

Purpose Lived

THE POINT

We live out our purpose as we are led and filled with the Spirit.

THE PASSAGE

Galatians 5:16-26

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Often in society, the very wealthy seek to give greater meaning to their lives through good work and philanthropy. We applaud their generosity, but there is a greater good we do when we allow God Himself to empower us and work through us. He equips and empowers us to live daily with a purpose that reaps eternal benefits.

THE SETTING

NOTES

The Letter to the Galatians is Paul's vigorous defense of the gospel truth that sinners are justified by trusting in Jesus Christ alone and can live godly lives by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul had visited the towns of the province of Galatia during his second missionary journey. Apparently, after his visits, Paul received word of false teachers who were teaching a distortion of the gospel; one that called into question the gospel of grace and sought to supplement it with a religion of works. He challenged the Galatian churches (Gal. 1:2)—meaning this was a widespread issue not an isolated one—to make corrections in their faith and practice.

In the verses from chapter 5 that comprise this study session, Paul specifically dealt with the ongoing internal struggle of believers against satisfying the desires of the flesh as opposed to demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit. The struggle Paul described is no less real in our day. Throughout this session, we will be reminded and encouraged to submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we live out the godly purpose the Lord has for us.

NOTES

STUDY THE BIBLE

Galatians 5:16-18

What is the admonition Paul gave to his Galatian readers? What does living in the Spirit prevent? To what does flesh refer? What is the relationship of the Spirit to the flesh? So, how can a person avoid becoming a captive of lust or legalism in any form?

¹⁶ I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.

¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.

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

Walking by the Spirit keeps us from fulfilling sinful desires. The phrase **I say, then** is transitional. Having reaffirmed the freedom of believers in Christ (5:1-15), Paul described what that meant in practical terms. **Walk by the Spirit.** The tense of the verb allows for a rendering “keep on walking in the spirit,” a continuous action. Such an understanding would indicate Paul was talking to believers who he urged to continue doing what they had been doing.

Walk (peripateo) is a favorite word of Paul's for denoting one's daily manner of life. It appears in his letters almost three dozen times. In his book on Galatians, Leon Morris thinks the walk metaphor was used “to denote progress. People in the first century could not travel as fast as we do . . . But even though walking was slow and unspectacular, walking meant progress. If anyone kept walking, she or he would certainly cover the ground and eventually reach the destination.”¹ In this setting the destination is not salvation, as if trying to achieve it, but fullness in living as one who has been saved. In theological terms, we call that *sanctification*, the process of growing more and more to be like Christ. *Spirit (pneuma)* is, of course, the Holy Spirit. Live immersed in Him; live according to Him. It is living with complete dependence on the Spirit, that person of the Godhead who dwells within the believer.

When one does that, when one takes the positive action of living in the Spirit, that person **will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh**. In Greek the sentence includes a double negative; thus, indicating “you most certainly will not.” *Carry out* means “to complete; to bring something to its desired end; to accomplish.” The ESV and NIV render the word as “gratify.” *Desire* denotes “a craving or longing.” In this case, the craving is for something of *the flesh*, a word Paul used in reference to the earthly nature of a person apart from godly influence—one’s lower, carnal nature; thus, denoting that which is prone to sin and stands in opposition to God and the new God-like nature given to those who are in Christ.

Living in the Spirit and living in the flesh are so incompatible that a person cannot possibly do both; it is one or the other. **For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh.** As a result, **these are opposed to each other.** *Opposed* means “to be set over against or to be averse to.” Life in the Spirit and life in the flesh are in an adversarial relationship with each other.

Because of this conflict, believers can’t **do what you want**. The NIV reads, “They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” What are the things we *want* to do? One view is, being caught in the struggle between the longings of the Spirit and the cravings of the flesh, the individual cannot do the right things he or she wants or knows to do. The person is caught in a constant tug of war. Paul enlarged on this struggle in his own life in Romans 7:7-24. Another view—almost an opposite approach—is that because of this struggle, the believer has the spiritual power to overcome the flesh and thus not do what he pleases, meaning what brings nature pleasure.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. We may be surprised that Paul shifted to contrasting the Spirit and the law when in the prior verses the conflict was between the Spirit and the flesh. Nevertheless, whether speaking of the flesh or the law the two are one and the same in result. They stand in opposition to living a full life in the Spirit. Both enslave people rather than setting them free.

NOTES

The NIV's use of uppercase "Law" suggests the codified law, specifically the Law of Moses. The rendering of several other translations is lowercase *law*. Hobbs comments, "In the Greek text *law* has no definite article, and can mean legalism in any form. The emphasis is upon 'if by the Spirit.' The 'if' clause assumes the readers are led by the Spirit."² A person faced with the lusts of the flesh has at least two options for controlling his or her behavior: live in the freedom of the Spirit or try to manage life by living according to a collection of rules, which in themselves soon make one a captive. To live by the law would be to walk the path that leads to failure, for we cannot make enough rules to protect us; we can't even keep the ones we have.

What are some lasting lessons that come from Galatians 5:16-18?

- The Spirit-led lifestyle enables a person to reject the desires of the flesh—one's carnal nature that leads to sin.
- The way of the Spirit is adversarial to the way of the flesh; the two ways cannot coexist.
- Choose the way of the Spirit, for therein lies freedom from anything that would seek to enslave a person to a sinful lifestyle.

Galatians 5:19-21

How can a person be identified as living in the flesh? What are some actions, attitudes, and behaviors Paul identified as works of the flesh? What do such things disqualify a person from receiving?

¹⁹ **Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity,**

²⁰ **idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions,**

²¹ **envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Walking in the flesh leads us to sinful behavior. In verses 19-21 Paul identified fifteen manifestations or **works of the flesh**. Like most of the lists Paul included in his letters, whether the *works* of the flesh, fruit of the Spirit, or spiritual gifts, no one list is exhaustive or all-inclusive. No significance should be attached to the number of items. In some cases, a few commentators attempt to categorize or systematize the items in the list. Whether Paul grouped the items in some way, he does not say. The items in the *works of the flesh* list do reflect a comprehensive perspective of life; they address our physical nature, attitudes, relationships, religious convictions, and more. The desires of the natural person apart from God affect all dimensions of our being not just a piece of us. Even as we define the items in the list, consider them as representative of all other similar outcomes of living a lifestyle based on human desire; one in opposition to the Lord.

Consider also that Paul referred to them as *works (ergon)*. The word denotes deeds, or the results of what people do; in this case, when they function under the control of their natural desires or focus on satisfying natural desires. That they are **obvious** means they are plainly recognized, apparent, public, outwardly evident.

Sexual immorality refers to any improper sexual relationship. **Moral impurity** (“uncleanness,” KJV) refers to the contamination that comes from a lustful, profligate lifestyle, both in a

NOTES

physical and moral sense. **Promiscuity** (“lasciviousness,” KJV; “sensuality,” ESV, NIV) refers to unbridled lust, excessive shamelessness. Clearly, these words suggest physical activity, primarily sexual in nature.

Idolatry is the worship of false gods and can include any vices that spring from idolatrous practices. **Sorcery** (from which the English word *pharmacy* is derived) refers to “witchcraft” (KJV) and magic but the Greek word can also be applied to the use or administration of drugs. In fact, in ancient times magical incantations and mind-altering drugs often went hand in hand. Perhaps the word encompasses anything that poisons the mind from rational, logical, godly thinking. **Hatreds** is hostility that leads to enmity with another. **Strife** (“discord,” NIV) suggests quarreling and contentiousness. **Jealousy** can denote contentious rivalry and resentment. **Outbursts of anger** comes from a word that suggests “boiling over with anger” (“fits of rage” NIV). **Dissensions** is a synonym for contentiousness, partisanship, or fractiousness. In this list, it could be the kind of partisan spirit in which one seeks to promote himself over another. **Factions** are dissensions that arise from diverse opinions and aims that result in “divisions” (ESV). Notice that several of these words overlap in meaning and deal with negative mental attitudes that develop in the context of social relationships.

Envy is ill-will spawned by jealousy or covetousness. **Drunk-
enness** denotes intoxication. **Carousing** (“revellings,” KJV; “orgies,” ESV, NIV) refers to the kind of nocturnal frolicking that often results from intoxication. **And anything similar** is Paul’s way of covering “things like these” (ESV) that he left out or did not identify specifically. He said enough to make his point about the kind of things that come from choosing to live life under the domination of natural instincts, inclinations, and desires. Anything similar to what he specifically identified ought to be avoided as well.

Nothing in the list is what we would consider a desirable quality, enviable character trait, or admirable behavior. **Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** Apparently, this was not the first time Paul had offered this

admonition. Perhaps he had told them **before** when he had visited them personally. Does his statement mean that one's behavior determines whether one enters God's kingdom? No, but such behavior is evidence that one is not living in the Holy Spirit, for such behavior is incompatible with His presence. And without His presence a person is not fit to enter the kingdom. "The kingdom of God is the rule of God at the end of time and also its presence already in the lives of believers. Participation in this kingdom means control by the Spirit. It excluded a life which is controlled by the flesh and which manifested this control in works such as Paul had described."³ No true believer is devoid of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Every believer is indwelt by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**What are some lasting lessons that come from
Galatians 5:19-21?**

- Living according to human desire will manifest itself in a person's behavior, attitude, and overall lifestyle.
- No one who lives by the standards of the world is fit for the kingdom of God.
- Don't ignore the warnings that are found in God's Word.

NOTES

Galatians 5:22-26

*How does the concept of the **fruit** of the Spirit differ from the concept of the “works” of the flesh? How can we define or understand each of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit? What are we to do with the affections and lusts of the flesh? If we have life in the Spirit, then what difference should that make in the way we live?*

²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

²³ **gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.**

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 keep in step with the Spirit.**

²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Walking by the Spirit produces Christlike character. There is another side of life; another set of qualities that mark a person as “walking” or living “in the Spirit” (v. 16). Paul referred to these qualities as **fruit of the Spirit**. *Fruit* is “that which originates or comes from something.” They are not the outcome of what a person does but the traits of what a person is, in this case by the activity of the Holy Spirit. For instance, an apple tree produces apples because that is what it is, an apple tree. An apple tree does not *do* anything to produce the apples. It is the nature of an apple tree to produce apples; it can’t do anything else.

The *fruit of the Spirit* is the result of the indwelling work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Paul’s list of nine stands in contrast to the many works of the flesh in the previous verses. George observes, “Whereas the works of the flesh are many in number but poor in quality, the fruit of the Spirit are few in number but boundlessly rich in quality.”⁴

Before we identify *the fruit of the Spirit*, consider how we are to understand them. The word *fruit* is singular not plural. That suggests that what follows is not a list of nine fruits but the qualities of the one single fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. In that sense,

fruit is a comprehensive term that identifies what a believer is in Christ—one who walks in the Spirit.

Think again about an apple. For example, describe all the qualities that make a Fuji apple what it is. Consider its color inside and out, shape, crispness, juiciness, sweetness, and overall flavor. All those factors make the Fuji apple what it is, distinguishing it from other fruit. Perhaps that is the way we should view *the fruit of the Spirit*; not as individual qualities that a person may or may not have but as the composite of qualities that mark one as a believer living in the Spirit. Such a view means we cannot pick and choose or excuse ourselves by saying we don't have one of the fruits. No, Paul is saying this is what a believer living in the Spirit is. That does not mean these traits are all equal in quality in a believer, but they are present in some way to some degree.

Love is the familiar word *agape*, which, while in the first century was a common word for love or affection, by its use in the New Testament has come to represent an unconditional, sacrificial kind of love; God-like love. **Joy** (*chara*) denotes a spirit of rejoicing that is not dependent on circumstances. **Peace** is a state of tranquility that is present even amid conflict. **Patience** (“forbearance,” NIV) is the ability to endure or remain steadfast even when a situation might ordinarily produce a vengeful spirit. **Kindness** suggests moral goodness and integrity. **Goodness** (from *agathos*, meaning “good, pleasant, agreeable”) speaks to an uprightness of heart and life. **Faithfulness** likely denotes having the character of one who can be relied on, one who is trustworthy.

Gentleness suggests a gentle spirit, mild manner. Unfortunately, *gentleness* is too often considered as weakness, when in truth it may be more accurate to think of it as the strength to maintain self-control; hence, a kind of disciplined strength. In the first century the word was used to describe an animal that had been tamed and brought under control. **Self-control** is the virtue of a person who has mastered his desires, passions, and his sensual appetites.

The law is not against such things. They cannot be produced by adherence to the law; neither can they be controlled or regulated by the law. That is true because the Spirit is greater than the

NOTES

law. The Spirit within bears witness to Christ, who in grace gives such distinguishing qualities. Furthermore, **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** The believer in Christ, walking by the Spirit, has taken action to put to death—a metaphor of rejection—the ways of the flesh and intentionally chosen to submit to life by the Spirit.

Therefore **if we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.** The word for *keep in step* (*stoicheo*) in this verse is not the same word as “walk” in 5:16. Here the idea is of “marching in step.”

Because that is true, Paul admonished, **Let us not become conceited.** Such would be inconsistent with walking in line with the leading of the Spirit. We will not seek after the empty praise of the world. Seeking glory for ourselves usually leads to **provoking one another** and **envying one another.** Both are attitudes we are to avoid. To *provoke* is to “challenge one to combat.” This especially applies to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will not have an attitude of jealousy toward others for who they are or what they have.

Hobbs makes a pointed but somewhat humorous application of these verses drawing from his rural background of a century ago. “Spirit-controlled Christians will enjoy spiritual fellowship. They will be so busy working for the Lord and His glory that they will not be tempted to battle among themselves. Kicking mules never pull, and pulling mules never kick. When hounds are chasing a fox they are not devouring one another.”⁵

What are some lasting lessons that come from Galatians 5:22-26?

- If we live by the Spirit, we think and act differently because we have been made different.
- The fruit of the Spirit is a product of the Spirit not human effort.
- To walk in the Spirit is accompanied by taking deliberate action to reject the ways of the flesh.
- Christians live for the honor, glory, and purpose of God, not for self-glorification driven by empty desires.

LIVE IT OUT

If living in the Spirit doesn't make us different than living by the desires of the flesh, then why bother? But it does. Even so, sometimes we struggle and question whether we can do all the things the Lord expects of us. And we are correct in that assessment. We can't. The struggle is real. We can't do enough good, and even when we do, we are not always consistent. So, what is the solution? Here it is: being led and filled with the Spirit. When we are, we can and will live out the divine purpose He has for all who believe and for each of us individually. When we do not, then the logical and right conclusion is that we have not been filled with or are being led by the Spirit.

No, we still won't be perfect as long as we are living on this earth. Nevertheless, we can claim victory over our natural desires because the Spirit will enable us. Concurrently, the Holy Spirit leads us to display the fruit of godly character—fruit that only He produces and that makes us who we are in Christ—a people living on purpose.

What struggles are you facing because of the conflict between the desires of the flesh and the desire of the Holy Spirit in your life? How have you allowed such works of the flesh—legal or lustful—to take away your freedom in Christ?

NOTES

Which traits of godly character need more development in your life?

What steps are you taking to crucify the desires of the flesh and to get in step with the direction of the Holy Spirit so that you may live the Spirit-filled life?

1. Leon Morris, Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian Freedom (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 167.
2. Herschel H. Hobbs, Galatians: A Verse by Verse Study (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1978), 125.
3. David C. George, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, vol. 21 in Layman's Bible Book Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 86.
4. George, 86.
5. Hobbs, 132.