

# The sinful nature vs. the fruit of the Spirit

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Galatians 5 makes a vivid contrast between two forces vying for control of our choices in life: the [Holy Spirit](#) and the [sinful nature](#). The Holy Spirit is God. He takes up residence in every Christian from the moment we trust in Jesus. [Galatians 5:22-23](#) describes the changes that occur when we follow the Holy Spirit - qualities that we all want to see develop in our lives: "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

By contrast, the sinful nature ("the flesh" in older translations) is the fallen moral and spiritual condition of human beings which is generally inclined toward sin. The sinful nature is the source of our internal thoughts, attitudes, and impulses that are contrary to God's will and character. In [Galatians 5:19-21](#), you can see how dramatically different the sinful nature is from the Holy Spirit: "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these."

Clearly, these two forces are in conflict with each other and will inevitably send our lives in opposite directions. [Galatians 5:17](#) points out that "the sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants." The Holy Spirit wants us to honor God and live holy lives. The Spirit wants us to experience all the benefits of salvation in our lives. The sinful nature wants only to gratify itself and its corrupt cravings, regardless of the cost or consequences.

Because of this inner conflict, Christians must continually choose which power is going to define the direction of our lives. [Galatians 5:16](#) puts it like this: "So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves."

The phrase "let the Holy Spirit guide" is literally "walk by the Spirit." This speaks of a process or journey. "Walking" implies moving forward one step at a time - staying in step with the Spirit's leading and depending on his empowerment, moment by moment. This calls us to be conscious and deliberate about each of the succession of choices we make throughout every day. We need to become aware of the Spirit's presence and leading, and to follow his guidance. We then must choose to take every step in life in reliance on his strength within us, so that we can experience the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

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