

Introduction

How do we walk by faith? How do we resist the sin that we are drawn to? The answer in [Galatians 5](#) is that we **Kill sin by walking in the Spirit**. That is, this passage teaches that we do not resist temptation by will-power, but by setting our attention on God, Himself.

Spirit vs flesh

First, this passage explains that we must choose between living according to our flesh and living according to the Holy Spirit.

Resist the flesh

We should walk by the Spirit to resist sinful desires. [Galatians 5:16](#) “16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

“Flesh,” here, refers to our humanity. “Desires of the flesh” refers to the desires of our **sinful nature**. We tend to view temptation as something that comes from outside of us. We think that what we see or hear tempts us. However, Jesus said that it was what comes out of our heart that defiles us ([Matt 15:18-20](#)). James states that temptation comes from our own heart ([James 1:13-15](#)). We are all born with a sinful nature that desires sin.

Verse 16 states that the way we resist the sinful desires of our hearts is to walk in the Spirit. *Who is the Holy Spirit?* **God is Triune**. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons who are equally and eternally one God. After Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension, God gave the Holy Spirit to all who know Him through faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit indwells us and forms us into the image of Christ. We resist sinful desires by living with our hearts, minds, and devotions set on the Holy Spirit.

Opposition

The Spirit (God) and flesh (sinful nature) oppose one another. [Galatians 5:17](#) “17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

“The **desires** of the flesh are against the **desires** of the Spirit.” *What are the desires of the Spirit?* Unlike our nature, which desires sin, the Holy Spirit in us desires holiness. The Holy Spirit in us desires that Christ be formed in us. This is God’s will for your life.

The desires of the flesh keep you from doing what you want to do. In [Romans 7](#), Paul expressed the frustration that every Christian faces. I don’t do the things I want to do (a life pleasing to God). I do the things I don’t want to do (giving in to sinful desires). Holiness is a **fight**.

Led by the Spirit

Much of Galatians confronts the wrong idea that we are under the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. Verse 18 contrasts following the law with following the Spirit. [Galatians 5:18](#) “18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

It is interesting that this passage contrasts the Holy Spirit with both flesh and law. It makes sense to contrast the desires of the Holy Spirit with the desires of our sinful nature. But the law was given by God. [Romans 7-8](#) explains that **the weakness of the law is our sinful flesh**. The law itself was not bad; it was given to reveal our sinfulness. But we please God by living **in the Spirit by faith**, NOT by living **under the law by works**.

Works vs Fruit

Verses 16-18 state that we resist the desires of the flesh by walking in the Spirit. Next, this passage clarifies the distinction between works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit.

Sins of the flesh

The works of the flesh are sin. [Galatians 5:19-21](#) “19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

I don't think this list of sins is meant to be exhaustive. Throughout Scripture there are similar lists of sins that are slightly different than this list. This list focuses on **immorality** and **bitterness**. If we are honest, Christians tend to preach heavily about immorality, but justify bitterness. We tend to point out that culture is becoming more immoral. Yet, gossip and strife grows within the church. Both are harmful to the church.

The point here is simply that if we walk in the desires of the flesh, the outcome will be sin. I cannot battle my sinful desires by the flesh. I cannot overcome temptation by my own power. Overcoming sin and temptation can only be a work of God in us.

Kingdom of God

Notice that verse 21 says “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The phrase, “kingdom of God” refers to the people of God who have submitted to the rule of Christ in their lives. Jesus taught that the kingdom was not just a future reality; that is, it is not something we are waiting for. The kingdom of God was established when Jesus, the King, was on earth. Jesus's kingdom is different than the kingdoms of the world because it is not bound by geography or borders. Rather, God's people submit to Christ's rule all throughout the world.

To say that those who practice the sin listed in these verses will not inherit God's kingdom is a disturbing statement. *Doesn't this describe all of us?* Listen to the clarification in [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#) "9 Or do you not know that the **unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such **were** some of you. **But** you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit** of our God."

The point in both passages is that when we are judged by our works, we are condemned because we are unrighteous. However, we were washed, sanctified, and justified by the Holy Spirit. Sinners do not inherit God's kingdom, but those who are forgiven in Christ do inherit His kingdom.

Fruit of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit in us produces godly character. [Galatians 5:22-23](#) "22 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."

This passages lists nine characteristics of the life in the Spirit. Notice that these characteristics contrast with the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh are immorality and bitterness. The fruit of the Spirit is genuine love and patience toward others and self-control in the face of temptation.

Notice the distinction between fruit and works. If I serve God in my flesh, I will produce sin. If I serve God in the Spirit, **He** (the Spirit) will produce godliness. We do not grow in godliness by **effort**; we grow in godliness by **submission**.

Death and life

This chapter closes by looking back at the time when we came to faith. We should walk in the Spirit because we died to the flesh and live to God.

Crucified flesh

We have put the flesh to death in Christ. [Galatians 5:24](#) "24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Notice that this describes a past-tense event. When you came to faith in Jesus, you put to death your life in the flesh. [Rom 6:6](#) says that our old self was crucified. [Gal 2:21](#) says that you are crucified with Christ. You no longer live; Christ lives in you.

But [Galatians 5](#) is talking primarily about how we **live** as God's people, **not** how we **become** God's people. So, the point here is when you came to faith in Jesus, you crucified the flesh.

However, your battle against your sin nature is not over. Therefore, you continue to kill the flesh by walking in the Spirit.

Conform to the Spirit

Verse 25 does the same thing; it points back to our conversion as the basis for Christian life. [Galatians 5:25](#) “25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

The basis of walking in the Spirit is that we “live by the Spirit.” I don’t think this is just another way of wording verse 16 (walk in the Spirit). In light of verse 24 which describes us crucifying the Spirit, I think verse 25 describes the **life** that the Holy Spirit has given us. We are spiritually and eternally dead in our sins. When we have faith in Jesus, we die to our old self and the Holy Spirit makes us alive. *Why should we **walk in the Spirit**?* Because the Spirit has made us alive.

That phrase “keep in step” means to “conform to” or “hold to.” That is, walking by the Spirit means conforming your life to the Holy Spirit. Scripture is clear that we can choose to **walk** in the Spirit or to **quench** the Spirit. If we **walk** in the Spirit, we **conform** to the Spirit. If we **quench** the Spirit, we ask the Spirit to **conform** to us.

How do we conform to the Holy Spirit? Scripture says that the Spirit forms us into the image of Christ, leads us into all truth, and makes us holy. We conform to the Spirit by setting our eyes (hearts and minds) on Christ. We conform to the Spirit by reading and obeying Scripture. We conform to the Spirit by repenting of sin.

Unity

It is interesting that the two sections of this chapter end with a warning against division within the church. Verses 1-15 encourage us to live in Christ’s freedom and not return to the slavery of sin. That section concludes with a warning in verse 15 about the danger of creating division between you and a brother.

Verses 16-26 encourage us to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. This section ends with a warning of the danger of creating division between you and a brother. [Galatians 5:26](#) “26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

I think the point here is clear. If a person **thinks** he is living faithfully before God, but he is speaking against a Christian brother or thinking judgmentally against a Christian brother, then he **is not** walking in the Spirit. He is walking in the flesh. As James said, you **cannot** bless God while cursing “people who are made in the likeness of God” ([Jam 3:9-12](#)).

Conclusion

How do we walk by faith? How do we resist sinful desires? [Galatians 5:16-26](#) says we **kill sin by walking in the Spirit**. I pray that you will crucify the flesh and conform to the Spirit. Only by walking in the Spirit will Christ be formed in you.