

Study 14  
Galatians 5:16-21

1. a) What is the issue that Paul is dealing with in this part of the letter as seen in Gal 5:15 . Why is this happening in the Galatian church?

In Galatians 5:15, Paul addresses the issue of conflict and division within the Galatian church. He warns that if they continue "biting and devouring one another," they will be consumed by each other. This happens because the church members are caught up in disputes, likely influenced by false teachers, and are not exercising true Christian freedom. Instead of using their freedom to love and serve one another, they are using it for selfish, flesh-driven purposes, leading to division and strife.

b) Reflection Question. Does this happen in your family, your church, or your community?

2. The Greek word for desire here is "*epithumias*" which means over desire. So when Paul warns against gratifying the desires of the flesh what is he warning us against? Why is this important?

When Paul warns against gratifying the desires of the flesh in Galatians 5:16-17, he is specifically warning against "*epithumias*"—over-desires or excessive desires that become an end to themselves. For example the desire for food is a good God given desire to nourish us but and over desire is where instead of eating food to live we live to eat. The same with the desire for sex it is good and right and God given in order to facilitate procreation, enjoyment and forge intimacy and unity between the married couple who will worship and praise God for such a God given facility and their sex is the consummation of their relationship . However sex becomes and overdesire when it becomes and end to itself when people seek the pleasure of sex as an end to itself irregardless of the original intent of the Creator. Hence these desires are good and even wonderful but become sinful or wrong when they become disordered or take precedence over God's will, they lead to sin and destruction. Over-desiring things like approval, control, comfort, or indulgence can draw us away from God and lead to selfish behavior, conflict, and division.

This is important because our desires shape our actions, and if we give in to over-desires, we allow them to control us rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and transform us. The key to true freedom is not the absence of desires, but the reordering of them—placing God and His will above all else. By walking in the Spirit, we can have our desires transformed and directed in a way that aligns with God's purposes for our lives, rather than being enslaved by our fleshly impulses.

3. What are the works of the flesh that Paul warns us against? What is the difference between the desires of the flesh and the works of the flesh?

In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists the **works of the flesh**, which are the outward expressions of the sinful desires that arise from our fleshly nature. These include:

1. **Sexual immorality** (porneia) – any form of sexual sin outside the boundaries of marriage.
2. **Impurity** (akatharsia) – moral filthiness or corruption.
3. **Sensuality** (aselgeia) – unrestrained indulgence in sinful pleasures.
4. **Idolatry** – worshiping anything other than God.
5. **Sorcery** (pharmakeia) – witchcraft, magic, or the use of drugs to manipulate others.
6. **Enmity** – hostility or hatred toward others.
7. **Strife** – conflicts or arguments.
8. **Jealousy** – coveting what others have.
9. **Fits of rage** – sudden outbursts of anger.
10. **Rivalries** – competitive, self-seeking behavior.
11. **Dissensions** – divisions that cause separation among people.
12. **Divisions** – parties or factions that divide the body.
13. **Envy** – resentment over another's success or possessions.
14. **Drunkenness** – excessive consumption of alcohol.
15. **Orgies** – wild parties or gatherings that promote sexual immorality and excess.
16. **Things like these** – other behaviors that are similar to the above.

The **desires of the flesh** (or "epithumias" in Greek) refer to the internal, sinful cravings or impulses of our fallen nature. These are the deeper, often hidden inclinations toward self-centeredness, control, or indulgence. The desires of the flesh are what motivate us to act in ways that are contrary to God's will.

The **difference** between the desires of the flesh and the works of the flesh is that the desires are internal and focused on the *longings* or *impulses* we have, while the works are the *external actions* or *behaviors* that result when we give in to those desires. The desires of the flesh can remain hidden, but when they are not resisted or surrendered to the Holy Spirit, they manifest as the works of the flesh in our behavior. Therefore, the works of the flesh are the visible fruit of the unchecked desires within.

4. What is the danger of indulging in the works of the flesh? Doesn't this contradict Paul's previous argument that we are saved by faith in Christ and not compliance with The Law?

The **danger of indulging in the works of the flesh** is that it can lead to spiritual destruction and separation from God. In Galatians 5:21, Paul warns that "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." This emphasizes that living according to the flesh, indulging in sinful behaviors, is incompatible with a life in Christ. Indulging in the works of the flesh can deeply damage one's spiritual life,

leading to ongoing sin and rebellion against God's will, which ultimately threatens the individual's standing in the kingdom of God.

As for the **apparent contradiction** with Paul's earlier argument that salvation is through faith in Christ and not by adhering to the Law, the key lies in understanding the difference between justification and sanctification. **Justification** (being declared righteous before God) is by faith alone in Christ, as Paul argues throughout the letter to the Galatians. This means that a person is saved and made right with God not by following the Law, but by trusting in Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross.

However, **sanctification** (the process of becoming more like Christ and living according to God's will) involves a transformed life. Once someone is justified by faith, they are called to live in the Spirit, which produces the fruit of the Spirit and leads them away from the works of the flesh. The indulgence in the works of the flesh is a sign of failing to walk by the Spirit, not a means of achieving justification. In other words, while salvation is not earned by compliance with the Law, living a life marked by the works of the flesh is incompatible with living by the Spirit, which is the true Christian life.

Therefore, Paul is not contradicting himself. He's saying that, while the Law cannot save, the **life of a believer in Christ is marked by the rejection of the works of the flesh** and the pursuit of godly living through the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith in Christ brings freedom, but that freedom should be used to live according to the Spirit, not to indulge the sinful desires of the flesh.

5. a) What is Paul's solution to the division and dissension amongst the Galatians believers as seen in Gal 5:15?

In Galatians 5:15, Paul warns that if the Galatians continue to "bite and devour" one another, they will destroy each other. His solution is found in the very next verse Galatians 5:16 (ESV) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Their constant pandering to their over desires to please themselves instead of God has inevitably lead to division and disunity because if it is every man for himself there will always be clashes because of the very nature of these desires as they are targeted towards self and every one has their own agenda which will be the opposite of the others. I remember that there was a book written once that had become a NY time best seller called the "prayer of Jabez" that the author had misused a verse in

*1Chronicles 4:10 Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that You would indeed bless me and enlarge my border [property], and that Your hand would be with me, and You would keep me from evil so that it does not hurt me!" And God granted his request.*

Imagine two landowners or farmers who are both Christians who are neighbours and they both claim God's promises and ask that He will enlarge their borders. Who will God answer. They both have their own selfish agendas which will inevitably clash and they are focused inwards

By focusing on walking in the Spirit, the Galatians are commanded to instead live in accordance to His Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit which will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control hence by default if the focus is right then there will be no strife of fighting.

In Galatians 5:13-14, he urges them to serve one another in love. Instead of indulging in selfish ambitions or engaging in conflict, Paul calls the believers to use their freedom in Christ to love and serve one another. He stresses that the whole law is fulfilled in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Paul encourages the Galatians to move away from self-centeredness, which causes division, and toward mutual care and love, which fosters unity.

b) How do we avoid the desires of the flesh after all it is deep-seated in the default stance of all of us. Gal 5:16.

In **Galatians 5:16**, Paul gives the key to avoiding the desires of the flesh: "**Walk by the Spirit.**" By walking in the Spirit, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and empower our lives, which in turn helps us resist the temptation to indulge in the desires of the flesh. Since the desires of the flesh are deeply ingrained in human nature, walking in the Spirit involves a **conscious choice** to follow God's leading, choosing His ways over our own sinful inclinations.

The struggle against the desires of the flesh is ongoing, but the more we walk in step with the Spirit, the more we align our lives with God's will and live in victory over sin. Walking by the Spirit also involves developing a relationship with God, where we trust in His strength and direction to help us make the right choices.

c) How do we practically do this in our lives please share.

- 1. Engage with the Word of God:** Regularly reading and meditating on Scripture allows the Holy Spirit to work in us, shaping our desires and aligning them with God's. The Word helps us discern right from wrong and strengthens our resolve to live according to the Spirit, not the flesh.
- 2. Cultivate spiritual disciplines:** Practices like prayer, fasting, and worship help us stay connected to God and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. These disciplines train us to resist the desires of the flesh by focusing our attention on God and His will.
- 3. Seek accountability and community:** Engaging in a supportive Christian community can encourage and challenge us to live according to the Spirit. Accountability partners or small groups can help us stay on track and remind

us of the importance of walking in the Spirit.

4. **Choose to serve others:** Instead of focusing on fulfilling selfish desires, we can choose to serve others in love. Acts of service and kindness shift our focus from self-gratification to others' well-being, aligning with the Spirit's guidance to love our neighbors.
5. **Practice repentance and confession:** When we fail and give in to the desires of the flesh, we must be quick to confess and repent. Recognizing our mistakes and turning back to God enables the Holy Spirit to continue His work in us, restoring us and helping us grow in holiness.
6. **Develop a habit of constant awareness:** Being mindful of the Spirit's presence in our daily lives helps us to avoid temptation. As we go about our day, we can remind ourselves to pause and check whether our thoughts, words, and actions align with the desires of the Spirit.

By practicing these habits, we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds, progressively overcoming the desires of the flesh. This is an ongoing journey, but with God's help, we can live victoriously and reflect Christ in our daily lives.

### Case Study

Ronald was the boss of a gambling den. Due to the economic downturn, his business ran into trouble and on the invitation of his friends, he came to an Alpha program in a nearby church and came to faith in Jesus. He tried to clean up his life and stop gambling, the use of curse words, and sexual infidelity towards his wife. His progress in his Christian life was slow and intermittent as there was a war of different desires in his life. He felt he needed a breakthrough which his pastor was preaching about. He read about the Spirit-led life in Galatians 5 and asked to be prayed over in church. He received the gift of tongues. He began to use this gift in the church in corporate worship and felt so much more spiritual and began to serve in the church choir singing. He managed to revive his business and expand it to three other towns, becoming more prosperous. He no longer felt conflicted he was happy in church and happy at work.

Another friend in church then made him realize that Gal 5:19-22 that what he was doing in his business is the work of the flesh and he would not be going to heaven if he kept it up. He again felt fearful and began to clean up his act and reduce his branches to just one because he had to maintain the business to provide employment he rationalized.

- a) Discussion Question. In the first part of the case history was Ronald's breakthrough actually inspired by the Holy Spirit described by Paul as walking in the Spirit? Isn't his lack of internal conflict a sign of the Spirit's work? Give your answers based on the passage

- b) If Ronald was not keeping in step with the Spirit. Why was he feeling so much better and unconflicted?
- c) What do you think about Ronald's change when his friend pointed out to him the dangers of his immoral lifestyle, do you think these remedial measures will result in lasting transformation?
- d) Reflection Question. If you were Ronald's friend in church how would you counsel him?

#### **Takeaway**

**This study explores the concept of true freedom in Christ, emphasizing that it is achieved by walking in the Spirit, which empowers believers to overcome the desires of the flesh, cultivate godly desires, and reflect Christ's love and righteousness through faith and the transforming power of God's Word.**