

The Admonition To Walk In The Spirit, And Not In The Flesh!

Text: Gal 5:16

1) To Whom This Admonition Is Addressed

Suggested Hymns:

2) How The Admonition Is Heeded

178, 610, 321, 68, 155

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Galatians 5:16–24, ¹⁶ *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.* ¹⁷ *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

¹⁸ *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,* ²¹ *envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* ²⁴ *And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.”¹ These are the words with which St. Paul begins the chapter from which our text is taken. Christ has made us free, free from the curse and bondage of the Law.

We Christians are no longer bound by the Law, as God's chosen people were bound in the time of the old covenant, so that they could hardly move without fear lest they might transgress some divine command.

Christ has made us free. Christ has abolished the entire ceremonial law as to meat and drink, purification, holy-days, sabbaths, and hundreds of things which the Jews were required to do by divine command.

And even the moral law we are not required to keep to for the purpose that by the fulfilment of the holy Ten Commandments we might obtain eternal life. Christ has made us free. Christ has fulfilled all the commandments of God for us, and has thereby worked out for us a spotless righteousness which we appropriate to ourselves by faith in our blessed Redeemer.

What God demands of us now, in the time of the New Testament, is not that we should attempt to gain heaven by keeping the commandments, but that we should believe in His dear Son and obtain eternal life through His name.

Now this doctrine of the liberty with which Christ has made us free has often been grossly abused. Ever since the days of the Apostles people have been using this liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, as Peter says in his First Epistle.

They have been arguing in this way: *If Christ has made us free, if we are no longer bound by the Law, why, then we can do as we please; for did not Christ fulfil the commandments for us, so that we do not need to keep them, and did not Christ take upon Himself all our sins and suffer the punishment we have deserved?*

But such arguments are suggested by the father of lies, the devil. Christ has not made us free that we should sin, but that we should walk in true holiness, and that we should not walk in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

Paul therefore sets forth an admonition in our text which we shall now consider *The Admonition To Walk In The Spirit, And Not In The Flesh!* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. To Whom This Admonition Is Addressed.

Our text begins, ¹⁶ *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.* To whom does St. Paul address this admonition? Does he address it to all people, whether they be Christians or unbelievers? Does he expect unbelievers to walk in the Spirit, and not to fulfil the lust of the flesh? Certainly not!

An unbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit; how, then, can he walk in the Spirit? He lives after the flesh; how, then, can he keep himself from fulfilling the lust of the flesh?

Paul preaches the Law here, but he uses a different language when he preaches the Law to unbelievers. He says in his Epistle to the Romans, Romans 8:13, ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh you will die*, and in Romans 8:9, *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*.

When Paul preaches the Law to unbelievers, he holds up the Law before them as a mirror in which they may see themselves and realise that they are damnable sinners, that in them, that is, in their flesh, dwells no good thing, that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and that they are an abomination in the sight of God.

The Apostle addresses the admonition in our text to the Christians, as we may see from the following verses in which he says, ¹⁷ *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.* ¹⁸ *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

In the language of the Scripture the flesh, when opposed to the Spirit, is not the physical body of man, but his sinful condition, his natural depravity, or the evil lust with which he is born into this life and which he inherits all the way from Adam.

And the Spirit, when opposed to the flesh, is not the soul of man, but the new spiritual life, which the Holy Spirit has produced in him, the new heart, the new sentiments which he acquires in regeneration, and which urge him to set his affection on the things that are above.

Now, who possesses these two natures, these two qualities, which the Scriptures call Spirit and flesh? The Christians, and the true Christians alone. How necessary for all Christians is this admonition to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh!

My dear Christians, you are not all Spirit. If you have come to believe in your Saviour, the Spirit of God surely dwells in you, you are the temple of God's Holy Spirit, and you will be able to notice the presence of the Spirit in your heart by the working of the holy Spirit, as He leads and guides you to do the will of

God. He fills you with peace and joy in the Saviour Jesus, delights you with the Word of God, and comforts you in the troubles of this life.

But besides the Spirit the flesh is with you, and will remain with you as long as you are in this world. Besides those good thoughts and desires and emotions, evil thoughts, sinful desires, and emotions will crop forth upon the soil of your own heart.

Do not think that you have ceased to be a Christian because you still feel the flesh working within you. Even the most faithful Christians are assailed by their own sinful flesh. It was the flesh within him which caused Paul to exclaim in Romans 7:24, ²⁴ ***O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?!***

But do not let the flesh rule over you, and rule out the Spirit that is within you. Do not let the flesh have dominion over you! When you are tempted to sin and your own flesh urges you to do wrong, do you not hear the voice of the Spirit saying: *Do not do it! How can you, a child of God, consent to sin?* Therefore heed the voice of the Spirit!

And if ever the flesh should have its own way and you should fall into sin, let the Spirit lead you to true repentance, so that in the bleeding wounds of your Saviour you find forgiveness, and God will not take His Holy Spirit from you.

This, my friends, is the mark by which you may easily perceive whether or not you are a true Christian, — the struggle between the Spirit and the flesh.

Even the best Christians are sometimes assailed by doubt and fear so that they will say: *Am I really a true believer? Do I keep the faith? Am I a true child of God? Will I go to heaven when I must die?*

Let me ask you, my friends: *Does the flesh within you lust against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh?* Do you notice that often you cannot do the things that you would because of the weakness of your flesh? Does the Spirit come out victorious in the end when there has been a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh?

In short, are you led by the Spirit of God? If this is the case with you, you may rest assured that you are not under the Law, that the Law of God will not condemn you, because you are God's true child.

2. How The Admonition Is Heeded.

And now, in the second place, let us see how the admonition to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh is heeded. It is heeded by avoiding the works of the flesh and by bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit.

First, avoiding the works of the flesh. The Apostle says, ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The sins which the Apostle lists here are such as were common in the heathen world of those days, and especially among the inhabitants of Asia Minor.

He mentions several groups of sins. “*Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness*” — this is the first group, sins against the Sixth Commandment. So common were these sins among the heathen that even the most refined and educated people committed them.

“*Idolatry, and sorcery, also called witchcraft.*” These two form the second group. The heathen had a great number of false gods whom they worshiped, and there was great superstition among them, so that they believed in signs for almost everything and used sorcery to heal diseases and to pry into the future.

“*Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders.*” This is the third group, sins of hostility, sins which are the reverse of the love which we should show to the neighbour.

The Galatians were noted for their quarrelling disposition, and angry disputes were carried on, even in the Christian congregations of Galatia, so that Paul tells them later in this chapter, Galatians 5:15, ¹⁵ *But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*

The last group of sins which the Apostle mentions is “*drunkenness, revelries, and the like.*” These are sins of excess in eating and drinking. These are the sins which St. Paul mentions to the Galatians because they were so

common among the heathen with whom they lived, and because the Christians were in constant danger of being drawn into these sins.

But are not many of these sins a menace to Christians to this day? Is not immorality as common now as it was in the days of the Apostles? Do we not have mediums, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers? Is there no hatred, strife, and enmity in Christian congregations?

Do not people go to excess in eating and drinking? Beware of all such works of the flesh! Avoid these sins!

Do not obey the voice of the flesh which would consent to these sins. For to live in these sins, to continue in these sins, not to turn from these sins in true repentance, not to shun them, and to be a Christian at the same time — this is an impossible thing. *“Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

To heed the Apostle’s admonition to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh you must also bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. The Apostle says: ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

The Law finds nothing to condemn in these things, and therefore nothing to condemn in those who live in the practice of them. The Spirit will urge you to all such things as are good and right. The fruits of the Spirit are manifold.

There is love. If you heed the voice of the Spirit, you will love your neighbour, and help him wherever you can, and you will do good, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

And joy will fill your heart, joy in the Saviour Jesus, and you will find your delight in the Word of God.

Peace will, come into your soul, peace with God, so that your conscience will not trouble you, and you will love peace, and, as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.²

Long-suffering is another fruit of the Spirit. You will have patience with those who have wronged you, and be willing to forgive. Gentleness, goodness, that is, a kind and friendly disposition the Spirit will work in you, so that you will try to please others.

Faith is a fruit of the Spirit, that is, faithfulness, fidelity, so that you will be true to others and keep your promises.

Meekness or gentleness will make you submissive, so that you will not exalt yourself above others, but always bear in mind that before God you are but a damnable sinner.

Temperance or self-control will enable you to control yourself, your passions and your appetites, so that you will not go to excess in anything.

Behold, my friends, these are the fruits of the Spirit which every Christian must bring forth if he would heed the Apostle's admonition to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Does the Spirit within you bring forth these fruits?

Remember that our text says *those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*. If you belong to Christ, you must be found willing to hurt your flesh, and to let the Spirit of God have dominion in you, that you may abound in Christian virtues.

May the Lord grant us all, His grace that His Holy Spirit be and remain with us unto our end, until we are rid of our sinful flesh.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,³

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Galatians 5:1

² Romans 12:18

³ Hymn 68