

Living by the Holy Spirit



SABBATH—DECEMBER 10

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 5:16–25; Deuteronomy 13:4, 5; Romans 7:14–24; Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 22:35–40.

MEMORY VERSE: “So I say, live by the Holy Spirit’s power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do” (Galatians 5:16, NlrV).

ONE OF THE MOST BELOVED CHRISTIAN HYMNS IS ROBERT ROBINSON’S “COME, THOU FOUNT [SPRING] OF EVERY BLESSING.” But Robinson was not always a man of faith. The death of his father left him angry, and he became a drunk. But after hearing the famous preacher George Whitefield, Robinson surrendered his life to the Lord. Then he became a Methodist pastor and wrote that hymn. This hymn originally included the lines: “Oh, to grace¹ how great a debtor / Daily I’m [I am] constrained [forced] to be! / Let Thy goodness, like a fetter [chain], / Bind [unite] my wandering heart to Thee.”

Uncomfortable with the line about the Christian heart’s wandering, someone once changed the words to read, “Prone [likely] to worship, Lord, I feel it, / Prone to love the God I serve.”

The editor might mean well. But the original words correctly describe the Christian struggle. As believers we have two natures,² the flesh and the Spirit. And they both are at war with each other. Our sinful nature³ will always wander from God. But if we are willing to surrender to His Spirit, we do not have to be enslaved to the desires of the flesh. This is Paul’s main message in the verses for the week.

1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. natures—the particular aspects or qualities of things that make them what they are; our hearts and minds.

3. sinful nature—any of the fallen qualities or aspects of humans that we are born with. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, and so on.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 11**WALKING IN THE SPIRIT
(Galatians 5:16)**

Read Galatians 5:16. How is the idea of “walking” in Galatians 5:16 connected with a life of faith? Read also Deuteronomy 13:4, 5; Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:1, 17; and Colossians 1:10 for answers.

“Walking” is a metaphor⁴ from the Old Testament that explains the way a person should behave (act). Paul, himself a Jew, makes use of this metaphor often in his letters to describe the type of action that should show the Christian life. Paul’s use of this metaphor is also connected to the first name that was associated with the early church. Before the followers of Jesus were called Christians (Acts 11:26), they were known as followers of “the Way” (John 14:6; Acts 22:4; and Acts 24:14). This suggests that, at a very early date, Christianity was not just a set of beliefs that centered on Jesus. It also was a “way” of life to be “walked.”

In what way is Paul’s metaphor about walking different from that found in the Old Testament? Compare⁵ Exodus 16:4; Leviticus 18:4; and Jeremiah 44:23 with Galatians 5:16, 25; and Romans 8:4.



Walking is a metaphor from the Bible that explains the way a Christian should live and act.

Behavior in the Old Testament was not explained as “walking.” It was closer to the meaning of “walking in the law.” *Halakhah* is the legal word Jews use to mean the rules found in both the law and the customs of their forefathers. *Halakhah* usually is translated as “the Jewish law.” But the word actually is based on the Hebrew word for “to walk” and really means “the way of going.”

When Paul comments about “walking in the Spirit,” he is not suggesting that Christians should live in a way that breaks the law. Paul is not opposed to the law or to obedience to the law. Instead, he is opposed to how some were trying to obey the law. The true obedience that God desires never can be gained by force. It is done only through the desire to serve God faithfully with the Holy Spirit’s leading (Galatians 5:18).

4. metaphor—an object, activity (something one does), or idea that is used as a symbol of something else. Walking is used as a metaphor to describe how a person should live his or her life in Christ.

5. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

What has been your own experience of “walking in the Spirit”? How do you do that? What practices in your life make this kind of walk more difficult?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 12

THE CHRISTIAN’S STRUGGLE (Galatians 5:17)

In your own life as a believer, how have you known the painful and real experience of the truth found in Galatians 5:17? Read also Romans 7:14–24.

The struggle that Paul describes is not the struggle of every human. It is about the inward tug-of-war that goes on inside the Christian. Humans are born with the desires of the flesh (Romans 8:7). So, when we are born anew by the Spirit, a real spiritual struggle begins to take place in us (John 3:6). This does not mean that non-Christians never experience struggles between good and evil. They certainly do. Even that struggle is a result of the Spirit. But the struggle of the Christian is of a new kind. This is because the believer has two natures that are at war with each other, the flesh and the Spirit.

Throughout history, Christians have longed for peace from this struggle. Some have tried to end the struggle by withdrawing from society. Others have claimed that the sinful nature can be removed by an act of God’s grace. Both attempts are of the wrong kind. Yes, by the Spirit’s power we



In every human heart there is an inward tug-of-war going on between the desires of the flesh and the Spirit.

certainly can control the desires of the flesh. But the struggle will continue in different ways until we receive a new body at the Second Coming. Trying to escape from society does not help. No matter where we go, we take the struggle with us. And we will do so until death or the Second Coming.

Paul writes in Romans 7 about the inner struggle in Christians. This struggle stops Christians from doing what they want to do. Paul really is explaining more fully what that struggle means. Because we have two natures, we are on both sides of the battle at once. The spiritual part of us desires what is spiritual and hates the flesh. But the fleshly part of us desires the things of the flesh and is an enemy of what is spiritual. The Christian mind is too weak to fight against the temptation of the flesh by itself. So, the only hope we have of victory over the flesh is by making a daily decision to choose the Spirit against the desires of our sinful selves. This is why Paul encourages us so strongly to walk in the Spirit.

From your own experience of the battle between these two natures, what advice would you give to a Christian who is trying to understand this never-ending struggle with self?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 13

“THE WORKS OF THE FLESH” (Galatians 5:19–24, NKJV)

Paul has introduced the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. In Galatians 5:18–26, he explains more clearly the nature of this struggle by making a list of what is good and bad. This list was well known in both Jewish and Greek-Roman literature. The list named bad actions to avoid and good actions to be lived out.

Carefully examine the lists of bad and good actions in the verses below. In what way is Paul’s list in Galatians 5:19–24 the same as, or different from, these other lists? Read Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; Mark 7:21, 22; 1 Timothy 3:2, 3; 1 Peter 4:3; and Revelation 21:8.

Paul knows the lists well. But there are important differences in the way he uses the two lists in Galatians. First, Paul shows the differences between the two lists. But he does not speak of them in the same way. He labels the list of bad actions as the “works of the flesh” and the list of good actions as the “fruit of the Spirit.” This is an important difference. As James D. G. Dunn writes, “The flesh *demands*,

but the Spirit *produces*. The one list breathes an air of self-centeredness or selfishness which is negative. But the other speaks more of interest in people and peace and trustworthiness. The one shows evil actions against others. But the good list shows godly influences and positive changes in how people act toward others.” —Adapted from *The Epistle [Letter] to the Galatians*, page 308.



The fruit of the Spirit produces or grows love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the human heart.

The second interesting difference between Paul’s two lists is that the list of bad actions is labeled as plural (many) in number: “works of the flesh.” But “fruit of the Spirit” is singular (one). This difference may suggest that the life lived in the flesh can produce (make) nothing but quarrels, fights, trouble, and divisions. But, the life lived with the Spirit’s leading produces one fruit of the Spirit, which shows itself in nine good parts that encourage unity.

Some people claim that what a person believes about God does not really matter as long as he or she is sincere. But this is not true. Paul's list of bad actions suggests the opposite: impure thoughts about God lead to wrong ideas about sexual behavior and religion. This leads to the breakdown of human relationships. What is more, such wrong ideas can lead to the loss of eternal life too (Galatians 5:21).

Read the list of “works of the flesh.” In what ways can each of the things listed break one or more of the Ten Commandments?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 14

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22–24)

In what ways does obedience to the Ten Commandments show the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul lists in Galatians 5:22–24? (Read also Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28; and Matthew 22:35–40.)

The Ten Commandments are not something we can choose instead of or in place of love. They just help guide us in how we are to show love, both to God and to humans. Love might go above the letter of the law. But it is not opposed to the law. The idea that love for God and love for our neighbor does away with the Ten Commandments makes no sense. It is the same as saying that love for nature does away with the law of gravity.

Also, there are the 15 one-word

descriptions of the “works of the flesh.” But the “fruit of the Spirit” is described in nine positive parts. Scholars (Bible thinkers) believe these nine parts are organized into three groups of three. But they do not agree on the importance of their order. Some think there is a direct connection to the Trinity in the number three. Others believe the three groups of three show the ways in which we should relate to God, to our neighbor, and finally to ourselves. And still others believe the list is a perfect description of Jesus. Each of these views may have some good points. But the most important point to remember is that Paul thinks of love as the most important part of the Christian life.

The fact that Paul lists love as the first of the nine parts is not by accident. He has already shown love to be the most important part in the Christian life in Galatians 5:6 and 13. And Paul includes it in his lists of good acts elsewhere (2 Corinthians 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:11; and 2 Timothy 2:22). All the other “good” parts appear in non-Christian books also. But love is distinctly (clearly) Christian. All this shows that love should not be just one good part among many. Instead, love should be the most important part of the Christian life because it is the key to all other good parts. Love is the greatest fruit of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 5:5), and it should be included in the life and attitudes (feelings) of every Christian (John 13:34, 35), no matter how difficult it might be to show love at times.

How much self-denial (personal sacrifice) is involved in love? Can you love without self-denial? What does Jesus teach us about love and self-denial?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 15

THE WAY TO VICTORY (Galatians 5:16–26)

An inner struggle between the flesh and the Spirit always will be raging (taking place) in the heart of every believer. But the Christian life does not have to be controlled by defeat, failure, and sin.

According to Galatians 5:16–26, what is the key to living a life in which the Spirit rules over the flesh?

Galatians 5:16–26 hold five key verbs that describe the type of life in which the Spirit rules. First, the believer needs to “walk” in the Spirit (verse 16). The Greek verb is *peripateo*, which means “to walk around or to follow.” The followers of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle came to be known as the Peripatetics because they followed Aristotle everywhere he went. The fact that the verb is in the present tense implies that Paul is not talking about a once-in-a-while walk. Instead, it is to be a continuous, daily experience. Because we are commanded “to walk” in the Spirit, this verb also suggests that our walk in the Spirit is a choice we have to make every day.

The second verb is “to be led” (verse 18). This suggests that we also need to let the Spirit lead us where we

should go (compare Romans 8:14; and 1 Corinthians 12:2). It is not our job to lead but to follow.

The next two verbs appear in Galatians 5:25. The first is “to live” (*zao* in Greek). When he says “live,” Paul is speaking about the new-birth experience that every believer needs to have. Paul’s use of the present tense points to a new-birth experience that is to be renewed daily. Because we live by the Spirit, Paul goes on to write that we also need “to walk” by the Spirit. The word translated as “walk” is different from the one in verse 16. Here the word is *stoiceo*. It is a military word that means “to draw up in a line,” “to keep in step,” or “to conform [follow].” The idea here is that the Spirit gives us life and should direct our lives every day too.

The verb Paul uses in verse 24 is “to crucify [to put to death on a cross].” This is a little shocking. If we are to follow the Spirit, we must make firm decisions to put to death the desires of the flesh. Of course, Paul is speaking of it as a symbol. We crucify the flesh by feeding our spiritual lives and by starving the desires of the flesh.



The Spirit gives us life and directs us where we should go every day.

What kinds of victories do you need but do not yet have? What

changes and choices must you make in order to have these victories that you are promised in Christ?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 16

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The life of the Christian is not all smooth. The Christian has serious challenges to meet. Satan will attack him with great temptations. ‘The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh’ [Galatians 5:17, NKJV]. The nearer we come to the close of this earth’s history, the more dangerous the enemy’s attacks will be. His attacks will grow stronger and come more often. Those who refuse to accept light and truth will become more hardened and bitter toward those who love God and keep His commandments.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1111.

“The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not see Christ and speak to Him. But His Holy Spirit is just as near to us in one place as in another. It works in and through everyone who receives Christ. Those who have the leading of the Spirit in their lives show the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1112.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about the idea of crucifying the desires of the flesh. What does that mean? How do we do it? How often do we have to do it? Why would Paul use such a strong verb? What does his use of the word *crucify* tell us about just how hard the battle with self is?
- ② What part do humans play in producing (making) the fruit of the Spirit? What does your own experience tell you about your part?
- ③ Paul says that those who practice the works of the flesh will not receive the kingdom of God. How do you compare this with the fact that Paul says we are saved by faith and not by works?
- ④ In your own walk with the Lord, what is the biggest struggle you face? Is it not sin and what sin does to your relationship with God? What Christian has not felt separation, doubt, and disappointment as a result of the sin in his or her life? The promise of victory over sin that Jesus gives us makes our failures seem so much more discouraging too. We know we have the promise of victory over sin. So why must we always remember that our salvation depends completely upon what Jesus has done for us?