

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES PART II

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The last chapter listed and explained ten steps one can follow in studying a Bible passage. In order to help the reader to master these steps, Galatians 5:16 will be studied following these ten steps.

The goal of our investigation will be to understand the author's intended meaning in Galatians 5:16: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh."

OBSERVATION

The following lists initial observations made when starting this study.

But suggests a contrast with what is stated previously.

I say suggests an emphasis.

Walk means more than the literal act of walking. It refers to behavior. The walking is to be with the help of the Spirit.

Flesh does not mean literal meat on one's bones.

And connects clauses.

The verse is a part of a larger discussion on living by the Spirit contrasted with living according to the flesh.

The statement in the sentence commands a positive action and forbids an opposing behavior.

More observations could be made but this indicates what is meant by making observations.

QUESTIONS

These are some of the who, what, why, when, where and how questions that can be formulated from Galatians 5:16.

Who wrote this verse? To whom was it written? Who is expected to obey this statement?

When was this written? Does it apply to Christians today?

Where was the author when he wrote this?

With what previous thought is this verse contrasted? What do these words mean: *walk*, *spirit*, *gratify*, *desires*, *flesh*? What type of literature is the book of Galatians?

Why did Paul write Galatians?

How does verse 16 fit into the line of thinking presented in Galatians 5? How does one walk by the Spirit? How does one gratify the desires of the flesh?

WORDS

The chart on page 87 indicates how other translations shed light on the meaning of the words in the Revised Standard Version of Galatians 5:16.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES, PART II

Revised Standard Version	New American Standard Bible	American Standard Version	King James Version	New International Version
<i>But I say</i>	But I say	But I say	This I say then	So I say
<i>Walk</i>	Walk	Walk	Walk	Live
<i>By</i>	by	by	In	by
<i>the Spirit</i>	the Spirit	the Spirit	the Spirit	the Spirit
<i>Do not</i>	You will not	Ye shall not	Ye shall not	You will not
<i>Gratify</i>	Carry out	Fulfil	Fulfil	Gratify
<i>Desires</i>	Desire	Lust	Lusts	Desires
<i>the Flesh</i>	the flesh	the flesh	the flesh	your sinful nature.

Two words in the RSV are used figuratively. *Walk* does not refer to the physical act of walking, but rather to the activities of life. *Flesh* does not designate the meat on our bones but rather the person who lives by his selfish desires, ignoring the will of God in his life. The more literal translations, RSV, NASB, ASV and KJV have *walk* and *flesh*. The New International Version gives an interpretation instead of translating literally. *Live* is used instead of *walk*, and *sinful nature* instead of *flesh*.

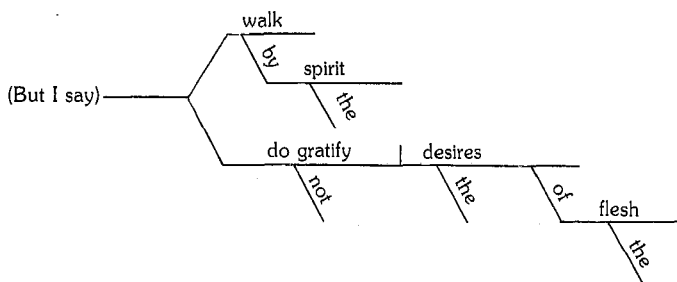
A concordance can guide the student to see how the word is used in other places in the Bible. For example, *flesh* may mean the substance of the body, the human body, mankind, or man's selfish nature.

SENTENCES

The word *but* is a connecting word which suggests a contrast to a way of life that bites and devours one another (Gal. 5:14,15). "I say" adds emphasis to the imperatives stated in the verse.

In the RSV the verbs *walk* and *do not gratify* have no expressed subject, but *you* is the subject understood. The above chart shows other versions read *you will not* or *ye shall not*. From these translations we can see the second clause may express a promise in terms of strong denial instead of an imperative command as in the RSV. This explains the reasons for the variant translations. Paul is not merely giving a feeble suggestion. He is giving a clear command for all Christians that they live not by the flesh. (The second clause in Paul's Greek sentence includes an extra negative that makes either a very emphatic command or an emphatic promise of the results of obeying his first command.)

The sentence may be diagrammed as follows:



CONTEXT

Justification by Faith, Christian Freedom and Walking by the Spirit are themes that have been suggested for the book of Galatians. In the first two chapters Paul defends the divine authority of his message as an apostle. In chapters three and four, justification by faith rather than by works of law is explained. In the last two chapters (5 and 6) Paul shows the freedom in Christ to walk by the Spirit in loving concern and helpfulness to one another.

In chapter five Paul shows that a Christian should be free from legalism (5:1-12). He next warns against turning liberty into license which indulges the flesh (5:13). Love is emphasized.

What really counts is "faith working through love" (5:6). Paul instructs them to "through love serve one another" (5:13). The whole law is fulfilled in "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14).

Galatians 5:16 introduces a paragraph which contrasts walking by the Spirit with life according to the flesh. It is obvious from the context that these two lifestyles are in direct opposition.

The following listing identifies the context and throws light on the meaning of our verse:

Walk by the Spirit	(v. 16)	Do not gratify the desires of the flesh.
Spirit against the flesh	(v. 17)	Flesh sets its desire against the Spirit.
Led by the Spirit	(v. 18)	You are not under the law.
	(vv. 19-21)	Works of the flesh.
Fruit of the Spirit	(vv. 22-23)	
Belong to Christ	(v. 24)	Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
Walk by the Spirit	(v. 25)	

HISTORICAL SETTING

Paul wrote this letter to Galatian Christians. They were confused by certain Jewish teachers who said, "Unless you are circumcised according to the customs of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Because of the challenge of false teachers Paul had to defend his apostolic authority and explain justification

by faith. He needed to show the nature of true spiritual living in contrast with legalism and license.

Galatians is a doctrinal and practical letter. From a study of the introduction to the book I have concluded that Paul wrote Galatians about 56 or 57 A.D. from Corinth or Ephesus to the churches in southern Galatia.

OTHER SCRIPTURES

Carefully read each of these verses because they throw additional light on verse 16: Gal. 5:24; 6:8; Rom. 8:1-17; 13:14; Eph. 2:3; 4:17-5:21; Col. 3:1-17; Titus 3:3-8; I Pet. 2:11; II Pet. 2:10. From these verses one learns the direct opposition between walking by the Spirit and gratifying the desires of the flesh and learns more about the nature of each of these lifestyles.

EXPLANATION

But I say. But is a connecting word indicating a contrast from what is described in earlier verses with what is stated in verse 16. The selfishness of legalism and license causes people to misuse others. Paul emphasizes his imperatives stated in this verse.

Walk by the Spirit. This is not a mild suggestion but rather an imperative. *Walk* is used figuratively of live. Attitudes, actions, thoughts, words, and one's whole lifestyle are included. This behavior must be according to the teaching and standards of the Spirit of God and with the power supplied by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit will be developed in one's life. *The Spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit.

And do not gratify the desires of the flesh. This is a strong prohibition against the lifestyle that seeks merely to satisfy one's selfish desires. *Flesh* means man apart from God and living by his own desires. The person who lives only for self will eventually

manifest the works of the flesh in his behavior (Gal. 5:19-21).

PARAPHRASE

In contrast with the selfishness of legalism and license you must live by the standards and power of the Spirit of God. Every aspect of your life should be in harmony with the mind of Christ. You must absolutely reject the lifestyle that is devoted to satisfying one's selfish desires. Live for Christ instead of for self.

APPLICATION

Am I walking by the Spirit? Can I say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20)? Am I growing in exercising the fruit of the Spirit in my character and conduct (Gal. 5:22,23)? Is my top priority to do the will of Christ in all things?

Do I have selfish desires and ambitions that I pet and indulge which are not in harmony with the Spirit of Christ? Are any of the works of the flesh manifested in my life (Gal. 5:19-21)? What entertainment or reading habits, what places or people lead you to gratify the desires of the flesh?

What decisions about thoughts and behavior do I need to make in order to obey this verse?

Let us hear and heed Paul's instruction: "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Study Questions

1. What other observations can you make about Galatians 5:16 in addition to those given?

2. Show what translations are more literal to the Greek words and what one is more interpretative in translating *walk* and *flesh*.
3. How does a diagram help in understanding a sentence?
4. How does the context throw light on Galatians 5:16?
5. Show what false teachings Paul is opposing in dealing with the Galatians.
6. Give your own paraphrase of Galatians 5:16.
7. In our personal lives how can we walk by the Spirit?
8. What steps must be taken in our sinful age not to gratify the desires of the flesh?

Project

Complete the last five steps of study in your passage started in the project on chapter eight. Learn as exactly as you can what the author intended to teach in the passage and take that truth to heart in your personal life.