

- *The right use of freedom*

- *Freedom to serve*

1. The Christian is to walk in the Holy Spirit

- *Two types of prompting*
- *The flesh – to sin- and the Spirit to live for Jesus*

2. The Christian will always be in the fight of faith

- *A triangle*

- *The flesh pulls one way*

- *The Holy Spirit pulls the other way*

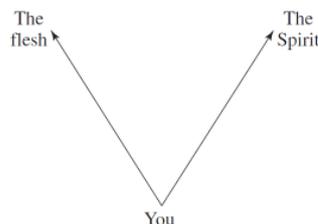
- *Always a fight*

3. The struggle need not make us feel condemned

Paul is putting it to us that although we are free from the law, we must use our freedom in the right way. The rule of the Mosaic law is abolished for the Christian. Yet that does not mean that he is removed from any kind of leadership; it does not mean he lives wickedly or selfishly. God wants us to use our freedom in serving His people. Now Paul develops another angle of this matter. The Christian is led by the Holy Spirit.

1. **The Christian is to walk in the Holy Spirit.** *‘Now this is what I am saying. Walk by the Spirit, and you will not satisfy the desires of the flesh.’* ¹ We are not under the Mosaic law, but we are under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul takes it for granted that we have received the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is exercising a leadership in our lives that we can know and feel. Paul also refers to ‘the flesh’. It is a word that has different meanings in different places. Here it refers to an aspect of our personality in which we feel prompted into sin. Two kinds of promptings are in our life. On the one side there is the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit says to us: Live for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and something within us says ‘Yes, I want to do that.’

2. **The Christian will always be in the fight of faith while he is in this world.** Paul explains why he says the Christian must walk in the Spirit. He says, *‘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.’* ¹ There is a triangle here:



The flesh is pulling one way. The Holy Spirit is pulling the other way. They stop ‘you’ from doing the things you want to do. You are never perfectly sinless because the flesh stops you from totally doing what you wish to do. But, if you are ‘born again’, you are never happy being in sin, because the Holy Spirit is pulling you away from sin. The two powers (the flesh and the Spirit) are pulling you in different directions. There is always a fight going on and it never ends totally while you are in this life. The Spirit is pulling us into love, into faith, in purity, into single-minded love of God, into contentment and truthfulness and obedience to everything that we know is God’s will.

3. **The struggle need not make us feel condemned.** We might say to ourselves, ‘I feel condemned because of evil desires I find within myself. I wish I could get rid of sinful desires altogether.’ Paul addresses this problem by saying, *‘But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.’* ¹

¹ 5:16

¹ 5:17

¹ 5:18

4. Which side will win?

• The one we yield to

• Resist temptation

4. 'Which side will win?' someone might ask. I answer: the one that you yield to! The Holy Spirit enables us to resist temptation. He gives us the grace. But we have to do the resisting! Sometimes it is a hard fight. It is not enough to try to throw off responsibility. 'I'm praying about it. I am asking God to remove the flesh.' But that is not the answer. It is we ourselves who have to 'mortify the deeds of the body' so that new floods of energy and spiritual liveliness come into our lives.

5. How do we know what the sins of the flesh are if we are not under the law?

• The Holy Spirit makes it obvious

5. **How do we know what are the sins of the flesh are if we are not under the law?** Paul's answer is, '*Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ^{¶1} idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ^{¶2} envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these*'. ^{¶3} The works of the flesh are obvious! Do you need the Mosaic law to tell you when you are being immoral? Did Joseph have the Mosaic law when he was facing temptation? ^{¶4} No, he did not. The Holy Spirit will convict you of sin when you are in or getting near to sorcery – dabbling with witchcraft. He will convict you when you are showing 'enmity' towards someone. You will feel bad when you get into 'strife' or 'jealousy' and when you lose your temper. The works of the flesh are obvious!

¶1 5:19

¶2 5:20

¶3 5:21a

¶4 Genesis 39:9

6. A Christian is damaging his experience of the kingdom of God

• Three ways in which this verse may be taken

6. **A Christian in sin is damaging his experience of the kingdom of God.** '*I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*'. ^{¶1} What is Paul saying here?

¶1 5:21 b

(i) Is he threatening that you might lose your salvation? I do not think so. Paul says he has 'died' to the law. There is nothing that can condemn the Christian eternally.

(ii) Or is Paul saying if you commit these sins ever there is no forgiveness? No! Jesus Himself made it clear that 'all the sins and blasphemies of men and women will be forgiven them'. Only refusing Jesus' salvation is unforgivable, and no Christian does that!

(iii) Is he saying if you **continue** in sin there is no forgiveness? People who take it this way normally have 'sexual immorality ... idolatry, sorcery' in mind. They feel those sins are more serious and really deserve hell! But what Paul is saying applies equally to 'jealousy. ... rivalries ... dissensions ...' And actually it is rather hard to define at what point someone is 'continuing' in sin. How many times make 'continuing'? Once? Twice? A hundred times? I can certainly point quite easily to some well-known Christian leaders, past and present, who seem quite happy to cause dissension and who often seem to be giving in to jealousy. Is it 100% certain that they will be punished with eternal hell? Remember, what Paul says about immorality, he also says about dissension!

• In chapters 5-6 Paul is speaking of this life

I believe it is important to notice that all of the way through Galatians chapters 5–6 Paul is speaking of this life. Christ has set us free in this life. We are to stand in liberty in this life. If we are circumcised in this life we shall block the benefits of Christ now! Paul is addressing those 'who want (now!) to be justified by the law' and what they 'have' already done in cutting themselves off from Christ. It is in **this** life that we are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. It is in this life that some might bite and devour one another, such that there might be serious consequences in the **immediate** future. Galatians 5:21b is continuing the same thought that is everywhere in Galatians chapters

• *Consequences of sin are 'now'*

• *The loss of our present experience of kingdom life*

• *And also fearful consequences in the future*

• *On the other hand, sowing to the Spirit brings blessings in this life and in eternity*

5 – 6. Paul is not speaking of some distant future inheriting of the kingdom. He is speaking of what the consequences of sin will be now, immediately. If there is fornication or idolatry or one of the 'less important' sins in our lives (enmities, strife, jealousy, dissensions) we will **immediately** damage our experience of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God (right now) is (present tense!) righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If we sin the inheritance of the kingdom will be damaged or lost. We shall lose the clean happy sense of being righteous. We shall lose our peace. We shall never be able to know much joy in the Holy Spirit. Our usefulness to God will become dry or perhaps will die altogether. The way we live matters, and it matters now! What we sow we shall reap! The Christian is safe in his status in the kingdom of God, but the sinning Christian is setting himself up for loss of the blessings of the kingdom, for the powerful **corrective** punishments of God, and for the possibility of ultimately being saved through fire. We are to walk in freedom; we are to walk in the Spirit. God asks this of us voluntarily and willingly. Yet it is not so voluntary, for there are fearful consequences now and eternally if we fail to resist the flesh. On the other hand, if we sow to the Spirit, the blessings of God will come upon us in this life and in the visible and glorious rewards of eternity.



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