

Galatians 5:16

Gal 5:16 (NKJV) **I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

The overall goal in approaching this section of Scripture of [Galatians 5:16-26](#) is to try and discern exactly what is meant by the word “walk” in v16. Obviously, it is very important simply because the idea of being able to “walk in the Spirit” is directly related to “not fulfilling the lust of the flesh”. To “walk in the Spirit” is very good and spiritual, and fulfilling the lust of the flesh is very bad and quite unspiritual. [Galatians 5:17](#) says that these two areas of a believer’s life are diametrically opposed to each other, or specifically “contrary to one another”. If I can say it this way without sounding somewhat irreverent or disrespectful to the Holy Spirit, they simply do not like each other. As we proceed, Paul will tell us in v19 that the “works of the flesh are evident”. I.e., there is no mistake about their character or about the consequences that they produce in a person’s life. There is not one good word in the listing and not one good thing that can come about in a person’s life who finds themselves in the grip of the power of any of these fleshly characteristics in their life – not one good thing.

Now, in coming to [Galatians 5:16](#) it is important to recognize that the word “walk” is the only imperative tense verb in the entire section from v16-26. That is very important because what it does is to identify that it becomes the single most important verb in the entire passage. It is the one thing that Paul is emphasizing, the one idea that he is underlining, underscoring, and highlighting. I.e., everything else that follows is actually his commentary on that one imperative tense verb. His discussion on the differences between the “flesh” and the “Spirit”, his discussion on being “led by the Spirit”, his discussion on the “works of the flesh” vs. the “fruit of the Spirit”, his discussion on living and walking in the Spirit – they are all a commentary on the word “walk”. So, whatever Paul is going to say is designed to help the believer learn how to “walk” in a way that will be honoring to Christ. In his explanations, he fully knows that every believer has a spiritual war to wage between the “flesh” and the “Spirit”. He knows that. He knows that at times that every believer is going to struggle with his flesh. So, one of the things that Paul wants to do is to help believers to recognize, to discern, and to identify areas where their life is breaching and disregarding what the Spirit would want them to be doing. That is why he provides such a long list of the “works of the flesh”, and then at the end adds this little tiny, but powerful phrase - “and the like”. By the same token, he also wants believers to recognize when the “fruit of the Spirit” is being worked into their life, so he provides a shorter, but very powerful list of the evidence of God’s work in their life.

Every believer should, in some visible and tangible way, be constantly demonstrating the evidence of this spiritual fruit in their life. Any tree or plant has visible, tangible evidence of its fruit. This spiritual “fruit” is the ongoing evidence that believers are actually submitting their life to the life-transforming work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, every believer must be willing to examine their life on a continual basis to determine if in reality they are “walking” and “living” in a way that is honoring to Christ. Even though v22-23 do not use the word “practice” as it does in v21, the conjunction “but” at the beginning of v22 connects the two verses [in intent](#) so that hermeneutically the word “practice” can be interjected into the idea of “the fruit of the Spirit”. The word “but” in this context is what is known as an “adversative conjunction”, or a conjunction used to express a contrast between the immediate

clause and the one preceding it”.¹ It is also called a “logical contrastive” where a contrast “refers to opposition. A contrastive conjunction is a conjunction that suggests an oppositional thought or relationship to the word, phrase, or clause to which it is connected. For example, “This car is fast, but that one is not.”² By using the conjunction “**but**” in that sentence, it means that the second car was not fast even though the word fast is not included in the last phrase. The simple point is that the word “**but**” causes v22-23 to have the meaning that all of the listed attributes are qualities that will be habitually demonstrated in the believer’s life if they are being “**led by the Spirit**” (v18). So, in this particular context the attributes of “**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness**” and “**self-control**” are all attributes that should constantly be the normal practice, the ongoing practice, the habitual practice of a believer who is yielding themselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Now, it is important then to gain a clear understanding of the meaning of the word “**walk**” in this context. It is the Greek word “*peripateō*” and is a very often used word in the New Testament. It means to live one’s life in a particular manner.³ In much of the New Testament it simply refers to physically walking. However, in this context “*peripateō*” assumes theological significance because it becomes one of the many New Testament terms for describing the spiritual life-style of the believer.⁴ There are many descriptive references to “walking” that refer specifically to how someone lives, and especially to how a believer lives. Anyone, believer or unbeliever can be “**walking in darkness**”, and what that phrase clearly suggests is that someone is engaged in a sinful lifestyle. [John 8:12](#) says,

Jn 8:12 (NKJV) Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

[1 John 1:6](#) says,

1Jn 1:6 (NKJV) If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

[1 John 2:11](#) says,

1Jn 2:11 (NKJV) But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Then to amplify the idea of walking “**in darkness**”, there is the idea of those who “**walk according to the flesh**” – which certainly embraces the context of [Galatians 5:16-26](#) since the word “**flesh**” is used five (5) times in 11 verses. For instance, [Romans 8:4](#) says,

Ro 8:4 (NKJV) that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

On the positive side, however, there seems to be more descriptive passages that identify different attributes of a godly walk in a believer’s life. [Romans 6:4](#) says that we are to “**walk in newness of life**”.

¹ Lukaszewski, Logos, *Galatians 5:22*, ep.

² Heiser, Logos, *Galatians 5:22*, ep.

³ Zodhiates, 1148.

⁴ Gilbrandt, WORDsearch, 3906 – *peripateo*, ep.

Ro 6:4 (NKJV) **Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**

Romans 13:13 says that we are to “walk properly”.

Ro 13:13 (NKJV) **Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.**

2 Corinthians 5:7 says that we are to “walk by faith”.

2Co 5:7 (NKJV) **For we walk by faith, not by sight.**

Ephesians 5:8-9 says that we are to “walk as children of light”.

Eph 5:8 (NKJV) **For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),**

Colossians 1:10 says that we are to “walk worthy of the Lord”.

Col 1:10 (NKJV) **that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

Colossians 4:5 says that we are to “walk in wisdom”.

Col 4:5 (NKJV) **Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time.**

1 John 1:7 says,

1Jn 1:7 (NKJV) **But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

2 John 1:6 says that we are to walk in obedience.

2Jn 1:6 (NKJV) **This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.**

The Holy Spirit in His own supernatural way will always be giving “spiritual impulses” to the believer to help correct their life from heading off in the wrong direction. The difficult part of this is that to make a statement like that is what people use to make their decisions very subjective and almost arbitrary. The moment that we mention a term like “spiritual impulses”, someone is going to read into that statement a kind of mystical element. However, and this is very important to understand, those impulses are not to be governed by someone’s vivid imagination as to what they think the Holy Spirit is saying to them. That is a clear path to a kind of spiritual insanity. Rather believers are going to be governed by what the Holy Spirit has already clearly stated in His Word. He will bring to the believer’s remembrance what He has already taught them. The moment that a believer becomes engaged in any of the works of the flesh as identified in **Galatians 5:19-21**, they can be sure that the Holy Spirit will provide some kind of instinctive warning to them about what they are about to do. At a personal level, I always seem to know when I am about to act or to say something that is not appropriate. It is not like I hear this loud voice out of heaven or something physically shaking me – not at all. To the contrary, it is just something that

I know, something innate and instinctive, a kind of gentle nudge saying to me “*What you are doing is not right*”. I just know it and so do you.

So, the word “**walk**” in this context refers specifically to the act of how someone conducts themselves and how they order their manner of life and behavior. It means to live and behave in a specific manner – a manner that reflects Christ, that honors Christ, that is obedient to His Word, that is led by the Holy Spirit. The verb “**walk**” is in the present tense, imperative mood, and active voice which simply means that it is something that the believer himself is commanded to constantly be doing. Once again, it is idea that the believer has to live out the Christian life. I love [1 Thessalonians 4:1](#) which says,

1Th 4:1 (NKJV) Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

This idea of the Christian “**walk**” is clearly something in which the believer is to be abounding. Of the 96 times that this word “**walk**” is used in the New Testament, 44 of those times it is specifically referring to the believer’s behavior. We have not even discussed it yet, but what Paul is saying is that this walking to which he is referring is to be done under the power of the Holy Spirit. He specifically says, and we will look at this in greater detail later, but the believer is to “**walk in the Spirit**”. Generally that is accomplished when the believer is following the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit as provided in His Word. There is one thing of which every believer can be sure. It is that the Holy Spirit will never lead them into sin. That is a spiritual fact and reality that cannot be denied. He will never prompt a believer to do something that is wrong or in contradiction to His Word. So, if a believer finds themselves doing something that they know is outside of the boundaries of God’s Word, they can be fully assured that it is not the Holy Spirit driving that impulse on their part, but their flesh and their personal proclivity to sin.⁵ The key to all of this is understanding what Paul means in v18 when he says that the believer is to be “**led by the Spirit**”. [Romans 8:14](#) reiterates the same idea when it says,

Ro 8:14 (NKJV) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The sense of the word “**led**” means to be willingly, cooperatively, and voluntarily directed to a particular course of action due to the influence of a spiritual influence - which in this case is specifically the Holy Spirit. The point is that it is not just “walking” that is involved in this verse, but rather walking specifically in accordance to the spiritual influence of the Holy Spirit. The last thing that needs to happen is to somehow make all of this mystical or difficult because it is not something difficult. It is something that should become very normal and very natural for the believer. This is the Christian life, this is the way we are to live, and this is how the Christian life works the best – by being “**led**” by the Holy Spirit. If a believer never asks the Holy Spirit for His guidance, if he never seeks His direction, and if he never spends any time in His Word, then there is absolutely no reason why that individual should ever think that he will be directed by the Holy Spirit. The more time that a believer spends in the Word of God listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying, the more that believer will be “**led**” by the Holy Spirit. Because I spend time with you on a regular basis, when you call me on the phone, I almost know immediately who is calling simply because I know your voice. I know exactly what you sound like. If we were in a dark room where no one could see anyone at all, and someone spoke, we would all recognize

⁵ Spurgeon, Logos, *Galatians 5:16*, ep.

that person's voice. Why? It is because we have spent time with them and we know their voice. Well, it is no different when it comes to hearing the Holy Spirit speak to us and lead us. His voice is distinctive and is readily recognizable to the believer who is spending quality time with Him. This should be very normal and very natural for every believer – that they can hear the Holy Spirit as He helps them to walk in a manner and live in a manner that is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

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