

# The Fruit of Freedom

Galatians 5:16-26

SS Lesson for 05/29/2022

**Devotional Scripture:** John 15:4-7

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Gal 5:25*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### FREEDOM THROUGH WALKING IN THE SPIRIT (GAL 5:16-18)

*In the Spirit to not carry out the desires of the flesh (16)*

Desires of the flesh brings forth death (Rom 8:13)

Desires of the flesh choke God's word and makes us unfruitful (Mark 4:19)

Desires of the flesh sometimes degrades the body (Rom 1:24)

Desires of the flesh is offering our body as an instrument of wickedness (Rom 6:12-13)

Desires of the flesh is following the ways of this world (Eph 2:1-3)

Desires of the flesh belongs to the earthly/sinful nature (Col 3:5)

Desires of the flesh causes fights and quarrels (James 4:1)

*In the Spirit will aid in Spiritual warfare (17)*

Because people struggle against evil spiritual forces (Eph 6:12)

Because Satan is prowling looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8)

Because the end is near (1 Peter 4:3-7)

Because Satan wants to sift us (Luke 22:31-32)

Because Satan roams the earth (Job 1:7)

*In the Spirit by being led by the Spirit (18)*

Led by the Spirit for guidance and hope (Ps 25:4-5)

Led by the Spirit into truth (John 16:13)

Led by the Spirit to inherit eternal life (Rom 8:11-14)

Led by the Spirit to obtain power and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7)

#### FREEDOM THROUGH NOT YIELDING TO THE FLESH (GAL 5:19-21)

*Yielding to the works of the flesh (19-20)*

Works of the flesh are controlled by the sinful nature (Rom 7:5)

Works of the flesh leads to death (Rom 8:6)

Works of the flesh comes from our worldliness (1 Cor 3:3)

Works of the flesh enslaves us with evil passions (Titus 3:3)

*Yielding causes missing God's inheritance (21)*

Yielding to the trap of trying to get rich the wrong way (1 Tim 6:9)

Yielding to self-seeking lusts and rejecting God's truth (Rom 2:8)

Yielding to the sinful nature (Rom 8:13)

Yielding to wickedness (1 Cor 6:9)

Yielding to immorality (Eph 5:5)

Yielding to impurity (Rev 21:27)

#### FREEDOM THROUGH THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (GAL 5:22-26)

*Displaying the fruit to indicate crucified flesh (22-24)*

Crucify the flesh by crucifying the old self (Rom 6:6)

Crucify the flesh by clothing ourselves with Jesus (Rom 13:14)

Crucify the flesh by crucifying the world to us (Gal 6:14)

Crucify the flesh by Jesus living through us (Gal 2:20)

*Displaying the fruit by living in the Spirit (25-26)*

Living in the Spirit is displaying the light of God (Eph 5:8-9)

Living in the Spirit because the Spirit gives life (John 6:63)

Living in the Spirit is displaying a life of righteousness (Rom 8:10)

Living in the Spirit provides a soft heart for God (Ezek 36:26)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Central to Paul's argument in this lesson is the nature of "the flesh." However, the nature and implications of the flesh are not static in the New Testament. Even the dozens of uses of the word in Paul's writings indicate slight differences and nuances. To claim a singular understanding of "Paul's view of the flesh" would be mistaken. Paul uses the word to speak of physical matter of living creatures generally (1 Corinthians 15:39) and the human body specifically (6:16). In other instances, flesh is regarded negatively. Paul referred to it in the context of circumcision (Galatians 6:12; Philippians 3:3), rebellious human nature and desires (Romans 8:3–12; Ephesians 2:3), and temporal lineage in contrast to an eternal one (Romans 4:1; Galatians 4:23, 29). As used in today's Scripture text, flesh refers to the carnal, unredeemed self and its rebellious nature and desires (see Romans 13:13–14). In order for believers to live fully as children of God, the ways of the flesh must die (see Galatians 2:19–21). The entire epistle to the Galatians has been building to this lesson's Scripture text. With a proper understanding of God's law and promises (Galatians 3:1–22) and true freedom in God's Spirit (4:21–5:14), Paul puts all the pieces together.

### Key Verse: Gal 5:25

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**5:16.** The answer to the abuses described in the previous verse is to **live by the Spirit**. The verb *peripateite* is a present imperative and is literally translated, "keep on walking." As a believer walks through life he should depend on the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance and power. But the Spirit does not operate automatically in a believer's heart. He waits to be depended on. When a Christian does yield to the Spirit's control, the promise is that he will not in anywise (the double negative *ou mē* is emphatic) **gratify** (*telesēte*, "complete, fulfill" in outward action) **the desires of the sinful nature**. Thus, while no believer will ever be entirely free in this life from the evil desires that stem from his fallen human nature, he need not capitulate to them, but may experience victory by the Spirit's help.

**5:17.** Paul next explained the need for a life that is controlled and energized by **the Spirit**. The explanation is found in the fact that each Christian has two natures, a **sinful nature** received at birth, inherited from fallen Adam, and a new nature received at regeneration when said Christian became a participant in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). Both natures have desires, the one for evil and the other for holiness. Thus **they are in conflict with each other**, and the result can be that they keep a believer from doing what he otherwise would. In other words the Holy Spirit blocks, when He is allowed to do so, the evil cravings of the flesh. (Some hold the view that each believer *is* a new person, still possessing the fallen human nature, but not having a new nature. Others prefer to define "nature" as capacity, the old nature being that capacity to serve sin and self and the new nature the capacity to serve God and righteousness.)

**5:18.** In summary, Paul emphasized that a godly life is not lived **under** the rules of the **Law** but is a life **led by the Spirit**. It was important for the Galatians to know that just as justification is not possible by works so sanctification cannot be achieved by human effort. This of course does not mean that a Christian is totally passive in either case for the response of faith is necessary—faith in Christ to save and in the Holy Spirit to sanctify.

Since a Christian has the same sinful nature he possessed before salvation, he may fall prey to the sins that nature produces if he does not live by means of the Spirit.

**5:19.** The apostle declared that the sins of the flesh **are obvious**, meaning either, as some suggest, that they are public and cannot be hidden, or better, since some are private sins, that they originate with **the sinful nature** and not with the new nature indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The listed sins are commonly seen to fall into four categories. First, three sexual sins are mentioned. **Sexual immorality** (*porneia*) is often translated "fornication." From this word comes the term "pornography." *Porneia* refers to any and all forms of illicit

sexual relationships. **Impurity** (*akatharsia*) is a broad term referring to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed (cf. Eph. 5:3-4). **Debauchery** (*aselgeia*) connotes an open, shameless, brazen display of these evils (cf. 2 Cor. 12:21 where the same words occur; *aselgeia* is included in Rom. 13:13).

**5:20.** Following the sexual sins, Paul cited two religious sins. **Idolatry** involved the worship of pagan gods by bowing to idols, and because of its mention just after the listing of sexual sins it probably includes the male and female prostitution so often a part of heathen religion. **Witchcraft** is the translation of the Greek word *pharmakeia* from which the term “pharmacy” comes. In ancient times the worship of evil powers was accompanied by the use of drugs to create trances. This vice will also be prominent in the Tribulation period (cf. Rev. 9:21; 18:23). Eight societal evils are then listed (the last one in Gal. 5:21). **Hatred** (*echthrai*) is in the plural form, denoting primarily a feeling of enmity between groups. **Discord** (*eris*) is the natural result of “hatred” and no doubt a problem in the Galatian church. **Jealousy** (*zēlos*) refers not to the godly form but to the sinful and self-centered type. (These two words, *eris* and *zelos*, are also listed in Rom. 13:13.) **Fits of rage** (*thymoi*) or outbursts of temper, often come as a final eruption of smoldering jealousy. **Selfish ambition** (*eritheiai*) is a self-aggrandizing attitude which shows itself in working to get ahead at other’s expense (cf. Phil. 2:3). **Dissensions** (*dichostasiai*) and **factions** (*haireseis*) describe what happens when people quarrel over issues or personalities, causing hurtful divisions.

**5:21.** **Envy** (*phthonoi*) is an evil feeling, a wrongful desire to possess what belongs to someone else. Thus the sinful nature is seen to be responsible for the breakdown of interpersonal relationships in homes, churches, and in public society. Two sins associated with alcohol fall in a fourth category of evils.

**Drunkenness** (*methai*) refers to excessive use of strong drink by individuals, and **orgies** (*kōmoi*) probably refers to the drunken carousings commonly associated with such things as the worship of Bacchus, the god of wine. Finally, to show that this long list was only representative and not exhaustive, Paul added the words **and the like**. The apostle then solemnly warned the Galatians, as he had done when he was in their midst, that **those who live like this**, who habitually indulge in these fleshly sins **will not inherit the future kingdom of God**. This does not say that a Christian loses his salvation if he lapses into a sin of the flesh, but that a person who lives continually on such a level of moral corruption gives evidence of not being a child of God.

**5:22-23.** There is a pointed contrast here. As verse 16 indicated, there is no need for a believer to display the works of the flesh. Rather, by the Spirit’s power he can manifest the nine graces that are now listed. It is important to observe that **the fruit** here described is not produced by a believer, but by **the Holy Spirit** working through a Christian who is in vital union with Christ (cf. John 15:1-8). The word “fruit” is singular, indicating that these qualities constitute a unity, all of which should be found in a believer who lives under the control of the Spirit. In an ultimate sense this “fruit” is simply the life of Christ lived out in a Christian. It also points to the method whereby Christ is formed in a believer (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:21). The first three virtues are habits of mind which find their source in God. **Love** (*agapē*) is listed first because it is the foundation of the other graces. God is love and loves the world (cf. 1 John 4:8; John 3:16). Such self-sacrificing love that sent Christ to die for sinners is the kind of love that believers who are Spirit-controlled manifest. **Joy** (*chara*) is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which was promised to those who abide in Christ (cf. John 15:11). It does not depend on circumstances because it rests in God’s sovereign control of all things (cf. Rom. 8:28). **Peace** (*eirēnē*) is again a gift of Christ (cf. John 14:27). It is an inner repose and quietness, even in the face of adverse circumstances; it defies human understanding (cf. Phil. 4:7). The second triad reaches out to others, fortified by love, joy, and peace. **Patience** (*makrothymia*) is the quality of forbearance under provocation (cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 1:11; 3:12). It entertains no thoughts of retaliation even when wrongfully treated. **Kindness** (*chrēstotēs*) is benevolence in action such as God demonstrated toward men. Since God is kind toward sinners (cf. Rom. 2:4; Eph. 2:7) a Christian should display the same virtue (cf. 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 3:12). **Goodness** (*agathōsynē*) may be thought of both as an uprightness of soul and as an action reaching out to others to do good even when it is not deserved. The final three graces guide the general conduct of a believer who is led by the Spirit. **Faithfulness** (*pistis*) is the quality which renders a person trustworthy or reliable, like the faithful servant in Luke 16:10-12. **Gentleness** (*prautēs*) marks a person who is submissive to God’s Word (cf. James 1:21) and who is considerate of others when discipline is needed (cf. “gently” in Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25; “gentle” in 1 Cor. 4:21; Eph. 4:2; “gentleness” in Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 3:16). **Self-control** (*enkrateia*; this noun is used in the NT only here and in Acts 24:25; 2 Peter 1:6) denotes self-mastery and no doubt primarily relates to curbing the fleshly impulses just described. Such a quality is impossible to attain apart from the power of God’s Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16); As a final summary statement Paul affirmed that there are no prohibitions (lit., **there is not a law**) **against such** virtues. In a *litotes* (understatement) he asserted that obviously no one would make laws against people who practice such things.

**5:24.** Paul next explained that believers (lit., “those who are of Christ Jesus”) need not be responsive to **the sinful nature** because they **have crucified** it. This does not refer to self-crucifixion or self-mortification. Rather, it refers to the fact that by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Christians were identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul declared that this had been his experience (cf. 2:20) and that of all believers (cf. Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:11; 3:9). While co-crucifixion took place potentially at the cross, it becomes effective for believers when they are converted. This does not mean that their sin nature is then eradicated or even rendered inactive but that it has been judged, a fact believers should reckon to be true (cf. Rom. 6:11-12). So victory over the sinful nature’s **passions and desires** has been provided by Christ in His death. Faith must continually lay hold of this truth or a believer will be tempted to try to secure victory by self-effort.

**5:25-26.** Again Paul reminded the Galatians that in addition to a divine judgment of the sinful nature there is a divine enablement in the person of the Holy Spirit. He made the believer alive by regeneration (cf. John 3:5-6), so each believer is exhorted to **keep in step** (*stoichōmen*, trans. “follow” in Gal. 6:16) **with the Spirit**. Step by step one’s Christian walk should conform to the Spirit’s direction and enablement, lest believers **become conceited, provoking and envying each other**. The latter traits would be true of a walk in the flesh (cf. 5:19-21) and may point to divisions in the Galatian churches occasioned by the Judaizing error (cf. v. 15).

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Freedom through Walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18)**

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

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

#### **In the Spirit to not carry out the desires of the flesh (16)**

*Desires of the flesh brings forth death (Rom 8:13)*

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,

*Desires of the flesh choke God's word and makes us unfruitful (Mark 4:19)*

19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

*Desires of the flesh sometimes degrades the body (Rom 1:24)*

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

*Desires of the flesh is offering our body as an instrument of wickedness (Rom 6:12-13)*

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

*Desires of the flesh is following the ways of this world (Eph 2:1-3)*

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

*Desires of the flesh belongs to the earthly/sinful nature (Col 3:5)*

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

*Desires of the flesh causes fights and quarrels (James 4:1)*

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

### **In the Spirit will aid in Spiritual warfare (17)**

*Because people struggle against evil spiritual forces (Eph 6:12)*

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

*Because Satan is prowling looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8)*

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

*Because the end is near (1 Peter 4:3-7)*

3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. 7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

*Because Satan wants to sift us (Luke 22:31-32)*

31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

*Because Satan roams the earth (Job 1:7)*

7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

### **In the Spirit by being led by the Spirit (18)**

*Led by the Spirit for guidance and hope (Ps 25:4-5)*

4 Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; 5 guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

*Led by the Spirit into truth (John 16:13)*

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

*Led by the Spirit to inherit eternal life (Rom 8:11-14)*

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

*Led by the Spirit to obtain power and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7)*

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

## **Freedom through Not Yielding to the Flesh (Gal 5:19-21)**

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,  
20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,  
21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

### **Yielding to the works of the flesh (19-20)**

*Works of the flesh are controlled by the sinful nature (Rom 7:5)*

5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

*Works of the flesh leads to death (Rom 8:6)*

6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

*Works of the flesh comes from our worldliness (1 Cor 3:3)*

3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

*Works of the flesh enslaves us with evil passions (Titus 3:3)*

3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

### **Yielding causes missing God's inheritance (21)**

*Yielding to the trap of trying to get rich the wrong way (1 Tim 6:9)*

9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

*Yielding to self-seeking lusts and rejecting God's truth (Rom 2:8)*

8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

*Yielding to the sinful nature (Rom 8:13)*

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,

*Yielding to wickedness (1 Cor 6:9)*

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders

*Yielding to immorality (Eph 5:5)*

5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-such a man is an idolater-has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

*Yielding to impurity (Rev 21:27)*

27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## **Freedom through the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26)**

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.  
24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.  
25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.  
26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

### **Displaying the fruit to indicate crucified flesh (22-24)**

*Crucify the flesh by crucifying the old self (Rom 6:6)*

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-

*Crucify the flesh by clothing ourselves with Jesus (Rom 13:14)*

14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

*Crucify the flesh by crucifying the world to us (Gal 6:14)*

14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

*Crucify the flesh by Jesus living through us (Gal 2:20)*

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

### **Displaying the fruit by living in the Spirit (25-26)**

*Living in the Spirit is displaying the light of God (Eph 5:8-9)*

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

*Living in the Spirit because the Spirit gives life (John 6:63)*

63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

*Living in the Spirit is displaying a life of righteousness (Rom 8:10)*

10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

*Living in the Spirit provides a soft heart for God (Ezek 36:26)*

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

#### **Walking by the Spirit (5:15-26)**

15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 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. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident,

which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 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 shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Verses 16 and 17 are vitally important. Paul writes, “But I say, ...” which I take to be a contrast to the biting and devouring one another in verse 15. “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (v. 16).

Paul previously argues in verse 13 that we are not freed in order to serve the flesh. However, in verse 15, Paul describes the Galatians as doing precisely this. They were serving themselves; that is to say, they were serving the flesh. They were not serving one another. Thus in verse 16, Paul capsulizes the solution to their selfishness. He asserts that fleshly desires are combatted by walking in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit results in serving one another through love.

Verse 17 explains the crux of the conflict by describing the nature of the war within. “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.” Within us rages a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. It is critical to have a correct understanding of “the flesh.” The ancient Greeks believed that the real problem was a battle between the mind and the body. Thus some have incorrectly identified “the flesh” with the body. It is not entirely true and is an error still propagated today. One misguided teacher has called the body the “carton,” and he says it is the source of evil. This identification is incorrect because the body is to be presented to God as a holy, living sacrifice. We do not present something evil to God. The body is something which is to be transformed. As a matter of fact, our body will be transformed and glorified (Phil. 3:21). The body is not evil; the flesh is evil. The flesh does refer to our bodily appetites. The flesh is our fallen humanity, our fallen humanness. It is what we are apart from Christ.

We received the Spirit as a result of faith in Christ, and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. Paul laid this foundation for the Galatians previously in chapter 3.

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Christ Jesus was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal. 3:1-2).

In the above verses, Paul refers to the initial reception of the Holy Spirit that comes at conversion. He asked, “How did the Spirit come? Did the Spirit come by law-works? Did it come by submitting yourself to the Law? Did it come, so to speak, when you were circumcised?” No. The Spirit came by faith alone, as found in the example of Abram. Paul continues: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

Do you notice that those are two opposing forces—flesh and spirit? The following verses continue the dichotomy between the flesh and the Spirit. “Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:4-5).

A distinct relationship is revealed, the relationship between faith and the Spirit, the Law and the flesh. Faith is related to the Spirit. Faith receives the Spirit of God, the agent of both salvation and sanctification. Law-keeping relies upon the flesh. When Paul speaks about the flesh and Spirit being at war one with another he writes, “For these things are in opposition to one another so that you may not do the things that you please” (v. 17b).

What exactly does Paul mean when he says, “... you may not do the things that you please”? In the light of Romans 7, I believe that Paul means we are unable to do the things that we want to do, that is, the things that we know are good. In other words, I believe it is those things which the Law requires, the standard of righteousness. Thus we are unable to do righteousness because the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to one another. The Galatians had opted to resist sin by submitting to the Law. However, Paul has demonstrated that submitting to the Law and adopting works results in surrendering faith. When the Law is not only the standard but the source of righteousness, there is only one means through which to keep it; that is, through the flesh. Since the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to one another, the Spirit doesn’t empower men who are under Law. The Spirit empowers men who live by faith. Thus Paul reasons, you cannot do the things which the Law requires. You cannot keep the standards of the Law in the power of the flesh because the flesh is opposed to the



Spirit, and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. Consequently, if you are under Law your only power is the flesh, yet walking in the Spirit is the only means to serve one another in love. Men are defeated in their good intentions by submitting to the Law. To place oneself under the Law is to place oneself in a position where only the power of the flesh and the desires of the flesh are operative. Trying to overcome sin with Law is something like trying to put out a grease fire with water. All it does is multiply the problem. It makes sin grow rather than reducing it.

In verses 18 and following Paul characterizes the man who walks in the Spirit as a man who is not under the Law. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (v. 18). The elaborate description of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are given to demonstrate that if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law. We will address further the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in my next message. But I do want you to notice that the things which are described as the deeds of the flesh and the works of the Spirit are not all inclusive. These are not all of the things which are the works of the flesh, nor are they all of the things which are the fruit of the Spirit. Most of us probably assume these lists are complete and use them to assess our spiritual condition. Notice the wording of verse 21, "Those who practice **such things** ..." Thus the works of the flesh that are listed are a mere sampling. Again, notice the wording in verse 23 in reference to the fruit of the Spirit: "against **such things** there is no law." The fruits of the Spirit which Paul lists are mere examples.

The fruits of the Spirit and the works of the flesh which Paul has listed, were chosen because of the particular problem of the Galatians. The church was beset with strife, described as biting and devouring one another. When Paul recounted the deeds of the flesh, immorality, impurity, sensuality, I honestly believe that the Galatians were saying "Preach it brother, preach it! Oh, that's the Gospel! Wow, look at him, coming down on sin!" It must have really tickled the ears of the Galatians because Judaism despised immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, and sorcery (vv. 19b-20a). Those were the "filthy five."

They agreed with Paul that the "filthy five" shouldn't be practiced. What they weren't ready to hear was the rest of the list: "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these ..." (vv. 20-21a). Paul grouped them together as from the same source. Paul categorizes the Galatians "socially acceptable" sins with those that they would abhor committing. He wants to impress upon the Galatians that they are acting in the flesh. Jesus severely dealt with the scribes and the Pharisees because of the same issue. The scribes and the Pharisees were basically law-abiding citizens. With, or around whom would you rather live? In what town would you rather live? A Pharisees' town or a Gentile pagan town? I would choose the Pharisee town any day. However, the Lord reprimanded the scribes and Pharisees, "You white-washed sepulchres, you blind leaders of the blind, you snakes!" Yet He counseled the woman caught in the act of adultery, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Their socially acceptable sin is abominable in God's sight because it comes out of a self-righteous heart. In our churches today we sometimes tolerate "socially acceptable" sin, while condemning those which are unacceptable (to us, at least).

Just as the deeds of the flesh were selected to address the problem in the Galatian church, the fruits of the Spirit are also samples relating to this strife. I see a relationship between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. Let's call the gifts of the Spirit **charisma** and the fruit of the Spirit **character**. They are both manifestations of grace. Is not the source of the fruit of the Spirit grace and not works? The word for spiritual gifts, *charismata*, is derived from the word for grace, *charis*. Let us compare spiritual gifts to gasoline and the fruit of the Spirit to oil. Even though gasoline makes a car run, without oil to lubricate the engine it would go nowhere. In the same way, spiritual gifts are a manifestation of God's grace in the life of a believer, but without the fruit of the Spirit such gifts accomplish nothing.

An unbelieving psychiatrist, Victor Frankel, has given me further insight into this text, although his subject matter vastly differs. He describes the pursuit of happiness in the following words: "As for the pleasure principle I would go even farther in my criticism. It is my contention that in the final analysis that the pleasure is self-defeating."<sup>109</sup>

Victor Frankel is talking about the pursuit of pleasure as a goal. "The more one aims at pleasure, the more his aim is missed."<sup>110</sup> In other words, the very pursuit of happiness is what thwarts it. Then he continues: "And that is why one need not pursue happiness, one need not care for it once there is a reason for it. But even more, one cannot pursue it. To the extent to which one makes happiness the objective of his motivation, he necessarily makes it the object of his attention."<sup>111</sup>

Later in the book he addresses the topic of the status drive. He gives the illustration of himself seeking something selfishly. He had published sixteen books, however one book was written anonymously. In an

agreement with the publisher the German translation would be published anonymously. He purposely wrote it anonymously to conceal his identity, and the book turned out to be his bestseller.

Let me relate Victor Frankel's theory about the pursuit of happiness to the message of the book of Galatians. The primary reason that the Galatians were deceived into pursuing legalism was because "being spiritual" became their goal. I believe that spirituality is never a legitimate goal. Take for example, the life and ministry of our Lord and the disciples. The disciples were concerned about spiritual status. In my estimation, in Christian circles today we attempt to become "spiritual" to attain status in the church. In the world, wealth gives prestige, in the church spirituality gives status. Do you understand why the disciples were concerned about who was going to be first in the Kingdom of God? They were status seekers. They looked for spiritual success to gain prestige. The Lord's response to this kind of thinking was, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26).

Verse 13 of our passage contains the same message that our Lord conveyed to the disciples. Service, not spirituality, is our goal. I maintain spirituality, like happiness, is something that is unattainable when pursued. It cannot be a legitimate goal. This helps us to understand why our Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Abide in Me." The goal is abiding in Christ, and the results are fruit-bearing. We have reversed the goal and the results. We have made fruit-bearing the goal because we think that is spiritual. We look at abiding in Him as the necessary evil, or the necessary mechanism to achieve fruitfulness.

When spirituality becomes our goal one of the consequences is that we become self-centered. We begin to ask ourselves, how am I doing? This is why we are so preoccupied with self-image. I suggest that self-image problems are the result of improper orientation. We are self-centered in orientation instead of being service-centered. In our passage Paul states that our goal is to serve one another.

Think through the Book of Philippians, in the light of what I've been saying about servanthood with regard to one another. Servanthood is the goal, not spirituality. When we seek spirituality as the highest aim, we look at distinctions as the basis for elevating ourselves above others. This problem was prevalent in Corinth, for example. When we seek to serve, we see distinctions as the opportunity to minister. We see that the differences in the body are designed by God so that the body can minister to itself in love.

Paul wrote the Book of Philippians in prison. In chapter 1 he sets forth the problems related to his imprisonment, two of which were his uncertain future and the fact that others were preaching the gospel in such a way as to distress Paul. How would you feel, and how would you respond, especially if you were preoccupied with being noted as spiritual? You can imagine the response of the other preachers who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. They said to their congregation, "We really need to pray for Paul. It's obvious he's under divine discipline. He's in jail. God has taken away his ministry. God is rebuking him. Let's pray for Paul that God would restore him." Paul's response to his situation was totally different, "Nevertheless Christ is being preached, and in that I rejoice." Paul responded this way because he was a servant, not a status-seeker who wanted to be esteemed as spiritual.

Later in the chapter Paul writes that his uncertain future may include either life or death. If death was the outcome he would go to be with Christ. If not, Paul stated that he would labor on and continue to serve the saints. Paul had a servant's heart, and was willing to do whatever advanced the cause of Christ. Paul drew his example from Christ, described as the suffering servant in chapter 2. I've always resisted the interpretation of the passage which says, "Let each one of you esteem others better than himself." It has always troubled me whether the words in Greek mean "more important than," or "better than." I finally see the wisdom of the word "better." What is the mentality of a servant? He sees others as over him. What is the mentality of one who chooses to be spiritual? He aspires to leadership. He aspires to have people serve him. The mentality of a servant is the mentality that sees others as better than and more important than himself.

In Philippians chapter 3 Paul is renouncing the error of the teaching of the circumcisers that men must submit to the Law to obtain righteousness. These men aspired to achieve their prescribed standard of spirituality. Instead Paul sought only to know Christ and Him crucified, the power of His resurrection. I suggest that one of the greatest problems in the church is that we've been seeking spirituality and not servanthood. Our focus is shifting from Christ, and we're beginning to ask, "How spiritual are we?" We really cannot answer that question. I think that's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians "I don't judge myself" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4). Spirituality is God's business. Abiding is our responsibility. Serving is our responsibility. Whenever we shift our focus from Christ, even to such a pious-sounding commodity as spirituality, we begin to emphasize outward, external standards. This is the essence of legalism.

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/war-without-and-war-within%E2%80%94part-1-galatians-513-26>)*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

If the Galatian epistle were a narrative, Flesh and Spirit would serve as the main characters. In this scenario, the conflict between the two played out in the lives of the Galatians. However, the Spirit has already won—the resolution of the story has been made complete! Therefore, Paul wants his hearers and readers to act accordingly. As followers of Jesus live in step with the Spirit, we will bear the Spirit's fruit. When this life is demonstrated in a community of believers, the result is a unified people of God. Mutual submission in love becomes the ultimate example of the Spirit's presence. This narrative is timeless; it is just as applicable for modern audiences as it was for the first-century Galatians.

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

Walk in the Spirit, Not the Flesh - Walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh cannot happen simultaneously. The walk of a Christian should display His walk. If not, the person is walking in the flesh. Paul gives examples of works of the flesh versus works of walking in the Spirit—having sex with someone who is not your spouse, sex between singles, pornography, or any thought or act opposite of the pure loving relationship God intended between a man and a woman. Religious and relational sins include worshiping another god, following occultic experiences, or using drugs to alter reality. Those walking in the flesh mistreat others, continually fight, wish for another's possessions, have uncontrolled anger, cause disunity, insist on always being right, and misuse alcohol. Paul said if you look at this list and realize you are doing some of these things repeatedly, maybe you should be asking yourself some serious questions if you are truly trusting in Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit. Those who continually practice works of the flesh will not enter heaven. Those who are in all-out rebellion against God are not going to make it in.

Fruit of the Spirit - On the other hand, Paul laid out examples of walking in the Spirit, showing the fruit of the Spirit. The desires of the flesh can seem overwhelming, but God has given us His power in strength through the Holy Spirit to be overcomers. Through the Spirit, we love persons we do not like or find hard to love, we practice peace, we are long-suffering with others, we are generous, persevering, faithful to God and each other, and gentle.

What to Do with My Stuff - Stuff from the past such as guilt, shame, failings, and fearing not doing better in the future can haunt our daily thoughts. How can one get rid of these inner nagging? When Jesus comes and takes the believer home, the fleshly battles will end. But even now, in this life, Christians can experience victory by regularly, humbly kneeling at the foot of the Cross depositing their stuff there and saying, "I'm done with this."