Spirit.
7. “walk” is a present active imperative emphasizing the constant obligation 24/7 order our lives by the influence of God’s Spirit – **Romans 8:4; 13:14.**

B. The Control of the Spirit

1. The essence of our reliance on the Spirit is to yield to the influence and instruction by the Holy Spirit – primarily through the Word of God as the Spirit seeks to promote the interests of Jesus Christ.
2. It is like our obligation to be “filled with the Spirit” – cp. **Ephesians 5:18.**
3. This is a matter possible only for those who have received the Holy Spirit by means of their faith in Jesus Christ – cp. **Romans 8:9, 11-14.**
4. The power for Christian living is provided by the Holy Spirit, and yet,

without reliance upon that power, Christians cannot live the Christian life – that is, God will not do for us what He gives us the resource to do through His enabling.

5. It is in this way that we are called upon to “work out our own salvation” – cp. ***Philippians 2:12***.
6. This refers strictly to sanctification and not to justification where God does all the work.

C. The Constancy in the Spirit

1. Note the imperative “*walk*” [περιπατέω] – which describes the constant characteristic of one’s life.
2. It refers to how a person conducts one’s life – how they behave as a habit.
3. It describes the Christian’s willingness to go where the Spirit directs, do what He directs, say what He directs him to do.
4. It is by means of “*walk[ing] by the Spirit*” that a believer is able to “walk worthy of your calling” – cp. ***Ephesians 4:1***
 - a) It focuses on our **Purpose** – ***Ephesians 2:10***.
 - b) It focuses on our **Priority** – ***Colossians 1:10***.
 - c) It focuses on our **Progress** – ***1 Thessalonians 2:12***.

II. THE ADVANTAGE IN THE SPIRIT – **5:16B**

A. The Desire of the Flesh

1. Notice that the text does not say, “refuse to walk in the flesh and you’ll be able to fulfill the desires of the Spirit.”
2. The emphasis is on purposefully striving to “*walk by the Spirit*” and the result will be “*you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*”
3. The “*desire of the flesh*” describes the residual propensity to sin due to one’s fallen humanness.
4. There is within every believer the sin principle that interferes with our willingness to live in surrender to God’s Spirit.
5. This sin is lively and seeks to use our bodies to gratify its “*desires*” [ἐπιθυμία] – cp. ***Romans 7:18-20***.
6. The inordinate desire of sin within is a constant harassment – cp. ***Genesis 4:7***.

B. The Disruption of the Flesh

1. The power of the flesh is disrupted only by means of the power of God exercised by means of the believer surrendering to the Holy Spirit.
2. It is the Holy Spirit that enables one to resist the urge to “*carry out the desire of the flesh.*”
3. These two things the Spirit and the flesh are mutually exclusive so that at any given point a believer will be either careful to “*walk by the Spirit*” or

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they will be “*carry[ing] out the desire of the flesh*” – you can never do both at the same time.

III. THE ADVERSITY TO THE SPIRIT – 5:17

A. The Struggle ongoing Within

1. God realizes the struggle this is for us – He explains: “*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another ...*”
2. This describes the life-long conflict that is waged within the heart and mind of every believer who finds the flesh constantly warring against the influences of the Spirit which is committed to cutting off the desires of the flesh.
3. “The Spirit often halts what our flesh desires, and the flesh often overrides the will that comes from the Spirit.”¹ – cp. [Romans 7:24](#).
4. Although unsaved people can regret their sin and even feel ashamed, wishing they could stop, their behavior is consistent with their nature and the internal conflict is slight; but for the believer who possesses the Holy Spirit, they are severely conflicted.

B. The Subjugation of the Will

1. The result of the opposition existing between the Holy Spirit and the flesh is such “*... that you may not do the things that you please.*”
2. This verse basically states that there are no third options – you will either do what the Spirit desires or you will do what your flesh desires.
3. You must choose between what the Holy Spirit leads you to do or what the flesh leads you to do – cp. [Romans 8:2](#).
4. Paul is advocating that we side with the Holy Spirit who is constantly promoting the interests of Christ Jesus and His glory in our lives instead of the desires of the flesh.
5. This is done by:

- a) Admitting our weakness – [Matthew 26:41](#).
- b) Avoiding provisions for the flesh – cp. [Romans 13:14](#).
- c) Acknowledging our members are dead to sin – [Colossians 3:5](#).
- d) Appealing to the protection from God – [Matthew 6:13](#).
- e) Accepting the way to escape – [1 Corinthians 10:13](#).
- f) Amputating abilities to stumble – [Matthew 5:29-30](#).
- g) Answering (Accountability) to other believers – [Proverbs 28:26](#).
- h) Acknowledging the fear of the Lord – [Proverbs 16:6](#).
- i) Abiding under the guidance of God’s Word – [Psalm 119:9-11](#).
- j) Admonishing Oneself – [Psalm 42:11](#).
- k) Asserting to avoid defilement – [Daniel 1:8; Psalm 101:2](#).

IV. THE ACTUATION² BY THE SPIRIT – 5:18

A. The Direction by the Spirit

1. The state of “walking by the Spirit” is that we will be *“led by the Spirit.”*
2. The Spirit-filled believer does what he does because the Holy Spirit’s influence in his life – cp. [Romans 8:14](#).
3. This is the point that Paul was making in the previous section – the Gospel produces positive outcomes that glorifies God – and prohibits the believer who walks in the Spirit from fulfilling the desires of the flesh.
4. As we love Christ, we have internal **prohibitions** generated by the Spirit that seek the glory of Christ – cp. [Psalm 37:4](#).

B. The Defusing of the Law

1. When this is our motivation, the law does not have the impact of stirring up our flesh – cp. [Romans 7:5-11](#).
2. Thus, *“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law”* – the flesh is powerless to keep the Law and the Law is powerless to overcome the flesh.
3. We live by a greater standard of righteousness attainable only by means of the power of God’s Spirit to which we must yield by “walking in the Spirit” – that internal motivation generated by the Spirit focuses on the love for and glory of Christ Jesus.

Christians are enabled to live uprightly by means of the influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

² the state or condition of being impelled or moved to action