God's grace does not allow one to continue in sin and Paul draws a contrast between the spirit and the flesh. We will read the entire passage, but this lesson will deal with Galatians 5:16 through part of verse 20.

**Galatians 5:16-21.**

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 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. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

What does it mean to, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh?” It is obvious that the word “flesh” in this context does not refer to the law of Moses, but to the bodies of Christians. The law did not have “lusts,” but all men have “the lust of the flesh.” In view of this, Paul says the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The result of this conflict is that “ye cannot do the things that ye would.” The last phrase of verse 17 directly connects with Paul’s discourse on that same conflict in Romans 7:19-25: “For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me
from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:19-25).

The conflict of which Paul speaks in both the Roman and Galatian epistles is the conflict between the inner man—the spirit—and his flesh. That is further explained in Romans 8:4 where the apostle refers to walking, “not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” For that reason, I believe this is another instance when the word “spirit” should not be capitalized. The spirit of Romans 8:4 and in Galatians 5 is not the Holy Spirit, but the inward man. That is the meaning of Paul’s statement that, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” He is not saying, as the Calvinists do, that when a Christian sins, he does so with his body, but his spirit does not sin. Paul refers to that part of man which controls him and that is the contrast between “flesh’ and “spirit.”

JERRY

In his Romans commentary, R. L. Whiteside wrote on page 163,

It seems to me that the commentators fail entirely to grasp the meaning of this verse. Some of them take it for granted that Paul is speaking of the condition of the Christian. In their estimation, the mind of the redeemed man serves God, but the flesh serves the law of sin. When they seek to explain this idea by dwelling on the warfare in the Christian between the spirit and the flesh, they miss the point entirely, for the verse says nothing about such a warfare. Paul spoke of service and not of fighting. And there is no such thing as serving God with the mind while the body serves sin.

Continuing this theme in Romans 8, Paul says the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4).

The clause is descriptive of the characters in whom the righteousness of the law is fulfilled. ‘Walk’ refers to manner of life. As flesh and spirit
are here contrasted, it seems certain that Paul meant the human spirit, and not the Holy Spirit. To walk according to the flesh is to lead an animal life. No matter what his character is, he is one who lives a worldly life. He lives as if this life were all that is worthwhile. To walk according to the spirit is to keep the flesh under control so as to promote spiritual growth in the service of God (Whiteside, 171).

**JIM**

That is what Paul means in Galatians 5 when he refers to the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is the source of that fruit, but it is produced in the spirit of man and brings him to a higher plane of living. The conflict between flesh and spirit results in one or the other dominating a man or ruling his life. He is either ruled by his fleshly lusts, or his inward man controls him under God’s law and submits the members of his body as servants of God (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:1-10).

The Christian serves with the mind the law of God; the sinner with the flesh serves the law of sin. In the life of the Christian, the mind—the inner man—dominates the flesh; in the sinner’s life the flesh dominates the mind. But in either case, the mind does the planning and willing. In the sinful life, the mind yields to the appetites and passions of the flesh, and plans for their gratification; in the Christian life the mind keeps the body under, and uses it in acts of service to God (Whiteside, 164).

To “walk in the spirit” is to live with the fleshly lusts under the control of the inner man which has been purified by obedience to the gospel. It is to conduct one’s life with his body in subjection to his purified soul, as his soul follows the precepts of the gospel of Christ. That is Paul’s contrast between the lusts of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5. If the fruit of the spirit is fruit which the Holy Spirit directly—without medium—produces in man’s heart, it should logically follow that the works of the flesh are produced by Satan operating directly upon man’s heart. In this case, one must not only affirm a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the Christian, but also direct demon influence.
I asked that question in a personal letter, dated January, 2000, which I wrote to Mac Deaver who teaches a direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Christian. His reply indicated that he might consider demon influence on men today. He wrote, “The works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19ff) come from man’s own spirit which includes his heart (Matt. 15:18-20). How the devil exerts his influence on man is something I am not prepared to say. He works through false teachers for sure (1 Tim. 4:1-2) but whether he is limited to informational power, I really doubt. I have not conquered Luke 22:3.”

If Satan’s influence over Judas in Luke 22:3 was direct—without Judas’ concurrence—then there is no such thing as free will. Greed—a lust of the flesh—drove Judas to conspire with the chief priests to betray the Lord (Lk. 22:4-5). Satan entered Judas as he enters all who are ungodly—through lust (Jas. 1:13-15). The same was true of Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-3). Peter said to Ananias, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” (v. 3). Satan did not directly fill their hearts to lie. His influence was through their lust for money which dominated their spirits, and Peter later asked of Sapphira, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (v. 9). Satan has neither direct, nor “informational power” over men. There was a time, during Christ’s personal ministry, when direct demon possession was allowed to manifest the power of Christ over the demon world. But in no case during that time did Satan or demons have direct power to cause a person to commit sin. That kind of power has never been exercised by Satan. Even in the Garden of Eden his influence over Eve was through her own lust (Gen. 3:6), not by direct influence. Satan’s power is exercised when man’s spirit allows the lusts of his flesh to dominate and control his life. The fruit of the spirit is fruit produced by man’s spirit when it is purified by the gospel, and the works of the flesh are produced and practiced when his spirit is corrupted by his own lust.

**JIM**

Verses 18 through 21 contain an enumeration of the works of the flesh
—those things which are committed when the flesh dominates and controls man’s whole being. In the first two—adultery and fornication—there is a difference. If these were the same thing, they would not have been listed as two distinct works of the flesh. “Adultery” is from the Greek, moicheia, and “fornication” is from porneia. All adultery is fornication, but not all fornication is adultery. Adultery is unlawful sexual relations with a person other than one’s own spouse by either a husband or wife. Fornication is a broader term and encompasses any kind of unlawful sexual relations by persons married or unmarried. Those include such sins as sodomy and bestiality.

“Uncleanness” is from, *akatharsia*, and means “impure” (Strong, 9). This is a general term that Lipscomb says is “Unnatural practice—self-abuse, bestiality and sodomy” (266). Thayer says it is, “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living” (21). This would then be closely linked with fornication, as would “lasciviousness” that immediately follows.

**JERRY**

“Lasciviousness” is *aselgeis* in the original, and means, “unbridled lust, excess, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence, wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc” (Thayer, 79-80). It is characteristic of the general lifestyle of lascivious persons that they unashamedly engage in things such as dancing—“indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females”—and filthy language.

“Idolatry” is simply “image worship.” That was the universal sin of the ancient pagan world, and continues as a near-universal sin in our world today—especially in our own society. An “image” can be literal or a philosophical image, or concept, on which the mind has fixed its affections. Our society worships at the image of “Choice” by permitting women to murder their unborn children under the euphemism, “abortion.” While the idols have changed from Molech of the Canaanites to Choice in modern society, the rites and results are the same. As parents took their infants and burned them to death in the
arms of Molech’s image as a sacrifice to him, so modern parents take the unborn and kill them in sacrifice to their idol, Choice. Unlike images graven from wood or stone in the ancient world, modern idolatry takes a multitude of forms today, among which are the gods of Leisure, Mammon, Family, Celebrities, and Hedonism.

“Witchcraft” is from pharmakeia. That is the word from which we derive the English word “pharmacy” and describes the ancient occult practice of drug-induced influence on others. Thayer says it means, “The use, or the administering of drugs; poisoning; sorcery, magical arts, often found in connection with idolatry and fostered by it...the deceptions and seductions of idolatry” (649). The dangers of witchcraft are far greater than the mild forms that are popularized in modern entertainment.

**JIM**

“Hatred” is echthra which means, “hostility or hatred” (Strong, 34). This evil is the basis of murder, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on The Mount (Matt. 5:21-22), and as John addressed: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:14-15). Murder is the fruit which springs from the seed of hatred. Not all hatred reaches fruition in murder, but hatred is the seed of it.

“Variance,” says Strong, is “a quarrel, i.e. (by impl.) wrangling:—contention, debate, strife, variance,” (32), and Thayer says it is, “contention, strife, wrangling” (249). These definitions of the word indicate a quarrelsome disposition which is contrary to Paul’s admonition in which he says, “As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). Those who are at peace with God (Rom. 5:1) will be at peace with one another. The quarrelsome spirit is foreign to the character of Christians and is of the flesh. This does not mean the Christian cannot oppose error, but that he must not allow his passions to rule his heart to the extent that he seeks to quarrel as a way of life. Peaceful fellowship with one another is a horizontal
relationship that results from first having a vertical relationship with the Father (1 Jn. 1:7). If we walk in the light of God’s Truth, fellowship and peace with one another are the results.