



HOW TO GAIN **VICTORY** **OVER SIN**

Knowing the Sanctification
of the Holy Spirit

Andrew Bernhardt

**HOW TO GAIN
VICTORY
OVER SIN**

Also by the author:

Seeing Jesus - A Disciple's Perspective

How To Gain Victory Over Sin

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*“Not by might,
nor by power,
but by my Spirit...”*

Zechariah 4:6

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Introduction

The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...¹

Dear Reader,

I wrote this book to help a specific group of people, so I am going to assume two things are true of you:

First, you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. You have put your trust in Him and His finished work on the cross to save you from your sins. God has taken away the burden of guilt, and has given you new life in His Son.

Second, you still struggle with sin and temptation. You know your sins are forgiven, and you want to live in a way that pleases God, but it really bothers you that you can't stop sinning. Sometimes you manage to resist temptation for a while, but eventually it seems you always fail. As a result, you find yourself burdened with guilt and shame over your actions on a regular basis.

If you find this describes you, welcome to the club—I'm a fellow-struggler myself! But I have found some things of great value in the scriptures that give me hope. I want to share what I've learned and show you the God-given way to overcome practical sin in your life. I don't mean to say that sin is now a thing of the past for me, because it isn't. While success in the spiritual battlefield comes through specific, God-given means, I still have habits of doing things my way. However, I have found the road to

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victory, and I'm learning how to walk it. You, too, can know the truth of 1 Timothy 1:15 in a *practical* way: Christ Jesus came into the world, not just to save lost sinners, but to save born-again 'sinners'!

"But wait!," you object. "I'm a saint, not a sinner!" True. But practically speaking, you still sin. Jesus Christ came to save us from all aspects of sin, not just its consequences. Two verses earlier Paul said, "I was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent." He no longer lived that way because God was working in him to change him. The same power to change the worst of sinners is available to change you.

What follows is a practical introduction to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. In the main part of this book, we'll discover what makes resisting temptation so difficult, and we'll see what God does to make victory over sin possible. Following this are additional articles about the Holy Spirit and sanctification that I hope will help you in your walk with Him. But however helpful you may find this book, it is only an introduction to this important subject. I strongly encourage you to take time to study the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification. At a minimum, you should look up the scripture references in the endnotes and read them in context. Then put what you learn into practice, trusting God to do His good work in you to make you like Christ.

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Our Common Experience

I grew up in a Christian home with believing parents, and came to salvation at an early age. That, in itself, did not guarantee I would never live on the ‘other side of the tracks’. There are many who grew up in Christian homes, but you wouldn’t know it from how they live today. I could have been like them, but God has been gracious to me in this respect.

In spite of my lack of ‘history’, I am like any other born-again believer: I find it difficult to live the Christian life. I don’t mean coming to church on Sundays, reading my Bible, or praying. I don’t find those things difficult at all. But I do struggle with sin and temptation on a daily basis. I struggle with lust. I struggle with self-control. I struggle with loving others from the heart. The reason I struggle is not because I am unusually weak, but because I have the same fallen human nature we all share in this world. I know it’s not God’s will for me to give in to temptation, and it seems the only alternative to giving in is to struggle.

Sometimes losing the battle with sin appears to be inevitable. It’s not just outright temptation I have to deal with, but the constant thoughts of my mind and the wayward desires of my heart. I want to be more like Jesus—to love like Him, to be patient like Him, to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Him. But Satan regularly attacks my faith, and the world constantly tries to lure me away from my Lord. To make matters worse, my flesh

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naturally wants to side with Satan and the world. The fight is very tiring. Sometimes the odds for winning the battle against sin appear hopelessly stacked against me.

And yet Jesus said, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”²

There have been times when I felt I could never know the reality of this. The struggle was just too difficult. When I’d fail, I’d beat myself up, and feel like I hadn’t the energy to resume the fight.

Perhaps you find what Jesus said difficult to believe. Maybe you’ve dismissed the easy yoke and light burden as an impossible ideal. You may even doubt your salvation because you haven’t been able to “overcome the world.”³ If so, I want to share the hope I’ve found.

Know this: Jesus did not do away with one impossible standard (the Law⁴), to replace it with another impossible standard. He knows our struggles, and He has a solution for them. But to grasp this solution, we first need to be confronted with our need for the solution.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul presents to us the doctrine of salvation in a very systematic manner. In the first five chapters, he writes about justification, that is getting into a right relationship with God. He begins with our need for salvation, continues with our inability to save ourselves, and ends with God’s solution to our problem.

After concluding the topic of justification, Paul covers sanctification (how we are to live) in the same orderly way. In the next three chapters he describes the need to live right, our inability to do so, and God’s solution to our problem. We’re going to focus on this second section of Romans, especially the 8th chapter, because

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it contains the solution we're looking for. But before we move on, it is essential to have a firm handle on the fact that these three chapters are about sanctification, not justification. By this point, Paul has completed his argument that justification is entirely through faith in the finished work of Jesus.⁵ If you assume parts of chapter 8 are also about justification, it will appear Paul contradicts himself, especially in verses 4, 8, and 13. But there really is no contradiction. Justification provides freedom from condemnation, the eternal consequences of sin. Sanctification provides freedom from the power of sin in this life. It is the latter that Paul is concerned with here, and I shall remind you of this at times.⁶

An Elusive Reality

Paul begins his talk on sanctification by telling us how we are to live once we've been saved. Since we have been freed from sin, we are no longer to walk in it:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? ... Therefore don't let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.⁷

This whole chapter of Romans deals with God's intent on how we are to live as born-again believers. Victory over sin is not just an ideal. It is supposed to be a reality. We are not to treat grace as a license to sin. Grace is really a call to live righteously.

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However, there's a problem here, and Paul was aware of it, even as he was writing. The problem is that this chapter, taken by itself, presents a standard that is *impossible* in practice to live by. Paul knew this, and in the next chapter he goes on to describe his own experience in trying to live up to the standard:

...For I don't know what I am doing. For I don't practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. ... For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. ... For I delight in God's law after the inward man, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.⁸

It's tempting to think Paul is speaking here of his life before Christ, but that is not the case. He has not interrupted his current topic to go back to an issue he has already fully addressed. Paul has a new heart that delights in the law of God, not just in Jewish traditions. He wants to do good. Besides, before he was saved, Paul was not aware of any inner conflict. He thought he was able to live up to the Law blamelessly.⁹ Only after salvation did he find he couldn't stop sinning.

So, even as a saved believer in Jesus, Paul found himself doing the things he did not want to do. While delighting in God's Law, he found himself to be a practical slave to sin.¹⁰ He wanted to do good, but he kept doing evil. His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak. I identify with this, and I expect you do, too.

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Most of us feel the need to struggle to live up to the Romans 6 dead-to-sin-and-alive-to-God standard. But hopefully, through honest self-examination, we realize the struggle is futile, and we get to the point where we despair of ever being able to overcome sin through sheer will power. We echo Paul's frustration when he said:

*What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?*¹¹

We all need to come to this point in our Christian experience. It might not seem like it, but it really is a good thing when we hit our bottom. It is only when we come to realize our utter hopelessness to overcome sin in our lives that we can become receptive to God's solution.

A Confusing Victory

Paul describes this solution in the next chapter, but before he gets there, he writes something that is, at the same time, both encouraging and depressing:

*...I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! So then with the mind, I myself serve God's law, but with the flesh, the sin's law.*¹²

Paul points to where our victory over sin lies, and it certainly does not lie in our own personal efforts. My deliverer from the 'body of this death' is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His sovereign power that gives me victory.

However, it used to be when I read this chapter and came to this verse, something didn't sit right. Why would Paul give thanks to God while admitting he still served sin with his flesh? I used to

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reconcile this by thinking Paul was thanking God for the forgiveness of his sins that was made possible by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

But after reading and re-reading this section of Romans, the context forced me to conclude Paul was thanking God for *practical* victory in his struggle with sin. He was thanking God for sanctification, not salvation.¹³

But it still didn't make sense to me. I identified with Paul's struggle. So how can it be a good thing that, while I serve God with my mind, I still serve sin with my flesh? *I don't want to serve sin with my flesh! I want to serve righteousness with my flesh!* What am I thanking God for here?

Then I saw it. Paul had already given us a little taste of the answer earlier in chapter 7:

*But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve **in newness of the Spirit**, and not in oldness of the letter.*¹⁴

You see, Paul was losing the sin battle because he was trying to fight sin the old way: by keeping the law. Law-keeping attempts to correct the outward actions, but it is powerless to correct the inner cause of sin. Therefore, God has provided a new way to live: through the promised Holy Spirit that Jesus sent down for us. As we move into the next chapter, Paul explains why this is such a good thing.

God's Solution

First, to those who keep losing the sin battle, Paul addresses the self-condemnation issue. Immediately (!) after admitting he himself served sin in his flesh, he says:

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...*¹⁵

Even though Paul could not stop sinning, God did not condemn him, because he was *in Christ*.

You may condemn yourself over your constant failures to live up to God's standards, but if you are *in Christ* (...and only God can put you in Christ), Paul assures you that God does not condemn you for the evil you can't stop doing (Romans 7:19, 23). Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for your sin on the cross. It is because of the righteous blood He shed that God does the unthinkable: He *justifies the ungodly!*¹⁶ So, if God doesn't condemn you for your sins, you shouldn't either.

We should always be thankful for being delivered from the condemnation of the law. But, as Paul said earlier, we are not to use our freedom from condemnation as a license to sin. Romans 6 is still God's intent for you and me.¹⁷ (By the way, if living in sin doesn't bother you, you should seriously question your salvation!¹⁸)

So, if God wants us to live righteously, but we can't stop sinning, how do we resolve our dilemma? Here's how:

True practical freedom from sin is not obtained by personal effort, but by walking in the Holy Spirit. Instead of focusing on your sin or on trying to keep the Law, you need to focus on Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit He has freely given you.

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Continuing on in Romans chapter 8, Paul tells us how he personally found freedom from sin:

*For the **law** of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the **law** of sin and of death. For what the **law** couldn't do, in that it was weak through the flesh, **God did**, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh; that **the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**¹⁹*

There are three kinds of laws mentioned in this passage. In reverse order, they are:

- The **Law of Moses**, in verses 3 and 4. This is the law that reveals God's standard of righteousness. The Law is righteous and good. It says you must not do this and you must not do that, but it doesn't give you any power to fulfill its demands. Our flesh is too weak, handicapped by our sinful nature, to keep all of its requirements. The Mosaic Law doesn't help us. All it does is condemn us:

Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God.²⁰

- Next, there is the **law of sin and death** in verse 2. This law is the operating principle we find within ourselves when we try to keep the Mosaic Law. It is the 'other law' mentioned in Romans 7:23, the one that won't let us keep God's law, even though we want to. The Mosaic Law, while good in itself, empowers sin in our fallen nature, which results in death.²¹ The Mosaic Law reveals this law of sin and death *that is already in us*, and therefore it condemns us.

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- Finally, in verse 2 there is the **law of the Spirit of life**. Unlike the Mosaic Law, this law is the power of God actively working in those of us who are in Christ through His Holy Spirit. It *completely* overcomes the law of sin and death, and brings us into right *practical* relationship with God, fulfilling the requirements of the Law of Moses.²² The important thing to note here is that the power of this law is experienced, not by those who try to keep the Mosaic Law, but by those who walk in the Spirit. As Paul says elsewhere:

*Walk in the Spirit, and you will **not** fulfill the lusts of the flesh.*²³

A Different Hope

Walking in the Spirit is the key to gaining victory over sin. But you may say, “I already know that, and yet I still struggle with temptation! I still sin!”

Yes, you do! And so do I! But we’ve only looked at part of God’s solution to our problem. Let’s continue on.

If you’re like many believers today, you probably think of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work in you as somehow transforming your fleshly nature to make it more like Christ. The Holy Spirit is helping you to lie less, to overcome an addiction, to be less of a hypocrite, to be more loving, and so on. He pushes you to somehow do better. If you have been thinking this way, stop!

Listen: The Holy Spirit was not given to improve or correct the flesh. The fleshly nature will always be sinful because the mind of your natural self is an incorrigible rebel against God, and it will always be your worst enemy as well.

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*...because the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; for it is not subject to God's law, **neither indeed can it be**. Those who are in the flesh **can't** please God.²⁴*

The fleshly nature never improves. We have this idea that as Christians our flesh gradually becomes better, but it doesn't. It actually gets worse. The recovering alcoholic can identify with this. An alcoholic can have sobriety for 40 years, but all it takes is one drink to find himself exactly where he left off, showing there never was any real improvement to the addiction.

Before you can gain victory over sin, you must first accept the fact that your natural mind will always be in rebellion against God. Your flesh will never willingly submit to God's rule, and if you insist on forcing it to do so, you might as well get used to disappointment!²⁵

*This is why Paul admitted he served sin in his flesh at the end of chapter 7, and it's the reason why we also cannot conquer sin through any amount of self-effort. Trying to reform our minds and actions is just a waste of time. It's hopeless. The only appropriate action to take for the fleshly nature is to *put it completely to death by the power of the Holy Spirit*.*

*So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body**, you will live.²⁶*

Imagine you see a dandelion on your lawn. You pull the weed up, but a week later it's back. You pull it up again, but it still comes back. No matter how many times you pull it, that stubborn weed keeps coming back. The problem is you're only removing the top part of the plant. You're not getting at the root.

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Sin is like the top part of that weed, and the fleshly nature is its root. While it's certainly better to pull the weed of sin up than to let it grow, unless the root is dealt with, sin will keep coming back. Sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit gradually kills the root of the fleshly nature. It is only as He does His work in us that our efforts in resisting temptation will meet with success.

We'll look at this in more detail later, but for now understand God does not expect you to live a righteous life through *self*-effort. He knows it is impossible for you, and therefore He is not going to condemn you for your failures (Romans 7:25–8:1). Just as your salvation has been accomplished by the work of Jesus Christ, so your sanctification is being accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. Your sanctification is God's on-going work, and therefore the results are His responsibility. *Don't beat yourself up over something that is not your responsibility!* Your part is to simply walk by faith in submission to His Spirit. Cease from your own work and yield to His power and direction. Let Him do His work in you and leave the results with Him, ...so *He* gets the glory. Yes, it takes time to learn this, but trust Him!

Now don't misunderstand me. Sanctification is not a passive "Let go, and let God" process on our part. I'm not against works—I'm just against those works of the flesh. We will look at what we are to do, but first we need to understand our absolute reliance on God's power in us to overcome the root cause of our sin.

But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.²⁷

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Once you grasp the concept that your sanctification is just as much God's responsibility as your salvation, you will find release from self-condemnation. And this will enable you to look to Him to do His work in your life.

If you still struggle with a particular sin, don't worry about failure. Get your eyes off your sin and on to Jesus. Trust His Holy Spirit to work in you to change your heart and mind. When you sin, confess it to Jesus, thank Him for His blood which covers it, and *immediately get back in step with the Spirit*, submitting yourself to Him and depending on His power to overcome the flesh. Your focus should not be on sinning less but on walking in the Spirit more—even continually. As the latter happens, the former *will* happen as a result.²⁸

For most of us the first eight chapters of Romans picture the path of progress in our Christian walk. Chapters 6 through 8 can be summarized this way:

- A chapter 6 believer is someone who acknowledges we are not to sin, but hasn't been serious about putting it into practice, or honest with himself about his inability to do so.
- A chapter 7 believer is someone who has attempted to put chapter 6 into practice, and has come face to face with failure. He realizes his need for supernatural intervention.
- A chapter 8 believer is someone who relies on God's solution to the problem exposed in chapter 7. He seeks to walk in submission to the Holy Spirit—and *experiences victory over sin when he does so!* He realizes his sanctification is not just his goal, it is God's goal.

Which chapter are you?

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*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
these are children of God.”²⁹*

*“Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh
with its passions and lusts.*

If we live by the Spirit, let’s also walk by the Spirit.”³⁰

“It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing.

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life.”³¹

*“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror
the glory of the Lord, **are transformed into the same image**
from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit.”³²*

*“... ‘Not by might, nor by power, but **by my Spirit,**’
says Yahweh of Armies”³³*

Two Warnings

I hope what we’ve seen so far opens your eyes to the possibility of overcoming sin in your life. It has certainly done so for me. Before we move from doctrine to how it works out in real life, I need to warn you of two wrong turns that can sidetrack us right from the start.

First, if I present a laundry list of things to do, it would be easy and natural for you to try to do those things in your own strength. But that would be missing the whole point.

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh?³⁴

Simply put, walking in the flesh is doing anything apart from walking *in submission* to the Spirit.³⁵ There are all kinds of good things you can do, but unless you do them under the leading and

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power of the Holy Spirit, they will eventually result in sin, and we don't want to go there.

This leads to the question: How can you know if you're walking in the flesh? I've sometimes heard it described by the word *trying*:

"I'm trying to control my temper."

"I'm trying not to think lustful thoughts."

"I'm trying to love my neighbor."

If your focus is on trying to obey, it's a good sign you're relying on your own strength rather than God's strength. The Spirit does not work through your trying to keep the law.³⁶ You cannot work the change from the outside in—you might as well try filling the outside of a bottle. God must work the change from the inside out.

Elsewhere, Paul warned the Philippian believers about the Judaizers who wanted to bring elements of lawkeeping into the church. He said that is not the way we are to live:

*For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and **have no confidence in the flesh.***³⁷

In the original language, the word 'worship' here refers not to the worship of praise, but to how we live for God in our day-to-day lives. In my natural strength, doing the right thing is a chore. It's a battle I know I *will* lose. Galatians 5:17 says there's a war going on in me between my natural self and the Spirit. There's enmity between them, a battle for mastery. If I try to please God in my own strength, I'm taking the wrong side as much as if I seek to satisfy my fleshly desires. I'm grieving the Spirit and feeding the flesh. I *will* experience defeat as a result.

Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh

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*reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*³⁸

We usually understand these verses as a warning against carnality, but keep in mind Paul was speaking to outwardly moral believers who were trying to keep the law. It may come as a surprise to you, but just by trying to live a morally upright life, you could be living in the flesh! This is because legalism and the flesh are closely tied together.³⁹

My earnest desire is that you abandon all hope in your own ability to live righteously, so that you put all your hope in God's power in you to live righteously. Otherwise, you will get sidetracked into fleshly "trying."

If you think you have a sin or weakness under control, or a particular temptation is behind you, humble yourself quickly before you fall! You will never have your weaknesses under control except through continual submission to the Holy Spirit. Don't hope to become stronger to withstand temptation. Instead, put all your hope in Christ and His Spirit to give you grace to stand day by day.

The other way you could get off track is by being spiritually lazy. I've emphasized the necessity of relying on the Holy Spirit to do His work in your life. That doesn't mean sitting back and doing your own thing while waiting for sanctification to miraculously happen. To gain victory over sin, you must replace walking in the flesh with *walking*, not merely resting, in the Spirit. It's impossible to replace walking in the flesh with nothing at all.⁴⁰

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? To answer that question, all we have to do is look at the life of Jesus in the gospels.

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When Jesus came to earth, He “emptied” Himself⁴¹, laying aside His own power and will. As God in human flesh, Jesus was fully able to minister in His own strength. He could have done what He wanted without sinning. However, He denied Himself and submitted to the Holy Spirit’s leading anyway. After His baptism, the Spirit came upon Him and led Him into the wilderness to be tempted. When Jesus returned to Galilee, He did so in the power of the Spirit. He then preached and performed miracles by the same Spirit.⁴² His life was a channel for the Spirit of God to work through.

We also need to walk the same way: to empty ourselves, pray in the Spirit, love in the Spirit, serve God and live to Him in the Spirit.⁴³ This is not merely trying to imitate the life of Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ⁴⁴ actually living through us as we rely on Him to direct, guide, and empower us. It is the “Not I, but Christ” life of Galatians 2:20–21.⁴⁵

An integral part of walking in the Spirit is abiding in Christ. Jesus said we can do nothing unless we abide in Him. But when we abide in Him, the result is fruit for God.⁴⁶

When I think about fruit, I picture an apple tree. An apple tree does not work or struggle to produce apples. As long as it remains connected to the root, the life-giving sap flows through it, and fruit develops naturally. When we remain connected to Christ, the ‘sap’ of the Holy Spirit flows through us, and over time we produce *much* fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. ...⁴⁷

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Not surprisingly, this is what characterized the life of Jesus on earth. Fruit is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work. You could see it in the church at Pentecost, and in the Philippian and Thessalonian churches.⁴⁸ The Corinthian believers, however, while having a reputation for being Spirit-filled, were carnal. They lacked love for one another, and their church was cliquish and plagued with immorality.⁴⁹ Clearly they were walking in the flesh, not in the Spirit.

First Steps

If you're like me, you probably find the biggest obstacle to walking in the Spirit is simply remembering to do so. With the world and life in general offering plenty of attention-grabbing distractions, how do we keep God at the forefront of our thoughts? I believe it begins with an urgent sense of need for Him.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*⁵⁰

When Jesus talked with the woman at the well, He spoke of a thirst only He could satisfy. The apostle John tells us that thirst was for the Holy Spirit. Just as water consumes our thoughts when we're in great thirst, the path to continually walking in the Spirit begins with a consuming sense of thirst for the Holy Spirit.

Most Christians would agree Jesus sent His Spirit because He knew we needed power to be witnesses for Him and to serve Him. But few recognize their absolute dependence upon the Spirit to overcome sin and become like Christ. Yet this is why Jesus gave us His Spirit: because He knows we can't do it on our own. To sense our spiritual thirst we must recognize our need as well. A big part

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of this is becoming aware of the specific ways we are enslaved to our own way of thinking.

While the fleshly nature usually expresses itself in the words you say or the things you do, it's really about what's going on inside you. The flesh operates through attitudes such as pride, self-righteousness, lack of godly love, and the unwillingness to forgive others. It is motivated by things like money, pleasure, happiness, comfort, security, and even blessings—things that may be good in themselves, but are evil when they become our goals, and God merely a means to attain those goals.

Learning to recognize the flesh-walk is difficult because we've been immersed in it all our lives. It seems so natural that we're not even aware of it. You may think you're doing okay. You may even believe you are walking in the Spirit. But if the fruit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 isn't increasing in your life over time, you're not doing as well as you think. You probably have a hidden, fleshly stronghold somewhere.⁵¹ Those strongholds in your life don't have to remain hidden, however. You can discover them by taking time to read *and meditate* on the living word of God.

*For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*⁵²

When you read your Bible, make it a habit to first ask God to point out areas in your life where your flesh is still in control. Take a cue from King David when he prayed:

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*Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*⁵³

...and then listen to what the Spirit has to say.

As you spend time in God's word, you'll read about various people who did right or wrong. You'll come across commands and instructions on how you are to live. Examine yourself in light of what you read. Be honest. Maybe you have a pride, anger, lust or other problem that you're unaware of. Keep asking God to reveal those areas to you. Then, don't be surprised when the Holy Spirit starts convicting you of things in your life you've never had a problem with before. He will probably make you very uncomfortable at times. That's okay. Let Him bring those areas to light anyway so He can deal with them. You will only have victory when you stop holding on to what grieves the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

As the Spirit brings each of these flesh areas to light, confess them to Jesus right away and they will be forgiven. Confess not only sinful actions, but also the fleshly attitude, the root cause, that led to them. For example, confess the lack of love that led to your outburst of anger, or the selfishness that caused you to walk away from someone in need. Even if a fleshly attitude does not result in a sinful action, confess it anyway. As you keep confessing the works and attitudes of your flesh, not only will they be forgiven, God promises to cleanse you practically from *all* unrighteousness: He promises to sanctify you.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness.*⁵⁵

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And when you confess these things to God, don't forget to ask His Holy Spirit for the boldness and power to put the works of your flesh completely to death (Romans 8:13). Confess not only your weakness but also His strength, and by faith expect Him to answer your prayer.

As you learn to walk more in the Spirit, and by His power put the works of your flesh to death, you will find sin losing its grip on your life. Romans 6 will no longer appear to be full of impossibilities. You will find yourself able to 'reckon' yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.⁵⁶ You will also be able to boldly 'present' yourself by faith to God each day for Him to work through you.

*Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God**, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ... I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh, for as you presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to wickedness upon wickedness, even so now **present your members as servants to righteousness for sanctification.**⁵⁷*

This 'presenting' of yourself is not about your ability to live in a righteous manner, but about your *availability* to God for Him to do His good work in and through you. It is saying, "God, I come before you as an empty vessel. Fill me with your righteousness for Your glory. Work through me today as You see fit." I recently began a habit of starting my day by presenting myself to God in this way. As a result, I've noticed God working in and through me during the day. I think you'll discover the same when you present yourself to Him each morning.

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In case we didn't get it the first time, Paul repeats his instruction in Romans chapter 12:

*Therefore I urge you, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.⁵⁸*

The word 'transformed' refers to God's work in making us like Christ, not our work in reforming ourselves.⁵⁹ All we have to do is offer ourselves to Him daily, and He in His mercy will do His sanctifying work in us. You don't have to understand how He works. All you need to do is trust Him to do His work.

The normal Christian life is one that relies on the grace of God in all areas, and I believe the chief manifestation of that grace for day-to-day living is the Holy Spirit. It matters not how weak you are—His grace is always sufficient for you. So strive to walk in the Spirit. Cling to Him as if your life depends on it, because, as far as your sanctification is concerned, it does.⁶⁰ While your salvation is assured in Christ, your life here on earth will only be fruitful as you walk in the Spirit.

First Steps Summary

1. Build your thirst for the Holy Spirit by...
 - a. examining yourself in the light of scripture,
 - b. asking God to reveal your fleshly nature to you,
 - c. realizing your powerlessness to overcome the flesh, and
 - d. realizing the sufficiency of His Spirit to overcome the flesh.
2. Confess to God your fleshly nature and its works (i.e. sins)...
 - a. immediately,
 - b. specifically, and
 - c. completely.
3. Confess God's power and ask Him...
 - a. for power to put the fleshly nature to death, and
 - b. to make you like Christ.
4. Trust God to answer this prayer by...
 - a. reckoning yourself dead to sin and alive to righteousness, and
 - b. presenting yourself to God daily.

Continuing On

We've seen what the Bible says about our fleshly nature, and about our need for the Holy Spirit to transform us on the inside so we can resist temptation. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God always provides a way of escape from temptation. I firmly believe that way of escape comes through the power of the Holy Spirit, whether the temptation appears easy or difficult to resist.

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Satan's goal in tempting you is to separate you from the life of the Holy Spirit. (Thank God, he can do nothing about separating you from Christ!) He does so by trying to get you to rely on your own strength and willpower. He will tell you, "You can handle this temptation on your own." Don't listen to him! Keep relying 100 percent on the Holy Spirit!

If you do fall and sin, Satan will tell you, "Now you did it! God won't have anything to do with you." Again, don't listen to him. Immediately confess your sin to God, thank Him for the blood of Jesus that covers it, and get back into step with the Holy Spirit. It's a lie of Satan that you have to wait awhile for God's anger to cool down before He'll accept you again. Your standing before God is entirely on the merits of the righteous blood of Jesus Christ. Period.

Of course, the Holy Spirit is more than just a means to help you live right. The indwelling of the third Person of the Trinity means real fellowship with God is always available.⁶¹ The Christian life is a walk with God through easy times and difficult times.

If you are in Christ, you already have the Holy Spirit, but don't be satisfied with just *having* the Spirit. The benefits of such a relationship are known through *walking* in Him.⁶² Yes, it takes time to learn how to walk, but stick with it. Spend time in your Bible getting familiar with His voice. The more you rely on the Holy Spirit to make you like Christ, the more precious your walk with Him will be.

One more thing: If you have not been born again, then none of this information will do you any good because you don't have the Holy Spirit. (The converse is also true: if you don't have the Holy

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Spirit, then you have not been born again.) When God saves someone, He gives him His Holy Spirit as an assured promise of salvation.⁶³ If you don't have the promise (the guarantee), then you aren't saved:

*...But if any man doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.*⁶⁴

So your first priority is getting right with God so that He can send you His Holy Spirit. Humbly surrender yourself before God, confessing your sin against Him, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died to pay the penalty for your sins, and you will be saved. And you will receive the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵

*May the God of peace **himself sanctify you completely**. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, **who will also do it.***⁶⁶

*Now to him who is **able to keep you from stumbling**, and to **present you faultless** before the presence of his glory in great joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.*⁶⁷

Fitted to Christ—A Parable

I walk with a limp.

No, I wasn't injured. And I don't have a birth defect. But to explain, I need to repeat a story I found floating around on the internet.⁶⁸

It seems that a man had gone to the tailor to have a suit made cheaply, but when the suit was finished and he went to try it on, it didn't fit him at all. Complaining that the jacket was too big in back, the right arm was too long, one pant leg was too short and three buttons were missing, the man was justifiably upset.

"No problem," said the tailor. "Just hunch your back, bend your arm, walk with a limp, and stick your fingers through the button holes and you'll look just fine!" The man contorted his body to fit the suit, and feeling duped by the tailor he left. He had not walked one block when he was approached by a stranger.

"Who made that suit for you?" asked the stranger. "I'm in the market for a new suit myself."

Surprised, but pleased at the compliment, the man pointed out the tailor's shop.

"Well, thanks very much," said the stranger, hurrying off. "I do believe I'll go to that tailor for my suit. Why, he must be a genius to fit a cripple like you!"

While the story is funny, I see a parable we can learn something from.

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For much of our lives we were living in the poorly-made clothes of sin. They didn't cover us very well, but they fit us perfectly as far as we were concerned, with our hunched backs, bent arms, fingers through button holes and limping walk. They were comfortable, and we told ourselves we looked just fine. We didn't know any better, and we couldn't or wouldn't have done anything about it if we did.

Then God saved us. He opened our eyes to see our true spiritual condition, and gave us new, perfectly healthy bodies with which to serve Him. Those old sinful rags were useless, so God gave us garments of righteousness to go with our new bodies and told us to put them on:

...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, for its lusts.⁶⁹

We looked at our new clothes with amazement: the backs didn't have a bulge, both arms and legs were the right size, none of the buttons were missing, and they covered us perfectly. We didn't deserve this, but we were most thankful to the Tailor for providing us with such wonderful and righteous attire.

However, many of us discovered problems the moment we first put on our new garment. We found for some reason the back is too tight, the arms and legs don't feel the right length, the suit chafes in some areas and limits movement in others. Simply put, it's very uncomfortable to wear. (To tell the truth, some of us have even toyed with the idea of going back to those old, comfortable rags.)

What gives?

The problem is not with the suit. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only perfect garment for us, and wear Him we must if we want to

appear presentable before God. The problem is how we fit into Christ.

We still have habits of spiritually bad posture. Our new clothes were not made to walk hunchback or with fingers through holes... in other words, to live in the sinful ways of our old life. So when we thoughtlessly or stubbornly walk like we've walked in the past, the suit chafes and binds, and seems like a very poor fit.

God won't tailor the suit to fit us. Instead, He uses His Holy Spirit to fit us to the suit—to conform us to Christ. He teaches us and enables us to stand up straight, and to walk the way we were intended to walk: righteously.

But, just as in the earlier story where the man had to 'submit' himself to fit into his suit, we have to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit who is tailoring us—transforming us—to fit into Christ.

The more we submit to the Holy Spirit's tailoring, the better we'll find the new suit to be... much better than our old rags. As we walk upright in humility and love, the garment of Christ will become the easiest and most comfortable clothes we'll ever wear.

And this is what I'm discovering. The garment of Christ gets more and more wearable and comfortable as the Holy Spirit works on my spiritual posture. Oh, it still binds and feels unpleasant at times, but that's because I still walk with a bit of a limp. Yes, old habits die hard.

Don't lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator, ...⁷⁰

For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...⁷¹

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But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit.⁷²

The Examination of the Scriptures

*Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting
way.*⁷³

It is good to take time to regularly examine the Bible, but it is far better to let the Bible take time to regularly examine us. The former gives us knowledge of the scriptures that can puff us up. The latter gives us knowledge of ourselves that humbles us, opening the door to repentance and the building-up that is of God. The former happens as we read and study the scriptures. The latter happens afterwards as we take time to meditate on what we have read and studied.

The Bible is not a religious textbook or doctrinal repository. It is the word of God: living, active, and powerful. It has the power to probe our minds, our hearts, our inmost being (Hebrews 4:12). But the benefit is only experienced by those who submit to its scrutiny.

The examination of the scriptures is usually painful. Knowing this, I don't let God's word examine me as often as I should. I expect this is due to fear of what will be revealed. A phrase from *The Neverending Story* comes to mind: "Confronted by their true selves, most men run away, screaming!"

I already know there's bad stuff deep inside me, but I'm comfortable keeping this knowledge as general or theoretical as can be. I don't want to be confronted with the specifics. However, avoiding the doctor for fear of his diagnosis of cancer will do

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serious harm if there really is cancer. There can be no cure without there first being a diagnosis.

Regardless of how God's word makes me feel, it is always a good thing to submit to His probing of the deeper recesses of my heart. How else can those fleshly strongholds I'm only vaguely aware of be fully revealed in all their ugliness and torn down? It is those very areas that have hindered my walk with the Lord since I've known Him. Why should I let them continue to obstruct God's will for me?

I'd like to share a few of these painful, probing scripture passages that have been on my mind lately. You will probably find them very familiar and not painful at all, especially if you just give them a quick read-through and forget about them. But the more I let them examine me, the clearer I see the true condition of my heart. I find myself becoming more desperate for the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to work in me God's cure.

Love of the World or Love of the Father?

Don't love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love isn't in him.⁷⁴

I like to think I don't love the world—at least not in the bad way. But when it comes down to specifics, there are some things in the world I do find attractive and pleasing: certain foods, books, songs, movies, TV shows, jokes, philosophies ... rollercoasters.

But Jesus presented an exclusive choice. I can either love the world, or I can love God. *I can't do both.* I don't even have the option of loving the world less than God. I am not to love the world *at all.* (I'm talking love here, not the mere use of the world's

things. We can't isolate ourselves from the world. We have to be in the world, but not of it ...just as Jesus was.)

Of course, it's easy to say, "I love God and not the world," but what do my actions show? What kinds of thoughts do I find pleasing? What motivates me? What would I rather spend my time doing? If I examine myself according to my thoughts and actions, will I find I love the Father or hate Him?

Thorns or Fruit?

*"Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them. ... this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."*⁷⁵

These words of Jesus are frequently on my mind. The "cares of the world" and the "deceitfulness of riches" are the things that the world is concerned about: food, clothing, family, employment, a good retirement, entertainment, comfort, pleasure, happiness. These are not evil in themselves, but they become evil when they form the basis of my goals, desires and motivations. This happens all too often, and when it does, Jesus ends up taking the backseat in my life. I then find it more difficult to hear Him speak to me. This hinders my growth in Christ to the point where it becomes impossible to bear fruit.

The fruit that love of the world prevents is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–24), which is headed up with love. So love of the world prevents the love of the Spirit. If I allow the world to attract me, I shouldn't wonder that I'm not making progress in loving my enemies, growing in patience toward those who irritate me, growing in my relationship with the Lord, and so on.

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What thorns have I allowed, and even now am allowing and nurturing, in my life? (It's time to do an inventory!) The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches are the number one cause for stunted spiritual growth. God only knows how much spiritual fruit I've already dropped prematurely due to the thorns in my life!

Sowing to My Flesh or Sowing to the Spirit?

Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.⁷⁶

As any farmer knows, if you want to harvest wheat, you must sow wheat. You can't sow one thing and expect something else to crop up. This God-given law has been in effect since the beginning of creation and it can't be circumvented.

For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.⁷⁷

Another sure God-given law is presented in this passage. I can sow to my flesh, or I can sow to the Holy Spirit. Which one I sow to determines what I reap. It matters not what I intend to reap, desire to reap, or think I will reap. If I sow to my fleshly desires, I will reap corruption. If I sow to the Spirit's desires, I will reap eternal life—which is the kind of life, not just its length. I believe there is no way around this; it is just as sure as the law the farmer relies on.

When it comes down to it, sowing to the flesh is no different than sowing thorns. So why do I still sow to my flesh at times? I don't know. I may do many good things for the right reasons, but

if I also cater to my fleshly desires, why should I expect a good harvest?

Thorns are whatever I do that hinders the life and work of the Holy Spirit in me, and they must be dealt with right away. Thorns start out seemingly innocent enough, but as time goes on, they grow harder and become more entrenched—more difficult and painful to pull up. I must pull them up anyway by denying myself in those areas that grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and I must sow to the Spirit instead.

Appearances or Fruit?

“Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can’t bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”⁷⁸

Jesus’ words search me in various ways here:

As one branch connected to the Vine, I desire to look good, with lots of healthy green leaves. But God is not concerned with looks. He did not plant the Vine for decoration but for fruit. Am I concerned with appearances, or the goal at hand?

Assuming I desire fruit, why do I desire it? The Father placed me in Christ so that I would bear much fruit *for Him*. Is my desire to satisfy myself or get the admiration of others, or is it simply to satisfy God?

Twice Jesus stated the absolute necessity of abiding in Him to produce fruit. I can do nothing without Him. But do I really

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believe this? How essential do I view my connection to Christ for hour-by-hour living?

Awareness of my need to abide in Christ is good, but am I really abiding in Him? It is very easy to fool myself here. Abiding in Christ is not just listening to Him or agreeing with Him, but doing what He says. Do I do what He says?

Post-Examination Action

But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ...⁷⁹

The word of God provides a thorough examination of the heart. If we were graded on the results of our examination, most of us (myself included) would not even receive a C-. And the few who have A's or B's probably wouldn't be aware of it anyway.

But even with a failing grade, this examination is a good thing if it leads us to call out to God for the grace of a lasting change of heart, mind, and actions.

Without this change, the examination is useless. It is like someone who looks in a mirror, and then leaves, forgetting what he looks like. This is a believer whose Christianity is relegated to a limited portion of his life: Sunday mornings, a devotional reading, or the occasional prayer. Jesus Christ is something added to life, rather than what life is all about. There is no continual meditation and communion with the Father and the Son. There is no fellowship of the Spirit. There is little difference between that person and the world.

The Examination of the Scriptures

This is a man who has fooled himself, and is probably plagued with doubts. I do not want to be this man.

“Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, ... Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn’t do them will be like a foolish man, ...”⁸⁰

The way out of self-deception and into real, tangible, spiritual union with Jesus is to act on what He says. I can be both a doctrinal genius and a fool at the same time if I don’t obey my Lord.

The examination continues, but the time for action is now. Let us examine ourselves closely, grit our teeth, and through the power of the Holy Spirit painfully pull out all the thorns in our lives, living only for the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.⁸¹

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.⁸²

Examine me, Yahweh, and prove me.

Try my heart and my mind.⁸³

The Catwalk

In the clothing industry, big name fashion designers show off their latest designs at fashion shows. Each model wears the designer's clothes and walks up and down a catwalk, surrounded by photographers and other onlookers. This is so they can see how the clothing looks and fits as the model moves and poses.

Not too long ago, I thought of a strange twist on this. I'm a down-to-earth guy who's not so much interested in form as function. I'd rather see how useful the clothing is than how it looks. (My wife would rather I be otherwise.) So I wondered how typical designer fashions would fare in real-world conditions. My idea is to have a fashion show with powerful fans blowing lots of cold air, rain, and snow on the models. I want to see how well the fashions perform in really bad weather. After all, I don't want to wear something that can't handle the real world!

Okay, it's a stupid idea ...even if it would make for a cool LL Bean outerwear commercial. But, I am going somewhere with this.

*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ ...*⁸⁴

When Paul told us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he used a picture of putting on clothing. I usually take this to mean I need to put on Christ for the personal benefit of my day-to-day living in the world. But recently it occurred to me that we Christians are also to be like fashion show models, walking up and down the catwalk for all the world to see. Like those models, our job is to

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draw attention to what we're wearing, and not to ourselves. We're displaying the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to do that, before we get into the spotlight, we have to take all our raggedy old clothes off, and then put on the Designer's clothes exclusively (Colossians 3:5–11). We're here to showcase Jesus, and Him only. Everything else is a distraction. We can't even pridefully strut about, because all the glory must go to the Designer, not the models.

This show we're in is not like any earthly fashion show or beauty pageant. It runs 24 hours a day for the rest of our lives. Instead of photographers and fans of the Designer, we're surrounded by His competitors—His enemies. They don't want Jesus to look good, so they throw mud and all kinds of nasty stuff at us. When we get hit, we mustn't take it personally. After all, it's not us they hate; it's our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the show goes on. But because we're wearing Christ, we don't respond in kind. When they curse, we bless (Luke 6:28). When they abuse us, we intercede for them. When they hate us, we show love to them. (The garment of Christ enables us to do this.) And after all is said and done, the clothing of Christ is no worse for wear. He wears well no matter what we've been through!

Why Perfection is Delayed

*Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*⁸⁵

You've been a Christian for a while now—years, maybe decades. At times you've found yourself longing for a perfect heart, one where you continually live in the Spirit, you're unfazed by temptation, you never have to struggle with the flesh, and where it's a joy to always obey God immediately because you love Him so much.

You know God wants you to be holy (1 Peter 1:15), but sometimes you wonder why He doesn't make you perfect right now. You know when you reach eternity God will have completely removed your sin nature, but why not now? What purpose does the never-ending struggle with the flesh serve?

The answer is that God wants to teach you something you can't learn apart from this struggle. He wants to teach you to submit to Him based on His authority alone.

Think about it. If you were perfect, if it were always a pleasure to obey God, then your obedience would be due to love (which is a good thing), but not necessarily due to His authority over you. If you do right because you always want to do right, you'll never learn to do right just because God says so.

Now I know for many of you this sounds contrary to what you've been striving for, but it's not. I truly want to obey God more and more because I want to—because I love Him. But there

Why Perfection Is Delayed

will still be times when God tells me to do something I don't want to do. I must also obey Him in those times. Even Jesus obeyed when faced with something that was a horror to Him.

*"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."*⁸⁶

God does not make us practically holy right away. Life is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit, and this internal conflict will continue to our last breath. It is necessary to teach us to humbly submit ourselves before our God.

The next time you struggle with temptation, take it as an opportunity to submit to God anyway, just because He wants you to—because He deserves it!

*...though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered...*⁸⁷

How Powerful is Your God?

All believers have a limited idea of what God is capable of doing. We may say He can do anything, but we still have unspoken reservations in some areas. Yes, God can heal the sick and raise the dead. He can part the seas and move mountains. He not only created the sun, which is incomparably more powerful than our biggest nuclear bomb, He filled the universe with hundreds of trillions of suns, all without breaking a sweat. His power is truly incomprehensible.

And yet, when it comes to His work in our lives, there are some things we think He must have a difficult time doing. His purpose is to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ⁸⁸, but why does it seem such a struggle, and with so many setbacks?

The truth is that many of us unconsciously think God's power is limited by our limitations. Sure, God has had some success with a few "super saints," but, for the majority of us, bringing us closer to Christ must really tax God's strength and patience. After all, many of us have been believers for a long time, and yet that old sin nature keeps raising its ugly head and making its presence known.

But God is still able to do what you and I think is impossible, even transforming our lives from the inside out. The well-known story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:21-39 illustrates this point very well.

After the false prophets called upon Baal to send down fire on their sacrificial offering (...with no results, by the way), Elijah rebuilt his altar, dug a trench around it, and laid on the wood and

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sacrifice. Then he poured twelve barrels of water over everything until the trench remained full. He then called on God to glorify Himself:

“Hear me, Yahweh, hear me, that this people may know that you, Yahweh, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of Yahweh fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.⁸⁹

God’s power was strong enough to do what most thought was impossible, easily overcoming Elijah’s apparent act of making it difficult for God to light the fire. This small but very impressive show of God’s power has practical significance for you.

Think of that sacrifice as your life, and all the water poured on it as those sins and weaknesses you think prevents God from doing a great work in your life. You certainly can’t light the fire... not at least until the wood dries out. And that’s your problem: you’ve tried and tried, but you can’t stop pouring water on the whole thing. Your sins and weaknesses are always manifesting themselves, constantly keeping the wood soaking wet. But what is a big problem in your eyes is nothing to God. You don’t have to light the fire. That is God’s job, and He can do it no matter how damp the wood.

If you’re asking yourself why He hasn’t done so, perhaps you need to examine your altar. What does God have to work with? What have you given Him? Is it only a portion of your life? Or perhaps there’s nothing there at all. God is not going to send fire down on an empty altar.

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For God to bless your whole life and to make your whole life a blessing to others, you need to offer your whole life to God. Biblical sacrifice is surrender. It is irrevocably giving your best over to God so you can no longer benefit by it, unless He gives it back. Whatever you hold back for yourself, whether it be material things, your finances, attitudes, relationships, desires, will, rights, time, or anything else, God is not going to bless, and this is going to end up holding you back spiritually. You need to give your all to God.

Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.⁹⁰

Thank God we're called to be *living* sacrifices, not crispy critters. But as Walter Martin used to say, the trouble with living sacrifices is that they keep trying to crawl off the altar. It requires conscious effort to stay on the altar daily.

Examine your life. What have you been holding back on? Has God asked you to do something that you are not willing to do? Are you seeking glory for yourself in some area? Is there some sin, habit or thought that you are not willing to give over to Him? It could be anything. If it is not on the altar, don't expect God's blessing.

But when your all is on the altar, expect great things from God. His power is infinitely greater than your sin nature. He is not limited by you, only by what you give Him to work with. The more areas of your life that you cease holding on to and give to God, the more Christ-like you will become, and the more God's

How Powerful Is Your God?

glory will show through you. God is not limited by your limitations.

Yokes

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁹¹

I once heard someone put what Jesus said this way. It is like an advertising slogan that the carpenter’s son put on a sign outside of his shop: “Jesus Christ’s Easy Yokes.”

You may think of a yoke as a big wooden contraption that is placed on the neck of oxen to harness them to do work. You may think of a yoke as work, but it is actually something designed to make work much easier. In some countries people bear a yoke, a stick, across their shoulders to help them balance and carry heavy loads that would be impossible otherwise. The yoke is not the burden, but it makes carrying burdens easier.

Jesus tells you to put on His yoke of ease, and with that yoke to carry His light burden. This is the only way to find rest for your soul. If you find things are getting spiritually unbearable, check the following:

- Do you have the burden Jesus gave you, or did you pick up some other heavy load elsewhere? Why not trade loads? Give Jesus your heavy one and you take his light one.
- Are you using His yoke, or are you trying to carry your burden with some cheaply made imitation that is hard, chafes, and does nothing to help you carry the burden? Perhaps you’re even trying bareback?

Yokes

- Are you using His yoke properly? A yoke is worn by a servant, so it must be worn with humility. Our Master took on the form of a servant and served His heavenly Father by humbly serving us. He now offers you the same yoke He carried.

The Wrong Yokes

Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?⁹²

Now therefore why do you tempt God, that you should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?⁹³

Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.⁹⁴

The Right Yokes

Let as many as are bondservants under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and the doctrine not be blasphemed. Those who have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brothers, but rather let them serve them, because those who partake of the benefit are believing and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.⁹⁵

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous.⁹⁶

The Lord Who Loves Us

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

Jesus

How does what Jesus said sit with you? Are you okay with a friend who makes demands? ...whose friendship is a condition based on submission to him? Is that true friendship? Is it love?

I'll admit, I've had difficulty understanding what Jesus said here. It appears His love is conditional, offered on the basis of works. I have to earn His favor somehow, or He won't be my friend. This doesn't fit in with my understanding of Jesus from other parts of the Bible.

If you've had problems with what Jesus said here, it's time to take another look. Here it is in context:

“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love. I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.”⁹⁷

Here are some things I see:

The Lord Who Loves Us

First, even though Jesus had already loved His disciples (and they Him), He did not begin calling them His friends until this time. He was known to them as Master first. They called Him Lord.

I think we get into trouble when we begin with Jesus as Friend, and then later try to add 'Lord' to the relationship. When a friend starts making demands, the friendship doesn't get stronger, it gets weaker, strained.

But if we begin with Jesus as Lord, recognizing His right over us, and we submit to Him, then, when we realize He is also our closest Friend, instead of becoming weaker, the bond grows stronger. We have a Master who loves us and always seeks our wellbeing. His commands are not burdensome, but good and beneficial.

Don't think of Jesus as a friend who is trying to get power over you. Think of Him as the One who already has rights over you, and yet is your best friend.

Second, verse 14 is not about Jesus' love for me, but my love for Him. Jesus did not tell His disciples, "I am your friend if..." He said, "You are my friends if..." He declared His friendship in verse 15: "I have called you friends." Shortly thereafter, He proved it by dying for them (vs. 13).

Jesus already loves us. He died for us when we were ungodly.⁹⁸ The question is do we love Him in return? Are we His friends in practice? Are we living in His love?

The command Jesus wants us to keep is simple and modest: to love one another (vs. 12). It is a command that should be easy to keep, and yet we find it difficult because it involves the denial of

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self—even to the point of laying down our lives. How can we keep this command as Jesus wants us to? Through the love of the Spirit.

“If you love me, keep my commandments.”⁹⁹

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

How can we identify the work of the Holy Spirit? What sets the Spirit's work apart from the work of man or a deceiving spirit? What makes the Holy Spirit's work unique? These are important questions for today's believer.

Much supernatural activity goes on in churches that is assumed to be of God, but is it? Here are a few examples. As you read them, ask yourself, "Do these describe the work of the Holy Spirit? How can I tell?"

- News item: NEGLIGENCE—"Act of God" Defense, The Supreme Court of Louisiana has refused to allow application of the "Act of God" defense in a personal injury suit brought by one worshiper against another on allegations that defendant ran into plaintiff while plaintiff was in the aisle of a church praying. Defendant had contended that she was "trotting under the Spirit of the Lord" when the accident occurred.¹⁰⁰
- Classified ad: DIVINE HEALING, lay on of the hands, by appointment only, Tuesday and Wednesday, 12–8PM.¹⁰¹
- An audio series called *The Holy Spirit In You* teaches you "how to put the awesome power of God's Holy Spirit to work as effectively as the disciples did in the First Century Church."
- A popular video series called the Alpha Course presents the gospel and basic Christian lifestyle to non-believers. It has

been endorsed by many well-known evangelists, pastors and church denominations. The course also promotes as from the Holy Spirit such manifestations as uncontrollable laughter, shaking, and animal noises.

If you came to a conclusion on any of these examples, can you give a good biblical reason for your conclusion? It should be easy for us believers to know what is of God because we have the Spirit living inside us. But sadly, many of us feel a work is of the Holy Spirit even when that work goes counter to how the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit works.

The point of this article is to show you how you can recognize the Spirit's work so you can distinguish it from man's or Satan's work. While I am going to focus a lot on spiritual gifts in this article, what I have to say applies to all areas of the Spirit's work.¹⁰²

Spiritual Gifts—A Different Approach

The church today tends to approach the subject of spiritual gifts in one of two different ways. Charismatic churches teach that the Holy Spirit still gives miraculous sign gifts to believers just as in the early church. Non-charismatic churches teach that miraculous gifts ceased early on because they were only to help the church get started. Both sides have some pretty convincing arguments to prove their position. Both have scriptures to back up what they believe, but obviously both can't be right. If you bring them together to share their viewpoints, the discussion usually blows up into a verbal battle that doesn't change anyone's mind.

While I have my opinion on this subject, in this article I'm not going to take sides. I'm not going to say whether such-and-such a

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gift is for today or not, or say which supernatural manifestations are of God and which are not. That is not my purpose for writing this. Instead, I want to show you how you can know if any specific work is of God. Then you can apply what you have learned to see for yourself if a particular gift or manifestation is of God or not.

One of the reasons that dialog between charismatics and non-charismatics is so difficult is that each of us tend to focus on our own 'pet' doctrines. The problem is that we tend to study only the parts of the Bible that confirm what we already believe. This is a type of self-deception. When we study the Bible, we need to study all of it, and not make excuses for the parts we don't agree with.

*He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him.*¹⁰³

This proverb is a picture of a legal court proceeding. The defendant and the prosecutor will each put forth only the evidence that supports their side of the case. If you listen to only one side, you may not find the truth of the matter. But, by listening to both sides, you can weigh the evidence and come to an understanding of the truth.

When I study the Bible, especially about something controversial, I try to set aside my own biases. This is hard to do because I'm not always aware of my biases. Listening to various viewpoints helps me become aware of them, but what I believe must not be determined by the best sounding argument, but by what the Bible says as a whole.

As far as miraculous spiritual gifts are concerned, I've come to the conclusion that the question of whether they are for today or not is irrelevant. Instead, we should be focusing on the character

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and nature of God, who is the Giver of the gifts, so we can tell on an instance by instance basis if any specific work is of God. Paul said:

Now there are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are various kinds of service, and the same Lord. There are various kinds of workings, but the same God, who works all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the profit of all. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, by the same Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; to another different kinds of languages; and to another the interpretation of languages. But the one and the same Spirit works all of these, distributing to each one separately as he desires.¹⁰⁴

The key words in this passage are the last three: “as He desires.” The gifts we received when God saved us were given at His discretion. We had no say in the matter. When I first trusted in Christ, God did not ask me what gift I would like. And I did not say, “Well, Lord, I’m going to go to a Baptist church, and they don’t believe the gift of tongues is for today, so please don’t give me that gift.” That would have been silly! If the gift isn’t for today, what do I have to worry about?—God won’t give it. But if it is for today, who am I to tell God what to do? Likewise, I did not say, “Since I’m going to go to a Pentecostal church, please give me the gift of healing.” That would have been equally as silly for the same reason. No, God decided which gift He wanted me to have. He

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gave me the gift I needed for the area He wanted me to minister in. Any other gift would have limited God's work through me.

To put it simply, if a gift is for today, then we will see God give it. If it is not for today, then we won't see God give it. This is a statement I think both sides can agree on.

The Problem With Pragmatism

At this point there are some who will say, "So, miraculous gifts are for today because there are believers who practice them." But it's not that simple. Just because someone is doing something miraculous doesn't mean it is of God, even if it is a believer who is doing it. John warned us:

*Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*¹⁰⁵

The reason he warned us is because we can be deceived.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were instructed to test the prophets. Deuteronomy 13 details how they were to know if a prophet was truly sent from God:

*If there arise in the midst of you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods" (which you have not known) "and let us serve them;" you shall not listen to the words of that prophet, or to that dreamer of dreams: for Yahweh your God proves you, to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*¹⁰⁶

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Notice that the test had nothing to do with whether a miracle had really happened. Real or not, the people were not to listen to the prophet who led them away from God to serve other “gods.” They were to obey God as He had already revealed Himself, and one of the ways He had done so was with the command, “You shall have no other gods before me.”¹⁰⁷

God isn’t the only one who works miracles in this world. God also permits Satan to do some pretty amazing things. When Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and it became a snake, Pharaoh’s magicians did the same thing and their staffs also became snakes.¹⁰⁸ The same is true today. Satan can and still does work false signs and wonders for the purpose of leading us astray.¹⁰⁹

When we become believers, we don’t suddenly know all that is of God and all that isn’t. We are not given perfect understanding of all things spiritual. Just like the Israelites in the Old Testament, New Testament believers were also instructed to test the prophets. In the early church, when someone prophesied, those who listened were not to blindly accept what they heard, but were to listen with a discriminating ear to see if what was said was really of the Holy Spirit, or was of a deceiving spirit:

*Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others discern.*¹¹⁰

A quick reading of this verse makes it appear that all Paul is doing is limiting the number of those who prophesy in church to three, and instructing those who listen to pay close attention because they might learn something. But Paul is actually giving the listeners a big responsibility. The Greek word translated “discern” is *diakrino*, which means to try, to learn by discrimina-

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tion, to decide. The New King James Version of the Bible translates this same word as:

- Discern (Matthew 16:3, 1 Corinthians 11:29)
- Judge (1 Corinthians 6:5, 11:31, 14:29)
- Make distinction (Acts 15:9, Jude 1:22)
- Show partiality (James 2:4)
- Waver (Romans 4:20)
- Differ (1 Corinthians 4:7)
- Doubt (Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:23, Acts 10:20, 11:12, Romans 14:23, James 1:6)
- Contend (Acts 11:2, Jude 1:9)

What a responsibility! Paul is telling believers to test prophecies. We are to discern, judge, and even doubt the message if it shows signs of not being from God.

Testing is scriptural. The Ephesian church was commended for testing those who were called apostles, and they found they were not.¹¹¹ The Bereans were commended for testing the teachings of the apostle Paul, and they found his teachings were true.¹¹² Paul told us to “test all things.”¹¹³ Without testing, we can be led astray.

In 1994, Jill Barnes¹¹⁴ heard about a church meeting where people were on the floor “laughing their heads off.” Some shared about how God had revealed things in their lives that displeased Him. Others said they felt drunk.

After hearing a friend talk about a meeting where she had gone forward for prayer, and then fell down and shook from head to toe, Jill became curious enough to go with her.

At the meeting, the pastor gave a message, after which there was an invitation to come forward for prayer. Jill went forward.

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Someone put a hand over her head and she felt a bit dizzy. She noticed others were falling to the floor around her. Wanting to be touched by God, Jill let herself fall back. She felt what she later described as a “horrible, uncomfortable, heavy, oppressive feeling” go over her head and down her body. Her hands were clenched together, but she couldn’t relax or unlock them from each other. Scary, yes. But Jill thought this was of God. Eventually the meeting came to an end and she went home.

A few days later, the heavy, uncomfortable feeling came back and Jill went to bed terrified. Soon after, she started hearing voices that said, “Now you’re free! Now you don’t have any problems!” Then the voices said, “Kill yourself! Jesus isn’t real! The Old Testament is real, but Jesus wasn’t the Savior! You’ve got to look again, and find out where and who the Savior really is!”

By this time Jill knew this was demonic oppression. She eventually came out of her oppression with God’s help, and that of friends, through prayer, in-depth Bible reading, and obedience to what she found there. But what happened to her can happen to any one of us who fails to recognize how the Holy Spirit works.

Biblical Testing

The Bible tells us to test the spirits. This implies that there is a method of testing—a standard by which we can know if a message or sign is truly of God.

Many Christians feel uncomfortable with the idea of testing God, and well they should. The Bible says we are not to tempt God.¹¹⁵ But I am not talking about tempting God. When you know God is telling you to do something, there is only one thing you

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must do: obey. But not every spiritual manifestation is of God, and we need to recognize that. We are not to blindly accept all supernatural events as from the Holy Spirit.

So how can we know? What is this measuring stick by which we can test spiritual manifestations? Does it really exist? Can we really know if a message or sign is truly of God? I believe we can.

First, while the Holy Spirit can manifest Himself through physically miraculous means, His work is not identified through a particular outward act or manifestation. Satan has power in this world to cause miracles that look on the surface very much like the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, what we know of today as the gift of tongues or glossolalia (speaking in an unknown language), also occurs in some eastern religions and cults. The Way International, which denies that Jesus is God, practices glossolalia. So did the Heaven's Gate cult whose mass suicide in 1997 made the headlines years ago. There is even some evidence that much of this practice is not even supernatural. An article in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*¹¹⁶ told of an experiment where 20% of the participants spoke in tongues (unknown languages) immediately after listening to a tape recording of genuine glossolalia. With some further training, the number increased to 70%. Whether this is a valid gift of the Spirit or not, it cannot be relied on as evidence that God is at work. No outward physical manifestation can.

Second, the Holy Spirit's work is not identified through a particular feeling or emotion. Satan can produce in us convincing feelings of closeness with God. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit doesn't always supply us with good feelings. One of the things the

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Holy Spirit does is make people uncomfortable with respect to sin in their lives.

However, the Holy Spirit's work can be identified through the character and the results of His work. It is these two areas that show the uniqueness of the Spirit's work and set it apart from the work of man or Satan.

The Character of the Spirit's Work

The character of the Holy Spirit's work is what reveals His character and divine nature, and it is always in agreement with God's character as revealed in the Bible. This is because the Holy Spirit is God, who is unchanging, the same yesterday, today, and forever.¹¹⁷ Therefore, we can use the Bible to tell us about the Holy Spirit's character and how He works today.

The Holy Spirit is the least understood Person of the Trinity, but this doesn't have to be. Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are One and share the same nature, we can learn what each Person is like by studying the Others. When Jesus walked this earth, He showed us what the Father is like so that when one of His disciples asked Him to show them the Father, He replied:

"Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?'"¹¹⁸

Jesus also showed us what the Holy Spirit is like because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus.¹¹⁹ Just as Jesus revealed God's character and nature through how He lived, when the Holy Spirit dwells in us and works through us, God's character and nature should also be evident through our lives. Those who claim their

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actions are directed by God's Holy Spirit, while their actions contradict how God has already revealed Himself, are not being led by the Holy Spirit but by a deceiving spirit. For example, the Holy Spirit...

- will not lead someone to glorify himself or a ministry at the expense of His own glory (Isaiah 42:8).
- will not cause someone to prophecy falsely. (Anything less than 100% accuracy is not of Him—Deuteronomy 18:22.)
- will not tell someone to lie or act deceptively (Zechariah 8:17)
- will not tell someone to steal (Hosea 4:1–3)
- will not tell someone to seek a divorce (Malachi 2:16)

These things displease God, and what displeases God the Father also displeases the Son and the Holy Spirit. Angel Maturino Resendiz¹²⁰ murdered 9 people in 1997 and 1998 because he believed he was on a mission from God to eliminate evil. His actions showed his mission was not from God. His actions contradicted God's character.

We grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin¹²¹, and when that happens, God's work is hindered in us. (This is not the primary way to determine what sin is because it is after the fact. We need to determine what sin is by God's word. But it is a way we need to become sensitive to.) If we are living a life of sin, then we are not being led by the Holy Spirit but by the flesh. When we are living in the flesh, we cannot please God.¹²² However, when we are led by Christ's Spirit, we cannot sin:

*Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. ...*¹²³

When you sin, you can be sure you didn't do it under the control of the Holy Spirit!

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God's character and nature were most evident through the life of Jesus on earth. We can learn a lot about God's character by studying Jesus' life and teachings, and by putting those teachings into practice. When we let the Holy Spirit have His way in our lives, we will become more Christ-like.¹²⁴ For example:

- We will be careful not to cause even the least person to stumble in his walk with God (Matthew 18:6).
- We will make sure our relationships with others are in order so that our relationship with God will not be hindered (Matthew 5:23–24).
- We will forgive those who continually sin against us (Matthew 18:21–22, Ephesians 4:32).
- We will love and seek to benefit those who are our enemies (Luke 6:35).
- We will humbly serve others (John 13:13–15).

Nobody is saying that these are easy things to do. But the Holy Spirit living inside us enables us to do them because God's work inside us reveals God's character and nature through us. If we are not living this way, then what's being revealed is not of God but of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

God's character is evident through the work of the Holy Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments. God's Holy Spirit was with David through much of his life, and it showed. David was called a man after God's own heart.¹²⁵ David was sensitive to the Spirit's leading. His life revealed much of what God was like, seen in such areas as his mercy to Saul and in the psalms he wrote. How much of God's character is revealed through your life?

The Results of the Spirit's Work

Just as with the character of the Holy Spirit's work, the results will also always be in agreement with the results of His work in the Bible. One of the most well-known passages on the work of the Holy Spirit is Acts chapter 2. Sometimes, when we read this chapter, we focus on only one aspect: the miraculous signs. But to gain a more complete understanding, we need to look at the ends, not the means, of the Spirit's work.

*Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place.*¹²⁶

Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, was a Jewish holiday that celebrated the bringing in of the first fruits of harvest. It occurred 50 days after Passover and was one of three holidays when all Jewish men were required to be in Jerusalem. So at this time, not only were all of the disciples still in Jerusalem (per Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:4), so were many other Jews. This chapter details the birth of the church, which was quite fitting considering the holiday. This was the day that the disciples first began "harvesting" new believers into the church.

We also read in this verse that the disciples were all together in one place when the Holy Spirit came. This group included the eleven remaining disciples (vs. 14), but it also included some women (including Jesus' mother) as well as His brothers and others who were previously meeting together for prayer.¹²⁷ We don't know exactly what they were doing at the time, but devoting themselves to prayer is a strong possibility.

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Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.¹²⁸

When the Holy Spirit came, it was suddenly and without warning. Jesus had said He would send the Holy Spirit, and they were expecting Him to come, but the disciples did nothing to cause Him to come. As Jesus had told them, all they had to do was wait in Jerusalem, and He would send the Spirit to them unconditionally as He had promised.

We don't decide how or when the Holy Spirit works; God does.¹²⁹ Some churches teach or encourage spiritual manifestations such as speaking in tongues, "holy laughter," even barking like a dog or making other animal noises. The Holy Spirit does not work in this way. Look at the apostles. They were never taught their spiritual gifts. Jesus gave no instructions to His disciples about them. The most He did was mention a few gifts in Mark 16, but He never laid hands on them to impart to His disciples some spiritual power. The event in verse 4 happened completely in the Holy Spirit's own time and way.

We see here that **the Holy Spirit comes at God's own leading, not at our own.** We cannot cause ourselves to be filled with the Spirit. He is sovereign God who moves when He wants to move. But we can prepare ourselves to be used. We can willingly submit ourselves to His will, obeying the commands that He has already given us. When we do this, the Holy Spirit will fill us.¹³⁰

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under the sky. When this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because everyone heard them speaking in his own language. They were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Behold, aren't all these who speak Galileans? How do we hear, everyone in our own native language? ... we hear them speaking in our languages the mighty works of God!" They were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, "What does this mean?" Others, mocking, said, "They are filled with new wine."¹³¹

When the Jews heard the apostles speak, they were amazed. Here were uneducated, everyday people, who they recognized as Galileans, speaking in their own native languages. It was obvious to them that the apostles had never learned these languages. This miracle was in itself enough to attract their attention. However, not only did they recognize their own languages, they understood what the apostles were saying. They paid attention to the words. They heard them "speaking in our own languages the mighty works of God." This was something that would have been impossible had the disciples been speaking in an unknown language.

One of the results of the Spirit's work is that glory is brought to God the Father and Jesus Christ—not only by believers, but also by non-believers in their praises to God.¹³² By the end of this chapter, many of these Jews would become believers in Jesus Christ, but at this point they were only "devout men" who believed in Yahweh God, not in His Son. They were outsiders.¹³³

The Holy Spirit's work glorifies God the Father and Jesus Christ. In other words, His work makes His character and nature known to believers and non-believers alike. Men come away with a better understanding of who God is and what He is like. This is one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's purpose is not to glorify anyone or anything else—not a ministry, a leader, a spiritual gift, or surprisingly, even Himself.

When Jesus walked this earth, even though He was equal with God, He did not glorify Himself. Instead, He humbled Himself and glorified His Father, showing us what the Father is like.¹³⁴ Now it's the Holy Spirit's turn on earth in us. He also did not come to glorify Himself, but to glorify the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.¹³⁵

Beware of those who lift up a man or a ministry. When this is done, it is always at the expense of God's glory. We need to focus less on ourselves and our accomplishments, and focus more on God and what He has done.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spoke out to them, "You men of Judea, and all you who dwell at Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words. For these aren't drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel: 'It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. ...'¹³⁶

Peter's first public message was given under the power of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus had promised, he was given the words he needed to say in that very hour.¹³⁷ So what he had to say was very important.

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First, Peter addressed what had attracted the people's attention. No, he was not drunk as some had thought. This event was of God because it was a fulfillment of a prophecy written hundreds of years earlier. The prophecy said that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. It would not be limited to the occasional king, priest, or prophet. Instead, God would work through common people such as Peter the fisherman, Matthew the tax-collector, and even the Gentiles.¹³⁸

What the Jews had seen was not only a fulfillment of prophecy, it also verified the authority and message of the apostles. Because this miracle was obviously of God, the people had to listen to Peter because God was working through him. They must listen to him or ignore him at their own peril.

Miraculous sign gifts, such as the gift of tongues, were given to validate the gospel message to non-believers. Paul taught this when he said tongues are a sign for unbelievers, those outside of the church, not for believers.¹³⁹ We are not to seek after signs to increase faith, because we already “walk by faith, not by sight.”¹⁴⁰

“... It will be, that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know, him, being delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed; whom God raised up, having freed him from the agony of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. ...”¹⁴¹

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After Peter shows his authority to speak is from God, he draws the people's attention away from the miracle, and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He uses Joel's prophecy as a lead-in to the heart of his message.

Peter pulled no punches when he spoke; he just spoke the truth. He didn't worry about what the people would say or do. If they rejected him, then they would really be rejecting Jesus. This was a big turn-around from the way Peter had previously acted. Just seven weeks earlier he didn't want people to know he was close to Jesus. Now, he boldly proclaims the gospel message. This was entirely due to the Holy Spirit's power in his life.

Jesus was clearly a "man approved by God." His miracles testified to His being sent by God. But even with this evidence, He was crucified unlawfully by the very people Peter was speaking to. God, however, raised Him from the dead. As a direct witness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the disciples' testimony carried a lot of weight.

The Holy Spirit works in us to spread the gospel message. The gospel focuses on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as the final payment for our sins to reconcile us to God. It is the message of God's grace shown through the death of Christ. It is not a message of morality, healing, prosperity, Christian lifestyle, social change, religion, or anything else. These other things do not have the power to reconcile man to God.

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive

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the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself." With many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls.¹⁴²

Through Peter's message the people were "cut to the heart." They were suddenly aware of the status of their relationship with God, and almost in panic, they asked, "What shall we do?" This was a valid question since their guilt was real: they had crucified God's Holy One.

The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin and grants true repentance.¹⁴³ In fact, it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that we can come to a realization of our sin against God, confess it to Him, and on receiving His forgiveness, live a life that is a 180 degree turn-around from the way we were living before. All believers are saved through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is through His work that believers are added to the church.

A note on baptism: Peter says that everyone must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins. The baptism he is referring to is the regenerating indwelling of the Holy Spirit that begins the moment we are saved.¹⁴⁴ It is the gift Peter refers to in verse 38.

The best illustration of the meaning of the word "baptized" that I've found is given by James Montgomery Boice in the Bible Study Magazine of May 1989, where he says the Greek word for baptized (*baptizo*) was previously used in a recipe for making pickles.

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A cucumber becomes a pickle by taking on the nature of the vinegar solution it is immersed in. The longer it is in the solution, the more the cucumber nature is replaced with the vinegar nature. This change is permanent; a pickle can never become a cucumber again.

Likewise, when we're saved, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, changing us from the inside out. This is the process of sanctification, and it results in a permanent change. But it takes time. Just as the cucumber must remain in the solution to become a pickle, we must continue to walk in the Spirit to become more like Christ. The process is not instantaneous.

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer. Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved.¹⁴⁵

A change came over the people once they were saved. They had a new relationship with Jesus Christ and a new relationship with each other. Not only did they spend time under the apostle's teaching and in prayer and communion, they also started developing spiritual fruit. They sold their possessions, and with the money gave assistance to those in need. They did this joyfully

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with a great peace in their hearts. It was obvious the Spirit of God was at work in them.

The Holy Spirit produces good spiritual fruit in our lives. This fruit is listed in Galatians 5:22–23, Ephesians 5:9, and 2 Peter 1:5–7: Unconditional love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control, Righteousness, Truth, Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, and Godliness.

When we let the Spirit have His way, this fruit will grow and mature in our lives, and the church will become more unified in Christ. Not only will individual believers grow, the church will grow as a whole. The Holy Spirit doesn't cause us to lose control, but frees us from the other things that control us so that we can do God's will.

The Bible says the fruit (results) of a work will tell you about the source of the work.¹⁴⁶ Paul said that the results of his work among the Corinthian believers showed that it was of God.¹⁴⁷ He had no need to commend himself to them because the results spoke for themselves. They were clearly an "epistle of Christ," written by the Spirit of the living God on their hearts.

Jesus said every tree is known by its fruit.¹⁴⁸ A good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit. Jesus makes fruit the test by which we can tell if a work is of God or not. When the fruit of the Spirit abounds in our lives, we can tell that the Holy Spirit is at work. But if we exhibit the same corrupt fruit that is in the world, then our flesh and Satan are at work. Paul lists some of this corrupt fruit in his letter to the Galatians:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife,

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*jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*¹⁴⁹

Corrupt fruit is a result of living a life that pleases the flesh. Living to please yourself will produce corrupt fruit that is not edifying, but destructive.¹⁵⁰ Try as you may, you cannot produce unconditional love, joy, peace, etc. through selfish living. The only way you can produce good spiritual fruit is by giving control of your life over to God by remaining in Christ, and by walking in the Spirit.¹⁵¹

Summary

These same characteristics of the Holy Spirit's work can be seen elsewhere in the Bible. For example, in the next two chapters of Acts we see Peter heal a lame man. This gave him another opportunity to present the gospel to the Jews and to glorify God.

I encourage you to study the nature, purpose, and work of the Holy Spirit. When you become familiar with how the Spirit worked in the early church and throughout the Bible, you can better recognize His work today, and discriminate His work from the work of deceiving spirits. (Some general passages on the Holy Spirit are Numbers 11:24–29, John 14–16, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 12–14.) As you read, try to set aside your biases and read these passages as if they are new to you. You may find some aspects of the Holy Spirit's work that you have previously overlooked.

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Testing is very important. You don't want to get sucked into every whim of doctrine, and neither do you want to be deceived into thinking you are being led by the Spirit if you're not. These qualities that I've listed can also be used to see if the Holy Spirit is working in your own life. Just ask yourself:

- Are my actions affirming or contradicting God's character or nature as revealed in the Bible? Am I obeying or disobeying God's commands? Am I living a more Christ-like life, or am I living like the world?
- Is God the Father and His Son being glorified in my life? Are people able to see and understand God better through me? Is His character and nature being revealed?
- Is it obvious to outsiders that God is at work in my life? Or is it only me, a ministry, or a spiritual gift they see?
- Is my spiritual gift being used to build up the church, either by providing opportunities to spread the gospel, or by helping the church grow more Christ-like? Or am I using my spiritual gift only for my own benefit, and for my own self-interests?
- Am I being used to spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection? Are non-believers being convicted of sin, repenting, and coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?
- Are all the fruits of the Spirit becoming more evident in my life? Am I showing love even to my enemies? Do I have joy when external circumstances seem contrary? Am I living a more sober, self-controlled life? Am I more patient?

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- Am I seeking the Holy Spirit's leading, or am I trying to lead the Holy Spirit? Am I seeking God's will, or am I looking for God's approval of my own will?

If one or more of these areas are lacking, I suggest looking for things in your life that are grieving the Spirit. Examine yourself to see what is hindering the Spirit's work in and through you.

The key to recognizing the Holy Spirit's work is becoming personally and intimately familiar with God Himself. Spend time prayerfully reading, studying and meditating on God's word. Do so in private, and together with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Get to know God through obedience to His commands. Get to know His nature, His character, and His purpose. Get to know *Him*. Then you won't be fooled by imitations.

Notes

In this book I chose to quote scripture from the World English Bible™ because it is accurate, uses modern language, and is in the public domain. However, no translation is perfect. I encourage you to look up each of the following scripture references in your own Bible.

Introduction

¹ 1 Timothy 1:15

How To Gain Victory Over Sin

² Matthew 11:29–30

³ 1 John 5:4

⁴ Acts 15:10–11, Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, 21, 3:11

⁵ Romans 3:28, 5:1

⁶ Over the years many doctrinal errors have crept into the church by confusing justification and sanctification issues, especially when ascribing a justification-related consequence to a sanctification-related action. While they are closely related, justification and sanctification are not the same.

⁷ Romans 6:1–2, 12–13. This shows sin is still a possibility for Christians. Otherwise, Paul would not be telling us not to sin; he would be telling us to be saved.

⁸ Romans 7:15, 18–19, 22–23. (See also Galatians 5:17.) The flesh is the natural mind that wants to do things its own way using its own resources, rather than God's way with His resources.

⁹ Philippians 3:4–6

¹⁰ Romans 7:14.

¹¹ Romans 7:24. Paul was not accepting of his condition, and neither should you be. He didn't dismiss his inability to live right with, "Oh well. At least I'm saved!"

¹² Romans 7:25

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¹³ The context of Paul's giving thanks was his practical struggle with sin, not his guilt towards God. If his thanksgiving was about justification, then in effect he would be saying sin is okay because it's forgiven. However, Paul already told us not to sin in chapter 6. Hence, his thanks must be about sanctification.

¹⁴ Romans 7:6. This is Paul's first mention of the Holy Spirit in connection with our sanctification.

¹⁵ Romans 8:1.

¹⁶ Romans 4:5

¹⁷ See also 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

¹⁸ According to Romans 6:21, we should be ashamed of the way we lived before we were saved.

¹⁹ Romans 8:2–4. "Ordinance" can also be translated "requirement" or "righteousness." Remember, Paul is talking sanctification here. We are not just set free from the Mosaic law, but from the law of our sinful disposition!

²⁰ Romans 3:19. This "judgment" is the sentence of guilt before God. Those who are under the Law are under a curse (Galatians 3:10–11). 2 Corinthians 3:6–9 says the letter of the Law kills, it being called the ministry of condemnation.

²¹ Romans 7:5,8, 1 Corinthians 15:56, Romans 5:20, 7:5,9–12

²² While the Law is done away with for justification (Jesus having fulfilled it for us), note here that the Law is fulfilled *by the Holy Spirit* for sanctification (as prophesied in Ezekiel 36:27). However, don't view the Spirit merely as a means to keep the Law. The Law is neither the means nor the end. You are no longer under the Law but under grace (Galatians 5:18), so don't make law-keeping your goal.

²³ Galatians 5:16

²⁴ Romans 8:7–8. A Christian has two natures (Romans 7:17): the old fleshly nature that grows more corrupt over time (Ephesians 4:22), and the new Spirit-led nature which is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

²⁵ In Romans 7:18, Paul said good did not dwell in him. What was true of Paul is also true of us. Our fleshly nature will always produce works like those listed in Galatians 5:19–21. Your flesh is like a dead body. Paul likened it to a corpse in Romans 7:24. As time goes by, a corpse becomes more corrupt and putrid. The process never goes the other way. Likewise, your fleshly nature never improves. I know this to be true of myself, because there are things I am

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tempted with today that I wasn't tempted with when I was younger.

²⁶ Romans 8:12–13. To put to death means you no longer respond to fleshly desires. It is not that you don't have those desires, but that you choose not to respond to them.

²⁷ Romans 8:11. In context, this verse is about living in a God-pleasing way, not the resurrection of our physical bodies. The preceding verse says, "the body *is* dead," indicating Paul is not talking about physical death—therefore he's not talking about physical resurrection. This verse ties well with the phrases "mortal body" and "alive from the dead" in Romans 6:12–13. But even if you disagree with this interpretation, know that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work to sanctify you. Also, look up the references to God's power in Ephesians 1:19–20, 3:7,16.

²⁸ Romans 8:4. My experience matches Paul's. He found sin flourished when he tried to keep the Law, but he had victory over sin when he walked in the Spirit. The Christian life, therefore, is no longer a matter of submitting to the Law, but of submitting to the Holy Spirit.

²⁹ Romans 8:14. Being a son or child in this sense has to do with a life that conforms to someone else's example. When we are led by God's Spirit, we think and act like our heavenly Father. See 2 Chronicles 17:3 where Jehoshaphat followed in the ways of his father David, and John 8:44 where Jesus said His listeners followed in the way of their father, the devil.

³⁰ Galatians 5:24–25

³¹ John 6:63

³² 2 Corinthians 3:18

³³ Zechariah 4:6

³⁴ Galatians 3:3. Paul wrote this to those who were trying to follow the Mosaic Law, but his rebuke also applies to us when we try to obey any New Testament command legalistically. Sanctification comes not through self-reformation, but through God's transformation.

³⁵ This is what 'walking in the Spirit' means. It is not an emotional high or doing something miraculous. To 'walk in' means to follow in the way of. A few of many examples of this are shown in Exodus 16:4, Leviticus 20:23, 1 Kings 15:3, 2 Kings 17:22, Acts 14:16, Romans 4:12, Ephesians 5:2.

³⁶ Galatians 2:21, 3:2,5.

³⁷ Philippians 3:3

³⁸ Galatians 6:7–8.

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³⁹ Galatians 3:2–3, 4:21–31, 6:12. Legalism is trying to please God or gain His favor by keeping a set of rules. It places the Law above what God is saying presently. For example, a legalistic Abraham would have completed his sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 because God had commanded him to do so earlier. He would have ignored God's later command to spare his son. Non-legalistic obedience always has its eyes on God rather than the commands. When you think about it, legalism is actually sinful for Christians. According to Romans 7:1–4, we had to die to the Law to be joined to Christ. Now that Christ is our husband, we can't go back to the Law without committing spiritual adultery.

⁴⁰ Not that sanctification is achieved by our effort in walking. It comes from the One we walk with ...or rather the One we walk *in*. It is just like justification: we don't save ourselves by our faith—the One we have faith in does the saving.

⁴¹ Philippians 2:6–8

⁴² Luke 3:21–22, 4:1, 4:14, 4:18, 21, John 3:34, 6:63, Matthew 12:28.

⁴³ Philippians 2:5, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:8, Philippians 3:3, 1 Peter 4:6.

⁴⁴ John 14:15–18, Romans 8:9–10, Galatians 4:6, Philippians 1:19, 1 Peter 1:11

⁴⁵ One practical example of this can be seen in how the gospel was presented by the early church. The apostles were told not to worry about what to say, but to trust the Holy Spirit to speak through them. When they did so, the Spirit spoke powerfully through them (Matthew 10:19–20, Mark 13:11, Ephesians 6:19–20, Acts 4:8, 6:10).

⁴⁶ John 15:4–5. When Jesus tells us to abide in Him, I believe He includes the "how" (Spirit walk) along with the "what" (obedience to His teachings and commands). The two belong together. You cannot have one without the other.

⁴⁷ Galatians 5:22–23. This list contrasts with the works of the flesh in verses 19 to 21. But notice how Paul uses the word 'fruit' here instead of 'works'.

⁴⁸ Acts 2:41–47, Philippians 2:12–13, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 5:23–24.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:11–12, 3:1–7, 5:1–2, 6:1–8, 11:17–19

⁵⁰ Matthew 5:6. Righteousness is simply being in a right relationship with God. Jesus satisfies this hunger (John 6:35), and the Spirit satisfies this thirst (John 4:14, 7:37–39).

⁵¹ You should also check yourself for the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21.

⁵² Hebrews 4:12. See also 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

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⁵³ Psalm 139:23–24

⁵⁴ Ephesians 4:30. You may be aware of a certain sin you want victory over, but the Spirit may reveal another sin in your life that needs to be addressed more urgently. For example, you may be concerned about not spending enough time in worship, while being unaware that you need to be reconciled with someone else first (Matthew 5:23–24).

⁵⁵ 1 John 1:9

⁵⁶ Romans 6:10–11. ‘Reckoning’ (or accounting) is not, in itself, the way to overcome sin. Otherwise, Paul would not have gone on to describe the necessity of walking in the Spirit. I said earlier that the chapter 6 standard is impossible to live by, because in the flow of Paul’s argument he had not yet mentioned the Spirit’s role in sanctification.

⁵⁷ Romans 6:13,19

⁵⁸ Romans 12:1–2

⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us the Agent of this transformation is the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁰ Romans 8:6,13

⁶¹ Philippians 2:1

⁶² Romans 8:11,14, Galatians 5:16

⁶³ 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:14

⁶⁴ Romans 8:9. In Acts 19:1–4, When Paul found some believers who had not received the Holy Spirit, he discovered it was because they had not believed in Jesus. In Acts 8:14–17, where the Samaritans believed and then later received the Holy Spirit, they were not saved until the Spirit was given. This is because salvation is the result of what God does, not what man does. Man does not save himself by his belief. Faith is merely a precondition for salvation. Only God saves.

⁶⁵ Acts 2:38–39

⁶⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

⁶⁷ Jude 1:24–25

Fitted to Christ— A Parable

⁶⁸ <http://inspirationalstories.com/3/338.html>

⁶⁹ Romans 13:14

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⁷⁰ Colossians 3:9–10

⁷¹ Romans 8:29

The Examination of the Scriptures

⁷² 2 Corinthians 3:18

⁷³ Psalm 139:23–24

⁷⁴ 1 John 2:15

⁷⁵ Matthew 13:7,22

⁷⁶ Galatians 6:7

⁷⁷ Galatians 6:8. Note the wording. It is not *what* you sow, but *where* you sow. Two people can do the same thing, but get different results if one is flesh-led and the other Spirit-led.

⁷⁸ John 15:4–5

⁷⁹ James 1:22–25

⁸⁰ Matthew 7:24–27

⁸¹ John 13:17

⁸² Psalm 119:105

⁸³ Psalm 26:2

The Catwalk

⁸⁴ Romans 13:14

Why Perfection is Delayed

⁸⁵ 1 Peter 2:11

⁸⁶ Luke 22:42

⁸⁷ Hebrews 5:8

How Powerful is Your God?

⁸⁸ Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 3:21

⁸⁹ 1 Kings 18:37–38

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⁹⁰ Romans 12:1

Yokes

⁹¹ Matthew 11:29–30. I see the yoke Jesus offers us as the Holy Spirit.

⁹² 2 Corinthians 6:14

⁹³ Acts 15:10

⁹⁴ Galatians 5:1

⁹⁵ 1 Timothy 6:1–2

⁹⁶ 1 John 5:3

The Lord Who Loves Us

⁹⁷ John 15:10–15

⁹⁸ Romans 5:6–8

⁹⁹ John 14:15

The Work of the Holy Spirit

¹⁰⁰ Photocopy in The Wittenburg Door's *Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction* calendar, published by Harvest House Publishers.

¹⁰¹ Photocopy in The Wittenburg Door's *Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction*, published by Harvest House Publishers.

¹⁰² While I haven't made any significant changes to this since I wrote it over 15 years ago, my understanding of spiritual gifts (manifestations) has grown. Now I think the Spirit can work in various ways and at various times through an individual believer. We don't necessarily have one or two fixed gifts assigned to us for the rest of our lives.

¹⁰³ Proverbs 18:17

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:4–11

¹⁰⁵ 1 John 4:1

¹⁰⁶ Deuteronomy 13:1–3

¹⁰⁷ Deuteronomy 5:7

¹⁰⁸ Exodus 7:11–12

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22

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¹¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:29

¹¹¹ Revelation 2:2

¹¹² Acts 17:11

¹¹³ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

¹¹⁴ <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/blessing.html>

¹¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:9

¹¹⁶ <http://www.science-frontiers.com/sf051/sf051p15.htm>

¹¹⁷ Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8

¹¹⁸ John 14:9

¹¹⁹ Romans 8:9–11, Galatians 4:6

¹²⁰ http://lubbockonline.com/stories/051100/sta_051100113.shtml

¹²¹ Ephesians 4:30, Isaiah 63:10

¹²² Romans 8:8

¹²³ 1 John 3:6

¹²⁴ 1 John 2:6

¹²⁵ Acts 13:22, 1 Samuel 13:14

¹²⁶ Acts 2:1

¹²⁷ Acts 1:13–14

¹²⁸ Acts 2:2–4

¹²⁹ Numbers 11:24–29

¹³⁰ A note on spiritual gifts: All believers are given at least one spiritual gift. The gift you were given was not given for your own benefit but for the benefit of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). Spiritual gifts are relational. They are meant to be used for others, either to help bring new believers into the church, or to make those who are already believers stronger in Christ. Don't use your gift on yourself – use it for others.

¹³¹ Acts 2:5–13

¹³² 1 Corinthians 14:23–25

¹³³ One important point in this chapter is that even those who believe in God need to hear about Jesus Christ and what He has done. Just believing in God, or being a religious or spiritual person, is not enough.

¹³⁴ Philippians 2:6–8, John 8:50, 14:7–9, Hebrews 5:5

¹³⁵ John 16:14

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¹³⁶ Acts 2:14–20

¹³⁷ Luke 12:12

¹³⁸ Acts 10:45

¹³⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:22. This was especially significant since the Jews were ‘sign-seekers’ (John 4:48, 6:30, 20:25, 1 Corinthians 1:22).

¹⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:7, John 20:29, Matthew 12:39, John 12:37

¹⁴¹ Acts 2:21–36

¹⁴² Acts 2:37–41

¹⁴³ John 16:8, Acts 11:15–18

¹⁴⁴ John 3:5, Titus 3:5

¹⁴⁵ Acts 2:42–47

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 7:15–24

¹⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:1–4

¹⁴⁸ Luke 6:44

¹⁴⁹ Galatians 5:19–21

¹⁵⁰ Galatians 6:7–8

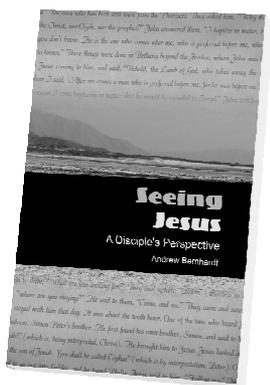
¹⁵¹ John 15:4, Philippians 1:11

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