

Note to teams: The KJV has additional actions in the works of the flesh list in verses 20-21.

Thrive: Living on Purpose
Session 4- *Purpose Lived*

September 22, 2024

The Point: We live out our purpose as we are led and filled with the Spirit.

Session Passage: Galatians 5:16-26

Galatians 5:16-18

Connection to the Point. Walking by the Spirit keeps us from fulfilling sinful desires.

Context. Paul wrote this letter to Christians living in Galatia (part of modern-day Turkey), a region he visited during his first and second missionary journeys (Acts 13–14; 16:6-7; 18:23). The Galatians struggled regarding the relationship between the law and the gospel. Some legalistically argued that Gentile converts had to participate in Jewish practices such as circumcision and observance of special days in order to be in right standing with God (Gal. 3:1-4; 4:8-11). Paul argued that believers were free from such observances of the Mosaic law (3:5-26; 5:1-12; see Acts 15), and were to live the Christian life in freedom under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:13-26).

Walk (v. 16). The Greek term for *walk* (*peripateo*) literally means to physically walk, but it is also used, as it is here, in reference to a person's lifestyle—how one lives or conducts oneself. The walk Paul was referring to is the Spirit-controlled life of the believer. The Christian must be intentional in how he or she lives (Eph. 5:15-21), in moment-by-moment-dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Galatians, Paul described this as walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), being led by the Spirit (v. 18), living by the Spirit (v. 25a), and keeping in step with the Spirit (v. 25b).

By the Spirit (v. 16). All people are born with a sin nature ("the old self," Eph. 4:22) to which they are enslaved (Rom. 6:15-23), and they are spiritually dead (Eph 2:1-3). When a person repents and puts saving faith in Jesus Christ, he or she is spiritually made alive ("born again," John 3:1-21; "alive with Christ," Eph. 2:4-9), is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-18; Rom. 8:9-11), and receives a new nature "created according to God's likeness" ("the new self," Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The old nature was crucified with Christ; it is dead so the believer is no longer enslaved to it (John 8:34; Rom. 6:15-23). Through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to reject the "desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16), so as not to return to living in sin ("the flesh"), and now is able live according to the new nature ("the new self," Eph. 4:24; see John 15:5) through which the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

While walking by the Spirit is done in the power and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, the believer must be intentional (day-by-day, moment-by-moment) in appropriating the Spirit's power by faith, choosing to reject the desires of the old sin nature ("take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires," Eph. 4:22) and choosing to walk (live) according to the new nature ("put on the new self," Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) in obedience to God (Rom. 8:4).

Walking by the Spirit is the life-long process of being transformed in Christlikeness (also known as sanctification). Salvation is through grace by faith alone in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:15-18; Eph. 2:8-9), so walking by the Spirit does not earn salvation. It is the process that begins after a person is saved. Walking by the Spirit is intentionally living as God would have us live. It is done out of love and gratitude for God having redeemed us through Jesus Christ and is both a life of freedom (from enslavement to sin) and obedience to God (Rom. 6:15-23; Gal. 5:13-14).¹

Desire (v. 16). The word for *desire* (*epithumia*) indicates a passionate longing, a craving, or lust. It can be neutral (the craving for one's favorite food) or positive (the desire of the righteous), but in this case it is an evil desire for the works of *the flesh*.

The flesh (v. 16). *The flesh* (*sarx*) can literally refer to the human body (Luke 24:39) or a worldly perspective (2 Cor. 5:16). However, in this context the term refers to the fallen, sinful nature to which all people are enslaved before conversion (Rom. 6:6-7) and which tempts believers to sin.

Opposed to each other (v. 17). The Holy Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other because the Spirit is God and desires that the believer live a godly life while the flesh desires sin. Paul characterized this opposition as a struggle between “the old self” (sin nature) and “the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10). Paul acknowledged that the Spirit and the flesh were waging a war within him (Rom. 7:22-23; on the struggle in general see Gal. 5:13-16).

You don’t do what you want (v. 17). As long as we are in this world, as Christians we will experience the spiritual conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. Although believers still struggle with temptations to sin (and sometimes fall into sin as well), through the new nature in the power of the Holy Spirit we should strive to live a righteous life of obedience to God (Rom. 6; Eph. 4:17-32).

Led by the Spirit (v. 18). The verb tense of *led* (*ago*) indicates that the Spirit’s leadership is ongoing in the believer’s life. Whereas before conversion, the life of the individual was dominated by the flesh (enslaved to sin, John 8:34; Rom. 6:6), now the believer is empowered and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables the Christian to live a life of freedom and obedience to God (Rom. 6; Gal. 5:13-14).

Under the law (v. 18). The law can never save anyone (Rom. 3:19-20) because its requirement is perfect obedience (Jas. 2:10). However, because Christ perfectly fulfilled the law and at the moment of salvation God permanently exchanges the believer’s sins for the perfect righteousness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:21), the Christian is no longer under the law—its demands have been fully met by Jesus. The life the believer now lives is not done to earn salvation—salvation is a free gift from God received by faith (Eph. 2:1-9). Rather the believer strives to live in obedience to God out of gratitude for what He has done and the desire to please Him in how the Christian lives (Rom. 6:14; 8:1-4).

Galatians 5:19-21

Connection to the Point. Walking in the flesh leads to sinful behavior.

Works of the flesh (v. 19). These are sins that characterize nonbelievers, those who are enslaved to sin. The unchecked “desire of the flesh” (v. 16) leads to the *works of the flesh*. The Holy Spirit in the believer is what curbs the desire of the flesh. While believers can and do still sin, their lives should not be characterized by the works of the flesh.

Obvious (v. 19). The Greek word (*phaneros*) means “to be revealed” or “to be visible” in the sense of making something plain or apparent. The works of the flesh’s opposition to God and godly living is clear. Paul divided the *works of the flesh* into several categories—immorality (v. 19), idolatry and the occult (v. 20a), relationships (vv. 20b-21a), and intemperance (v. 21b).

Sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity (v. 19). These are three related yet distinct words that describe sensuality of a sinful nature. *Sexual immorality* (*porneia*) refers all sinful sexual behavior (1 Cor. 5:1). This is the term from which we get the word “pornography.” *Moral impurity* (*akatharsia*) emphasizes the defilement of sexual sin and the resulting separation from God (Eph. 5:3). *Promiscuity* (*aselgeia*) refers to the unbridled lack of restraint as it relates to sexual sin (Rom. 13:13).

Idolatry, sorcery (v. 20). *Idolatry* (*eidololatria*) involves giving the worship due to God to the things He created. *Sorcery* (*pharmakeia*) was a problem rampant in Galatia (Acts 19:19). It involves the use of magic and trying to manipulate demonic powers rather than trusting in the Lord. The term can also be translated “witchcraft.” Furthermore, in its most basic sense, this word refers to the use of drugs (referring in the first century to drugs used for occultic purposes) and from its root the word “pharmacy” is derived.

Hatreds (v. 20). Shifting to relational sins, Paul listed eight words that describe the breakdown of interpersonal relationships (vv. 20-21). The first term, *hatreds* (*echthra*), refers to a deep-seated enmity directed against another, and can have either God (Rom. 8:7) or other people (Luke 23:12) as its object.

Strife (v. 20). The term (*eris*) describes one who has a contemptuous temper that is focused on others.

Jealousy (v. 20). The term (*ze/los*) can be used of a strong, positive interest in someone or something. It can also, as here, refer to a negative emotion one has over someone else's success or achievements. In this case, it describes a rivalry characterized by envy and malice.

Outbursts of anger (v. 20). The nature of this term (*thumos*) is dependent upon the context. It is used to describe God's holy wrath (Rev. 14:10; 19:15) and Satan's fury (12:12). In this context it could be translated "fits of rage" and describes hostile verbal outbursts against others.

Selfish ambitions (v. 20). This word (*eritheia*) comes from Greek politics, where it was used to describe those seeking office. In this context, it describes those who through their words and activities seek to manipulate people and circumstances for personal gain.

Dissensions (v. 20). Like "selfish ambitions," this word (*dichostasia*) has political overtones. It describes those who cultivate a sense of belonging to an elite party or faction.

Factions (v. 20). Similar to "dissensions," *factions* (*hairesis*) is derived from a verb meaning "to choose" and emphasizes that factions or elite parties are created by individuals who make personal choices to create such division and strife within a group or congregation.

Envy (v. 21). Similar to the word for "jealousy," *envy* (*phthonos*) means exhibiting ill-will, spite, and displeasure toward another when that person gains some advantage or prospers. It is an inordinate desire to possess what another has.

Drunkenness, carousing (v. 21). Both of these terms deal with intemperance (sinful excess). *Drunkenness* (*methe*) relates to the abuse of alcohol. *Carousing* (*komos*) has a broader meaning and refers to gatherings (wild parties, revelries) and may even be associated with pagan worship that included both drunkenness and sexual misconduct.

Anything similar (v. 21). These words indicate that Paul's list of the sins of the flesh was by no means comprehensive. The apostle John in his first letter provided his own broad list of sins (1 John 2:16). Believers, led by the Holy Spirit, should be able to discern other works of the flesh.

Practice (v. 21). In this context, the term (*prasso*) refers to someone living under the power of the flesh, who repeatedly or habitually engages in the works of the flesh. This is not a one-time occurrence or a mistaken slip into sin, but rather it is a life dominated by the influence of the old sin nature. Believers will still sin, but if any such sin becomes dominant in his or her life, at some point God will lovingly discipline His child so that he or she turns back to Him and away from such sin.

Will not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 21). Those whose lives are characterized by the works of the flesh demonstrate by their actions they are not born again, and so unless they repent and place their faith in Christ they will not enter (*inherit*) the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His rule and reign in the believer's life, now with abundant life (John 10:10) and in the future eternal life in the presence of God (Rev. 21–22).

Galatians 5:22-26

Connection to the Point. Walking by the Spirit produces Christlike character.

Fruit (v. 22). The term *fruit* (*karpos*) is used in a variety of ways in the Bible. It can refer to one's offspring (fruit of the womb, Luke 1:42; fruit of one's loins, Acts 2:30), praise (fruit of one's lips, Heb. 13:15), benefits or results (fruit of one's ministry, Rom. 1:13), profit (to one's account, Phil. 4:17), one's conduct (Matt. 3:8,10; John 15:5), and the fruit of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2).

Fruit of the Spirit (v. 22). This is the godly behavior the Holy Spirit produces in the believer. Jesus emphasized that believers can bear spiritual fruit only by remaining connected to Him (John 15:5). Paul identified nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit which he grouped in three categories. The first three are related to the believer's heart and mind. The second three to the believer's relationships with others. The final three are connected to the believer's conduct.

Love, joy, peace (v. 22). *Love (agape)* is key in the life of the Christian. It is also central to God's work in creation, the incarnation, the atonement, and salvation. The love God pours into the believer (Rom. 5:5) enables the Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit to love God and others with this same love.

Joy (chara) means more than just happiness. It is the inward experience produced by the grace of God that enables the believer through faith to celebrate life in Christ no matter the temporal, external conditions of life he or she may be experiencing.

Peace (eirene) is also not dependent upon temporal, outside experiences and events. It is related to the Hebrew term *shalom*, which refers to an inward condition of wholeness and well-being. The believer has peace with God through Christ which defies human understanding (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7). Both the joy and peace that come from the Holy Spirit are related to our permanent standing before God as His redeemed children and the truth that no matter what happens in this life nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:31-39), and we will spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Patience, kindness, goodness (v. 22). *Patience (makrothumia)* means that the believer has a long temper (as opposed to a short fuse). Unrestrained anger is the work of the flesh (v. 20), but those who walk by the Spirit are slow to anger (like God Himself, Ex. 34:6). *Kindness (chrestotes)* means being helpful and honest with others and treating them well. It overlaps in meaning with goodness. *Goodness (agathosune)* refers to the generous attitude believers are to have toward others. It involves acting in good ways toward others, even when they do not deserve it.

Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (vv. 22-23). *Faithfulness (pistis)* means to be trustworthy and reliable. *Gentleness (prautes)* describes a person who has a submissive and teachable spirit in relation to God and expresses humility and consideration toward others. A person who has *self-control (egkrateia)* has mastery over his or her emotions, impulses, desires, and passions, be they positive or negative.

Law (v. 23). The nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit are in keeping with *the law*. Through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers are transformed so that they are able to live in accordance with God's law—not in an effort to earn salvation (we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone), but rather as a response of gratitude to God for what He has done for us in Christ and out of a desire to please God by living for Him.

Crucified the flesh (v. 24). In Romans 6, Paul described how in Christ the believer has died to sin and been raised up to newness of life. In this process, the believer's old sin nature has been crucified with Christ, rendering sin powerless over the believer. However, making this a reality in the life of the believer is a gradual process, particularly given that the Christian remains in a sin-filled world full of temptations and ruled over by Satan. Paul therefore urged believers to no longer offer themselves to sin as weapons of unrighteousness but rather present themselves to God as weapons of righteousness. Jesus described this process as taking up one's cross daily and following Him (Matt. 16:24-26).

Keep in step with (v. 25). Those who live by the Spirit have an obligation also to *keep in step with the Spirit*. Drawn from an analogy in the military, this term (*stoicheo*) means "to advance in a line." Figuratively it means to behave or live in accordance with a standard or rule. Paul was saying since the Holy Spirit gives us life, we should also allow Him to control how we live.

Conceited (v. 26). The Greek word (*kenodoxos*) describes one who is prideful, arrogant, or boastful, who seeks to elevate himself or herself above others. The opposite of meekness, this word could imply those who seek popularity, fame, and notoriety.

Provoking . . . envying (v. 26). Believers sometimes provoke or envy one another in many ways. They might have selfish rivalries between churches or even within the same church body. They might also envy one another's spiritual gifts. Believers might also provoke others through empty arguments about unimportant matters. These are not characteristics in line with the fruit of the Spirit.

1. Another aspect of the transformative nature of life in Christ is God's renewing of the believer's mind which enables him or her to better discern the will of God (Rom. 12:2).