

In Galatians 5:14 we were told to love our neighbors as ourselves. That is, we are to take the natural love we have for ourselves and make it the measuring stick of our love for others. We are also to guard ourselves against biting and devouring one another lest we consume each other (5:15). However, if we are to do these things by our own strength we will surely fail; therefore, God tells us to walk by the Holy Spirit so we will not carry out the desires of the flesh. Instead of us trying to fulfill the law in the power of our flesh, the Holy Spirit fulfills the Law through us when we submit to Him.

5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

In verse 16 believers are commanded to walk by the Spirit. This is the only means by which someone will not gratify the desires of the flesh and the only way one can love his neighbor as himself. "Walk by the Spirit" is not a suggestion, it is a command and is to be the distinguishing feature of the Christian's life in this world. The believer is to be motivated no longer by the self and pursuing selfish interests; he is to live by the Spirit. Furthermore, the word "walk" suggests a continual and daily need to submit to the Spirit. To "walk by the Spirit" is the same thing as being "led by the Spirit" (v. 18), and the way it manifests itself is in a service-shaped life; it is seen when we don't turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, to satisfy our own desires, but through love *we serve one another* (v. 13). To state it differently, life in the Spirit is a life that lives in accordance with the desires of the Spirit (v. 17). The desires of the Spirit shape the contours of the Spirit-filled life. Romans 8:5 says, "those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (ESV).

Those who are led by the Spirit are those who put to death the deeds of the body. Romans 8:13-14 helps to clarify what it means to walk by the Spirit. It says, "if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but *if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body*, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." The Holy Spirit leads us to kill sin, rather than to indulge it. But according to Galatians 5:17, this does not come naturally; life in the Spirit is a life of conflict. The flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another, and both try to prevent the other from manifesting itself; the flesh tries to quench the manifestation of the Spirit and the Spirit the manifestation of the flesh. "It is this opposition which explains why walking by the Spirit will inevitably result in the desires of the flesh not being carried out" (Fung, 249).

Believers should not think that they are ever choosing to do what they want; what they do is either generated by the flesh which opposes God or by the Spirit who pleases God (Moo, 356). Therefore, no action is neutral, the believer either serves the flesh or follows the Spirit (Fung, 251). But the conflict is not an equal conflict; Paul says if you walk by the Spirit "you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (5:16). I John 4:4 tells us that "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." And as Paul says in Romans 8:37, "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

Hodge explains it as follows:

The Scriptures teach that the Spirit of God dwells in his people, not only collectively as the Church, but individually in every believer, so that of every Christian it may be said, he is a temple of the Holy Ghost. God is said to dwell wherever He permanently manifests his presence, whether as of old in the temple, or in the hearts of his people, in the Church, or in heaven. And as the Spirit dwells in believers, He there manifests his life-giving, controlling power, and is in them the principle, or source, or controlling influence which determines their inward and outward life. By the flesh, in the doctrinal portions of Scripture, is never, unless the word be limited by the context, meant merely our sensuous nature, but our fallen nature, i.e., our nature as it is in itself, apart from the Spirit of God. As our Lord says (John 3:6), "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." These then are the principles which "are contrary the one to the other." No man can act independently of both. He must obey one or the other. He may sometimes obey the one, and sometimes the other; but one or the other must prevail. The Apostle says of believers that they have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. They have renounced the authority of the evil principle; they do not willingly, or of set purpose, or habitually yield to it. They struggle against it, and not only endeavor, but actually do crucify it, although it may die a long and painful death. (Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, 225)

We need to develop a realism about what life in the Spirit is – it is a life of battle. It is a series of choices in which we can either use our body as a tool to be used for unrighteousness or as one for righteousness (Ro. 6:12, 13, 19). Satan has no doubt attacked many Christians by convincing them that this inner conflict is either evidence that they are not saved or are pathetic Christians. But that's not what the Bible says; it says there is an irreconcilable war within our members. In 2 Timothy 4:7, toward the end of Paul's life, he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Hebrews 12:1–2 tells us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us."

Verse 18 says we are to be led by the Spirit. "The word 'led' is used elsewhere of being guided by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Lk. 4:1), of being led by idols (1 Cor. 12:2), of women being moved by sinful desires (2 Tim. 3:6), or of people being brought to repentance (Ro. 2:4). The point here is not so much specific guidance for daily decisions as is being directed by the Spirit to live a life that pleases God" (Schreiner, 345; also Moo, 357).

Also, note that "led" is a passive verb; we are not walking around independently, we are being led. We are thus faced with the choice to follow or not. However, these verses give two incentives to follow the Spirit's leading. The first incentive is if we walk by the Spirit we will not gratify the desire of the flesh (v. 16b). The "flesh" is who we are in Adam as human beings apart from Christ. Romans 8:7 gives us the general nature of the flesh: "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law." That is, the basic tendency of the flesh is that it is unsubmitive. It does not want to submit to God's absolute authority or rely on God's absolute mercy. However, in Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I

now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Then in Galatians 5:24 he says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Although the flesh is still present within us, it has been stripped of its power; in Christ, believers now have the ability to resist the desires of the flesh and live a life that pleases God.

The second incentive for walking by the Spirit is found in verse 18: "If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law." The person whose life is evidenced by the work of the Spirit is the one whom Paul identifies as a true believer. In Romans 8:14 Paul says something similar: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." As a believer under the New Covenant, the Law has no binding authority over his life. The Law cannot kill the flesh.

This does not mean that believers don't fulfill God's Law. They do. Verses 13 and 14 just said, "through love serve one another. *For the whole Law is fulfilled* in one word, in the statement, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In the same way, Romans 8:3-4 states that God sent Christ "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." To walk according to the flesh is to carry out the conduct dictated by the sin nature, but the controlling principle of the believer's life is not the corrupt nature, but the Holy Spirit. The Spirit produces that which the law requires. The only external evidence we have of being in Christ is the subjugation of the whole life to the Spirit.

5:19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

5:19 begins a list of behaviors that Paul titles, "the deeds of the flesh." These are deeds that stem from our old Adamic nature ("of the flesh" is a genitive of source) and depict the life where self and self-gratification rule. These deeds are well known (they are obvious). This gives his readers a clear understanding of what he is talking about when he tells them not to fulfill the desires of the flesh (5:16). Though they are obvious, the reality is that these sins are often left unchecked in our lives.

Most of the behaviors listed are sins involving relationships with others and contrast Paul's command in Galatians 5:13 where he tells believers to serve one another through love. This contrast comes to focus again at the end of the section: "while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10).

"Those who practice such things (things like these)" (v. 21) makes it clear that Paul's list is not intended to be exhaustive, but is a representative selection.

- ***Immorality*** = sexual immorality, sexual sin of any kind including adultery, fornication, bestiality, and homosexuality

- **Impurity** = uncleanness; any type of sinful behavior, but often occurs in the context of sexual sins and could refer to sexual misbehavior in general
- **Sensuality** = behavior that breaks the bounds of what is socially acceptable (and in this case, biblically acceptable); it emphasizes the lack of sexual restraint; in modern terms it would refer to being a “party animal”
- **Idolatry** = the worship of anything but the One True God
- **Sorcery** = is a Greek word from which our word “pharmacy” is derived; in ancient literature it referred to the use of drugs in the magic arts; could refer to trusting in other sources to manipulate life, rather than in turning to God
- **Enmities** = “hatreds” (plural; plurals were sometimes used in Greek to signify manifestations of the quality denoted by the singular); expressions of hatred or hostility
- **Strife** = discord, quarrelling, bickering, contention
- **Jealousy** = in positive contexts can be translated as “zeal”; negatively, a passionate resentment of others and the desire of self-glorification
- **Outbursts of anger** (plural) = flashes of anger, uncontrolled temper
- **Disputes** (plural) = connotes an attitude of rivals; was used of political fights among opposing parties
- **Dissensions** (plural) = refers to acts that cause fragmentation in society
- **Factions** (plural) = may suggest rifts that take place among formally organized groups within the church; it cannot be sharply distinguished from dissensions
- **Envying** (plural in Greek) = something very similar to jealousy; the desire to possess what someone else has; the result of not being satisfied with the gifts that God has given
- **Drunkenness** (plural in Greek) = probably drinking bouts connected with carousing
- **Carousing** (plural in Greek) = (the NIV and ESV translate this as “orgies” but “orgies” is too specifically sexual); the word was originally used of a festal procession in honor of a Greek god and was used more broadly of a banquet or feast (Moo, 361); however, in the Bible it is always used of excessive feasting and drinking and the sexual liberties that often accompanied wild parties

The sins Paul selected are the most public, manifest signs of a decaying civilization. When society becomes idolatrous, immorality and other sexual sins will inevitably be openly publicized. Paul’s words may have well been written to American society. We are drowning in a sea of self-indulgent, God-dishonoring immorality, and justify our behavior in terms of freedom and tolerance. But God calls us to be intolerant; for “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

We need to recognize these traits for what they are, call them what they are, and identify where they come from; they come from the unregenerate heart of man. The reason that society cannot cure itself is because it cannot change that which is at the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart.

Indulging in the deeds of the flesh should not be seen as inconsequential. They should not be excused by thinking “that is just the way I am” or, “I only have a few issues on the list.” The one who practices these behaviors will be judged with the wicked. Righteousness through faith does not lead to a life of sin, nor does freedom from the Law encourage people to live in lawlessness. If we are not led by the Spirit we are showing evidence that we ARE under the law (5:18) and will be condemned by it. We are not saved by works; however, good works are the consequence of justification, though they are imperfect and incomplete. Paul knows that Christians stumble and live inconsistently, but those whom Paul is warning

are those who “*practice* such things” (5:21); that is, he is warning those who have these characteristics as a habitual lifestyle. If any of these are the dominant characteristic of the life of a professing believer, they are evidence that that person is not really saved. Jesus said, “...by their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7:16). When we have the Holy Spirit, there are manifest evidences that mark us out as being in Christ and indwelt with the Spirit. These are enumerated in verses 22 and 23.