

Walking in the Spirit (3): Why are we to walk in the Spirit?

We come this afternoon for the third and final time to Galatians 5:16. Thus far we've answered two questions: What is it to walk in the Spirit, and How are we to walk in the Spirit, which leaves us with our final question, Why are we to walk in the Spirit? While there's many reasons to walk in the Spirit, our text provides a very important one, "and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

1. Two things this promise does not mean: (a) this promise does not mean you will no longer have any lusts of the flesh.
2. Walking in the Spirit does nothing to eradicate the flesh—remember, the flesh remains, and it remains flesh.
3. Even if we were to perfectly walk in the Spirit (which is not possible), we would still have the flesh, and the flesh would still lust.
4. As long as the flesh remains, it remains flesh, and as long as it remains flesh, it will desire (lust) evil things.
5. Notice Paul does not say—"Walk in the Spirit and you shall not have the lust of the flesh," but, "you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."
6. This is further seen from v17—"for"—v17 is a commentary on v16—"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."
7. God's Spirit and our flesh are always in opposition to each other—the flesh always lusts against the Spirit.
8. (b) This promise does not mean, if we walk in the Spirit, we will never fulfill the lust of the flesh in any way.
9. But those who walk in the Spirit shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh in the same way or manner as others.
10. 1Jn.3:9—"Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for His seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."
11. This verse cannot mean Christian no longer sin (1Jn.1:8 – 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves'), but that they no longer sin in the same way.
12. Those born of God no longer fulfill the lust of the flesh in the same way as those who have not been born of God.
13. And so, when Paul says "walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh," he means, you will not fulfill it in the same way as those who do not walk in the Spirit.
14. John Gill—"Those who walk in the Spirit do not give up themselves entirely to the power and dictates of the flesh, so as to be under it and at its command."
15. John Calvin—"The man who walks in the Spirit may be frequently assaulted by the lusts of the flesh, but he does not permit them to reign over him."
16. MH—"Those who walk in the Spirit, though they may not be freed from the stirrings and oppositions of corrupt nature, shall be kept from fulfilling it in the lusts thereof; so that though it remains in them, yet it shall not obtain a dominion over them."
17. Thus, when Paul says, if we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, he means this in a qualified sense.
18. To be rather simple, I want to suggest those who walk in the Spirit will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh in these seven ways.
19. (1) Willingly—that is, a Christian man sins against his will (as it were)—he rarely commits sin without a prior fight.
20. Yes, of course, if and when he sins, he willingly sins, but he doesn't sin without resisting—he sins reluctantly.

21. Rom.7:15—"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."
22. Rom.7:17—"But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me"—by "sin" is meant his flesh.
23. It's almost as if he sins reluctantly and against his will—this is why he goes on to describe himself as captive.
24. His will, because it was renewed, desired to obey God, this is what he willed to do—this is what he desired—but there was another principle within him that willed contrary to his will (as it were – remember Paul is describing his own experience, and not giving a theological treatise, per say).
25. Rom.7:21—"I find then a law (a principle), that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good (Gal.5:17)."
26. A Christian is a person who desires to obey God, and yet, there's within him a contrary principle (Paul calls 'sin').
27. Thus, when he says, "it is no longer I who do it" he means—"I no longer sin without a conflict or battle."
28. (2) Heartily—that is, while Christians commit sin, they hate it—they have a love/hate relationship with it.
29. David describes the wicked in Ps.10:7 as having trouble and iniquity under his tongue—he relishes it; he delights in it.
30. Thus, Paul describes himself as hating the sin that he commits, willing the good, and delighting in God's law.
31. Rom.7:22—"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man (that is, according to his heart)."
32. Before we were Christians we sinned, as it were, with all our hearts, but now, we sin, as it were, half-heartedly.
33. Christopher Love—"The wicked are said to hide sin under their tongues as a sweet morsel, but the godly, though they have sin in their mouths, it is there as a bitter morsel; it is unpleasant to them."
34. (3) Brazenly—by this I mean, openly and shamelessly—this is how many of us lived before we were converted.
35. We sinned without shame—we sinned openly for all to see—we lived in open defiance to God and His law.
36. We basically said—I don't care what God thinks of my behavior; He likely doesn't see it, and if He does, so what!
37. Ps.73:11—"The ungodly say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?'"
Ps.10:11—"He has said in his heart, 'God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see.'"
38. This, in one sense or another, describes us all before conversion—we sinned brazenly and without shame.
39. Jer.6:15—"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush."
40. But this is no longer true of those who walk in the Spirit—for while they sin, they are ashamed of it.
41. (4) Cunningly—that is, we no longer lay on our beds, scheming and plotting how to do wickedness and evil.
42. Ps.36:4—"The wicked devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil" Micah 2:1—"Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds!"
43. (5) Eagerly—those who walk in the flesh are eager and ready to sin—they are enthusiastic about sinning.

44. Rom.3:13-16—"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways."
45. Sinners live to sin—this is what they do—they look forward to it—they anticipate it—they are eager for it.
46. (6) Contentedly—that is, those who walk in the flesh find contentment and satisfaction in their sin and evil.
47. They feel at home in sin—it's their natural habitat—they are like fish in the water or birds in the air.
48. Christopher Love—"Wicked men are as swine in the mire; it pleases them to be there. But for a sheep to be in the mire, how it troubles it."
49. Sinners live in sin and find little problem with it—it's their native environment—they fell at home in it.
50. (7) Customarily—by this I mean, those who walk in the Spirit no longer make a practice out of sin (evil).
51. Gal.6:21—"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"—they practice these things because they walk in the flesh and not the Spirit.
52. Closing exhortation 1—Let us educate ourselves—that is, we need to rightly understand Romans 13:14 and Galatians 5:16.
53. If we more clearly understand these texts and more carefully practiced them, we would be equipped for the battle.
54. In many ways, these are foundational texts upon which no small part of the doctrine of sanctification rests.
55. Closing exhortation 2—Let us examine ourselves—that is, let us ask ourselves, how faithfully do we walk in the Spirit?
56. To the degree we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh willingly, heartily, brazenly, eagerly, cunningly, and contentedly.
57. Don't misunderstand me—Christians at times willingly, heartily, brazenly, cunningly, eagerly, and contentedly sin (or fulfill the lust of the flesh).
58. But the reason they do this is because they fail to walk in the Spirit, because those who walk in the Spirit shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
59. The more we walk dependent upon the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, directed by the Spirit, obedient to the Spirit, and mindful of the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (in the ways I've suggested).
60. Closing exhortation 3—Let us encourage ourselves—by this I mean, God has given everything we need to walk pleasing to Him.
61. Romans 13:14—"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ" Galatians 5:16—"Walk in the Spirit"—what more do we need?
62. Our Father has not liberated us from Egypt only to leave us to our own resources within this wilderness.
63. Just like He provided them with manna from heaven, water from the rock, a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, so He has given us Christ to nourish us and His Spirit to guide us.