

## Galatians 5:16-25 Verse-by-Verse by Karl Kemp; October, 2013

INTRODUCTION. Galatians 5:16-25 is one of the most important passages in the Bible, along with Romans chapter 6 and Romans 8:1-14, which shows that Christians are called, enabled, and required to walk with the victory over all sin. This is good news, very good news! No true Christian wants to sin against God. We will be forgiven if we should sin when we repent, but God has called us to walk with the victory over all sin through new-covenant salvation through the all-important atoning death of His Son and the all-important pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

My goal for this present article is to discuss these verses in a rather thorough verse-by-verse manner, but to minimize the details and make this a rather short article. I discussed these verses in more detail on pages 195-200 in my book "Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ" and they are discussed in my new e-book, "Righteousness, Holiness, and Victory Over Sin," which serves as a good introduction for the paperback book. Both books are available at Amazon.com.

I am using the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition. Sometimes I make comments in the middle of quotations using brackets [ ] or double brackets [[ ]] to make them more obvious.

GALATIANS 5:16. "But I say, walk by [or "in," or "after"] the [Holy] Spirit, and you [most certainly] will not carry out the [sinful] desire of the flesh [of the old man who still wants to live in sin]." I'll quote the Amplified Bible: "But I say, walk *and* live habitually in the (Holy) Spirit - responsive to and controlled *and* guided by the Spirit; then you certainly will not gratify the cravings *and* desires of the flesh - of human nature without God." The words "most certainly" or "certainly" are justified by the intensive negative that the apostle Paul used in the Greek.

Paul exhorts his Christian readers to walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis, which we are called, enabled, and required to do, so that we will walk with the victory over all sin. No true Christian wants to leave any room for any sin, knowing, for one thing, that God hates sin. We are dependent on the Word of God and on the indwelling Spirit of God to have the victory over sin. A big part of the way we walk by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all born-again Christians (Romans 8:9, for example), is to walk in agreement with the Word of God (especially the gospel) by faith.

We will never understand this verse very well if we think (like many Christians do) that "the flesh" equals the physical body here. The Amplified Bible defines the flesh as "human nature without God" here in verse 16. The NIV translated "sinful nature" instead of the flesh here in verses 16, 17, 19, 24, and often. The flesh is

frequently contrasted with the Spirit of God in the New Testament (see John 6:63; Romans 7:5, 6; 8:1-14; and Galatians 6:8, for example). To be in the flesh is to be in spiritual death, separate from the Holy Spirit of life.

Born again Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and we are not in the flesh, but a continuous walk by/in the Spirit is far from being automatic. Even though we have been called, enabled, and required to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis, we still have the potential to walk in the flesh and do the sinful works of the flesh. Note that the sinful "deeds [works] of the flesh" of Galatians 5:19-21 are not at all limited to sins especially associated with the physical body. The works of the flesh include all sins, and all sin involves the heart/inner man (see Mark 7:15). The sinful "desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16) is to do the sinful "works of the flesh."

For born-again Christians to walk in/by "the flesh," which is the equivalent of walking in/by the old man, ought not be; we are called, enabled, and required to walk in/by the Spirit on a continuous basis. In Galatians 5:24 the apostle said, "Now those who belong to Christ have crucified THE FLESH with its passions and desires." In Romans 6:6 he said "our OLD MAN was crucified with [Christ]...that we would no longer be slaves to sin." The Amplified Bible explained "the flesh" to be "Godless human nature" in Galatians 5:24, and the NIV translated "the sinful nature."

The flesh when it is used in a full sense includes the work of demon spirits. We could undoubtedly do all of the sinful works of the flesh that Paul listed in Galatians 5:19-21 without the involvement of demon spirits, but evil spirits can be involved, intensifying the sin problem. This is another reason we must make it a top priority to always walk by the Holy Spirit and not leave any room for sinful works of the flesh. In Ephesians 4:27 the apostle said (in a context of exhorting Christians to walk with the victory over all sin), "do not give the devil an opportunity [more literally, "a place"]." We must not give the devil (or sin) any place in our lives. In Romans 13:14 Paul said "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts."

The only way we can walk in the righteousness and holiness of God on a continuous basis, with the victory over all sin, is to walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis, as we are called, enabled, and required to do. The apostle Paul makes it very clear that a continuous walk by the Holy Spirit is far from being automatic, or always easy. In the next verse, for example, he speaks of intense warfare against us, but he makes it clear that the victory over sin is always available, by grace through faith. The world, the flesh (the old man who wants to continue in sin), and the devil and his hosts are formidable opponents, but they are no match for the saving grace of God in Christ in the infinite power of the Holy Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:17. "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." This verse is tied to verse 16 by the conjunction "For." Here in verse 17 the apostle shows the absolute necessity for Christians to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis. We have an enemy (enemies: the world, the flesh/old man, and the devil and his demonic hosts) fighting against us, trying to keep us in sin.

The Spirit, who is always for Christians living in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God, and the flesh/old man, which is always for Christians continuing in sin, are in opposition to one another, like armies. However, the flesh (even when the old man is combined with the world and the god of this world and his hosts) is no match for the Holy Spirit, and we will walk in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God on a continuous basis if we walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis, which we are called, enabled, and required to do (see verse 16, for example). Nevertheless, the victory over sin certainly isn't automatic and it isn't always easy. Walking in the flesh is easy to do, and we have had a lot of practice in our pre-Christian lives, but the results are always negative and it makes things much more difficult for the future, even in this life, and the day of judgment is coming.

We know what the apostle meant by "the things that you please" (the things that you please, so far as the flesh/old man is concerned) at the end of verse 17. He just spoke of "the [sinful] desire of the flesh" at the end of verse 16. Being tempted isn't sin. Yielding to temptation is sin. And there doesn't have to be a physical act to constitute sin. It is a sin, for example, to yield to lusting, instead of resisting the temptation, even if no physical acts are committed. See Matthew 5:27, 28, for example, where Jesus made it clear that it is sin to look for the purpose of lusting, instead of resisting the temptation to lust, one way, or another. We can always turn our head and flee places of temptation.

GALATIANS 5:18. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." These words were very relevant to the situation that had developed in Galatia. The apostle Paul had brought the gospel to the Gentiles of Galatia, but after he left, the Judaizers came to Galatia, and they were trying to convince the Christians that Paul was wrong and they needed to submit to them and be circumcised, etc. (see Galatians 1:1-5:15; 6:11-16).

The apostle Paul frequently made the point that Christians are not under the Mosaic Law, which was the foundation for the old covenant (see Romans 6:14; 7:1-6, for example). This meant, for one thing, that we are not required to fulfill the ceremonial law of the Old Testament, including circumcision (see Acts 15:1-32; Romans 2:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 2:3, 5:2, 3, 6; 6:12, 13, 15; and Colossians 2:16, 17, for example); but he also made it clear that we are required to fulfill the requirements of God's moral law in our daily lives (see Romans 2:26, 27; 8:4; and 1 Cor. 7:19, for example).

To be "led by the Spirit" all the time is the equivalent of walking by the Spirit all the time, and we will be walking in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God, with the victory over all sin (Galatians 5:16), which is the equivalent of fulfilling the requirements of God's moral law in our daily lives (Romans 2:26, 27; 8:4). In Romans 8:14 (see 8:12-14), Paul said that it is only those "who are being led by the Spirit of God [to put to death the sinful works of the flesh/old man, etc]" who "are sons of God." (See my recent article on Romans 8:1-14.)

GALATIANS 5:19-21. "Now the deeds [works] of the flesh [[the sinful works of people who have not been born again and do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and the sinful works of born-again Christians that take place when they do not walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis and yield to sin.]] are evident, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, (21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these [All sins are, by definition, "works of the flesh."], of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you [in the past], that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

To not inherit the kingdom of God is to miss heaven. True Christians can turn from God and His salvation and lose their salvation. (See my paper "Once Saved, Always Saved?") The New Testament makes it clear that Christians will be forgiven when they repent, but it also makes it clear that we are called, enabled, and required to walk with the victory over all sin (see Galatians 5:16, 24; Romans chapter 6; 8:1-14, for example). This is good news! What God calls us to do He enables us to do!

GALATIANS 5: 22, 23. "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." In fact, the righteous, holy fruit that is manifested in our lives as we walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis, by grace through faith, in accordance with the gospel of new-covenant salvation, constitute a fulfilling of God's moral law. The "fruit of the Spirit" here is contrasted with the "deeds [works] of the flesh" mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21. When we love God the Father and the Lord Jesus (love is a fruit of the Spirit), we keep His commandments and walk in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). And God's law is fulfilled when we walk in love (see Romans 13:8, 10; Galatians 5:13).

GALATIANS 5:24. "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its [sinful] passions and desires." I'll quote Romans 6:6: "knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." In the ideal case we would "[crucify] the flesh with its [sinful] passions and desires," by grace [which includes all of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to live in an abiding state of righteousness and holiness] through faith, from the time we

become born again Christians and begin to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis. For the flesh/the old man to be crucified means that we will be dead to sin/sinning (Romans 6:1, 2, 11) and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). We cannot annihilate the flesh/sinful nature while we live in this world, but we (by grace through faith) can keep the flesh/sinful nature/old man from manifesting itself in sin, and after we are glorified, the flesh/sinful nature/old man will be left behind forever.

GALATIANS 5:25. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by [follow after] the Spirit." If we have life by the indwelling Spirit of life as born-again Christians, let us be consistent and faithful to the new covenant and always walk by/follow after the Spirit on a continuous basis, which we are called, enabled, and required to do.

May this paper glorify God and fully accomplish His purposes in the body of Christ!

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