

Living the Triumphant Life – Walking by the Spirit

Galatians 5:25 states, *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."* Paul is in full agreement with Jesus that it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that we have been given new life. *"Even when we were dead through trespasses God made us alive together with Christ We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5 & 10)* Just as God once said, *"Let there be light,"* and there was light, so he *"has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6)*. "Walking by the Spirit" means doing what you do each day by the Spirit; live your life in all its details from waking up in the morning until going to sleep at night "by" the enabling power of the Spirit. But what does that mean, practically speaking? How do we "walk by the Spirit"?

Let's look at a few things in the context of **Galatians 5** and then bring in some other Scriptures in order to get an answer to this question.

How Do We Walk by the Spirit?

The phrase "walk by the Spirit" occurs not only in verse 25 but also in verse 16, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh."* So here we see what the opposite of walking by the Spirit is, namely, giving in to the desires of the flesh. Remember, "flesh" is the old, ordinary human nature that does not relish the things of God and prefers to get satisfaction from independence, power, prestige, and worldly pleasures. When we "walk by the Spirit," we are not controlled by those driving forces. This is what verse 17 means: the flesh produces one kind of desire, and the Spirit produces another kind, and they are opposed to each other.

Walking by the Spirit is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh. This means that "walking by the Spirit" is not something we do in order to get the Spirit's help, but rather, just as the phrase implies, it is something we do by the enablement of the Spirit.

Ultimately, all the good inclinations or preferences or desires that we have are given by the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Spirit we are mere flesh. And Paul said in **Romans 7:18**, *"I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing."* Apart from the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, none of our inclinations or desires is holy or good, *"for the mind of the flesh is hostile to God's law and does not submit to it because it cannot" (Romans 8:7)*. The new birth is the coming into our life of the Holy Spirit to create a whole new array of desires and yearnings and longings. And when these desires are stronger than the opposing desires of the flesh, then we are "walking by the Spirit." For we always act according to our strongest desires.

Therefore, "walking by the Spirit" is something the Holy Spirit enables us to do by producing in us strong desires that are in line with God's will. This is what God said he would do in **Ezekiel 36:26-27**: *"A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you . . . I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes."*

Therefore, when we "walk by the Spirit," we experience the fulfilment of this prophecy. The Holy Spirit produces in us desires for God's ways that are stronger than our fleshly desires, and thus he causes us to walk in God's statutes.

Now, if we look at verses 19–24, we will find one more expression about the Spirit which confirms and expands what we have seen so far about "walking by the Spirit."

In these verses Paul contrasts the "works of the flesh" (verses 19–21) with the "fruit of the Spirit" (verses 22–23). The opposite of doing the "works of the flesh" is "bearing the fruit of the Spirit." This is exactly the same contrast we saw in verse 16: *"Walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh."* The "works of the flesh" are what you do when you "gratify the desires of the flesh." The "fruit of the Spirit" is what appears in your life when you "walk by the Spirit." Therefore what we have in these verses are three images of the Spirit's work in our lives: (1) **"walking by the Spirit"** in verse 16, (2) **"being led by the Spirit"** in verse 18, and (3) bearing **"the fruit of the Spirit"** in verse 22.

Why does Paul refer to the "fruit of the Spirit" instead of the "works of the Spirit" to match "works of the flesh"? In view of what we have seen so far, I think the reason is that Paul wants to avoid giving any impression that what the Spirit produces is our work. It is not our work; it is his fruit. What we do when we **walk by the Spirit** is simply fulfil the desires produced by the Spirit. And what better way is there to describe the ease of following our strongest desires than to say it is like having the Spirit's fruit pop out in our attitudes and actions? Therefore, just like the phrase "led by the Spirit," so also the phrase "fruit of the Spirit" stresses the Spirit's initiative and enablement to fulfil God's law. For Paul it is absolutely crucial that, if we came to life by the free and sovereign work of the Spirit, we learn to walk by the free and sovereign work of the Spirit. In view of the sovereignty of the Spirit who leads us where He wills by the stronger desires He creates within us, what should we do? What exactly is involved in obeying the command, "Walk by the Spirit"?

Five Steps Toward Walking by the Spirit

Here are 5 things we can do to be truly "walking by the Spirit."

1. Acknowledge

First, we must acknowledge from our hearts that we are helpless to do good apart from the enablement of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says in **Romans 7:18**, *"I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing."* What did Jesus mean when he said in **John 15:5**, *"Without me you can do nothing"*? Of course we can do something without Jesus: we can sin! But that's all we can do. So, the first step of walking by the Spirit is: admit this fact and let it have its devastating effect on our pride. We cannot do anything pleasing to God without the constant enablement of the Spirit.

2. Pray

Second, since it's promised in Ezekiel that God will put His Spirit within us and cause us to walk in His statutes, pray that He does it to you by His almighty power. Many of us probably know the glorious, liberating experience of having an irresistible desire for sin overcome by a new and stronger desire for God and His ways. And as we look back, to whom do we attribute that new desire? Where did it come from? It came from the merciful Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us pray like Paul did in **Thessalonians 3:12** for that primary fruit of the Spirit: *"Now may the*

Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men." And let's pray like the writer to the Hebrews did, *"And now may the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ."* If it is God alone who works in us what is pleasing in His sight, then above all, we must pray. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me"* (**Psalm 51:10**).

3. Trust

The third step involved in "walking by the Spirit" is faith. We must believe that since we have come under the gracious sway of God's Spirit, *"sin will no longer have dominion over us"* (**Romans 6:14**). This confidence is what Paul meant by "reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God." We simply count on it that the Spirit who made us alive when we were dead in sin wills our holiness and has the power to achieve what he wills. I am fully persuaded that one of the things we believers can pray for, with undoubting faith that God will do it, is our sanctification (which is the same as being led by the Spirit).

The reason we can is that we know that God will cause His children to be led by the Spirit. And the way we know this is because of **Romans 8:14**, where Paul says you can't even be a child of God unless you are led by the Spirit. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."* If you are a child of God, you have a solid and unshakable promise that God will give you victory over those powerful desires of the flesh. One word of caution: do not prejudge the timing of the Holy Spirit's work. Why He liberates one person overnight but brings another to freedom through months of struggle is a mystery concealed for now from our eyes.

4. Act

The fourth step in "walking by the Spirit" - after you have acknowledged your helplessness without Him, prayed for His enablement, and trusted in His deliverance is to act the way you know is right. Notice: this is not step number one. If this were step number one, all our actions would be works of the flesh, not fruit of the Spirit. Only after we have appealed for the Spirit's enablement and thrown ourselves confidently on His promise and power to work in us, do we now work with all our might. Only when we act with that spiritual preparation, will we be able to say with Paul, *"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me."* A person who has acknowledged his helplessness, prayed for God's enablement to do right, and yielded himself confidently to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit has an astonishing incentive to do righteous acts. And whatever righteous act he does, it is God almighty who is at work in him giving him the will and the power to do it.

It is a great incentive, not discouragement, that all our effort to do what is right is the work of the Almighty God within us. At least for myself, I am greatly encouraged when the going gets rough that any effort I make to do right is a sign of God's grace at work in me. *"Let him who serves serve in the strength which God supplies, that in everything God may get the glory"* (**1 Peter 4:11**). To God be the glory! Amen!

5. Thank

The final step in “walking by the Spirit” is to thank God for any virtue attained or any good deed performed. If without the Spirit we can do no right, then we must not only ask for His enablement for it but also thank Him whenever we do it. Just one example from **2 Corinthians 8:16**, where Paul says, *“Thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.”* Titus loved the Corinthians. Where did that come from? God put it in his heart. It was a fruit of the Spirit. So what does Paul do? He thanks God. And Titus should, too. Thanks be to God who puts love in our hearts!

“If we live by the Spirit, then let us also walk by the Spirit.” Let us acknowledge from our hearts that we are unable to please God without the Spirit’s constant enablement. Let us pray for that enablement. Let us trust confidently in the Spirit’s power, and His promise to give that enablement. Then let us do what we know is right. And having done it, let us turn and say with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, *“Not I, but the Spirit of Christ within me.”* Thanks be to God! To Him be glory for ever and ever!

The triumphant life can be yours if you **walk by faith** and **walk by the spirit!** Amen!