

THE HELPER OF THE BELIEVER'S WALK

Theme: The Holy Spirit enables the believer to conduct their daily life in a way that pleases God.

This morning, we continue our consideration of the specific ‘helps’ that the Holy Spirit gives the individual believer. And it would be hard to think of a more ‘practical’ subject to take up in this theme than that of our ‘walk’ in the Spirit.

Our ‘walk’ is a very common metaphor in the New Testament. The Greek word *peripateo*—translated “walk”—comes from the combination of two other words. The word *pateo* means “to tread”. (You probably recognize that we get the word “patio” from it.) And the preposition *peri* means “around”. So, figuratively, our *peripateo* is our daily course as we go ‘walking around’ in practical living.

The Holy Spirit aids us wonderfully by conducting our daily ‘walk’ with the Lord Jesus. His help is absolutely essential. As William Fitch wrote; “When we ‘walk in the Spirit,’ we are in a place of security, safety, and scope. The ‘walk’ of the believer is his life, his liberty, his activity, his creativeness, and his guidance under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit.”¹ We could not possibly exercise our daily conduct in a way that is pleasing to our Lord in the power of the flesh. We must have the help of the Holy Spirit.

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The Bible not only tells us about the Holy Spirit’s help in our daily walk, but also gives us guidance as to how we are to be submitted to the Spirit’s help in that daily course of practical living. It even helps us to understand why His help is so necessary.

So; let’s begin by asking ...

I. WHY DO WE NEED THE SPIRIT’S HELP IN OUR WALK?

- A. The Bible tells us something that we might not know otherwise—and that is that, apart from Jesus Christ, our “walk” is not merely “neutral”, but is actually under the influence of harmful and diabolical forces. Ephesians 2:1-3, we’re told this about God the Father’s grace to us;

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Ephesians 2:1-3).²

Apart from God's grace, then, we were dead toward Him—that is to say, inactive and unresponsive to His will. But even when we were in that spiritually dead condition, the truth is that we were actually the “walking dead”. We did indeed “walk”—but our walk was under the influences of this world and in accordance with the devil.

- B. And that's not all. Not only were we under the pressure and influences of these diabolical forces, but we—on our own—did not even have the ability to conduct our walk in a way that was pleasing to God or good for ourselves. As it says in Jeremiah 10:23, “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” It was never God's design for human beings that they walk independent of Him. It—by design—is not in them to do so.

So then, we need the Spirit's help in walking as we should because (1) it is not in us to do so in and of ourselves, and (2) the ‘walking’ that we do is in accord with the devil. Let's next ask ...

II. WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF WALKING IN THE SPIRIT?

- A. The above points help us to appreciate what happens when someone tries to ‘walk’ independently from God—that is, in the power of the flesh. In Galatians 5:17, Paul explained that a conflict exists between two principles in us—two principles that cannot, in any way, be reconciled with one another. He writes;

For the flesh [that is, that principle of our fallenness at work in us which we have inherited from Adam after the fall] lusts [that is, strongly desires] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ... (v. 17).

These two principles are in diametric opposition to one another; and can never be made to cooperate. They are, as Paul stressed, “contrary to one another”. To choose to submit to one is to choose to set one's self in opposition to the other. This is even true of the believer. Therefore, Paul warns—in words that every believer can relate to—that you “cannot do the things that you wish”. As he wrote in Romans 7—that great chapter of the Bible that expressed, in such dreadfully detail, this terrible inner-struggle—“For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15). Who among us cannot relate to that! To attempt, then, to walk in a pleasing way before God in the power of flesh—that is, in the power of our own human capabilities—is the opposite of walking in the Spirit. It always leads to failure and frustration.

- B. And what's more, Paul went on in Galatians 5 to write of the dreadfulness of the results of that kind of walk:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts

of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 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 (Galatians 5:19-21).

These things are, then, the result of trying to ‘walk’ before God by means of the power of the flesh in accordance with the strict letter of God’s law. It is something that we just do not have it in us to do!

- C. But by contrast, Paul affirmed in Galatians 5:18 that, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”; that is, we are not under the principle of righteousness before God on the basis of a strict adherence to the letter of the law through the power of the flesh. Instead, Paul writes, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). To walk in the Holy Spirit results in a daily, practical life that is pleasing to God; because it exhibits the “fruit” (or you might say, the “produce”) of the Spirit;

love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (vv. 22-23).

As Paul put it in Romans 8:1-9a;

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit ... (Romans 8:1-9a).

Obviously then, we should desire the Holy Spirit’s help in this walk. And praise Him—He gives it to us! Let’s next ask then ...

III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT?

- A. To ‘walk in the Spirit’ requires two basic things. It first requires a ‘putting-to-death’ (or as the Puritan theologians used to put it, ‘the mortification’) of the opposite principle—that is, the principle of the flesh. Paul put the matter very strongly and graphically when he wrote, “And those who are Christ’s have

crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). To crucify something is to hang it up for its death. The ancient Romans did not nail a criminal to a cross in order to merely ‘teach them a lesson’; with the intention of then taking the criminal down when he got the point. It was to completely and decisively put the criminal to death. We must not, as John Stott says, crucify the flesh and then “finger the nails” doubtfully. Paul put it in very practical terms. We must crucify the flesh (which is a principle that we cannot see) “with its passions and desires” (which we very readily identify and measure). We are not to “gratify” those desires; but rather uncompromisingly “crucify” or “mortify” them. As Paul put it in Romans 8:12-14;

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (Romans 8:12-14).

- B. Second, a ‘walk in the Spirit’ requires that we do just as the word ‘walk’ implies. We are to walk according to His lead in much the same way as we physically walk across the ground. We are to place our feet at the point of decision that each new step requires—step-by-step; just as the Holy Spirit directs us. Paul wrote, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). Note that the unusual Greek word that he used for “walk” in this verse (*stoicheo*) is a military term that means, “to keep in step” or “to march in order”—just as a foot soldier marches in beat to the drum. We are to no longer live in the domain of the law through the flesh, but rather in the domain of the Spirit; and it's as if the Holy Spirit sets the drumbeat for us, and we—as faithful soldiers—march in step with His cadence; letting Him direct our steps and exhibit His fruit in us. We present ourselves as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1-2), and our bodily members as “slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Romans 6:19); remembering Galatians 2:20; “I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me.”

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Dear brothers and sisters; the only way for us to make the difference that God our Father wants for us to make in this world is living the life of Jesus Christ in the midst of it—in everyday life. And because we cannot live that kind of life in the power of the flesh, the only way for it to be lived through us is by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the way that the Holy Spirit lives Jesus’ holy life through us is step-by-step, moment-by-moment; ‘walking’ as He leads us; putting our feet where the Holy Spirit tells us and by His enabling.

May we grow increasingly to ‘walk in the Spirit’. And as we do, may the life of Jesus Christ be displayed in this world through us!

¹William Fitch, *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 166.

²All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.