

The Way of Purity

Day 49 - Walking in the Spirit

**So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
Galatians 5:16**

Scripture describes for us how to live in a way which honors the Lord. This way involves a continual drinking of the Living Water, which is a continuous and unbroken fellowship with Christ, and a refusal to gratify the desires of the flesh. This type of life is extremely rewarding; as Scripture states, "Happy is he whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15b).

As believers, most of us would acknowledge this truth, yet we find within us competing desires and inner conflict. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:17).

So, are we to live the rest of our lives with this inner struggle going on all the time? Should we just give up, thinking we will always have these intense temptations, these fiery darts from the enemy? Will we at times have victory over them and, at other times, simply give in to them? Many people do just that. They are tired of fighting, tired of resolving to stop sinning, only to fall again, and worn out by the vicious cycle. But friend, this sin cycle does not need to continue. Scripture makes a declarative statement: "So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." We may still have the desires, but we are enabled to live above them, as we live by the Spirit.

So, what does it mean to live by the Spirit? Please read this quote from Matthew Henry and be ready to answer the question below:

Note, the best antidote against the poison of sin is to walk in the Spirit, to be much conversing with spiritual things, to mind the things of the soul, which is the spiritual part of man, more than those of the body, which is his carnal part, to commit ourselves to the guidance of the word, wherein the Holy Spirit makes known the will of God concerning us, and in the way of our duty to act in a dependence on his aids and influences. And, as this would be the best means of preserving them from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, so it would be a good evidence that they were Christians indeed; for, says the apostle 'if you would be led by the Spirit, you are not under law.' As if he had said, 'You must expect a struggle between flesh and spirit as long as you are in the world, that the flesh will be lusting against the spirit as well as the spirit against the flesh; but if, in the prevailing bent and tenor of your lives, you be led by the Spirit, if you act under the guidance and government of the Holy Spirit and of that spiritual nature and disposition he has wrought in you, if you make the word of God your rule and the grace of God your principle, it will hence appear that you are not under the law, not under the condemning... (Comments on Galatians 5:16-18).

Question 1. Write down everything you find which defines what living by the Spirit means, according to this quote.

Question 2. Obviously we have come to a crucial portion of Scripture for overcoming slavery to habitual sin when we read, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Please explain, in your own words, what you think it means to "live by the Spirit." Write your answer here.

Please read the passage we are studying in context, and answer the questions below:

¹⁶ **So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.**
¹⁷ **For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** ¹⁸ **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.** ¹⁹ **The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;** ²⁰ **idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions** ²¹ **and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.** ²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.** ²⁴ **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.** ²⁵ **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.** ²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Galatians 5:16-26**

Question 3. Please list the acts of the flesh as listed in verse 19.

The first act listed here is "sexual immorality," and the second is "impurity." These two get top billing as to the acts of the flesh and, if our lives are characterized by these acts, we are not living by the Spirit.

Note: There is a real possibility of being deceived when involved in acts like these. So Paul warns in verse 21, "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Oh, how we need to heed the warning. Friends, please understand Paul's words, and don't try to explain them away. He is issuing a warning to those who live in the acts of the flesh, that they will not inherit the

kingdom of God. In other words, hell is the destination of all who live by these acts, regardless of how much knowledge they have, how articulate they are, or what position they have in the church. This is serious. Do not be deceived.

Question 4. According to verse 24, what evidence must be in our lives to show that we belong to Christ?

We must say that we are believers

We must have bumper stickers that read "Honk if you love Jesus"
We must have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires

Question 5. What does the above passage teach about our relationship to the Spirit? What are we to do in relationship to Him?



Question 6. Please list the fruit of the Spirit from verse 22.



Question 7. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit?



Question 8. What does it mean to "keep in step with the Spirit?"



Note: The Christian life may be described as a walk with God. Just as "Enoch walked with God, and was no more," so we are to be in a daily relationship with Him. And it is this daily relationship, or this walking with God, that keeps us away from sin. Compare Psalm 56:13: "Because you have saved me from death. You have kept me from being defeated. So I will walk with God in light among the living."

The Christian life begins with a step of faith for salvation. Then it continues, step by step toward spiritual maturity as we develop a growing closeness to God.

It is a painful business to get through into the stride of God, it means getting your 'second wind' spiritually. In learning to walk with God, there is always the difficulty of getting into His stride; but when we have gotten into it, the only characteristic that manifests itself is the life of God. The individual man is lost sight of in his personal union with God, and the stride and the power of God alone are manifested.

It is difficult to get into stride with God, because when we start walking with Him we find He has outstripped us before we have taken three steps. He has different ways of doing things, and we have to be trained and disciplined into His ways.

Question 9. How does 1 John 1:7 add perspective to the above teaching? "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." Write your answer here.

Question 10. In Galatians. 5, Paul talks about the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. He states, "so that you do not do what you want." Does this refer to believers or unbelievers?

Believers

Unbelievers

John Calvin adds some clarity here: "So that you do not do what you want. This refers, unquestionably, to the regenerate (believers). Carnal men have no battle with depraved lusts, no proper desire to attain to the righteousness of God. Paul is addressing believers. The things that you want must mean, not our natural inclinations, but the holy affections which God bestows upon us by grace. Paul therefore declares, that believers, so long as they are in this life, whatever may be the earnestness of their endeavors, do not obtain such a measure of success as to serve God in a perfect manner. The highest result does not correspond to their wishes and desires" (John Calvin, commentary on Galatians 5).

Note: Because of the war in the soul of every believer (the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh) we are unable to perfectly do what we would like to do. We desire to seek God wholeheartedly, but the flesh wars against that desire. We desire ongoing intimacy and unbroken fellowship with Jesus Christ, but the flesh vehemently resists this. We want to show others only a sweet aroma of Christ, letting our gentleness be evident to all; we want to be gracious at all times, completely humble, submitting to one another always and forgiving each other as we have been forgiven. The flesh resists and fights against all of this so that we cannot perfectly, and at all times, do what we want to do. Should we then despair and give up?

The Galatians passage states there is a way to keep from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. It is to live by the Spirit. It is to be led by the Spirit. It is to walk with the

Spirit. So, our "fight" is not so much with avoiding pornography or greed, being selfish or divisive, it is with maintaining our walk with the Lord. For if we live by the Spirit, are led by the Spirit, and walk with the Spirit, the promise of Scripture is that we will not gratify our flesh. We will not view pornography; we will not be sexually immoral, etc. This is our answer!

I have been learning, over the past several years, what it means to walk with God. It is an experience to be sure, and it is not like anything we learn in school. It is exercising the spiritual disciplines of being in the Word daily, of being in prayer continually, and of recognizing the leading and prompting of God in our daily activities. This is all foreign to our natural state. But, I tell you, I would not trade it for anything. I love walking in and living by the Spirit of God (though my flesh hates it), and I don't ever want to return to the acts of the flesh. My wife, also, is thankful that I am walking in the Spirit, as she and I are much closer than when I was living in sin. I hope you are finding the same thing. Or, if you are single, remember that the goal in your search for freedom is not to be married: it is to *walk closely with the Lord* and to learn how to be *satisfied in Christ*. The one who finds freedom from habitual sin will find that Christ will satisfy and complete him, and also make his relationship with others more satisfying and godly.

Question 11. How are you doing? Are you learning to live by the Spirit?

Scriptures to consider for today:

**He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6:8**