

# Galatians 5:16-26

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## The Flesh Versus the Spirit (5:16-18)

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- From 5:16 to 5:26, Paul expounded upon the difference between the flesh and the Spirit.
- Three verses earlier, Paul warned not to turn our freedom in Christ for “an opportunity for the flesh.” Starting in verse 16, Paul explained exactly what the flesh is and how the indwelling Spirit wars against the flesh.
- Before going further, let me define what Paul meant by the flesh. Paul said, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).
- Humans are comprised of spirit, soul, and body. Some scholars refer to this as the tripart nature of humanity.
- Your spirit is the deepest part of your being. If you are a born-again believer, your spirit is where the Spirit of God dwells. Your spirit is the source for true worship and is the part of you that communes and fellowships with God. Your spirit operates by intuition—a deep internal knowing that transcends rational knowledge or constantly-changing emotions. If you are born-again, your spirit has been resurrected from the dead; is righteous, holy, and complete; is Christlike; is one with the Spirit of God; has everything pertaining to life and godliness; and is the holy of holies where God personally dwells (Rom. 8:10; Eph. 4:24; 1 Cor. 6:17; 1 Cor. 6:19; and 2 Peter 1:3). The work in your spirit was completed when you born-again.
- Your soul is comprised of your mind, will, and emotions. When you were born-again, your soul was initially unaffected by the new birth. The Holy Spirit is at work in your soul to transform your mind, will, and emotions into Christ’s image and likeness. This lifelong process is called sanctification.
- Your body is how you communicate with the physical world. Your body has five senses of taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell. These senses enable you to interact with the material world around you. Your body craves food, rest, sleep, and sex. Paul described our bodies as a “body of sin” and a “body of . . . death” (Rom. 6:6; Rom. 7:24). Sin and death have permeated our bodies, making it impossible to please God when our bodies are the leader of our lives.
- With all of this in mind, the flesh is the coupling together of the unrenewed soul and the unredeemed body. In a minute, when we look at the deeds of the flesh in 5:19-21, we will see how our bodies and souls work together to produce what Paul called “the deeds of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19).
- In 5:25, Paul said, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” In 5:16, Paul said, “Walk by the Spirit.” What’s the difference between *live by the Spirit* and *walk by the Spirit*?
- Analyzing the Greek, you could paraphrase 5:25 like this: “Since we are alive because of the Spirit’s life, let us live every moment by His life.” Paul was exhorting us, who have the precious Holy Spirit dwelling within us, to surrender to Him and live every waking moment by the power of His resurrection life.
- In the Greek, *walk* signifies “the whole round of the activities of the individual life.” *Walk* means everything we are and do. Paul encouraged us, therefore, to allow the indwelling Spirit to permeate, possess, control, and empower everything we think, dream, desire, and do.
- When we yield to the indwelling Spirit and allow Him to be Lord in us, we will not “carry out the desire of the flesh.” Notice carefully “the desire of the flesh” never goes away. We will have sinful, lawless, corrupt, and defiled desires until we die. But we don’t have to yield to these desires. We don’t have to

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act on these desires. The key to living in victory is yielding to the indwelling Spirit and allowing His life to be our life-source rather than our soul-life. When the indwelling Spirit permeates, fills, possesses, and leads us, the desires of the flesh will be fully conquered.

- We have the power within us, through the Holy Spirit, to overcome and thoroughly defeat the wicked, depraved, defiled, and corrupt desires of our unredeemed bodies working together with our unrenewed souls.

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

- The flesh has desires that never go away. The indwelling Spirit also has desires that never go away. As a result, there is an internal war raging within you. Your flesh is at war with God and God is at war with your flesh.
- Paul said “these are in opposition to one another.” Our spiritual warfare is not only against the devil and the powers of darkness. It’s also against our own flesh. Perhaps your greatest enemy is not demonic powers but your own fleshly desires in your soul and body. The soul and body coupled together war against God the Spirit in you.
- Let’s take a minute and talk about the depravity of the flesh. Putting together a few verses, the components of the flesh are *sin* and *me*. Paul said that “sin . . . dwells in me. . . . that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:17-18). *Sin* is the power of sin; our sin nature. *Me* is the self-life contained in our souls, which is the source of our sin natures.
- When Jesus said that our flesh profits nothing, He meant our unredeemed bodies and unrenewed souls, coupled together, were utterly incapable of doing anything of value for God (John 6:63). Our flesh can’t assist God with anything nor can it transform us inwardly. Our flesh is a helpless and useless agent to God.
- Though God loves us beyond comprehension, we can only please Him by the measure of Christ that possesses us inwardly. Only Christ—*never my flesh*—can please God (Rom. 8:8). The more Christ fills, possesses, and directs our spirits, hearts, and souls—including our deepest beliefs, desires, ambitions, thoughts, feelings, and inclinations—the more we will please God.
- It’s impossible to please God and to fulfill His will in the flesh. God looks at the flesh as utterly corrupt and unable to please Him. The sooner we can see the flesh as God sees it, the sooner we can make spiritual progress.
- Speaking of his flesh, Paul said, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18). Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).
- In our flesh, there is nothing of value to God. Nor is there any ability to do anything of value for God. Our flesh must be utterly crucified so that Christ can fill us and possess us.
- Living by Christ’s life begins when living by our life ends. If we don’t allow the Spirit of Christ in us to live His life through us, the flesh will live. When this happens, we will “not do the things that you please.”

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

- “Led by the Spirit” and “walk by the Spirit” are synonymous.

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- When we yield to the indwelling Spirit and allow Him to live within us, we “are not under the Law” but we are “under grace” (Rom. 6:15).
- Those led by the Spirit will keep “the requirement of the Law” (Rom. 8:4). This will not be a grit-your-teeth effort performed by self-determination and fleshly willpower. It will be by the power of Christ’s indestructible, resurrection life working within us.
- A lifestyle of meticulous obedience to the Law ends when living by Christ’s indwelling life begins. This is what it means to be under grace.

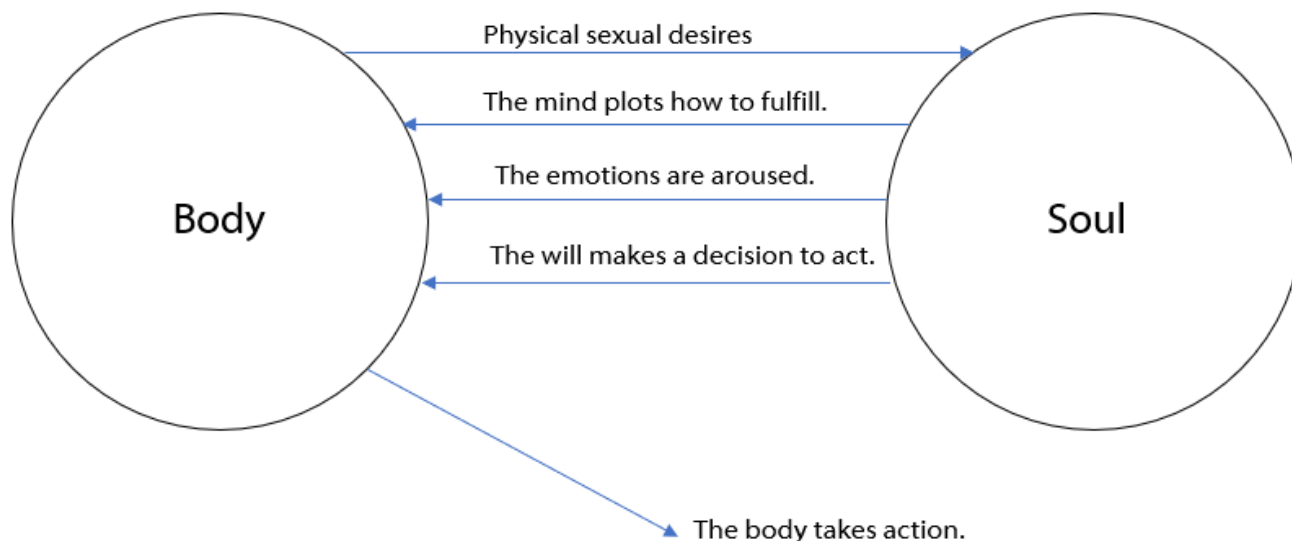
## The Deeds of the Flesh (5:19-21)

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

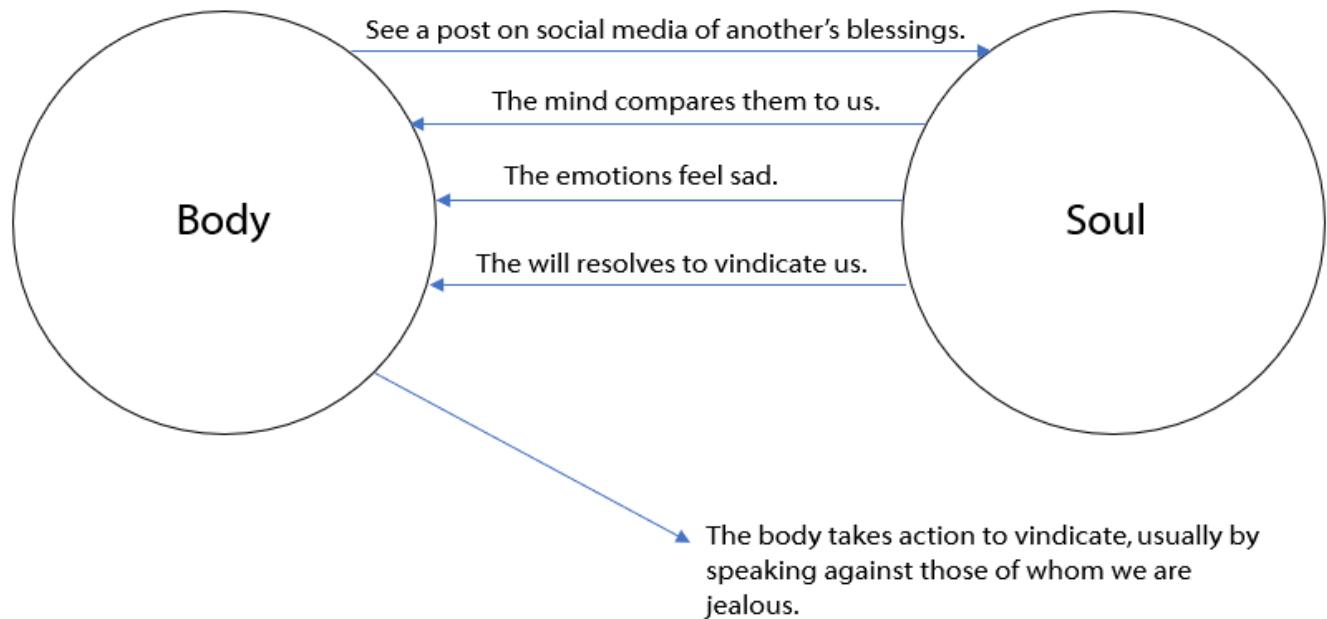
- Peter said, “I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).
- The physical senses of the body war against the mind, will, and emotions, trying to capture them and lead them into sin.
- We will look at two examples. The first is the fleshly deed of immorality expressed through pornography. The picture below shows the war that rages between the body and the soul.



- The second example is the fleshly deed of jealousy, shown in the picture below.

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- Paul said those who engage in these types of sins habitually—meaning these sins have become their lifestyle— “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
- Does this mean not receiving an inheritance *in* the kingdom of God or not inheriting *the* kingdom of God?
- The first idea implies going to heaven but not receiving any inheritance or eternal rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. A clear example is the one who was saved through fire but suffered the loss of all rewards at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15).
- The second idea implies one can be born of the Spirit but be so overcome by the flesh they sin repeatedly and habitually without remorse or repentance. They become so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, eventually they fall away from the Lord. When they die, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. That is, they will not go to heaven.
- How we interpret this verse depends upon whether we believe in once-saved-always-saved. This topic is way too complex and nuanced to discuss in-depth here. But here's my personal view. I believe in eternally security of the believer but I don't believe in once-saved-always-saved. By eternal security of the believer, I mean we can be 100% confident in our salvation and not live in fear of dying and going to hell. We can be filled with peace that passes understanding, knowing we are justified and declared righteous in God's eyes through faith in Jesus Christ. We can live without the slightest doubt of whether or not we will go to heaven when we die. That is what I mean by the eternal security of the believer. At the same time, I don't believe this gives us a license to indulge our flesh and live however we want. It is possible to sin so deeply and so often that sin hardens us and deceives us. Ultimately, the deceitfulness of sin can influence us to renounce Jesus as God's eternal Son and as the Lord of our lives. That is the danger of sin.
- In summary, I believe Paul has in mind the latter view. That is, sin can harden us and deceive us to such a degree that it's possible we can renounce Jesus Christ as Lord. As a result, we would not inherit the kingdom of God when we die. Meaning we would go to hell rather than to heaven.

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## Bearing Fruit for God (5:22-26)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- In Galatians 2:19, Paul said we have “died to the Law, so that [we] might live to God” (emphasis mine). Since we have died to the Law, we are no longer under the Law, the Law is no longer our child trainer, and we have exchanged the heavy yoke of the Law to be yoked with Jesus Christ. Now we see the Spirit-led life we are meant to live, where “there is no law.”
- To fully understand 5:22-23, notice what Paul said in Romans 7:4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”
- Notice these three things: 1) We have died to the Law; 2) we are joined to Christ; and 3) we are meant to bear fruit for God. Paul unpacked these three life-changing truths in the book of Galatians.

### 1. *Death to the Law*

- We have already looked in detail about our death to the Law, but here’s a reminder. When we were baptized into Christ’s body and clothed with Christ through the Holy Spirit’s internal work, we were also baptized into His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5). This means we have died to sin, self, and the Law.
- As a result, we are no longer under the system of the Law, which pays us wages based upon our performance. The entire bless-me-for obedience and curse-me-for disobedience lifestyle has been nailed to the cross. God no longer curses us if we fail to meticulously keep one of His external commandments. The ministry of death and condemnation written on tablets of stone no longer has jurisdiction over us because we died to it in the body of Jesus Christ.

### 2. *Joined to Christ*

- Not only that, but we have been joined to Christ spirit to Spirit. Paul said, “The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor. 6:17).
- The word *joins* means *to glue*. If you look at the previous verse (1 Cor. 6:16), Paul quoted the most famous marriage Scripture in the Bible—Genesis 2:24. Paul also quoted this verse in Ephesians 5:31, stating, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5:31). The word *joined* in this passage also means *to glue*.
- Marriage glues a man and a woman together for life. New birth also glues our spirit to the Spirit of Christ. Like a husband and wife are joined together in marriage, we are joined to Christ when we were born again.
- Imagine two separate pieces of construction paper. One of the pieces has a liberal amount of glue smothered on every square inch. When the two pieces are glued together, you can’t separate them without tearing both pieces. This is what marriage is like when a man and a woman are glued together. This is also what it looks like when your spirit and the indwelling Spirit of Christ are glued together at new birth. The two can’t be separated.

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- Think about the implications of this for a minute. Your spirit is literally joined together with the Spirit of Christ. The same Spirit who created the universe at God's command. The same Spirit who impregnated the virgin Mary. The same Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Your spirit and the indwelling Spirit of Christ are glued together, cemented and fastened together as one. Just as a husband and wife leave their father and mother and cleave to each other in an inseparable bond, you have left your former life and are now cleaving to Christ inwardly.

### 3. Bear fruit for God

- Now that we have died to the Law and have been joined to Christ, we can bear fruit for God. What is the fruit we are called to bear? Paul told us in verses 5:22-23.
- The *fruit of the Spirit* is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness [faith], gentleness [meekness], self-control" (emphasis mine to show meaning in the Greek).
- Notice carefully Paul said the *fruit of the Spirit is*. He didn't say the *fruits of the Spirit are*. Then he begins with *love*. The *fruit of the Spirit is love*.
- It's interesting to compare 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul defined love, to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Look at the comparisons.

#### 1 Corinthians 13

#### Fruit of the Spirit

Love is patient

Patience

Love is kind

Kindness

Love does not brag, is not arrogant, and does not seek its own

Meekness

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things

Faith

Love rejoices with the truth and is not jealous

Joy

Love is not provoked and does not take into account a wrong suffered

Peace and self-control

Love does not act unbecomingly

Goodness

- Up to this point, Paul expounded upon the importance of love. He said "faith working through love" is what really matters (5:6); "through love serve one another" (5:13); and "the whole Law is fulfilled in one word"—love (5:14). He stressed loving our neighbor as ourselves empowers us to fulfill the Law (5:14).
- The love Paul has in mind is not human love. It is love that comes from the indwelling Spirit. It is the love of the Spirit poured out on the heart (Rom. 5:5). It is the fruit of the Spirit.
- No amount of human effort can ever produce God's supernatural love. God's love can only be produced by His Spirit.

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- Love is the fruit of the Spirit expressed through patience when wronged; peace when provoked; joy in unfavorable circumstances; kindness in our thoughts, words, and actions toward others; goodness so others can be blessed; faith when hope seems lost; meekness rather than self-assertion and pride; and self-control when we want to act in our own wisdom, strength, and emotions.
- When the love of the Spirit expresses itself through joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control, there is no law. Internally, we establish the Law and keep the requirements of the Law. Externally, we demonstrate through our words and actions what the Law was intended to legislate. The love of the Spirit poured out upon the heart fulfills the Law. “Against such things,” Paul wrote, “there is no law.”
- How is the fruit of the Spirit produced in us and through us? By abiding in the vine. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Abiding in Christ is staying connected to Christ inwardly. Abiding in Christ is ensuring that our hearts and souls don’t block our spirit-to-Spirit connection with Him from flowing outward, releasing indestructible, uncreated life.
- If we don’t allow the flesh an opportunity, the divine life of Christ in us produces the fruit of the Spirit. The flesh is like a dam that blocks the free-flowing river of the Spirit from being released in us and through us. When the flesh has been pruned, the indwelling Spirit flows freely through us to produce His fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

## Walk by the Spirit (5:24-26)

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

- In Galatians 2:20, Paul said he was crucified with Christ. This crucifixion was something that was done to him. When Paul was baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, he was united to Christ’s crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. This is true with all who are in Christ.
- The crucifixion in 2:20 is our legal position in Christ. Because we are in Christ and Christ is our covenant representative, whatever is true of Him is imputed to us. As a result, we are reckoned to be crucified with Christ. When He died, we died in Him and with Him. This means, legally speaking, we died to sin, self, and the Law.
- However, the crucifixion Paul speaks of in 5:24 is different. This crucifixion is something we do to ourselves by the Holy Spirit’s enabling grace. This crucifixion is the Holy Spirit aligning our living condition with our legal position. The indwelling Spirit wants to make our crucifixion with Christ real in our daily experience. This is what Paul has in mind in 5:24.
- Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:23-24).
- Notice Jesus said we are to take up our cross daily. Paul takes Jesus’ command to its logical conclusion. Taking up our cross daily must end with the flesh actually dying. The flesh, which is our body coupled together with our soul, must die by the work of the Spirit. This work began when we gave ourselves to Christ. But it must continue daily, until every part of our flesh has been experientially crucified.
- The “flesh with its passions and desires” must be put to death experientially by the Spirit. This is how the Spirit wins the internal war raging within us. The only way for the flesh to be conquered is through daily crucifixion. A self-denial that leads to self-death is the only way to slay the flesh with its passions and desires.

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- When the self-life has been thoroughly crucified in our daily experience, then the Holy Spirit can be released fully into our hearts, souls, and bodies. As we allow the Holy Spirit to put our self-life to death, we begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit. This is the pruning Jesus spoke of in John 15. Pruning is the only way we can bear much fruit and fruit that remains.
- Daily experiential crucifixion removes the self-life. This allows the indwelling life of Christ to be released fully in us and through us. This is how the love of the Spirit is poured out upon our hearts, empowering us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to serve one another through love, and for our faith to work through love.
- When self-love dies and Christ's love replaces it, we will fulfill the intent of the Law. The 613 commandments in the Torah will be realized within us, for love is the fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 13: 10).

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

- *Live by the Spirit* means *alive by the Spirit* and therefore *possessing His life*. A paraphrase of this verse is: "When Christ came to dwell within us by the Spirit, our spirit was raised from the dead. We experienced a resurrection. We were made alive by the Spirit's uncreated, indestructible life. As a result, we possess His life in our spirits."
- Paul then said, "Let us also walk by the Spirit." The Greek word for *walk* is different than the word translated *walk* in 5:16. The word *walk* in 5:25 means *to walk in line*. It's used metaphorically of walking in relation to others. In Acts 21:24, this word is translated *walk orderly*.
- Here's the idea: The Holy Spirit is like a military general who commands His troops to walk in line. This first applies individually but it also applies corporately. Every member in the body of Christ is called to walk orderly by yielding fully to the Holy Spirit.
- Not only are we members of the body of Christ. We are also part of God's army under the direct authority of God's Spirit. Because the Spirit is the army commander and we are soldiers in God's army, we have to be careful how we walk in relation to others. That's why Paul warned us not to "become boastful." *Become boastful* means *glorying without reason, conceited, vain glorious, eager for empty glory*.
- When we neglect the cross, we naturally become self-focused, leading to pride. And pride usually leads to one of two outcomes. First, pride can lead to "challenging one another." The NKJV translates this as "provoking one another." Pride can lead to competition, where we try to one-up another by our accomplishments. If we win the competition, we boast in our victories and pride increases within us.
- Second, pride can lead to "envying one another." When we focus on ourselves, we compare what another has with ourselves. If someone has more beauty, talent, gifting, resources, blessings, influence, favor, or money than us, we begin to envy what they have. Whether we covet their blessings or spite them in our hearts, the result is the body of Christ becomes fragmented rather than unified.
- Paul exhorted us to walk orderly with one another by obeying the Spirit. How? By crucifying our flesh so that pride and self-focus don't lead to competition and envy within the body of Christ.