

Living By the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26

Laws cannot change man's sinful nature. Laws, traditions and punishments are unable to control the sinful nature from the outside. But Christ has bought our freedom and through the Holy Spirit, God is changing us from the inside. When we live according to the Spirit, we continue to grow in the grace and freedom we enjoy in Christ.

Read Galatians 5:16-26

1. How can we overcome or control our sinful nature? As they say, "we're only human." (v. 16)

We overcome it by living by the Spirit. Some translations say "walk" by the Spirit. Either way, it indicates an active, forward-moving progress. Christ did not set us free from slavery to the law so that we might become slaves to our own flesh/sinful nature.

By walking or living by the Spirit, we will not gratify our fleshly desires. The Spirit (who is in us) and the sinful nature are opposed to each other.

2. What kind of conflict is Paul describing in verse 17? (v. 17)

Paul describes an inner conflict that exists within ourselves. The desires of the flesh/sinful nature are based on self-preservation and self-satisfaction. We are driven to satisfy and indulge our physical urges. Without godly control, the flesh can lead us into utter lawlessness.

The Spirit within us, on the other hand, desires to please God. The man who chooses to be governed by his fleshly desires is no better than a brute animal. The man who chooses to be governed by the Spirit is a child of God.

3. If we are led by the Spirit, how does that show that we are not under the law? (v. 18)

Philosophers denied that laws were necessary for the wise, because they would choose what was right. In the same way, Scripture tells us that God would write the law on the hearts of his people (Jer 31:31-34) by the Spirit (Eze 36:27). The solution to the flesh is not found in fighting the flesh by obeying the law, but in yielding to the Spirit.

So when we yield to the Spirit (led by the Spirit), we are not under law because we don't need it. Our righteousness was paid for by the blood of Christ and we are being sanctified by his Spirit.

Titus 2:12 says, "[the grace of God] teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,"

4. The acts of the sinful nature are grouped. How would you define each group? (vv. 19-21)

Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery could be described as sins of moral indecency or sensuality.

Idolatry and witchcraft describe the sins of worshipping false gods and demonic activity. These sins were a rejection of the true God and were prompted by selfish motives.

Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy --- all have to do with our social relations and treatment of others.

Drunkenness, orgies, (and the like) could be described as intemperance, indulgence, or a total lack of self control.

The phrase "and the like" indicates that this list is not complete, but just a sampling of what Paul would identify as acts of a sinful nature.

5. What warning does Paul give concerning anyone who lives according to the sinful nature?

Paul warns that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

It is important to understand that the phrase translated in the NIV as "lives like this" or "do such things" in another translation, means to commit these acts as a regular and permanent habit.

Paul is not talking to those who might experience a temporary setback or one-time relapse into such sins. He is warning that those who deliberately choose to live a sinful lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of God. That means they will not be saved.

They do not display the characteristics of their Father and cannot be considered a child of God. Therefore, they are not heirs.

6. The fruit of the Spirit could be contrasted with the acts of the sinful nature listed in verses 19-21. List each characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit below and what act(s) of the sinful nature it could contrast with. (vv. 22-23)

There is no right or wrong answer here. It is just a way for you to see how the sinful nature is in conflict with what the Spirit desires. See below for a suggested contrast pairing.

Love vs. Hatred; Joy vs. Discord; Peace vs. Dissensions and Factions; Patience vs. Selfish Ambition; Kindness vs. Fits of Rage; Goodness vs. Impurity; Faithfulness vs. Idolatry and Witchcraft; Gentleness vs. Fits of Rage; Self-Control vs. Sexual Immorality/Drunkness/Debauchery.

The word for “love” in the fruit of the Spirit is the Greek word *agape*. It was rarely used and little regarded until Christians began to use it to define God’s love for us and the love believers have through the Spirit.

Agape loves even when love is not deserved (Rom. 5:8).

Agape loves without restrictions. It reaches out to meet the need wherever a need arises (I John 4:9-12).

Agape loves by choice and by will, not just by feeling and emotions. It is the only kind of love that can be commanded.

Agape loves without counting the cost, and without calculating its own profit.

7. What does Paul say is not against the fruit of the Spirit? (v. 23)

Against such things there is no law.

The purpose and basis of law is to restrain wrong behavior. The Spirit urges us on to produce the gracious fruit of the Spirit—right behavior. There is no need for any law to restrain us. The more in tune (or in step) we are with the Spirit, the more freedom from law we have.

8. Who has crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires? (v. 24)

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

This select group is made up of those who have:

1. been rescued by Jesus (1:4).
2. been justified by faith, not works of law (2:16).
3. been crucified with Christ (2:20).
4. been baptized into Christ and put on Christ (3:27).

When we accepted Christ as our Savior, we also chose to die to our old life and the power of the law (2:19). Here, Paul shows that a person also dies to the power of their sinful nature. The verb indicates that this is something initiated by the believer. The believer has actively repented of his old way of life.

9. What does Paul mean by keeping in step with the Spirit? (v. 25)

The Greek verb used here is different from the one in v. 16 for “live by” or “walk by.” Here it means to *walk in line with*.

We keep in step with the Spirit when we keep a close eye on where he is leading and guiding us. We are sensitive to his leading when we pray (Romans 8:26) and as we study and meditate on God’s word.

10. We know from verse 15 that the Galatians were “biting and devouring” each other. In verse 26, what attitudes does Paul urge them to avoid? (v. 26)

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

If a believer strives to produce the fruit of the Spirit and is successful, he may become conceited.

It is a pervasive trait of our sinful nature to gain a feeling of self-pride when we achieve positive change. But we must realize that it is the Spirit who is responsible for these positive changes, not ourselves.

Becoming conceited results in provoking and envying each other. Envy, in fact, is listed among the acts of sinful nature in verse 21. Christians should be accepting and generous in their attitude toward others. They should be genuinely happy when others are praised or are the recipients of good fortune.

Provoking could mean any irritating or annoying behavior. The word could also mean “manipulating.” Those who feel superior to others will often try to control other people.