

Living by the Spirit



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 5:16–25; Deuteronomy 13:4, 5; Romans 7:14–24; Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 22:35–40.

MEMORY VERSE: “So I say, live by the Holy Spirit’s power. Then you will not do what your desires controlled by sin want you to do” (Galatians 5:16, NIV).

ROBERT ROBINSON wrote the hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” It is one of the best-loved hymns of all time. But Robinson was not always a man of faith. His father’s death left him angry. He started drinking and living a life of sin. But one day he heard a sermon by the famous preacher George Whitefield. And then Robinson gave his life to God. He became a Methodist preacher. And he wrote that hymn with these lines, “Prone [likely to do something] to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”

Later, someone changed Robinson’s song. This person was uncomfortable with the part about the Christian’s heart wandering away from God. So, the words were changed to “Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it. Prone to love the God I serve.”

But Robinson’s words show the truth about the Christian struggle. As believers, we have two sides: the flesh and the Spirit. These two sides war with each other. Our sinful side will always be “prone” to wander from God. But we must be willing to surrender to His Spirit. Then we will no longer be slaves to the desires of our flesh. This message is at the heart of the verses for this week.



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WALKING IN THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:16)

Read Galatians 5:16. In this verse, Paul uses the word picture of “walk[ing]” (NIV). What is the relationship between “walking” and a life of faith? (Read also Deuteronomy 13:4, 5; Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:1, 17; and Colossians 1:10.)

“Walking” is a word picture taken from the Old Testament. It explains the way a person should behave. Often, Paul makes use of this word picture in his letters. He uses it to explain the way a Christian should live. Paul’s use of this word picture most likely points to the name that Christians first were known by. The first followers of Jesus were known simply as the followers of “the Way” (John 14:6; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14). This name shows that Christianity was not only a set of teachings about Jesus. It was also a “way” of life to be “walked” or followed.



Paul uses the word picture of walking to show what it means to follow the law and to live a godly Christian life.

Read what Exodus 16:4; Leviticus 18:4; and Jeremiah 44:23 say about the word picture of “walk[ing]” (NET) or “follow[ing]” (NIV). Now read what Paul says about “walk[ing]” (NKJV) or “living” (NIV) in Galatians 5:16 and in Romans 8:4. How is Paul’s word picture about walking different from the Old Testament’s?

In the Old Testament, living a godly life was not described only by the word “walking.” Instead, it was described by the wording “walking in the law.” *Halakhah* is the word Jews use to mean the rules found in both the law and in the traditions of the rabbis that were handed down to them. *Halakhah* usually is translated to mean “the Jewish law.” But the word really comes from the Hebrew word for “to walk.” And it means “the way of going.”

Paul’s words about “walking in the Spirit” are not against the law or against obeying the law. What Paul is against is the wrong way that the law is being used. The true obedience that God wants from us cannot be earned through obeying the law. It can be gained only by a change of heart. This change is brought about by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:18).

In what way have you “walked in the Spirit”? How is it done? What things are you doing in your life that make this walk harder? What can you do to change?

THE CHRISTIAN'S WAR (Galatians 5:17)

“The desires controlled by sin do not want what the Spirit delights in. And the Spirit does not want what the desires controlled by sin delight in. The two are at war with each other. [That is] why you are not supposed to do whatever you want” (Galatians 5:17, NlrV; read also Romans 7:14–24). How have you experienced the harsh and painful truth of these words in your own life?

The struggle that Paul talks about in Galatians 5:17 is the inner tug-of-war that takes place inside each Christian. Humans are born fallen. So, they naturally want to give in to the desires of the flesh (Romans 8:7). It is only when they are born again by the Holy Spirit that the real spiritual battle begins to take place. This teaching does not mean that non-Christians never struggle between right and wrong. They do. But the Christian has two sides within him or her: the flesh and the Spirit. And these two sides are at war.

Throughout history, Christians have wished to be set free from this struggle. Some have tried to end the battle by withdrawing from society. Others have claimed that their fallen and sinful condition as humans could be removed completely by a miracle of God. Both groups are wrong in their thinking. By the Spirit's power we certainly can overcome the sinful desires of our flesh. But running away from society does not help. Why? Because we take the struggle with us wherever we go. And we will continue to do so until death or the Second Coming.

Clearly, we have two sides to us as believers. We were born in human flesh, and we are born again by the Spirit. So, we are on both sides of the battle at once! The spiritual side of us wants what is spiritual. It hates the flesh. But our flesh wants to do sinful things. It is against what is spiritual. The new believer is too weak to fight against the flesh in his or her own strength. So, the only way we can conquer the flesh is to choose each day to side with the Spirit against our sinful selves. That is why Paul is so eager for us to choose to walk in the Spirit.

Think about the battle between your two sides. What would you say to a Christian who is struggling to accept this idea of a never-ending battle with self?



There is a tug-of-war between the flesh and the Spirit going on inside the heart of each Christian.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH (Galatians 5:19–21)

First, Paul introduces the idea of the war between the flesh and the Spirit going on inside of each Christian. Now, in Galatians 5:18–26, Paul tells us more about the differences between these two sides within us. He makes a list of bad habits and of good ones. Good habits or good things that we do are also known as virtues. Bad habits are called vices.

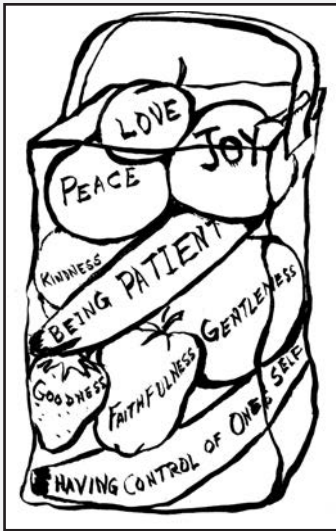
Read the lists of vices and virtues in the following verses: Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Mark 7:21; 1 Timothy 3:2, 3; 1 Peter 4:3; and Revelation 21:8. In what ways are these lists the same as Paul’s lists in Galatians 5:19–24? How are they different?

Paul knew very well about the lists of vices and virtues found in the Bible. But there are important differences found in his two lists in Galatians. First, Paul names the list of vices the “works of the flesh.” He calls the list of virtues the “fruit of the Spirit.” This difference in names is important. James D. G. Dunn explains why: “The flesh wants to have its own way. But the Spirit makes us more concerned for others. The list of vices shows the bad things people do to get what they want. The list of virtues shows how God changes us. It shows that a true spiritual change is at the heart of doing what is right.”—Adapted, *The Epistle [Letter] to the Galatians*, page 308.

The life lived in the flesh brings only division and trials. But the life lived in the Spirit produces one fruit of the Spirit. This one fruit is shown in the nine virtues Paul lists. These nine virtues join Christians together in belief.

Some people claim that what a Christian believes about God really does not matter as long as he or she is a good person. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul’s list of vices shows that wrong views about God lead to twisted ideas about relationships, religion, and the way that we should behave in society. Such wrong ideas lead to the breakdown of human relationships. And they also can lead to the loss of eternal life (Galatians 5:21).

Read again through Paul’s list of “works of the flesh.” In what ways does each vice break one or more of the Ten Commandments?



The life lived in the Spirit produces one fruit of the Spirit.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22, 23)

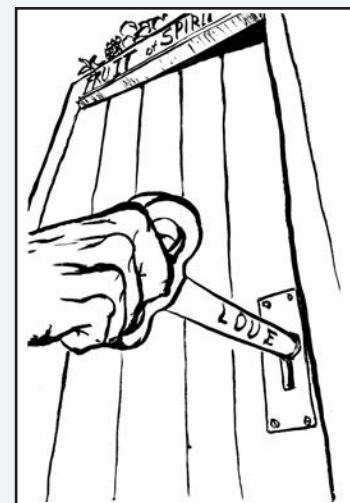
“But the fruit the Holy Spirit produces is love, joy and peace. It is being patient, kind and good. It is being faithful and gentle and having control of oneself. There is no law against things of that kind” (Galatians 5:22, 23, NIV). In what ways does obeying the Ten Commandments show the fruit of the Spirit as described in these verses? (Read also Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28 and Matthew 22:35–40.)

The Ten Commandments never were meant to take the place of love. Instead, they help guide us in how we are to show love to God and to others. Love is not at war with the law. Love for God and love for our neighbor do not do away with the Ten Commandments. Saying so would be as foolish as saying that love for nature destroys the law of gravity!

Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit in a list of nine beautiful virtues. Bible thinkers believe these nine virtues are grouped together in smaller bunches of three. Some think the number three points to the Godhead. The Godhead is made up of the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Others think the number three points to the ways that we should relate to God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Others see the list as a description of Jesus. Each of these ideas is good. But the greatest point to keep in mind is how much importance Paul places on love in the Christian life.

The fact that Paul lists love as the first of the nine virtues is no accident. In Galatians 5:6, 13, Paul shows the importance of love in the Christian life. And he includes love in his lists of virtues elsewhere (2 Corinthians 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22). All the virtues Paul includes in his lists also appear in non-Christians' lists. All, that is, but one. And that one virtue is love. It is found only in Christians' lists. So, we can see how special love is. It is not just another virtue. It is the greatest virtue of all. And it is the key to having all other virtues. Love is the most important fruit of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 5:5). Sometimes it can be hard to show love. But love should shape the life and thoughts and feelings of every Christian (John 13:34, 35) at all times and in all places.

How much dying to self is involved in loving others and God? Can you love without dying to self? What does Jesus teach about loving and saying no to self?



Love is the most important fruit of the Spirit. And it is the key that unlocks the door to having all the other fruit of the Spirit.

THE WAY TO VICTORY (Galatians 5:16–26)

The battle between the flesh and the Spirit rages in every believer's heart. But the Christian life does not have to be controlled by defeat, failure, and sin.

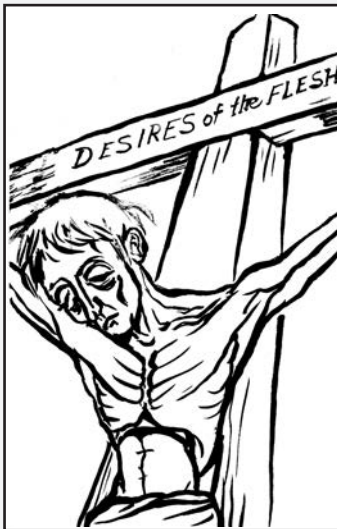
Read Galatians 5:16–26. What do these verses say will help us live a life of victory over the flesh?

Galatians 5:16–26 contains five important verbs. These verbs show the type of life the Spirit rules over. The first verb is “walk” (Galatians 5:16, NIV). The believer needs to “walk” in the Spirit. In fact, Paul *commands* us to do so. The word “walk” comes from the Greek verb *peripateo*. It means “to walk around or to follow.” The form of the verb “to walk” that Paul uses is in the present tense. It shows that Paul does not mean a walk taken only once in a while. Instead, the walk he is talking about is a daily experience. Indeed, walking in the Spirit is a choice we must make every day. The second important verb is “to be led” (Galatians 5:18, NIV). This verb shows that we also need to let the Spirit lead us where we should go. (Read also Romans 8:14; 1 Corinthians 2:2.) It is not our job to lead, but to follow.

The next two important verbs appear in Galatians 5:25. The first is “to live” (*zao* in the Greek). By “live,” Paul points to the new birth in Christ. This birth must be seen in the life of every believer. The new-birth experience must take place every day. We live by the Spirit. So, we also need “to walk” by the Spirit. The word translated as “walk” in this verse is different from the word for “walk” in Galatians 5:16. Here, the word is *stoicheo*. It is a military word. It means “to form up in a line,” “to stay in step,” or “to obey or agree with something.” The idea that Paul wants to get across is that the Spirit should direct our lives every day.

The verb Paul uses in Galatians 5:24 is “nailed . . . to [the] cross” (NIV). This idea may seem horrible and even gruesome. But we must choose to put to death the desires of the flesh. Then we can follow the Spirit. Of course, this idea is only a word picture. Nailing our flesh to the cross means feeding our spiritual lives and starving the desires of the flesh.

What victories are you promised in Christ? What changes and choices must you make to have them?



We nail the “flesh” to the cross by feeding our spiritual lives and by starving the desires of the flesh.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Satan’s attacks will grow worse as we near the close of history. He will try to cause Christians to believe things that are not true. He will try to trap them in sin. He will attack more often. Those who turn away from light and truth will become hard-hearted and closed off to the Spirit’s leading. They will become more bitter toward those who love God and obey His commandments.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1111.

“The Holy Spirit causes Christ to live in the soul. We do not see Christ now, nor speak to Him face-to-face. But the Spirit is just as near to us in one place as another. The Spirit works in and through everyone who receives Christ. Those who receive the Spirit within them will show the fruits of the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, peace, being patient, gentleness, goodness, and faith.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1112.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What does it mean to nail the desires of the flesh to the cross? How do we do it? How often must we do it? Why would Paul use such a strong word picture? What does nailing the desires of the flesh to the cross say about how hard the battle against self is?
- ② Paul says we are saved by faith, not by works. But he also says those who do the works of the flesh will not be in the kingdom of God. At first, these two statements may seem to disagree. But why do they support each other instead?
- ③ What is the biggest struggle you face in your Christian walk? Why must we always remember that our salvation depends all upon what Jesus has done?

SUMMARY: There is a war going on between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. It is being fought out in the life of every believer. But the Christian life does not have to be a life of failure. Christ won the victory over sin and death. So the Christian life can be a life over which the Spirit rules. And the Spirit can bring into the Christian life a daily gift of God’s grace. Grace is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. This gift helps us to have the victory over the desires of the flesh.



“Those who receive the Spirit within them will show the fruits of the Spirit.”