

GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL



WEEK 22 VICES AND VIRTUES: THE STRUGGLE IS REAL GALATIANS 5:16-24

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Galatians 5:16-24 – Vices and Virtues: The Struggle Is Real

The Text

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Introduction

- Chapter 1: There is only one gospel that has been revealed by God, not men.
- Chapter 2: we are not saved by obeying the law, but by faith alone.
- Chapter 3: Salvation has always been by faith. The law was never intended to save, but acted as a guardian (or jailer) until Christ came.
- Chapter 4: As heirs of salvation through faith, we are no longer slaves to sin.
- Chapter 5: Christ has set us free. Therefore, let's live in the spiritual freedom we have from the flesh's enslavement.

Principal Proposition

Those who are led by the Holy Spirit are not characterized by the enslaving passions of the flesh, but the freeing fruit of the Spirit.

Literary Context

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
 - B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
 - C. Paul's Application of the Gospel (4:12-6:10)
 - 1. The Plea not to Return to Bondage (4:12-31)
 - 2. The Appeal to Stand Firm in Freedom (5:1)
 - 3. **The Call to Freedom (5:2-6:10)**
 - a. Freedom through Resistance to Circumcision (5:2-12)
 - b. **Freedom through Walking by the Holy Spirit (5:13-26)**
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Literary Structure

Vices and Virtues: The Struggle Is Real

The Fight	(v. 16-18)
The Flesh	(v. 18-21)
The Fruit	(v. 22-23)
The Finished	(v. 24)

Interpretive Comments

Vices and Virtues: The Struggle Is Real

The Fight

v. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

➤ “But I say, walk by the Spirit”

- What is the tension or apparent paradox that accompanies this imperative?

- This phrase “walk by the Spirit” implies both the direction and enablement. It is the Spirit who guides us and empowers us to make wise decisions.
- Throughout Scripture, to “walk” refers to the pattern of conduct that typifies a person’s way of life. The present tense used here points to a continuous, regular action.
- Notice that Paul does not say, “walk by the Christ.” He says, “walk by the Spirit.” Through Christ we are justified, by the Spirit we are sanctified.



The power for Christian living is entirely from the Holy Spirit, just as the power of salvation is entirely in Jesus Christ. But both in the justifying work of Christ and in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, man’s will is active and commitment is called for. – John MacArthur

➤ “and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh”

- Walking by the Spirit is the cause, this is the result.
- If walking by the Spirit prevents us from gratifying the desires of the flesh, why do Christians fall into sin?

Believers are not immune to the desires of the old Adam. They still beckon them and are immensely attractive, but believers triumph over those desires as they walk in the Spirit. – Thomas Schreiner

v. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

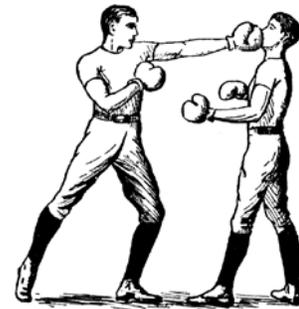
➤ “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh”

- ἐπιθυμέω (translated “desires”) implies compulsion and means “to have a strong desire to do or secure.”¹

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 371.

- The desires of the flesh are the cravings of those who are dominated by sin (Ephesians 2:1-3).
 - Paul will describe what walking by the flesh and walking by the Spirit looks like in verses 19-23.
- “for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”

- The Christian life is a struggle – between the flesh and the Spirit.
- We want freedom. Upon regeneration, the Holy Spirit gives us new desires that were not there before. We want to honor God and love others. However, our sinful flesh fights against us.



You are pulled about by two contrary forces: You are dragged downward by the flesh, and you are drawn upward by the Spirit. They will never agree.

These two powers are always contrary one to the other. If you think that you can help God by getting angry, you make a great mistake. You cannot fight God's battles with the devil's weapons. It is not possible that the power of the flesh should help the power of the Spirit. – Charles Spurgeon

- Augustine would pray, “Lord, deliver me from that evil man, myself.”

v. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

- “But if you are led by the Spirit”

- This verb (are led) points to an active, personal, and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.
- Another Spurgeon quote!

The Spirit never brings the soul into bondage. The terrors and the fears that come of legal slavery are not the work of the Spirit of God. Where He works, holiness is delight and the service of God is a continual joy. Oh, that we may be thus led by the Spirit! – Charles Spurgeon

➤ “you are not under the law”

- The theme of Galatians is once again crystalized: we are not saved by the law, but by faith. Likewise, we are not sanctified by observing the law, but by the Spirit’s work in our lives. The law condemns, the Spirit pardons.

The Flesh

v. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

➤ “Now the works of the flesh are evident”

- Paul takes a moment to point out the obvious. We do not need the Mosaic law to know what follows is wrong.
- Actions born out of the fleshly desires that oppose the Holy Spirit are easily identifiable.
- At least, four classes (or types) of sinful behavior are listed.



➤ “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality”

- The first class lists sins of lust.
- These three encompass every unclean sexual thought, desire, and action.

v. 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

➤ “idolatry, sorcery”

- The second class points to wicked devotion.
- The Spirit exalts Christ. To love anyone or anything more than Him is to feed the flesh that fights the Spirit.

➤ “enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions”

- The largest grouping involves sins of temper.

- People who habitually exhibit these traits are self-centered, pugnacious, belligerent, defiant, argumentative, and insolent.
- v. 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- “envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these”
 - The final class of fleshly acts refers to sins of appetite.
 - They encompass sinful cravings for what others have and excessiveness.
 - This list is not comprehensive. So Paul includes the phrase “and things like these” to cover the rest.
 - “I warn you, as I warned you before”
 - This is not new information.
 - “that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”
 - The word Paul uses for “do” (πράσσω) here is a present, active participle. It refers to those who make a practice of doing – whose lives are identified with such behavior.
 - Those who are truly saved are not characterized by a life of sin. We should see the Spirit’s victory and the flesh’s defeat as we continue to grow in Christ. We are lost and lying to ourselves if we do not.
 - A man’s outward conduct reveals his inward spiritual status.

The Fruit

v. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,



- “But the fruit of the Spirit is”
 - With little transition, Paul introduces a “fruit” metaphor to illustrate what it looks like to “walking by the Spirit.”

- Only a rooted plant bears fruit. In order for lives to produce acts of righteousness, the Holy Spirit must abide in our souls as a tree abides in soil.
 - Nine fruit of the Spirit are mentioned despite fifteen acts of the flesh.
- “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness”
- Joy and peace are the result of love. He who has love, has joy and peace.
 - The patient endure and the kind are ready to help – considering the needs of others.
 - God is the author of all that is good and His people should be reliable, trustworthy, and true to their word.
- v. 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- “gentleness, self-control”
- True believers are gentle and tender.
 - Self-control keeps every passion and appetite in check.
- “against such things there is no law”
- There is no gospel for the law and no law for the gospel.
 - No one is able to find fault with these characteristics. Those who have them fulfill the law in a way no legalist can.
 - However, if we do not have them, we do not have the Spirit. If we have the Spirit, we will bear His fruit.



The Finished

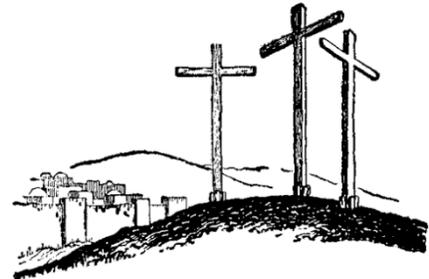
- v. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
- “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh”

- Verses 24 and 25 bring Christ and the Spirit together as the source of life for believers.
- To have crucified the flesh is to have died with Christ to sin (Galatians 2:20, 6:14; Romans 6:4–6).
- The last lengthy Spurgeon quote! For now...

A crucified Christ is the leader of a crucified people. Let it never be forgotten that the grand object for which we lay hold of Christ is the death of sin. If you believed in Christ so that you might escape the pangs of hell, you have a very poor idea of what Jesus Christ has come into the world to do. He is proclaimed to be a Savior who “shall save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). This is the object of His mission. True, He comes to give pardon, but He never gives pardon without giving repentance with it. He comes to justify, but He does not justify without also sanctifying. – Charles Spurgeon

➤ “with its passions and desires”

- Those crucified did not die instantly. Crucifixion was a slow, excruciating death. But final, nonetheless. The same is true for the desires of our flesh.
- Why does freedom in Christ not give us freedom to enjoy the pleasures of the world?



Summary Quote

The life of the Spirit is not a great mystery, if one means by mystery that we cannot tell if one is following the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is impossible to produce for the sons and daughters of Adam, but they are not hard to discern. Where there is sexual sin, self-absorption and self-worship, strife and quarreling, and dissolute lives under the control of drugs and alcohol, the flesh is in control. Where there is love, harmony, joy, forgiveness, and kindness, we see the power of the Spirit.

– Thomas Schreiner

Discussion Questions

- What is the tension or apparent paradox that accompanies this imperative? (pg. 2)
- If walking by the Spirit prevents us from gratifying the desires of the flesh, why do Christians fall into sin? (pg. 3)
- Why does freedom in Christ not give us freedom to enjoy the pleasures of the world? (pg. 8)



Sanctification: The Spirit and the Flesh

According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 35), sanctification is “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” It is a continuing change worked by God in us, freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues. It does not mean that sin is instantly eradicated, but it is also more than a counteraction, in which sin is merely restrained or repressed without being progressively destroyed. Sanctification is a real transformation, not just the appearance of one.

The basic meaning of “sanctify” is to set apart to God, for His use. But God works in those whom He claims as His own to conform them “to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). This moral renovation, in which we are increasingly changed from what we once were, flows from the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19, 20; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22–24; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:20, 21). God calls His children to holiness, and graciously gives what He commands (1 Thess. 4:4; 5:23).

Regeneration is birth; sanctification is growth. In regeneration, God implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for glorifying God’s name in the world; desire to pray and worship; desire to love and bring benefit to others. In sanctification, the Holy Spirit “works in you, both to will and to work” according to God’s purpose, enabling His people to fulfill their new, godly desires (Phil. 2:12, 13). Christians become increasingly Christlike, as the moral profile of Jesus (the “fruit of the Spirit”) is progressively formed in them (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; 5:22–25).

Regeneration is a momentary act, bringing a person from spiritual death to life. It is exclusively God’s work. Sanctification is an ongoing process, dependent on God’s continuing action in the believer, and consisting of the believer’s continuous struggle against sin. God’s method of sanctification is neither activism (self-reliant activity) nor apathy (God-reliant passivity), but human effort dependent on God (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 3:10–14; Heb. 12:14). Knowing that without Christ’s enabling we cannot do good works, but also that He is ready to strengthen us for all we have to do (Phil. 4:13), we “abide” in Christ, asking for His help constantly—and we receive it (Col. 1:11; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2:1).

The standard to which God’s work of sanctifying His saints is directed is His own revealed moral law, expounded and modeled by Christ Himself. Christ’s love, humility, and patience are a supreme standard for Christians (Rom. 13:10; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Pet. 2:21).

Believers find within themselves contrary urgings. The Spirit sustains their regenerate desires and purposes, but their fallen instincts (the “flesh”) obstruct their path and drag them back. The conflict of these two is sharp. Paul says he is unable to do what is right, and unable to restrain himself from doing what is wrong (Rom. 7:14–25). This conflict and frustration will be with Christians as long as they are in the body. Yet by watching and praying against temptation, and cultivating opposite virtues, they may through the Spirit’s help “put to death” particular bad habits (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). They will experience many particular deliverances and victories in their battle with sin, while not being exposed to temptations that are impossible to resist (1 Cor. 10:13).²

The last lengthy Spurgeon quote, for real...

Familiarity with Christ Leads Us to Be Like Him

Familiarity with Christ soon begets congeniality of disposition and spirit, for those who are much with Christ become much like Christ. He who lies on a bed of spices will naturally find his garments smell of the same. A mirror upon which the sun is shining is bright itself and flashes its reflected rays. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but he who dwells with infinite wisdom will be taught of God. Doubtless happy couples who live together in mutual affection and confidence become very much like each other. The one becomes the other’s self. They have the same aims and objects. They are often surprised to find that they have thought the same thought and are about to say the same words at the same moment. So do the saint and the Savior grow like each other after years of acquaintance, only the growth is all on one side—we grow up unto Him in all things who is the head (Eph 4:15).³

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1650.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).