

14. Walking in the Spirit

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Let's face it, we Christians have our own lingo, wouldn't you agree? If you are an unbeliever and walk into our church, and there a broken English speaking Swedish pastor says, "You must die to yourself," or "Don't let your flesh control your life, rather be controlled by the Spirit of the Living God." Or to top all the others, how about this? "We are washed by the blood of the Lamb."

If you don't know anything about Christianity, this would totally gross you out. You would think, "Blood of a lamb is going to be dumped on them and they think that they are going to be washed by the lamb's blood?!?!? I am outta here."

In this study, we are going to come across a familiar phrase "walking in the Spirit", yet not many Christians can articulate it clearly or even if they know the meaning, they don't care to do it. Why don't we let apostle Paul the author of this Book explain it to us so that we may learn and practice what we learn.

A. LIBERTY WITH LOVE

Galatians 5:13-15 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

We are prone to go to extremes. One believer interprets liberty as license to sin any way he wants, much like the indulgence during the Medieval period. Another believer, seeing this error, goes to an opposite extreme and imposes the OT Law on everybody. Somewhere between "a license to sin at one's will" and "legalism" is true Christian liberty.

The Christian is a truly free man. He is free from the guilt of sin because he has experienced God's forgiveness. He is free from the penalty of sin because Christ died for him on the cross. And he is, through the Spirit, free from the power of sin in his daily life. He is also free from the Law with its demands and threats.

Is the legalists' fear real? Yes, it is possible. But it is not because God's grace fails, but because men fail the grace of God. They just use the words 'God's grace' to hide behind and to continue their sins. Christian liberty through God's grace is not a license to sin but an opportunity to serve.

The key word of this portion of Scripture is 'love'. If you love people because you love Jesus first, you will not steal from them, lie about them, envy them, commit adultery with their spouse, or try in any way to hurt them. In other words, when we practice this love through God for Him and others, it take the place of all the laws God ever gave.

B. WALK IN THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-18 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

In Galatians 5:16-25, we find 7 references of the Holy Spirit mentioned. In this portion of Scripture, we probably find one of the best comparisons and descriptions of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit for our Christian living, especially the process of sanctification.

Sanctification should not be just a fancy theological word for the believers of Jesus Christ, rather it should be the way of life. We need to sanctify ourselves with the Word of God and prayers daily to be in sync with the Holy Spirit. Having a sanctified life is not like flipping on the switch of "Holy Spirit cruise control". Each day and actually each moment and each decision requires the guidance from the Holy Spirit.

When apostle Paul refers to the flesh, he means our old nature before we became Christians, not the body. Because the human body is not sinful; it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit; but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the lustful and sinful desires of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh have completely opposite appetites, and this is what creates the conflict.

The conflict or struggle, whichever you want to call it, between the Spirit and our flesh is unrelenting in our life. So fierce is the conflict that the flesh sometimes keeps us from doing the thing that we want to and ought to do.

Romans 7:15-16 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

The Christian life is a free life through Jesus Christ, but it is NOT an effortless life. Disobedience and rebellion against the Spirit of God try to control our life. To be obedient to the Holy Spirit, we must labor, and fight, and guard our heart each moment. It all starts with self-denial as Jesus taught us:

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

C. THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul now lists some of the ugly deeds of the flesh. You can find similar lists in Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:29-32; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; and 2 Timothy 3:2-5.

The flesh is able to manufacture sin but it can never produce the righteousness of God.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

This list in Galatians can be divided into three major categories:

1) The sensual sins – Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, Lewdness

Adultery is illicit sex between married people, while fornication, the original Greek word is "porneia" and we get the English word "pornography", not only refers to sex before marriage, but also covers any other type of illicit sex, such as, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality. Uncleanness means just that: a filthiness of heart and mind

that makes the person defiled. Lewdness is close to our word 'debauchery.' It speaks of an unbridled lust that knows no shame. It goes without saying that all of these sins were rampant in the Roman Empire and are becoming norm in our society .

2) The superstitious sins – Idolatry, Sorcery

Idolatry, like the sins named above, is with us today . Idolatry is simply putting people and things ahead of God. We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture completely. Jesus tells us that whatever we worship, we serve:

Matthew 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

The Christian who devotes more of himself to his car , house, or job, even spouse and children than he does to loving and serving Christ may be in danger of idolatry .

The word "Sorcery" is from the Greek word 'pharmakeia,' which means "the use of drugs." Our English word "pharmacy" is derived from this word. Magicians in Paul's day often used drugs to bring about their evil effects. Of course, sorcery is forbidden in the Bible as are all activities of the occult according to Deuteronomy 18.

3) The Social sins – Hatred, Contentions, Jealousies, Outbursts of wrath, Selfish Ambitions, Dissensions, Heresies, Envy, Murders, Drunkenness, Revelries

According to the apostle, the person who practices these sins will not inherit the kingdom of God. Does it mean that if a Christian commits one of these sins, he will lose his salvation? Paul is not talking about an act of sin, but a habit of sin that continuously discards the corrections of the Holy Spirit.

D. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

I've read a few commentaries regarding these two verses. Many respected theologians treat the fruit of the Spirit as if there are nine fruits. The Greek word for fruit is clearly as a singular, not plural. In other words, these 8 are the facets of love.

When a person lives in the sphere of love, then he experiences joy that is inward peace and sufficiency that is not affected by outward circumstances. Joy naturally bring forth peace in one's heart.

The Christian who is long-suffering, or patient, will not avenge himself or wish difficulties on those who oppose him. He will be kind and gentle, even with the most offensive, and will sow goodness where others sow evil. Human nature can never do this on its own; only the Holy Spirit can.

Some commentators try to categorize these facets of the fruit of the Spirit, but I believe that they should be considered as flowing together and flowing out of the believer's life as love for God and for others.

Remember what the Lord Jesus told His disciples in the Book of John in chapter 15?

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing .

As we grow in holiness of God and obedience to His commands, we are bearing fruit of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that the branches do not eat the fruit – our words and our works, but others enjoy our fruit. In other words, with our spiritual fruit that grows out of our abiding life in Christ we can bless other people around us.

Man-made works are dead and cannot reproduce themselves, but Spirit-produced fruit will go on reproducing from one life to another. There will be fruit to more fruits, to much fruits. It all starts from Jesus.

When we live in this fruit of the Spirit, we are fulfilling what the O T Law told the Israelites to do. The Spirit led life is not a life against the Law, rather fulfills it.

It is unfortunate that an overemphasis on gifts has led some Christians to neglect the graces of the Spirit. Building Christian character must take precedence over displaying special abilities. Yes, the fruit of the Spirit is far more important than the gifts of the Spirit.

E. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Galatians 5:24-25 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So how do we walk in the Spirit? How do we keep the flesh from getting a foothold? How do we live a life that consistently reflects the goodness of God? This is where daily sanctification comes in.

Though our old nature was crucified with Christ, but we are still living in this wretched flesh which is an enemy within. As we all remember Romans 12:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

The emphasis is on "living", because it has a tendency to crawl off the altar to go back to its own carnal behavior. That is why we need to be sanctified daily through the Word of God by the teaching, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Christian liberty through God's grace is not a license to sin but an opportunity to serve.

2) No matter how many rules or standards a church may adopt, they are no guarantee of spirituality.

3) The fruit of the Spirit is to bear and to share with others for the glory of God, not to keep it to ourselves.

4) Walking in the Spirit can only happen when we deny ourselves, submit to God, and obey what He tells us in the Word daily.