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LifeWay Family Bible Series for July 27

Christians should be controlled by the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-10

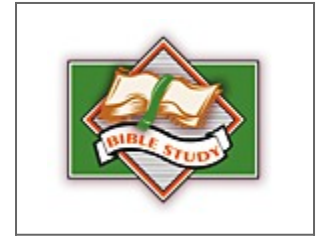
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What causes Christian leaders to give up their ministry and family for an illicit relationship? Why do Christian business people, who have conducted business honestly for years, become involved in scandal that destroys their integrity? How does one explain Christian men and women who leave their spouse and children for another person? The answer to these questions is found in Galatians 5:16-26.

The first three lessons of this series have underscored that people are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, not through human works. In this sense, the believer is free from the requirements of the law.

However, Christian freedom does not mean believers are free to live a lifestyle of sin. How can a believer live a life that is pleasing to God? Galatians 5:16 shows the way: Believers have the power to yield their lives to the control of God's Spirit, and in doing so, they do not carry out the desires of the sinful nature.



This introduces one of the most important truths in the Christian life—two natures exist within every Christian. All believers receive the Holy Spirit when they are saved. Instantaneously, at salvation, the Holy Spirit begins transforming the believer into the image of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brings into believers' lives a new desire to live obediently to God. The desires that the Spirit brings into the believers' lives are more specifically described in Galatians 5:22-23.

Unfortunately, believers also have the residue of their old sinful nature within them. Colossians 3:9 refers to this old nature as the “old self.” In Galatians 5:16, it is referred to as “the sinful nature.” Whatever the term, it represents that part of one's humanness that is opposed to God and his will. Paul elaborates on the characteristics of “the sinful nature” in Galatians 5:19-21.

The desires of the Spirit are at war with the desires of the sinful nature. This explains why Christians struggle between obeying God and choosing to sin. Inside the heart of every Christian are two opposite sets of desires that are waging war with one another.

Some will challenge the position that Christians possess two natures. Yet who could deny the fact that Christians still possess desires that battle against the Holy Spirit's work in their lives? Mature Christians know the sinful nature has no more power over them than they allow it to have, but they also acknowledge the sinful nature is a reality in their lives.

What is the solution to this internal struggle? Christians can be “led” or “controlled” by the Spirit. What does it mean to be led by the Holy Spirit?

First, it means to admit that there is a war between the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. Second, it means to acknowledge that the believer is powerless to win the war in one's own strength. Third, it means to believe that the Christian has the inner resource of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the believer to live in obedience to God. Fourth, it means to submit one's self to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to his good purpose." The believer can choose to submit to the control of God's Spirit.

A single young woman sought membership in a local church. The pastor asked her, "Are you a Christian?" She replied, "Yes, Christ has made a real difference in my life?" The pastor probed further, "Do you still sin?" She answered him, "Yes, I admit that I still do." The pastor replied: "I don't understand. You said that Christ made a difference in your life, but you still sin. How can that be?" The young woman thought for a moment and then answered: "I guess I could explain it this way: Before I was a Christian I ran after sin, but now I run away from it, although it sometimes still overtakes me." This is the experience of every Christian.

Galatians 6:7-10 amplifies the importance of choices in the life of the believer. What one sows determines what one reaps. The farmer's harvest is determined by what kind of seed is sown and how much is sown.

In the same way, spiritual blessings are determined by whether the believer chooses to submit to the control of the Holy Spirit. When believers give in to the desires of the sinful nature, they are planting seeds that will eventually destroy their joy and effectiveness in Christian service. When believers consistently submit their choices to the leadership of God's Spirit, they can expect a great reward at the final harvest when Christ returns.

Believers need to take notice of Galatians 6:9-choosing to yield to the

control of God's Spirit does not always provide instant gratification. That is why the Christian life is a walk of faith. However, the believer can be confident there will come a time when the investment of obedience to God will reap a huge, eternal harvest.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ How do you go about yielding your life to the control of the Holy Spirit?
- ◆ Spiritual warfare is often thought of as something happening in the world. Does it help to know that the battle also is going on inside each of us? How can that help to better fight temptation?
- ◆ Does sin in someone's life mean that they are not fit for service because they are not under God's leadership?

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