

R12.2 June 2024 Blog

Decision Point: Walk in the Spirit or Walk in the Flesh

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”¹

Prayerfully consider:

1. If I am truly among God’s elect, if I have experienced the second birth and been born of the Spirit, and if my name is in the *Lamb’s book of life*², God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in me. The implications of this are staggering!
2. If the Holy Spirit *is* in me, why can’t I consistently live life perfectly (righteously)? Why do I fail so often in dealing with pain, opposition, and temptation?
3. If I understand the times and know that I am to stand for Christ as His ambassador to a world opposed to Him, I must choose to live (“walk”) moment-by-moment in His Spirit, and not under my own power (the flesh).

The objective of this blog is to encourage the reader (and the author) to remember and rely upon the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel that the “Helper” has been provided by God the Father³. This beautiful truth is a gift to ruminate on continually. Do not let the tyranny of the urgent or the incessant noise of this world rob you of experiencing the Holy Spirit as your constant companion and Helper.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to our identity as Christians, and we can only scratch the surface on this important topic here. However, because it is the Holy Spirit that enables our ability to mature in faith, it is important to know and embrace His power. For this reason, I encourage you to spend time exploring these truths with other believers. May this small installment be a catalyst of encouragement to you.

Perhaps it’s my age or the circumstances of my life, or the nudging of the Holy Spirit in me, but I have been inundated of late with reminders of the vital role the Spirit plays in our lives. His ministry is critical, yet it is overlooked or underplayed in the lives of many professing Christians. We recognize the Holy Spirit’s work in the salvation of a soul – He convicts a person of sin, righteousness, and judgment, driving that person to a soft heart of repentance, and a hunger for a new Master. Only then can the Holy Spirit give us new life and produce in us faith in Jesus Christ, setting Him as our Lord and Savior.

¹ Galatians 5:16. All scripture references in this blog are NASB95 unless otherwise noted.

² Revelation 21:27

³ See John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”⁴

There it is, “Christ lives in me.” The implications of this are huge! The Galatians had forgotten this and were on the wrong path, pursuing righteousness by trying to keep the Law. Their error prompted the Apostle Paul (under the power of the Holy Spirit) to write his letter to the church at Galatia. It was a wake-up call to the people:

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”⁵

Paul is reminding them that they are a new creation, they possess the Spirit and are now no longer under the Law. He takes them through a powerful history lesson from the Old Testament through the rest of chapter 3, chapter 4, and into chapter 5 to remind them of their new beginning. Faith in Jesus Christ is what provided their righteousness, not self-effort to keep the Law. They had fallen prey to outside forces and reverted to a works-based salvation. They had rendered the ministry of the Holy Spirit useless in the living of their lives, and therefore stalled the sanctification process, the “walk” to Christian maturity.

There is great application here – you and I are just as susceptible to losing our way if we’re not constantly and intentionally walking in the Spirit. So, how do we do this? The challenge brings us back to our subject verse, Galatians 5:16:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh⁶.”

Simple enough, right? Walk by the Spirit. That’s pretty straightforward, but wait, there’s a problem. Look at the verse that follows:

“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.”

Mystery solved – there is war going on inside of every follower of Christ, and it will continue until we’re ushered into eternity. The text confirms that even though a person is a

⁴ Galatians 2:20

⁵ Galatians 3:1-3

⁶ Flesh: Primarily means human nature as used in this context, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God. Outline of Biblical Usage; blueletterbible.org.

“new creation,” sin and the desire to sin are still present within that person’s being. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is present too – He gave new life, and He sustains it.

A paraphrase of Romans 6:11-14 might read: “Although sin remains, it no longer reigns in the life of a believer.” While this is true, we must submit to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in our lives, moment-by-moment if we are to have any hope of finishing well. God’s will for us is contained in Scripture, but it will only be revealed to us and understood through our obedience to His Word. Therefore, we must exercise our wills to align with the Spirit’s leadership, and then walk (live) accordingly. Whenever we fail, when the flesh prevails in a particular battle, we must immediately repent and turn to the Holy Spirit to bring us back onto His path.

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul outlines the conflict that exists inside of each believer with precision. I won’t include the entire text here, but I encourage you to go to that passage right now and read carefully how Paul describes this ongoing battle. He bookends the section with these two truths about you and me –

“...but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin”⁷

“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”⁸

If this is Paul’s lament, how much more wretched am I? Thankfully, the Apostle doesn’t leave us there, he provides great encouragement in chapter 8 (I urge you to read it now). From this important chapter, these things are also true of every believer:

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”⁹

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”¹⁰

Praise God! He did not save us and then abandon us to battle opposition on our own, God has graciously and sufficiently provided a Helper. It is incumbent upon us therefore to continually rely on the Holy Spirit as we live moment by moment on this earth so that we

⁷ Romans 7:14

⁸ Romans 7:24-25

⁹ Romans 8:1

¹⁰ Romans 8:14-15

do not cave into our own desires, with which Satan relentlessly reminds/tempts us. All the Evil One needs is a tiny bit of flesh for landing – a miniscule speck – be on your guard!

We will end this installment where we began:

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

Applications¹¹:

1. *Walk in Humility* | Ephesians 4:1-3: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
2. *Walk in Purity* | Romans 13:12, 14: “The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.”
3. *Walk in Faith* | 2 Corinthians 5:7: “for we walk by faith, not by sight-”
4. *Walk in Good Works* | Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
5. *Walk Differently* | Ephesians 4:17-18: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;”
6. *Walk in Love* | Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”
7. *Walk in Light* | Ephesians 5:8: “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light”
8. *Walk in Wisdom* | Ephesians 5:15-16: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”
9. *Walk in Truth* | 3 John 1:3-4: “For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, *that is*, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”
10. *Walk in Peace* | John 14:26-27: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

¹¹ List of “walking” applications captured from a sermon by John MacArthur