

Galatians 5:24-26

Gal 5:24 (NKJV) **And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Suffice it to say that no believer at the moment of their salvation can fully understand what Christ did for them. They recognize their sinfulness and they accept Christ's sacrifice on their behalf, but it is extremely doubtful that these great doctrines related to the work of Christ against the work of sin was fully understood in the believer's life at that moment. So, the thrust of this passage is the idea that the believer grows in their understanding of what all of this means and that they come to a place where what Christ actually did for them becomes a precious reality into which they want their life to be conformed. They understand that they must crucify the deeds of their flesh and be guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Now, there are two distinct issues involved in this passage. The first is the idea of mortifying the flesh, of crucifying the flesh, and the second is that of continually growing by constantly yielding our life to the work of the Holy Spirit. Both ideas are fully captured in [Galatians 5:16-25](#), and they cannot be separated from each other. Stated another way, a believer will never grow spiritually if they are always allowing sin to control their life, and they will never be able to overcome sin if they are never yielding their life to the control and influence of the Holy Spirit. We cannot overcome sin on our own. Stated another way, as believers we do not have the power to simply crucify the flesh and the fleshly impulses that constantly arise in everyone's life. It is not just a matter of will or even personal resolve. Those are great and they are certainly helpful in this process, but in and of themselves they do not have the power to overcome the inclinations and drives of the flesh. Just me thinking that I personally have the power to overcome my flesh on my own is an illusion that will leave me disappointed. I am sure that every single one of us have told the Lord that we would never do something again, only to find ourselves failing in that area of our life over and over again.

The most concentrated place where the flesh is spoken of in Scripture is in [Romans 7:5 – Romans 8:13](#). The word “**flesh**” is used 14 times in those verses. In these verses Paul reveals that the “**flesh**” was a struggle for him. Below are just several of the key verses related to this idea of overcoming the flesh in the [Romans 7 - 8](#) passage.. The key verse is [Romans 8:13](#).

Ro 7:18 (NKJV) **For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find.**

Ro 7:25 (NKJV) **I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**

Ro 8:1 (NKJV) ***There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

Ro 8:13 (NKJV) **For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

So, in [Romans 8:13](#) Paul reiterates that the ability and the capacity to “**put to death the deeds of the body**” are directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Clearly, it is “**by the**

Spirit” that we are able to **“put to death the deeds of the body”**. We are not presently dealing with exactly what that means and how we actually do that, but suffice it to say that the Holy Spirit is the key to our being successful, and not our own personal resolve. Up to this point we have studied about walking in the Spirit (v16), being led by the Spirit (v18), allowing God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our life (v22-23), and in v25 we shall see that we are to **“live”** and **“walk in the Spirit”**.

Now, one of the aspects of this conflict that has to be addressed is the fact that the present tense of the verb for **“crucify”** in [Galatians 5:24](#) is not used. In fact, in the last study, we looked at the four passages where the idea of crucifying the flesh was addressed in the New Testament – [Romans 6:6](#), [Galatians 2:20](#), [Galatians 6:14](#), and [Galatians 5:24](#). None of those verses used the verbal form of the word **“crucify”** in the present tense. If the present tense had been used, it would have implied the ongoing aspect of this conflict and the daily dying to self that is so necessary in the Christian life. However, what the absence of that verbal parsing emphasized to us is that in these four passages that there is a clear and distinct decision that has to be made by the believer. Based on his knowledge of the work of Christ at the cross, the believer has to make a very conscious and deliberate decision that they too will crucify the flesh in their life. I.e., it is not possible for the believer to go somewhere in their Christian life that they do not want to go. No one will grow spiritually until they have a very deliberate and intentional moment where they commit their life to spiritual growth – and that is what [Galatians 5:24](#) is saying.

What we know from the entire context of [Galatians 5:16-26](#), as well as [Romans 7](#), is that there is always a constant conflict and spiritual battle taking place in the believer’s life between the flesh and the Spirit. No one escapes this reality. It could be called a constant tug of war between the two for supremacy in the believer’s life. What many believers seem to gain from this ongoing certainty is a kind of morbid resignation to defeat. It is like in their mind they become disillusioned and discouraged by the spiritual battle, and simply begin to yield themselves to various sins in their life. They do not want to give the time and energy and the emotions it takes to fight the battle, and eventually they become weary in doing the right thing and succumb to some sin or sins in their life. The result of that kind of perspective and spiritual mentality is that their spiritual growth is severely impaired and minimized.¹

What this entire section of [Galatians 5](#) has asserted is that the Spirit of God is the victor in our life. We have the fruit of the Spirit being developed by God in us (that is a fact), and we are to **“walk in the Spirit”**, be **“led by the Spirit”**, and **“live in the Spirit”**. He is the One who enables every believer to live above sin. I have to say at this point that if I never see spiritual fruit in a person’s life that my personal opinion is that they simply are not saved. The Holy Spirit is the author and initiator of spiritual fruit in the believer’s life, and He is always working these different fruits of [Galatians 5:22-23](#) into their life. However, the thrust of this verse is clearly that a life that is constantly succumbing to the flesh is to be replaced with a life that is constantly yielding to a Spirit-directed, Spirit imparted life. As we read earlier, [Romans 8:13](#) says,

Ro 8:13 (NKJV) For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Every believer has to make a clean break with what they formerly were in their life. The Christian life demands that reality. It is not enough to simply and formally acknowledge Christ as Lord of our life

¹ George, 404.

without making a break with the sin that characterized our life prior to salvation. If that were not the case, then we could simply eliminate the word “**repentance**” from the Scriptures. However, the church at large has capitulated to that falsehood and has actually damaged the cause of Christ by zealously accepting non-believer’s into their membership without demanding a real and genuine repentance on their part. This whole idea of repentance has been casually dismissed as irrelevant to the work of salvation. However, what [Galatians 5:24](#) is clearly saying is that what has been positionally effected by the work of Christ on the cross has to be worked out in the believer’s everyday life, in their everyday practice.² What we are positionally has to be worked out practically. If that does not happen in the believer’s life, then the work of Christ was in vain.

Now, what all of this means in a very practical sense is that every believer must come to a point in their life when they consciously and purposefully make the decision that they are not going to live for themselves and that they are going to live for Christ. It is difficult from any of the four passages on crucifying the flesh to actually determine when that happens. Many commentators seem to simplify this aspect of the timing of this event and imply that because of the aorist tense and because of its reference to the work of Christ that it happens at salvation and the moment of justification. For instance, and this is typical of many, Thomas Schreiner simply says “*The crucifixion of the flesh, then, occurred at conversion*”.³ I personally do not agree with that position relative to this verse, even though I agree with it in terms of what happened to believers “positionally”. At the moment of my conversion, I understood that Christ had given me a new and different kind of life, but I can assure you that I understood nothing about crucifying the flesh.

The crucifixion of our flesh did happen at conversion positionally, but this verse because of the active voice seems to be addressing what happens in the believer’s life at a later time. Just notice the difference between [Galatians 2:20](#) and [Galatians 5:24](#) in their verbal construction. In [Galatians 2:20](#), it says that “**I have been crucified with Christ**” (indicative mood, perfect tense, middle voice). The perfect tense refers to that which happened in the past, but still has ongoing results and impacts. Clearly, the correct understanding of this verb is that this action is something that happened to the believer. I.e., it was God who crucified the believer with Christ. However, in [Galatians 5:24](#) it says that “...**those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh...**” The word “**those**” clearly refers to believers and in this case, they specifically are the ones who “**have crucified the flesh**” (indicative mood, aorist tense, active voice). The phrase “**who are Christ's**” is what is known as a genitive of possession and simply means that the individual belongs to Christ, so it is clearly talking about believers. This verse is speaking specifically of a crucifixion that was carried out **by** those “**who are Christ's**” and NOT by what Christ actually did for them. So, in one case, the crucifixion happened to the believer and for the believer ([2:20](#)) and in the other case the crucifixion happened by the believer ([5:24](#)).

Please appreciate that hermeneutically just because the verb in in the aorist tense (past tense) does not mean that it had to be at the moment of salvation, but simply that it is something that has happened in the believer’s life at some point in time in the past. Could it happen at salvation? Certainly it could, but it is doubtful that it always does. Apparently it seems to have happened that way for Paul on the road to

² Bruce, 256.

³ Schreiner, 351.

Damascus, but my assumption is that he is the exception and not the norm. The basic demand of the Christian life comes from [Luke 9:23](#) when Jesus said the following,

Lk 9:23 (NKJV) Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

This verse points to the fact that this work of God in us not only has a beginning point, but that it also is a “**daily**” work, a continuous and lifelong process in the believer’s life. If you think about crucifixion, it was a long process of dying. It was not something that was sudden, but was continuous, and that was what made it so horrible. It often took days for death to finally come to the individual, and that was how it was designed. As genuine believers, we all know from personal experience that there is no shortcut to being spiritually successful in our life and to having victory over sin in our life. At times the struggle can be excruciatingly painful, even for the strongest of Christians. The first of Martin Luther’s 95 theses that he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church was that Christ has willed the believer’s entire life “*to be one of repentance*”. His last theses said that we enter into heaven “*through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace.*”⁴

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⁴ George, 405-406.