

Called to Walk in the Spirit

Galatians 5: 16-18

In the preceding verses of this chapter, Paul has been dealing with living a Spirit-filled life. This is the only way a believer is able to walk in a way that pleases the Lord. He will continue to offer guidance on the Spirit-filled life throughout the remainder of the letter.

As one is saved, justification in Christ is immediate. We are, at that moment, made righteous before the Father and secured in Christ. As we continue the Christian journey, we are under the influence of being sanctified – being conformed to the image of Christ. The work of sanctification is accomplished through the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is imperative in the lives of believers. The Spirit guides us to become more like our Savior.

As we discuss the [expectations](#) of Paul with the text, I want to consider: [Called to Walk in the Spirit](#).

I. The Admonition Expressed (16) – [This I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh](#). On the surface, this appears to be a very simple admonition, but it has significant implications for the believer. Consider:

A. The Command (16a) – [This I say then: Walk in the Spirit](#). Simply, the Galatian believers, and all who come to Christ by faith, are expected to walk in the Spirit. We must remember, many of the Galatians were being influenced by the false teachings of the Judaizers. This influence had caused some within the church to feel as if certain works of the flesh were also necessary for salvation, and beyond salvation, they felt these works were required to live pleasing to the Lord. Paul offered a simple admonition – walk in the Spirit. The Galatians were not expected to adhere to the desires of others, nor to seek the affirmation of men. As believers in Christ, they were to look to a single source for guidance in their walk with the Lord and continued maturity – the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit would provide the necessary guidance for a victorious Christian life and grant the assurance needed to persevere in the faith. [Gal.5:25 – If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit](#). [Rom.8:1-2 – There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.](#) ² [For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death](#).

➤ This is not to say that the believer should have no conscious awareness of the life they live, but there is no need for added worry and unnecessary expectation. Our sanctification is guided by the Spirit, not through self-perceived required efforts. If we want to ensure that we are walking with the Lord, in a manner that pleases Him, then all we have to do is maintain our walk with the Spirit.

As we follow as the Spirit leads, and serve as the Spirit directs, we will naturally grow in our faith and become more like Christ.

B. The Consequence (16b) – This I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. As we strive to keep this in context, Paul declared that those who walk in the Spirit would not succumb to the lusts of the flesh – adopting the teachings of the Judaizers, in an effort to please men, and thus, abandoning the truth of the Gospel. Their salvation was not secured based on works of the flesh, and the Spirit would never lead one to seek fulfillment in the flesh. If the Galatians wanted to ensure they were walking with the Lord, rather than in the flesh, they must continually walk in the Spirit.

➤ While the context of the passage dealt with the temptation of satisfying the demands of the flesh through seeking the approval of Judaizers, this admonition has broad implication for the Christian life. If we commit to walking in the Spirit, we will not be focused on satisfying the lusts of the flesh, whatever those lusts may be. Our Christian lives are viewed primarily by an outward appearance. Our level of spirituality is often judged by our actions; but in reality, our Christian life has one standard by which it is genuinely measured – are we walking in the Spirit? One can be very active religiously and not walking in the Spirit.

➤ “The fact that *peripateō* (**walk**) is used here in the present tense indicates that Paul is speaking of continuous, regular action, in other words, a habitual way of life. And the fact that the verb is also in the imperative mood indicates he is not giving believers an option but a command,” MacArthur.¹ As we contemplate the admonition to walk in the Spirit, it stands to reason that we would expect forward movement. One cannot walk and remain in the same position. As we walk in the Spirit, we are progressing toward Christlikeness through sanctification.

II. The Application Explained (17-18) – Here Paul seeks to make application regarding walking in the Spirit while encouraging believers to pursue such a walk. He mentioned:

A. The Conflict (17a) – For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other. Paul described the conflict that rages between the flesh and the Spirit. While we are well aware such a conflict exists on a universal level, Paul is particularly dealing with the conflict that exists in the lives of believers. While one is transformed in Christ at salvation, the flesh is not redeemed. There will always remain a battle between the flesh and Spirit, as long as we live. Rom.7:18-20 – For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.¹⁹ For the good that I

would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

➤ While striving to live for the Lord, and walk in the Spirit, the believer can expect no reconciliation between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul declared these are contrary to one another. They are continually in opposition – at odds with one another. It is not reasonable to assume that one can walk in the Spirit and satisfy the flesh at the same time. We will either walk according to the flesh, allowing the flesh to dictate our actions and attitude, or we will walk in the Spirit, being led according to His supernatural, spiritual guidance.

B. The Challenge (17b) – [so that ye cannot do the things that ye would](#). Paul presents the real challenge within this conflict. While believers have a genuine desire to serve the Lord, and walk according to the Spirit, we often submit to the flesh. Without fail, such behavior results in immediate conviction from the Spirit, and if our hearts are right with the Lord, we experience regret and will repent of our failure. Paul emphasizes the strength of the flesh and the difficulty in overcoming its desires. More than we like to admit, we don't do the things we should, because the flesh entices us to engage in activities or desires, we shouldn't as believers. [Matt.26:41 – Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak](#).

➤ A mature believer is willing to admit this conflict exists while also being aware of the danger associated with the desires of the flesh. While the enemy can and does tempt us to engage in sin, our strongest battles are always fought from within. We must be willing to crucify the lusts of the flesh, in order to walk in the Spirit. We must resist the momentary and deceptive pleasure associated with the lust of the flesh to continue to grow in the Lord, while walking in the Spirit.

C. The Consequence (18) – [But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law](#). Again, Paul refers back to the main concern within the letter – the temptation to adhere to the false teachings of the Judaizers in seeking righteousness through works of the flesh. Those who are led of the Spirit are no longer under bondage to the law. They are not expected to maintain works of the flesh in order to walk pleasing to the Lord. As we have discussed, such an attempt is futile anyway. The law cannot provide salvation, and the flesh is unable to keep the demands of the law. Paul encouraged the Galatians to embrace the liberty they enjoyed through salvation in Christ, walk in the Spirit, and forsake the demands of the flesh.

➤ We must be cautioned against interpreting the words of Paul to imply something that he would never embrace. Paul is not implying that we no longer consider the lives we live, nor does he imply that believers should not strive to keep the moral and spiritual demands of Scripture. Being saved by grace should never be viewed as a license to sin. If we are walking in the Spirit,

we are assured that He will always lead us in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. [Rom.6:12-15](#) – Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.¹³ Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Conclusion: This has been a straightforward challenge to walk in the Spirit. We are well aware that the Spirit abides within every believer, but it is possible to grieve the Spirit and walk contrary to His leading. If we are to please the Lord, we must walk in the Spirit rather than seeking to satisfy the flesh. It is impossible to please the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. We will either submit to one or the other. If you are yet unsaved, you are walking according to the flesh and its desires. Come to Christ in repentance and faith, so that you too may walk in the Spirit.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Galatians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 152.