

## 41. The Book of Galatians 5:16-23 (Topical)

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### *Liberty For Life-Part 12*

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(12-1-24)

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We have been studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings going through the book topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is **liberty**—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ.

Now with that in mind, one of the greatest passages in the Bible for liberty and victory in the Christian life is the passage we will be studying this morning.

It contains a simple yet all encompassing exhortation for walking in liberty as a believer in Jesus Christ—

#### **Galatians 5:16–17 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

So, what we have here is an *exhortation* followed by an *explanation*. Again, the issue that Paul is addressing in the epistle to the Galatians (which is to all of us who are Christians) is how a person gets saved and grows in their walk with God.

Is it by human effort and hard work (the works of the Law—religion) or is it simply by believing in Jesus Christ and allowing God's grace (His power and strength) to save and sanctify us—or both!

The passage we started looking at last time actually runs from verse 16 through verse 25 of Galatians Chapter 5 and is built around 4 principles:

1. **The Command**—verse 16
2. **The Conflict**— verses 17-18
3. **The Contrast**— verses 19-23
4. **The Conquest**—verses 24-25

In this section Paul is outlining how victory is achieved in the Christian life—victory over the flesh.

1. **The Command**—verse 16

## “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

As we said last time, the Greek word translated ‘walk’ can be understood as meaning—“to accomplish one’s daily tasks (in the power of the Holy Spirit).” In other words, we need to give our walk with God the priority it deserves by giving preference to our daily devotional responsibilities (prayer, Bible reading and study, church etc.).

Remember that I have a part in my spiritual development and growth as a Christian, and God has a part.

Paul tells us in verse 16—we are to “walk in the Spirit”—and then we won’t “fulfill the lusts of the flesh”—it’s a conditional promise involving constant decisions and choices.

J. Vernon McGee—

*“The word lust in our usage today has an evil connotation, which the Greek word does not have. Lust of the flesh refers to the ‘desires of the flesh’, many of which are not immoral, but are of the flesh (music, art, and works of do-gooders, etc.). There are many things which in themselves are not evil, but they can take the place of spiritual things. Some Christians can get wrapped up in a hobby which takes them away from the Word of God. Many Christians spend a lot of time worshiping before that little idiot box we call TV. Now don’t misunderstand—I watch TV. I am not under any law that says I can’t watch TV. There are a few programs one can enjoy. But watching TV is a desire of the flesh. If it takes you away from that which is spiritual, then it is wrong...”*

The word translated ‘flesh’ in New Testament can mean the ‘physical body’—but the vast majority of the time it refers to our fallen sin nature that we were born with that part of us that we inherited from Adam.

But then, when a person surrenders their life to Jesus they are ‘born-again’ (John 3:3).

This is a spiritual birth which connects them to God enabling them to have fellowship (communion) with Him and places His divine nature within them (His heart, His love, His character, and His desires).

But our *flesh* (old nature) doesn’t ‘go away’ it stays with us and tries to still control our mind and body and make them obey the desires of our fallen nature instead of the will of the Spirit—and that is where the war (all the inside struggles and conflict) comes from between the *flesh* and *spirit*.

## 2. The Conflict—verse 17

### **Galatians 5:16–17 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

As we said last week, the word ‘walk’ is the Greek word ‘peripateo’ and is in the present imperative which means that Paul is commanding us to—‘keep on walking in the Spirit.’

This command is critical if we are going to have victory in our daily conflict with our fallen nature—consistency is the key to victory.

## 3. The Contrast—verses 19-23

### a) The works of the flesh—verses 19-21

**Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, <sup>21</sup> envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice how Paul transitions from the *“lust of the flesh”* in verse 16 to the **“works of the flesh”** in verse 19—telling us that sin starts in the heart as the *lust of the flesh* before it works its way outward and becomes the *works of the flesh*.

**“Now the works of the flesh are evident”**—they can’t be mistaken for anything that comes from God (Paul lists 18 works of the flesh).

- **Adultery**— illicit sex between married people
- **Fornication**—(*porneia*) is often translated “fornication” but means any kind of sexual perversion (from this word comes the word “pornography”).
- **Uncleanness**— (*akatharsia*) is a broad term referring to filthiness of heart and mind that makes the person defiled.

The unclean person sees dirt in everything—*“To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.”* (Titus 1:15)

- **Lewdness**—close to our word debauchery and speaks of an open, unashamed appetite for all of the evils Paul has just listed—which were rampant in the Roman Empire back in Paul’s day, but also today in our culture.
- **Idolatry (starting with verse 20)**—putting your love and devotion into anything or anyone other than God.

Warren Wiersbe—

*“We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture completely. Jesus tells us that whatever we worship, we serve (Matt. 4:10). The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car, house, or boat than he does to serving Christ may be in danger of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).”*

This also applies to other things like the worship of sports, or other activities that take precedence over God and church (even your children and their activities can become idols).

- **Sorcery**—Sorcery is witchcraft, the Greek word being related to drugs (*pharmakeia*). Our English word *pharmacy* is derived from this word.

Because drugs (hallucinogenic, mind altering drugs) were used in sorcery, the word came to mean communion with evil spirits, or the use of magic spells—(sorcery is forbidden in the Bible as are all activities of the occult (Deuteronomy 18:9–22)).

- **Hatred** (*echthrai*) is in the plural form, denoting primarily a feeling of enmity between groups (think about politics in America).

There is a lot of partisan hatred in our country today—how tragic when applied to Christian groups that hate one another because of doctrinal differences.

- **Contentions**—rivalries or competitions that result in discord and quarrels.
- **Jealousies**—distrust and suspicions about others who you think want to take what belongs to you.
- **Wrath**—outbursts of rage.
- **Selfish ambitions**—the desire to be “number one,” even at others’ expense.
- **Dissensions**—(bickering, fighting, arguing, animosity etc.).
- **Heresies**—when hear the word *heresy* we assume it means ‘*false doctrine*’—but the word literally means ‘*to divide*’ or ‘*to choose*’—

One pastor—

*“Over time, it came to mean someone who divisively expressed their “choices” or opinions. We think today of heresies in terms of wrong ideas and teachings; but the emphasis in the word is actually the wrongful dividing over opinions.”*

In other words, to choose sides when people quarrel over issues or personalities, causing hurtful divisions (talk about how people on the left ostracized MAGA relatives from Thanksgiving celebrations).

- **Envy (starting with verse 21)**—is displeasure at the success or prosperity of others.
- **Murders**—the premeditated killing of others by individuals (not state sanctioned executions—Gen. 9:6).
- **Drunkenness**—refers to intoxication caused by strong drink.
- **Revelries**—debauched partying that is accompanied by drunkenness.

**“...and the like”**—indicating that this by no means an exhaustive list.

**Galatians 5:21 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> ...and the like; **of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

The key word here is ‘**practice**’.

**1 John 3:7-9 (NKJV)**

<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. <sup>8</sup> He who sins [practices sin] is of the devil... <sup>9</sup> Whoever has been born of God does not [practice] sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot [practice] sin, because he has been born of God.

**Galatians 5:21 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> ...**of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**b) The fruit of the Spirit—verses 22-23**

Now in contrast to the '*works of the flesh*' Paul now lists the fruit of the Spirit—

**Galatians 5:22–23 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Warren Wiersbe—

*“The contrast between works and fruit is important. A machine in a factory works, and turns out a product, but it could never manufacture fruit. Fruit must grow out of life, and, in the case of the believer, it is the life of the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). When you think of “works” you think of effort, labor, strain, and toil; when you think of “fruit” you think of beauty, quietness, the unfolding of life. The flesh produces “dead works” (Hebrews 9:14), but the Spirit produces living fruit. And this fruit has in it the seed for still more fruit (Genesis 1:11).”*

**“But the fruit of the Spirit...”—verse 22**

The word “**fruit**” is singular, indicating that these qualities constitute a unity, all of which should be found in a believer who lives under the control of the Spirit.

In an ultimate sense this “**fruit**” is simply the life of Christ being produced in and through a Christian.

- **Love** (*agapē*) God is love and loves the world (1 John 4:8; John 3:16). Such self-sacrificing love that sent Christ to die for sinners is the kind of love that believers who are Spirit-controlled manifest.
- **Joy** (*chara*) is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which was promised to those who abide in Christ (John 15:11). It does not depend on circumstances because it rests in God’s sovereign control of all things (Romans 8:28).
- **Peace** (*eirēnē*) is again a gift of Christ (John 14:27). It is an inner repose and quietness, even in the face of adverse circumstances; it defies human understanding (Philippians 4:7).
- **Longsuffering** (*makrothymia*) is the quality of patience in the face of provocation (2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 1:11; 3:12). It entertains no thoughts of retaliation even when wrongfully treated.
- **Kindness** (*chrēstotēs*) is benevolence in action such as God demonstrated toward men. Since God is kind toward sinners (Romans 2:4; Ephesians 2:7) a Christian should display the same virtue (2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 3:12).
- **Goodness** (*agathōsynē*) may be thought of both as an uprightness of soul and as an action reaching out to others to do good even when it is not deserved.
- **Faithfulness** (*pistis*) is the quality which renders a person trustworthy or reliable, like the faithful servant in Luke 16:10-12.
- **Gentleness** (*prautēs*) marks a person who is submissive to God’s Word (James 1:21) and who is considerate of others when discipline is needed (cf. “gently” in Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25; “gentle” in 1 Corinthians 4:21; Ephesians 4:2; “gentleness” in Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:16).
- **Self-control** (*enkrateia*; this noun is used in the New Testament only here and in Acts 24:25; 2 Peter 1:6) denotes self-mastery and no doubt primarily relates to curbing the fleshly impulses just described.

**“Against such there is no law” (verse 23)**

In other words, no one can pass a law that you must be *joyful* or *loving* or that a person has to have *peace*. This fruit can only be produced in the life of a Christian by the Holy Spirit—but only then if they are walking in the Spirit.

When Christians try to simulate, or imitate, somebody else’s fruit all they are doing is ‘*tying on plastic fruit*’ to themselves—it may look good from a distance, but in reality, it is nothing more than a cheap, artificial, counterfeit substitute.

Warren Wiersbe, in his book “The 5 Secrets of Living”—

“*What and who am I?*” “*Why am I here?*” You must answer these questions correctly if life is to have meaning for you. The man who calls a wrench a screwdriver, and who tries to use it as a screwdriver, is heading for frustration and failure. The person who does not know *who* and *what* he is will experience the same kind of frustration and failure. It is this identity crisis that has threatened and even destroyed many people in society today.

The Christian need not have an identity crisis. Jesus tells us who we are and why we are here. We are branches, and He is the Vine. We are here to bear fruit. Once you accept this simple fact, you are on the way to making your life meaningful and useful.”

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).