

Galatians 5:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Analysis

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. Paul describes the internal conflict. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit" (hē gar sarx epithymei kata tou pneumatos, ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος)—the flesh desires against the Spirit. "And the Spirit against the flesh" (to de pneuma kata tēs sarkos)—the Spirit desires against the flesh. Epithymeō means to desire intensely, crave. These two principles war against each other.

"And these are contrary the one to the other" (tauta gar allēlois antikeitai, ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται)—they oppose, stand against each other. Antikeimai (ἀντίκειμαι) is military term: opposed forces in battle. "So that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (hina mē ha ean thelēte tauta poiēte)—so that you don't do whatever you want. The conflict means believers can't simply follow natural desires (flesh) nor achieve instant perfection (Spirit hasn't yet fully conquered flesh). This is Romans 7 struggle: believers experience real internal warfare between remaining sin and indwelling Spirit.

Historical Context

This verse sparked theological debate: does Paul describe pre-Christian experience, carnal Christians, or normal Christian life? Context favors the latter:

all believers experience flesh-Spirit conflict until glorification. Entire sanctification (Wesleyan) and victorious life (Keswick) movements sought immediate resolution. Reformed theology acknowledges lifelong struggle, though with progressive Spirit-victory. Paul's point: the conflict itself proves you're Spirit-indwelt—unbelievers have no Spirit to oppose flesh. The battle rages, but Spirit increasingly triumphs as believers walk in Him.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you experience the internal conflict between flesh and Spirit in your daily Christian life?
2. What comfort comes from knowing this struggle is normal Christian experience, not evidence of spiritual failure?
3. How does walking in the Spirit give progressive victory in the flesh-Spirit conflict without achieving instant sinless perfection?

Interlinear Text

ἡ γὰρ σαρκός ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεῦμα τὸ δὲ
G3588 For the flesh lusteth against G3588 the Spirit G3588 and
G1063 G4561 G1937 G2596 G4151 G1161

πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκός ταῦτα δὲ ἀντίκειται
the Spirit against G3588 the flesh the things and are contrary
G4151 G2596 G4561 G5023 G1161 G480

ἀλλήλοις τὸνα μὴ ἀνθελητεῖ ταῦτα
the one to the other so that G3361 G3739 that ye would G2309 the things
G240 G2443 G302 G5023

ποιῆτε
do
G4160

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:13 (Spirit): For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

John 3:6 (Spirit): That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Matthew 26:41 (Spirit): Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Psalms 119:20 (Parallel theme): My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (Parallel theme): For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Psalms 119:32 (Parallel theme): I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

James 3:2 (Parallel theme): For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

Matthew 16:23 (Parallel theme): But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Luke 22:46 (Parallel theme): And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

Matthew 12:30 (Parallel theme): He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

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