

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

By Denver Cheddie

INTRODUCTION

Galations 5

16 *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 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. 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 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. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Paul speaks of a war waging within us between the spirit and the flesh. They both have different agendas and entirely different natures. Galatians 5 tells us what the works of the flesh are (vs 19-21) and what the fruit of the spirit are (vs 22-24). Many Bible scholars have put forward definitions of all the terms used in those verses. But the truth is that, whatever the definition of the terms, we can all recognize when someone is walking in the Spirit, and when they're not. The question that is unanswered in most Christians' minds is **how** to walk in the spirit.

Gal 5:21 states that those who practice the works of the flesh have no part in the kingdom of heaven. To some it gives the impression that whenever a Christian falls into sin, it disqualifies him or her from eternal life. This is the last thing Paul intended to convey. Paul talks about a liberty that comes

from being saved by grace. Verse 13 suggests that we could use that liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but we are advised not to. Thus verses 19-21 and 22-24 are not talking about two categories of Christians, but rather non-Christians vs. Christians. It is the unregenerate, who **practice** the works of the flesh, that have no part in the kingdom of heaven.

After one is saved, there is a great internal struggle between the spirit (new nature) and the flesh (old nature). Some people argue that Christians don't have a sinful nature, but rather sinful propensities. What exactly is the difference? It sounds like they just learned the word "propensity" and thought it was too good a word not to incorporate in their theology. Whatever word you wish to substitute for nature, the spirit refers to the new regenerate nature which was created after God in true holiness and righteousness (Eph 4:24). The flesh refers to the old sinful nature (propensities, whatever).

The flesh is somehow related to the frailties and corruptibility of this physical body, since Paul elsewhere speaks of mortifying the deeds of the body. However it is difficult to define what that relation is. All we know is that when Jesus returns, He will transform our corruptible bodies to the likeness of His glorious body (Phil 3:21), and when that happens, there will no longer be any flesh influencing us to sin.

This corruptible physical body, however, we have until we die. Thus the battle between spirit and flesh will never cease in this life. There will always be one part of us wanting to do that which feels good (but is wrong) and

that part which we know is right (but does not always feel good). At this point I must add that if one's life is characterized as all flesh, and no spirit battling against that flesh, one has to wonder whether one is genuinely saved.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Gal 5:22-24 give a list of 9 fruit(s) of the spirit. Some scholars believe that there is really one fruit which is love, and the other 8 are attributes of love. They call it the 9-fold fruit of the spirit. I tend to agree with that, since love is a dominant theme in the New Testament. Love is essentially self sacrificing and something that puts others ahead of ourselves. The 2 important characteristics of love are 1) it is self sacrificing, 2) it seeks others' well being (1 Cor 13:5). Having said that, love is not always nice and friendly, since it often entails rebuking others and telling them their faults. Jesus was not always nice and friendly.

This gives an indication of what the difference is between Christians and non-Christians. An unregenerate life is characterized by selfishness. They live primarily for themselves. The works of the flesh are all acts intended to please self. Whereas the fruit of the spirit are qualities which seek others' interests. An unsaved person is not always as bad as he could be, but the defining goal of his life is the pursuit of selfish ambition. Similarly, believers are not always as good as they should be, but theirs should be lives of servant hood. So we could say that walking in the flesh is the same as living in our unregenerate selfish nature, while walking in the spirit is the same as

living in self sacrificing love. As believers, those two natures are in us, warring against each other.

It is also interesting that Paul uses the word fruit to describe the regenerate nature. Fruit is something which is "natural". An apple tree naturally bears apples. It does not need to take a course, or to read a book on how to bear apples. It does it naturally because it is, by definition, an apple tree. That's what apple trees do, unless there is something wrong with it. Maybe it isn't getting a good supply of water. Maybe it is internally dead.

In the same way, a true believer would naturally bear the fruit of the spirit, except for the flesh. If the flesh were not present, we would be able to walk in perfect love. The problem is that the flesh hinders us. The solution is not to try to bear fruit i.e. pretend to be joyful, act as though we have peace, suffer long through much teeth grinding. That is not how it is done. Fruit cannot be forced. We must get the hindrances out of the way. That hindrance is of course the flesh. The internal struggle between flesh and spirit is like a see-saw. In order to get one end up, you need to get the other end down. Crucify the flesh, and we will walk in the spirit. Once we crucify the flesh (mortify the deeds of the body), fruit bearing once again becomes natural and effortless.

CRUCIFYING THE FLESH

The next question that arises is how to crucify the flesh. Gal 5:13 gives us a clue. Just before he listed the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit, Paul urges the Galatians to stop living for themselves, but instead should strive to serve others. Remember that the flesh is inherently selfish, while the spirit is inherently selfless. It ties in perfectly doesn't it? Paul is saying that when the focus of our lives is serving others rather than ourselves, that deactivates the flesh. It is not about trying not to sin. It is about serving others in love (becoming a living sacrifice).

Try the following exercise for a minute. Picture in your mind a tall building. So there is an image of a tall building in your mind. Now STOP thinking about that building. Difficult to do isn't it? In trying not to think about the building, you end up...thinking about it. Now picture a mountain peak covered in snow. You would find that at the minute you thought about the mountain, the image of the building left your mind.

The solution to the flesh problem, is not trying not to sin. But rather living in service. Christianity is not about trying not to commit sin, but rather about becoming a living sacrifice. Paul talks about this in Romans 7. Whenever he tried not to covet, that activated the law of his members (the flesh) and caused him to do exactly what he intended not to. Trying not to sin activates the flesh, perhaps because it puts the focus on ourselves. Trying to serve others deactivates the flesh, perhaps because it takes the emphasis away from ourselves.

The key to walking in the spirit is crucifying the flesh. The key to crucifying the flesh is to live a life of service to others. This is not merely getting involved in church, joining the choir, teaching a Sunday school class, or what have you. It is a life that is devoted to God for his service. It is a life of surrender. Every believer should figure that out for him or herself.

Just to give an example, most men tend to fantasize about women in a sexual way. But in my experience, whenever my focus has been off of my own desires, and rather directed toward doing what is best for her (whatever that may be), it is difficult for me to "lust after her" in my mind. That's because I de-activated the flesh. That's just my experience. I have also noticed, during difficult times in my life, when I've learned to just surrender my will and desires to God, that it is much easier to walk in the Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit. It is during those times that I'm ever mindful about having a good Christian testimony and serving others, whereas at other times, it is a struggle. These are just my experiences. It doesn't work exactly the same way for everyone, nevertheless, the general rules do apply.

Jesus gave us two commandments. Loving God is strongly related to accepting the One God sent i.e. Jesus. Loving others involves a life of self-sacrificing service. This is the key to walking in the spirit.

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