

GOOD SINCE

"SINCE WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT"

GALATIANS 5:16-26

This Week's Core Competency

Self-Control – I have the power, through Christ, to control myself. Titus 2:11-13, *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Galatians 5:13-26 contrasts two ways of life. One way of life indulges the "sinful nature." The other defers to the Holy Spirit. We can either live *by the Spirit* or live *by the sinful nature*. The term translated "sinful nature" in the NIV is the Greek word generally used to refer to the human body. However, it must mean something a bit different here because there is nothing inherently sinful about our physical bodies.

We human beings have material and immaterial parts. Our material part is our physical body; our immaterial part is our soul or spirit. The "sinful nature" or "old nature" (lit., "flesh") is not a third part wholly distinct from the other two. In fact, it isn't a part at all. It is rather our capacity and propensity to do evil—"a bent, a tendency, a bias toward sin and away from doing God's will" (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2:599). Therefore, living by the sinful nature simply means doing what comes naturally for sinful human beings. Notice how Galatians 5:13 is translated in *The Message*, "It is

Life by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license—nor a middle way between them.

– James Montgomery Boice

absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom." Christians who live according to the sinful nature or flesh lack self-control.

On the closely related topic of sanctification Erickson writes:

"The Holy Spirit also works sanctification in the life of the believer. By sanctification is meant the continued transformation of moral and spiritual character so that the life of the believer actually comes to mirror the standing which he or she already has in God's sight. While justification is an instantaneous act giving the individual a righteous standing before God, sanctification is a process making the person holy or good. In the earlier part of Romans 8, Paul dwells on this work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has liberated us from the law (v. 2). Henceforth believers do not walk and live according to the flesh, their old nature, but according to the Spirit (v. 4), having their minds set on the Spirit (v. 5). Christians are in the Spirit (v. 9), and the Spirit dwells in them, a thought that is repeated three times (vv. 9, 11 twice). As the Spirit indwells believers, he guides and leads them, and the deeds of the flesh are, accordingly, put to death (v. 13). All those who are thus "led by the Spirit are sons of God" (v. 14). The Spirit is now at work giving them life, witnessing that they are sons rather than slaves, and thus supplying indisputable evidence that they are truly in Christ (vv. 15-17).

"This life in the Spirit is what God intends for the Christian. Paul in Galatians 5 contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. He instructs his readers to walk by the Spirit instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh (v. 16). If they heed this instruction, the Spirit will produce in them a set of qualities which are collectively referred to as the 'fruit of the Spirit' (v. 22).

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Paul lists nine of these qualities: 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law' (vv. 22-23). These qualities cannot in their entirety be produced in human lives by unaided self-effort. They are a supernatural work. They are opposed to the works of the flesh—a list of sins in verses 19-21—just as the Spirit himself is in opposition to the flesh. The work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, then, is not merely the negative work of mortification of the flesh (Rom. 8:13), but also the production of a positive likeness to Christ" (3:875). Christians who live by the Spirit have self-control.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Galatians 5:16-26

13-15

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

16-26

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Cf., another translation

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. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And 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 walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 16.
- * Highlight "live by the Spirit" in v. 16.
- * Circle "sinful nature" in vv. 16-25.
- * Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 17.
- * Box "so that" indicating *result* in v. 17.
- * Bracket "you do not do what you want" in v. 17.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 18, 22.
- * Number the "acts of the sinful nature" in vv. 19-21.
- * Circle "kingdom of God" in v. 21.
- * Number the "fruit of the Spirit" in vv. 22-23.
- * Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 25.
- * Underline "let us" in vv. 25, 26.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Describe the relationship of verses 16-26 to verses 13-15.
2. What two kinds of things are *contrasted* in these verses?
3. Illustrate verse 17 by giving a concrete example.
4. In what sense are the vices listed in verses 19-21 "*acts of the sinful nature*"?
5. The punctuation in the NIV (;) indicates that there are four divisions in Paul's list of vices. The first division contains three sins, the second two, the third eight, and the fourth two. Label each of these four divisions.
6. What can you infer about a professing Christian whose life is blemished by these sins?
7. If Paul's readers were not in jeopardy of losing their salvation—and they were not—why do you think he issued the warning found in verse 21?
8. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 22.
9. Verse 24 says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires," and yet verse 17 says that the sinful nature and the Spirit are in conflict with one another (v. 17). If believers still have its passions and desires, in what sense have they crucified the sinful nature?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about the mental image behind the exhortation "let us keep in step with the Spirit."

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The Bible teaches that identity determines behavior. Behavior does not determine identity. The Galatians were "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:26). They had received the "full rights of sons" by faith (4:5). Because they were sons, they were no longer slaves either to the law like Jews or basic principles of the world like other Gentiles. However, Paul's opponents were trying to persuade them to be enslaved all over again, and they were nearly convinced. They had already begun to observe special days, which the apostle considered a harbinger of things to come. He was worried about them and rightly so. "I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you" (4:11). They mistakenly thought that behavior does determine identity—that they could somehow add to their standing before God by keeping the law.

However, as far as Paul was concerned they were on the verge of retreating to "those weak and miserable principles" that they had abandoned when they clothed themselves with Christ. But how could he say such a thing? The Galatians had been slaves to false gods before they came to know the one true God, but they did not aim to return to their historic pagan roots. Instead they aimed to turn to the law, but the distinction made no difference to Paul. In either case they would be "under the basic principles of the world." Jews who try to obtain God's favor by keeping the law and Gentiles who try to obtain God's favor by following their religious practices find themselves in the same situation. Both are slaves to "the basic principles of the world." Gentiles who try to obtain God's favor by keeping the law simply trade one set of these principles for a different set. Being religious per se does not commend a person to God.

Eugene H. Peterson translates Paul's words this way in *The Message*. "Earlier, before you knew God personally, you were enslaved to so-called gods that had nothing of the divine about them. But now that you know the real God—or rather since God knows you—how can you possibly subject yourselves again to those paper tigers? For that is exactly what you do when you are intimidated into scrupulously observing all the traditions, taboos, and superstitions associated with special days and seasons and years. I am afraid that all my hard work among you has gone up in a puff of smoke" (4:7-9).

If sons of God are neither slaves to the law nor slaves to religion does that mean that they are free to do as they please? Paul answers that question in 5:13

by saying, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." So, how, then, are Christians to live? Verse 16 says it all, Christians are to "live by the Spirit," and verse 18 clarifies that living by the Spirit entails being "led by the Spirit." They are to do what the Spirit directs them to do. (Uncertainty regarding the parameters of the passage in question is reflected in the fact that the 1984 edition of the NIV places the heading *Life by the Spirit* before verse 16, but the 2011 edition places it before verse 13—the better choice.)

In the paragraphs that follow Paul describes the antithesis between the sinful nature and the Spirit (vv. 16-18) and then *contrasts* the "acts of the sinful nature" (vv. 19-21) and "the fruit of the Spirit" (vv. 22-23) before closing with his final appeal to "keep in step with the Spirit" (vv. 24-26).

First, he explains that the only way believers can avoid their human propensity to sin is by following the Spirit rather than by trying to keep the law. The desires of the sinful nature (vv. 19-21) and the desires of the Spirit (vv. 22-23) are mutually exclusive. The former originate with believers' proclivity to do what comes naturally as human beings, that is, "all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in his life" (James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:494). The latter originate with the Spirit, who enables them to do what doesn't come naturally, that is, those things that fulfill the law of God (cf., v. 23).

Second, he lists fifteen acts of the sinful nature—three sexual sins, two religious deviations, eight disorders in personal relationships and two sins of intemperance (see Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, 253-60)—as examples of the kinds of vices he has in mind. The "fruit" of the sinful nature is off limits to believers because it characterizes those outside of Christ, who are not destined to inherit the kingdom of God. Believers, who are citizens of the kingdom and who belong to Christ, are no longer free to indulge in such things. And they don't have to because when they came to Christ by faith, they crucified the sinful nature and are no longer slaves to it. That doesn't mean believers will never sin again; that would make Paul's whole point moot. It simply means they have the ability to do otherwise. They can live by the Spirit, and the Spirit will produce his fruit in them.

By way of contrast, he then lists nine virtues of the Spirit—three habits of the mind, three special qualities affecting interpersonal relationships, and three general principles of Christian conduct (263-73)—again, as examples of the kinds of ethical graces he has in mind. (The detailed definitions of each of the vices and virtues that Fung provides are very helpful.)

Finally, Paul closes with the appeal, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (v. 25). One commentator summarizes the apostle's exhortation this way: "Paul exhorts his converts to acknowledge that their new

relationship 'in Christ Jesus' involves being also dead to 'the flesh with its passions and desires' (v 24) and to live their lives 'in step with the Spirit' (v 25), with such an acknowledgment and lifestyle having direct relevance to how they treat one another (v 26). And Paul's thesis statements (vv 13-18), elaborations (vv 19-23) and exhortations (vv 24-26) are directly relevant to Christians today as we seek to know more fully what it means to 'live by the Spirit' and not according to 'the flesh'" (Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, *Galatians*, 267).

The Message of the Passage

Rather than indulge the sinful nature, keep in step with the Spirit, who will produce his fruit in you.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 16 **live by** Lit., "walk by the Spirit" (NIV(c)2011; NASB); cf., "let the Holy Spirit guide your lives" (NLT). "'Walking' is a common Hebraism for 'conducting one's life' and thus is synonymous with 'living'" (Fung, 248).

v. 16 **sinful nature** NIV margin "the flesh" as in KJV, NKJV, NASB. The Greek word translated "sinful nature" here usually refers to the physical body. But Paul sometimes uses the term in a broader sense to refer to our sinful human desires. "In the earliest days of the Greek language *sarx* meant mostly the soft, fleshy parts of the body, like its Hebrew equivalent *basar*. But *sarx* soon came to denote the body as a whole (that is, the material part of a person) and after that, by extension, the whole man as conditioned by a bodily existence and by natural desires. In this sense, it is not bad. But when the word was taken over into the Christian vocabulary, as it was to a large degree by Paul, it came to mean man as a fallen being whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus, *sarx* came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in his life. In this respect *sarx* is synonymous with 'the natural man' or 'the old nature.' Because fallen man is only flesh apart from the intervention of God's Spirit, 'old nature' or 'sinful nature' (as in NIV) rather than 'lower nature' (NEB, Phillips) or 'animal nature' is the better translation in these passages" (Boice, 10:494).

v. 17 **do not do** "The last clause of v.17 may mean one of three things: (1) the sinful nature keeps you from doing the good you desire, (2) the Spirit keeps you from doing the evil you desire, or (3) each nature hinders the desires of the other (so Burton)" (494-95). Related to (3) is the notion that "it is impossible for the believer to remain neutral: he either serves the flesh or follows the Spirit" (Fung, 251). "The 'things that you please' may be good or evil. It is impossible for us to remain neutral; we either follow one or the other" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 2017 ed., 79, www.soniclight.com).

v. 18 **but if** "Here existence 'under the law' is antithetic to being 'led by the Spirit'. It is existence 'under law', according to Rom 7:15, that exposes one unprotected to the malignity of indwelling sin, and involves one in the frustrating situation: 'What I do is not what I want; it is rather the very thing I hate.' But there is no reason why those who were born under law should continue in this state any longer; even more emphatically there is no reason why those who have been delivered from spiritual bondage should gratuitously place themselves under law. With the coming of Christ and the completion of his redeeming work, the age of law has been superseded by the age of the Spirit. For the Galatians to retreat from grace to law would be to exchange the freedom of the Spirit for bondage to the *stoicheia*" [i.e., elemental principles] (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGNT, 245). "The desires of the flesh cannot be overcome by the Christian remaining under law" (Fung, 252).

v. 19 **obvious** Obvious, not in the sense that they are all public but in the sense that they clearly originate with the sinful nature; cf., "What human nature does is quite plain" (GNT); "Now the works of the flesh are evident" (ESV).

v. 21 **and the like** The list is not exhaustive, just representative.

v. 21 **will not inherit** This is not a warning to the effect that any Christian who falls into any of these sins will lose his or her salvation. Paul's point is that these acts are the "fruit of the sinful nature." They are characteristic of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. His point: Christians should never use their freedom in Christ to behave like the unsaved do (cf., v. 13). Note, Paul ascribes two of the vices mentioned, "envy" and "selfish-ambition," to "brothers in Christ," whose salvation he does not question but who preach Christ with tainted motives (Php 1:15, 17). One commentator contends Paul meant that Christians who practice these vices will have less inheritance (reward) in the kingdom than Christians who do not practice them. He equates inheriting the kingdom with obtaining an inheritance in the millennial reign of Christ on earth" (Zane Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 76-77).

v. 24 **have crucified** Identify with Christ in his death means that we were crucified with Christ. Through faith in him we "have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" and are no longer a slave to sin. We now live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit not the sinful nature. "Identification with Christ in his crucifixion means a new type of existence for the believer, for now 'Christ lives in me' (2:20) . . . For Paul, to claim identification with Christ in his crucifixion means that one cannot espouse a lifestyle that expresses either a legalistic or a libertine orientation. For in being crucified with Christ both the demands of the law and the impulses of the flesh have been crucified as well (cf. Rom 7:1-6; Col 2:13-15)" (Longenecker, 264).

v. 25 **keep in step** "In verse 16, the Greek verb for 'walk' is *peripateo*, which means 'to walk about,' referring to pursuing one's daily activities (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). In verse 25, the Greek verb for 'walk' is *stoicheo*, which means 'to walk in a row, go in order,' referring to pursuing the right way in an orderly fashion (cf. Rom. 4:12)" (Constable, 86) or "walking in the footsteps of another" (Longenecker, 266).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

My kids were in the marching band in high school. When they first started rehearsal during the summer before their freshman year, the director spent many hours teaching them how to "step in time." They needed to walk in accord with one another. The point was for them to look completely unified and indistinguishable from each other. In our passage today, Paul calls on believers to keep in step with the Spirit. Our lives should so resemble God that our faith in Him is evident to all. Thankfully, He has given us His Spirit to help us do this. 2 Corinthians 3:17 reminds us that we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." What is the evidence of this transformation? It is the increasing presence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It's time for a fruit check! How well are you loving God and others? Are you joyful or grumpy? Is your heart full of peace or anxiety? How patient are you with those around you? Are you finding it hard to be kind, good and gentle towards others or does it naturally flow out of you? Are you being faithful to the Lord? Are you being controlled by the Spirit, saying no to sin and yes to Him? Our kids learn to cultivate fruit in their lives by seeing ours in full bloom!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Gal 5:16-26

1. How do we *not* gratify the desires of our sinful nature?
2. What happens to our sinful nature once we belong to Christ (v. 24)?
3. List the fruit of the Spirit on another sheet of paper.

What Do You Think

Of the nine fruit of the Spirit listed, which is easiest for you to demonstrate? Which one is the hardest for you show in your life?

What R U Going To Do

Cut out nine different fruit shapes. Label each one with a fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5: 22-23. Draw a big tree and glue your fruit to it. Leave it at the dinner table this week so your family can talk about the fruit they displayed each day.

Core Comp

Self-control - I can take charge of myself with Jesus' help.

Memory Verse

John 1:2 - *He was with God in the beginning.*

KIDPIX COUPON

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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