

# Walk in the Spirit

## Galatians 5:16-26

After His resurrection, Jesus gave the apostles the enormous commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything He commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). As a man, Jesus ascended to God's right hand, received the Spirit and then at Pentecost, poured out the Spirit to empower the church to fulfill her mission (Acts 2:32-35). The Spirit fills the apostles with wisdom and boldness to preach, and He works in the hearts of those who believe to change their life. This is a gift who transforms the world and the life of every believer when we walk in Him.

### The Battle Within

Change can only be motivated in three ways: by self, society, or by God. In Christ, love drives us (Gal. 5:6, 14). Walking in the Spirit is the result of the Spirit winning the battle over the flesh, one that is always waged (v16). "Flesh" is sometimes translated "sinful nature", and doesn't refer to our physical bodies but to sinful desires that remain in a believer. Before becoming a Christian, the flesh governs a person (Eph. 2:3). Believing in Christ does not eliminate the flesh but instead begins the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh. Each "desires to dominate" the other, and the result is oddly encouraging. We sin, but this is not what we fundamentally want to do (v17). Of course every action we choose to do reveals our strongest desire in the moment, but if we are led by the Spirit, that moment doesn't define us. We're not dominated by law, flesh, self, or society, even though we may momentarily give in (v18). If we trust God, we are slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18). This is a battle we have the means to win, sometimes slowly, but surely. This is who we are in Christ.

### The Works of the Flesh

Paul wants us to know what the works of the flesh are, which also tells us what they are not. We define sin scripturally and not culturally. The works of the flesh are evident—obvious and identifiable. Jesus said you can identify people by their fruits (Matt. 7:16). What can be less obvious is the lies behind them. We have a list than be divided into four categories: sexuality, spirituality, relationships, and appetites. The first has to do with sexual sins: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness (v19). Our culture says if it feels good, do it. Looking for identity or pleasure in sexual pursuits destroy them both. Chesterton said free love is the first and most obvious bribe offered to a slave. Compare the relational and physical trouble from sexual immorality to the enduring marital love (Prov. 5:19). Spirituality is addressed as idolatry and sorcery (v20). The flesh loves religion with handles where one can feed his pride through good works. "Sorcery" is translated as witchcraft (*pharmakeia*), and it would apply to occult religion but also to spirituality through substances. Getting stoned is often a spiritual act either explicitly or implicitly stated. We get to be filled with Spirit, not with wine (Eph. 5:18). The third category includes

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eight words about relational sin (vv20-21). Hatred is hostility toward others. Contention is ungodly conflict and argument. Jealousy is misplaced zeal. Dissensions and heresies are separating and promoting falsehood. The fourth category is drunkenness and wild parties designed for stupid things to happen. It's impossible to indulge the flesh constantly—to love these things—and inherit the kingdom of God (v21).

## The Fruit of the Spirit

Rather leaving us naked and ashamed, the nine fruits of the Spirit deliver abundant life. These fruit grows slowly, naturally, consistently and necessarily on healthy trees which are fed from unseen places. Love is self-sacrificial action toward God and others. Joy delights in God for who He is and what He does, and it doesn't go away when we face challenges. Peace is freedom from anxiety and confidence in unshakeable grace and salvation. Longsuffering is patience with our circumstances and the sins of others. Kindness serves others and considers them first without expectations, free of manipulation and envy. Goodness is principled, consistent virtue, delivering the right thing whether generosity or rebuke. Faithfulness is reliability, loyalty and courage. Gentleness is meekness and humility before God, and disciplined strength before men (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7; 2 Thess. 3:10). Nothing holds us back from these (v23)! But we have to crucify the flesh. When we do, we are freed of pride ourselves in pride and envy of others. We are free to walk in the Spirit. Jesus did all these things for us so that we would be free to live for Him.