

Walking According to the Spirit

(Romans 8:1-17)

By Jon Quinn

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Are you being led by the Spirit? Are you “in the Spirit” and does the Spirit “dwell in you”? It is absolutely important for you to be able to answer “yes” to these questions, but just saying so doesn't make it so. There is, quite simply, many grossly unscriptural ideas about what these phrases mean. Many wrongly believe that the Holy Spirit's influence on a person is a mystical phenomena which overpowers and overrides human intentions and that we discern right decisions from wrong ones based on feelings which the Holy Spirit puts directly into our heads apart from Biblical revelation. Many will go on record stating that these feelings carry more weight than the written word (but see I Corinthians 4:6). I get so tired of hearing T.V. evangelists urging people to plead to God for something God has never promised. If one can truly answer “yes” to the three questions above, it is only because he, himself, has chosen to yield to the teachings and urgings of the Spirit that have been provided us by God's providence in His Holy Scriptures. To deny that the Scriptures are adequate for this is to deny something the Bible plainly says (Ephesians 3:4; II Timothy 3:16,17; II Peter 1:3; 20,21). You are not truly being led by the Spirit if you are not living according to His teachings in the gospel. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, says much to us about this matter in Romans 8:1-17.

## Two Kinds of Walk: Flesh and Spirit

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3,4). The Law of Moses could not save sinners. It was not designed to forgive, but to demonstrate how far everyone fell short of righteousness. “Weak as it was through flesh” refers to our flesh, or carnality. It could not take away our sins. Jesus came and died the death that the Law required of us; taking our sins with Him to the cross, so we who walk “according to the Spirit” and are “in Christ Jesus” will not suffer condemnation (vs. 1). There are two words which Paul contrasts with one another throughout Romans 8:1-17. They are “flesh” (sarx) and “Spirit” (pneuma). The Greek word “sarx” (flesh) is used several different ways. Sometimes, it literally means our skin and muscle (Luke 24:39). Sometimes, it simply means “from a human point of view”; for example, Jesus is the “son of David” on His human, or “fleshly” side (Romans 1:3). Neither of these uses are negative at all. But Paul also uses the word in a very negative way, as he does in Romans 8. He talks of “sinful flesh” and “sin in the flesh” (vs. 3); that the mind “set on the flesh is death” (vs. 6) and is “hostile toward God” (vs. 7); that those “in the flesh

cannot please God” (vs. 8). Living “by the flesh” means that we allow our desires and whims to override righteousness and moral good in our conduct. Allowing ourselves to be controlled by lusts makes us slaves and ultimately leads to the practice of “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”(Galatians 5:19-21).

The other word is “pneuma” (Spirit). We read of “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ” (vs. 2) and that the “mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (vs. 6). We are told that those “in the Spirit” have the “Spirit of God” dwelling in them and if one does not “have the Spirit of Christ then he does not belong to Him” (vs. 9). Finally, we are told that those who “are being led by the Spirit” are “sons of God” (vs. 14). The “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..” (Galatians 5:22,23)

### Walking According to the Flesh

“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die...” (Romans 8:12, 13a). Tragically, we see many extreme examples of utmost depravity in our society today. Extremes would include the abduction, exploitation and even murder of young children; the countless choices being made by mothers to have their yet unborn children slain; uncontrolled greed which results in the highly profitable drug trade and the subsequent human misery; cruelty to the extreme; murder for the thrill of it; bombings and other outrages.

But those are the extremes. Walking “according to the flesh” also includes things many would consider petty. To be hateful of others; to allow one's pride to cause such ungodliness as racial prejudice or other forms of injustice. To cheat or lie for any reason, perhaps to advance some worldly ambition. To gossip, dress immodestly, divorce for unscriptural reasons or to delve into entertainment which is impure. In fact, to simply get so busy with the things of this world that one has little time for God is “walking according to the flesh”. In short, the vast majority of our neighbors are doing just that. It is the modern American way. Carnality of every sort is increasingly more accepted, it is glorified by the media, and I fear our nation is only beginning to pay the consequences of our pursuit of the flesh.

### Walking According to the Spirit

“...but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14). “Walking according to the Spirit” means to be led by Him. It means to live by the moral, doctrinal and ethical standards of His written revelation, the Bible. It is to love others and to deeply enjoy the blessings of life, both spiritual and physical. Please understand that there is nothing wrong with having and enjoying material things, as long as we are thankful for them and that they do not become our gods (I Timothy 4:4,5). There is

peace and contentment in such a life, a life filled with kindness and goodness. If the Bible is not our standard for the way we live, worship and serve God, then we are not being led by the Spirit. The apostles' doctrine taught in the first century and made available to us today in the Scripture is the product of the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 42; I Corinthians 2:11-13).

Whose Responsibility is it to Choose the Spirit?

“For those who are of the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.... you are putting to death the deeds of the body...” (Romans 8:5; 13b). It is up to you to “set” your mind on the things of the Spirit. Do not pray that God do that for you. It is up to you to “put to death the deeds of the body”. The Lord has died for your sins and has arose for your hope. He has revealed how we must live and has invited us to willingly come to Him. He has given us magnificent promises to motivate us, shields us from impossible temptations, and makes His gospel easy to understand and obey. It is up to you to “crucify the old” and “put on the new” and not to let sin reign in your body, but rather righteousness (Romans 6:12-18). “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:24,25). You see? It is up to you, and it is an eternal life or death decision.

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