

## -----ENEMIES OF INNER PEACE-----

# THE FLESH VERSUS THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5:16 -18

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(EVANGELIST)

## INTRODUCTION

Apostle Paul's message to the Galatians and by implication to us today, describes an internal battle for every Christian between the sinful nature (the flesh) and the Holy Spirit, a constant conflict where the flesh's desires (selfishness, immorality) oppose the Spirit's leading (love, holiness), and brings true freedom, contrasting with being controlled by the Law or sinful urges.

Paul commands believers to "walk by the Spirit," meaning to live dependent on the Spirit's guidance and power, which prevents gratifying fleshly desires. Let's see how this happens. The best place to start is with the text.

*16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

## 1. THE COMMAND TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT (v. 16)

The passage starts with the command to walk by the Spirit. The idea in this verse is that if we walk by the Spirit, we will overcome our sinful desires. That's what Paul tells the Galatians. If they walk by the Spirit, they will not carry out their sinful desires. Take note, Paul gives a command and a promise in v. 16 saying, "But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

**A. THE COMMAND: WALK BY THE SPIRIT: WHAT DOES IT SIGNIFIES?** Apostle Paul is telling the Galatians to walk by the Spirit of God. This term "walk" carries an interesting meaning. It is an Hebrew term that describes one's life, someone's conduct, someone's "walk of life." We are familiar with this in the Old Testament: "For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the

*LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him” (Deut. 11:22). “But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’” (Jeremiah 7:23)*

This Hebrew term is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to picture one’s life. Walking is something we learn to do. We are taught as a toddler how we are to walk. That’s how life is—it’s something we learn how to do. We learn how to interact with people, develop relationships, get jobs, have families, and so on.

Walking is step-by-step. Life is just like that. It’s just one day at a time—one small step at a time. We learn one thing one day, and another the next. So, we understand walking in the Scriptures as talking about our conduct, conducting one’s life, living step-by-step just like walking. Paul told the Galatians that Walking by the Spirit is a continuous regular action. It is an habitual way of life.

It is submitting every step of our daily lives to the Spirit’s control, so that He can move us forward in our Christian lives. Same is our life as Christians, remembers what Jesus

says to Nicodemus about this in (**John 3:3-6**). This religious ruler talks with Jesus at night and Jesus told him that he must be “born again” to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Nicodemus was puzzled at Jesus’ statement thinking that he means one must go back into his mother’s womb and be born a second time. But Jesus told him that He is talking about spiritual rebirth that happens through the Holy Spirit. So it is with every believer: it is by the Spirit that we are born again. We were once dead to sins, and unresponsive to God because of our dead state (**Eph. 2:1**). It is on this Basis we are translated into the Kingdom of God.

#### **B. THE PROMISE: OVERCOMING SIN**

There’s a wonderful result from walking by the Spirit. Paul attaches a wonderful promise onto this command saying that if we will make the effort to walk by the Spirit, we “*will not gratify the desires of the flesh*” (**v. 16b**). There is no negotiation here. You will not gratify the desires of flesh if you are walking by the Spirit. These desires of our flesh are what remains of our sin nature.

Remember, we are not entirely free from the presence and power of sin—and sin has power through our desires. The Bible has much to say about the desires of the flesh:

*“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:16).*

*“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14). “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11).* We will be fighting our old sin nature until the day we pass from this earth and are glorified with the Lord in His eternal presence. But until then, we are in a constant fight, (the flesh vs. the Spirit ).

The only way to overcome the desires of our flesh is to submit each step of our daily lives to the Spirit. To walk by the Spirit. This is ultimately the only way to overcome our sinful desires. There are no other solutions or ways. Joseph is our perfect example in **Gen. 39:6-10**.

*Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care because you are his wife. How then could I do*

*such a wicked thing and sin against God?" NIV.*

The only sure solution to overcoming sin is by walking by the Spirit of God. The flesh cannot be tamed, it cannot be reformed, it cannot be trained, and it cannot be improved—but it can be overcome by walking by the Spirit.

### **THE REASON TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT (VS.17)**

Apostle Paul in v. 17 gave us the reason to walk by the Spirit. The idea in this verse is that we must walk by the Spirit because there is a conflict taking place within us between the flesh and Spirit—and we cannot claim neutrality (we can't be walking by the Spirit and by the flesh at the same time).

Listen to Paul in 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.”* Paul tells us why it is so crucial to walk by the Spirit, because there's a war going on! This is not a cosmic battle between the flesh and the Spirit somewhere out in space, but a battle between the flesh and the Spirit for your desires.

It is a real, deadly, costly, conflict of desire against desire taking place. And do you know where your

desires are located? Your heart. Here's the thing about the conflict: It's not happening somewhere outside of you. It's not happening in the world. It's not even the flesh coming to you and fighting the Spirit.

This conflict is much closer than you might think. In fact, this conflict is closer to you than the Bible in your hands—this conflict is happening in your heart. *"Guard your heart!"* says the writer of Proverbs. Why? *"for from it flow the springs of life"* (**Prov. 4:23**).

This conflict is happening inside of us. It is happening where our affections lie, it is happening on the throne of our emotions and intellect. You need to know where it is taking place or it will be destructive to you. It is a conflict of desires. Paul says *that "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit."* Even though we're saved, what remains of our old sin nature still has desires from time to time. We are not completely free from those desires.

The flesh will always say, *"This sin will never hurt!"* *"Haven't you done enough for God?"* Do it and pray for forgiveness and things of that nature. Not once has the flesh ever benefited you in your walk with God. Jesus says, *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all"* (**John 6:33**). Paul says the Holy Spirit has desires

against the flesh. The Holy Spirit has desires, too. He desires what God desires, for He is God. He wants you to be like Christ, be set apart for His purposes.

### **THE RESULTS OF WALKING BY THE SPIRIT(v. 18)**

We have seen the command to walk by the Spirit (v. 16), and the reason to do so (v. 17), and we realize at this point that we may be tempted because of what Paul has just said about this conflict of desires taking place in our hearts. What hope do we have for overcoming the desires of the flesh? Paul says in v. 18, *"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."*

What does he mean by the law? God gave the Israelites a unique code of law to direct His people in their worship, their relationship with Him, and their social relationships with one another. It served many purposes: to establish them as a nation, to set them apart so they could reflect God's glory, and finally to show the people their need for Him, thus paving the way for the Christ to fulfil the whole law and take the punishment for transgression against the law.

The people could not keep the whole law. They had no heart transformation in order to do so. So, they were promised throughout

the OT that a Messiah would come and change their hearts—and many placed their faith in this Messiah who would come. Jeremiah declared: *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people”*.

***Colossians 2:14-15*** – *14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.* NKJV

The day of Pentecost in **Acts 2** brought an end to the Old Testament law, when Jesus ascended after His death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit came to indwell with believers to bring Salvation to all mankind, and the establishment of Gods kingdom. when Jesus ascended after His death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers.

### **HAVING THE SPIRIT’S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES MEANS TWO THINGS:**

- 1.) **The ability to overcome sin.** The Spirit of God enables and empowers us to trump over the presence of sin in our lives by His conquering presence (vv. 16, 18). Before we were saved, we had no ability or desire to overcome sin, but now we have both, thanks to God the Spirit who lives in us.
- 2.) **The ability to carry out God’s commands.** The other side of this coin is that we have the power and ability to do God’s will revealed in the Bible, as we continually submit to His power and leadership in our daily lives in Jesus Name.