

QUESTION #22: “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ‘WALK IN THE SPIRIT?’” (Romans 8:1-17)

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INTRODUCTION

I remember listening to a veteran of the Korean War (1950-1953). He was talking about how, when they were concerned about being in an area where they suspected that enemy troops had planted land mines, it was always such a relief to find footprints to walk in. If you found footprints, you know that the area where you were walking was safe.

I am so excited to be dealing with this week’s question, “What Does It Mean To ‘Walk In The Spirit,’” because this is literally going to be about walking in Somebody Else’s footprints to keep yourself safe. To help us along the way, we’re going to be looking at the first half of Romans 8, but we’ll be looking at it in just small bits at a time because there are some visual things we want to look at that should be helpful in telling the story of what the apostle Paul wants us to understand.

Part of what we need to understand, before we get into the text, is an overall view of the Christian life. How many of you have or had a growth chart for your kids to mark how much they were growing from year to year? Well, in a sense, there are three (3) phases of growth in the chart of a Christian life:

- 1) Birth — justification
- 2) Growth — sanctification
- 3) Completion — final salvation in heaven

Now let’s look at Paul’s words in Romans 8 to that body of believers:

TEXT #1:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit — Paul, Romans 8:1-4.

A key word in these verses is the first word: “therefore.” Paul is offering a conclusion, based on what he was talking about previously — meaning that there’s a context here that we need to look at, and that context is this: In chapter 7, Paul is talking about the law, God’s standard of perfection, and how important the law is in our lives. The law informs us of what is sin. Paul gives a great example: ***I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet” — Paul, Romans 7:7b.*** And, as he goes on to say, the law cannot change him from what he is — a sinner. More than that, the law cannot enable him to do good; it just tells him that he’s not. And in the greatest anguish he expresses, he realizes that the law by itself can never set him free from his evil, sinful self, and that he is condemned, as the writer of Hebrews so colorfully put it, by ***the sin that so easily entangles — Hebrews 12:1a.*** But in the darkness of those truths, he finds a remedy that will rescue him from all his failures to uphold the law: ***Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! — Paul, Romans 7:25a.***

And what is the deliverance that Paul is celebrating? Deliverance from the slavery of life under the law to the glorious freedom of life in Christ. Earlier in this letter to Rome, Paul had written

another “therefore” — this first one telling of the condemnation that initially does exist for all mankind: *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law — Paul, Romans 3:19-20a.*

But here in Romans 8 we are presented with another “therefore” — Paul’s wonderful “good news” — the gospel he is presenting: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus — Paul, Romans 8:1.* In other words, being in Christ Jesus means that Christians have been declared “not guilty” by God himself — by him who, as it says in Psalm 33, *looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth — he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do — Psalm 33:13-15.* We have moved from condemnation to NO condemnation. And how can that be? Only one answer: Jesus Christ happened. There is no longer any condemnation for those in Christ Jesus because he BECAME what everybody would be without Christ Jesus. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *God made him (meaning his Son, Jesus Christ) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God — Paul, II Corinthians 5:21.* That’s how God “condemned sin in the flesh”; that sin wound up in his Son’s flesh. So, because of Jesus Christ’s work on the cross, and because of Christians surrendering to Christ’s work on the cross, we are now, in God’s eyes, matched with Christ: Our righteousness, our sinlessness, reflects HIS righteousness and sinlessness. Wow! Think about this in terms of what Jesus did: He clothed himself with us (as Paul says, “the likeness of sinful flesh”) so that we could clothe ourselves with him — Paul’s words: *[A]ll of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ — Paul, Galatians 3:27.*

Because of all that Christ accomplished, believers are now freed from judgment (“no condemnation”). So then, as a result of Christ’s taking our place on the cross, and his perfect life being transferred to us, the law’s power over us is drastically, completely changed, as Paul enumerates in the next three verses:

- 1) *[T]hrough Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death — Paul, Romans 8:2.* The law no longer claims us because the sin that held us has been taken away by Christ, and the power of the law has been replaced by the law of the Holy Spirit; as Paul had written earlier in this letter, what Jesus did on the cross has provided the means to be *brought from death to life — Paul, Romans 6:13a.*
- 2) *For what the laws was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering — Paul, Romans 8:3a.* The law no longer condemns us because Christ took away the condemnation when he took our place on the cross. God no longer condemns us because his holy, righteous wrath was poured out on Jesus. We aren’t condemned because he already was.
- 3) *[God] condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit — Paul, Romans 8:3b-4.* The law no longer controls us because, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are now being molded for the holiness that pleases God. The law cannot produce holiness, but only awareness of sin. It is the Holy Spirit placed in us that allows us to become holy, to live the holy life that God demands — springing from the law’s being fulfilled in us because of the Spirit’s presence in us. This is what is called “sanctification,” the life pleasing to God that begins the moment the Spirit takes up

residence in our lives; from that moment on, ***it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose — Paul, Philippians 2:13.***

David saw this reality coming; he wrote a thousand years before Paul's time: ***The Lord will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned — David, Psalm 34:22.*** OK, so let's move ahead to the next section.

TEXT #2:

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God — Paul, Romans 8:5-8.

Now Paul is moving on from justification, the moment of new birth in Christ, when we are declared “not guilty” by God, to sanctification, which is the life that now begins to grow and develop once the Spirit of God through Jesus Christ has been deposited in the new believer's life. Remember the old cliché of two gunfighters facing off in some old Western “B-movie” scene? “This town ain't big enough for the two of us.” That is actually a line from the 1932 Columbia movie, “The Western Code.” That's kind of the situation that occurs when someone surrenders to God through Jesus Christ. OK, so a person is living an unbelieving life, living according to the flesh, basically meaning that I am going to do whatever I want to do, and the only person I have to answer to is me. But then — I'm born again, new life . . . in Christ! Oh oh. Now a second nature — God's nature — moves into a place that, before conversion, was only home to that selfish, sinful, human nature. From that moment on, there's conflict. How can there not be? God wants to bring us triumph over our human nature, our “flesh.” Our old nature has no desire to “give up the throne” of its persuasive power in our lives. So Paul, knowing that conflict so well, shows us the opposition that is being played out in our lives by showing four (4) distinct contrasts between life in the Spirit — those who are saved — and life in the flesh — those who are unsaved:

- 1) Contrast #1: In the flesh / in the Spirit: ***Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires VS. [T]hose who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires — Paul, Romans 8:5.*** Because the unsaved person does not have the Spirit, his only context is to live in the flesh and for the flesh; the flesh sets the agenda that demands satisfaction. But because the Christian has the Spirit of God within him, his focus is squarely and only on the things of the Spirit. This is why the Christian should stand out as different from the world; as Jesus said when standing before Pilate: ***“My kingdom is not of this world” — Jesus Christ, John 18:36a.*** Everything is different because the starting point for how life is viewed and lived and desired is different: the Spirit vs. the flesh.
- 2) Contrast #2: Death / life: ***The mind governed by the flesh is death VS. [T]he mind governed by the Spirit is life — Paul, Romans 8:6.*** Now while the unsaved person is alive in the physical sense, he is dead in the far more important, far more eternal spiritual sense. Because he is dead to the Spirit, he will not respond to the things related to a life being lived in the Spirit.
- 3) Contrast #3: War with God / peace with God: ***[T]he mind governed by the Spirit is . . . peace VS. [T]he mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so — Paul, Romans 8:6b-7.*** Remember the immediate aftermath of the

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941? The next day, in a speech before a joint session of Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed these words: “I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.” In the spiritual sense, it is a state of war that has existed between God and mankind ever since Adam and Eve decided to do their little taste test with the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Paul makes that very clear a couple of chapters back in Romans 5 where he says that *we were God’s enemies* — **Paul, Romans 5:10a**. Apart from the Spirit of God dwelling inside, that is open warfare, open hostility, between people ruled by the old nature and those ruled by the new spirit of God’s nature.

- 4) Contrast #4: Pleasing self / pleasing God: *Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God* — **Paul, Romans 8:8**. The life lived in the flesh is inherently selfish; it cannot be anything else. There is no one else to live for except the self; consequently, the mantra, reflecting the selfishness that is at the root of all sin, is not “Thy will be done” but rather “My will be done.”

TEXT #3:

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you — **Paul, Romans 8:9-11**.

“You have the Spirit.” Think about what that means. Paul confirms all of this in his first letter to the Corinthian church where he says: *[Y]our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God* — **Paul, I Corinthians 6:19a**. And what’s more, due to the presence of the Holy Spirit, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will also be in us to enable us not only to become more like the Son but also to obediently serve the will and pleasure of the Father and the Son. And even more, because the Holy Spirit indwells us, the same power of God that raised his Son from the dead will not only one day raise us from the dead but will, day by day, powerfully keep us in God’s providential, loving hands, as Paul assured the church at Corinth: *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come* — **Paul, II Corinthians 1:21-22**. Short translation of living in the Spirit vs. living in the flesh? Living in the Spirit, we’re not alone! No only are we moment to moment accompanied by God but we are equally moment to moment enabled by God to become what he wants us to be.

TEXT #4:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation — but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory — **Paul, Romans 8:12-17**.

There are two (2) really awesome, amazing things that happen due to the Spirit of life that indwells the Christian:

- 1) First, the Spirit brings us death. Whoa; what does that mean? It means that, as Christians, the Spirit is putting to death in us those things that belonged to the realm of the flesh and brings to life those things that belong to the realm of the Spirit. As we continue our life in Christ, as Paul said in Romans 6, *sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace — Paul, Romans 6:14*. Therefore, the Spirit makes every part of ourselves, as Paul said in that same chapter, *an instrument of righteousness — Paul, Romans 6:13b*. The Spirit makes us die to ourselves that we may live for God. What's more, the Spirit makes us WANT that!
- 2) Second, the Spirit brings us adoption. We literally are adopted into God's family — but in a very special way. The Greek word used here means “being placed as an adult son.” That is significant. Yes, we are newborns into the family of God but, once born, we are immediately given the status of an adult. All of the things an infant is unable to do — walk, speak, make decisions, and draw on the family wealth — the believer has access to all those abilities the moment he is born into God's family.

Now something not to be overlooked is voiced by Paul early in this section: *[T]hose who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God — Paul, Romans 8:14*. The idea of being “led” in the Greek that Paul uses here suggests being willingly led. In other words, we surrender, we yield, to the direction of the Spirit because we choose to — out of relationship, out of desire. That's where the joy of the life is found. We yield to the Spirit's convicting us of sin because the Spirit rejoices in the overcoming of sin. We yield to the Spirit's directing us down a certain path because the Spirit rejoices when we follow in the footsteps of the Son. We yield to the Spirit's showing us how to be obedient because the Spirit rejoices when we embrace the ways of the Father. And as children of the Father, we are not being led in fear but rather in the joyous liberty of the Spirit which invites us and allows us to follow Christ. It is a life that we are enabled to live by the power of God the Father through the redeeming life of God the Son and the assuring, sealing power of God the Spirit. You've heard of being set up to fail? God through his wonderful Holy Spirit sets us up to succeed — and have the life that he always intended and desired, for everybody!

APPLICATION

OK. Now all of that was meant as set-up for the question we are now getting to: “What does it mean to ‘walk in the Spirit?’” Why the “scenic tour?” We need to understand just how incredibly much we have been graced with — from a forgiveness we could never deserve flowing out of a love we could never match. The point? Every last bit of our lives should be gladly given, without reservation, in response to the One who gave us the opportunity to know that forgiveness and love. To walk in the Spirit, we need to appreciate all that went into our receiving the Spirit. So, all that being said, what are some things we can do to ensure that we live the life maintained by the Spirit? In other words, what does walking in the Spirit look like? To answer this question, let's talk marriage.

Some time ago, I mentioned in another context and message that God gave us marriage for a whole lot more than the obvious reasons. One of the great reasons I believe God gave us marriage was for us to have a living, breathing, immediate example of what an intimate relationship is: how we maintain it, how we make it grow, how we make it weaken, how we make it flourish. To be truly “walking in the Spirit” involves more examples of living out in a

spiritual realm what many of us experience every day in a human, marital realm. So OK; let's meet our lucky, loving couple. Now, if I'm the pastor joining these two lovebirds together, here's some of what I'm telling them. Coming together in marriage features in the starring roles two complete strangers — not necessarily in the “who in the world are you” so much as “I've never lived with you before.” Coming into relationship with Jesus Christ is sort of a picture of the same thing: I have no idea how to do this, but I know I'm in it for the long haul — which syncs pretty well with the idea of “walking in the Spirit.” So what are some ideas? Actually, just two general ideas, with some specifics to add:

- 1) Intentionality. Relationships don't just happen. I might have thought Linda was the prettiest thing I'd ever laid eyes on, but I suspect I never would have learned more about her if I had just kept my affections to a glance. I had to actually do something, make something happen, to let her know I was there and interested. In the same way, it has to matter that I have surrendered my life to Christ. The Christian life is not about just sitting still. It's about seeking ways to grow and engage with God:
 - a) Spending time in the word. What kind of relationship would it be if we spent as little time with our loved ones as possible, letting virtually anything else take up our time? There would likely be no relationship. God speaks to us through his word; as the psalmist said: ***Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path — Psalm 119:105.*** Growth and strength happen when we feed on God's word — and the more we do, the more we will find we want to do. It's not just a book we're connecting with; it's our Father. We're not talking religious duty here; we're talking relational devotion. I do it because I'm in love. And remember what the apostle Peter said in his second letter: ***[P]rophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit — II Peter 1:21,*** reminding us that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of Scripture also dwells inside us. We should feel automatically tethered to God's Word because the author of that word resides in each and every Christian. Make a point of hanging out in God's word — not like you're trying to read a billboard as you're driving by, by rather like packing a lunch and making a day of it. Specifically, always include some time in the gospels. Remember what Christ said to the disciples after washing their feet in the Upper Room? ***“I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done for you” — Jesus Christ, John 13:15.*** He is our example; he is our guide — in everything. Stay in touch with that by reading what he did, how he reacted, how he lived his life. All the Scriptures are important; as Paul said to Timothy, all the Scriptures are “profitable” for our growth in Christ. There's no wrong place to read. I just make sure reading about Christ is on my “menu.”
 - b) Spending time in prayer. The one thing that has grown and maintained any healthy marriage is communicating — talking, about everything. The closer people are, the more they talk. A huge part of walking in the Spirit is talking in the Spirit. And guess what? Here too, the Spirit takes the lead; as Paul wrote: ***[T]he Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God — Paul, Romans 8:26-27.*** And the reality is, why wouldn't I want to talk to God about everything? What part of my life tells me I got it all under control? I have absolutely no part of my life under control. The more I talk with him,

the more I realize that by talking I am surrendering more to the only One who can accomplish in my life what He wants. I can't accomplish in my life what he wants; only he can do that!

- c) Spending time in family. Every time I am with my family, I am reminded of what a blessing they are, and how completely empty my life would be without them. Are they perfect? No. Are they always smiling and fun? No. But they are always my family, and a belonging that I know with no other group of people. Our church family reminds us that life is not a game of solitaire. We are part of a body, where we all contribute and we all matter because we are all important to the health and welfare of the body. Every one of us is here because God desired us to be here. We all have something without which the body would be weakened and diminished. That same Spirit that wrote God's word and leads us in prayer also shows itself in the gifts that God directs the body to have and display. It is in connection with that body that we grow and develop and are inspired and come alongside and minister and serve and encourage and build up and pray for and love.
- 2) Priority. Let's cut to the chase here: How important is our life in Christ to us? I know how important it is to him — he died for it. But how important is it to us? It's an important question. We often live at the rule of our culture and our schedules — which means that, more often than not, we live life kind of upside down. What should be more important is often shuffled to the “back of the bus” by things that we perceive as being more urgent. So while we may give “Sunday School” answers as to what is more important in our lives, our actions may communicate something drastically different. God winds up being what we try and squeeze into our day, or our week. That's religion, something we feel we “have” to do. Well guess what? We don't talk religion around here, and we're sure not talking about religion this morning. We talk relationship! The greatest mistake our culture makes is to think that Christianity is just another religion. Christianity is not a religion — never has been, never will be. It is a relationship, a love story — pure and simple. And not just “a” relationship, but the most important relationship in our lives. Back to the marriage thing: Linda is not just a facet of my life; in human terms, she IS my life. Nobody's more important. That's fine to say that, so I also need to act like that, to treat her like she is the most important thing in my life. Our spiritual lives should likewise be reflecting a relationship, a living, breathing, Father/child relationship with God, based on a love for God that continues to grow and develop each and every day — not because it has to but because my rearranged sense of priority in the Spirit makes me want to, making that relationship the most important thing in my life. The fact is, the only thing that is going to make it into God's eternal kingdom is the stuff that is a part of God's eternal kingdom — which means that my career, my savings account, my politics, my prejudices, my opinions, my hobbies, my toys, my priorities — none of those things are going to last. When I go, or this world goes, they go. So I ask again? How important is our life in Christ to us?

And with those two things in place, something changes — ME! I have to change; I am under the influence of the Spirit, under the influence of the One who has shown me more love than anybody, ever. What's more, I want to change. One more visit to marriage: When I married Linda, I quit dating. Well duh, that was probably a good move. But the point is that my life changed because she wasn't just a really good date. I committed my life to her — not an

afternoon or evening but a lifetime! I promised that to her so she has a right to expect that. But the longer I have been married to her, the more I have found that doing things for her, pleasing her, has become more and more natural; it's the thing I want to do. My greatest joy has been found in what makes her happy. Her joy has become mine. So could I date? Sure; it's in the realm of possibility (but really terrible for my health and well-being, not to mention my life expectancy). But I don't want to. My greatest joy is in being in this relationship with her. That has changed my priorities, my desires, my outlooks — pretty much everything about me. I live not for me but for somebody else — her. Just a picture of the end result of walking in the Spirit — a continually changing life that becomes more and more pleasing to God, based on my continuing to yield, and my continuing to learn that the greatest joy I will ever know in this life is living pleasing to my Master.

OK, so here are the rules for walking in the Spirit: First rule of walking in the Spirit: Surrender to the Spirit. Let him dictate priority. Let him dictate direction. Let him dictate what's important and what doesn't matter. Let him dictate what is we can hold on to and what we need to let go of. Let him dictate our spending — of money and of time. Let him rule. Second rule of walking in the Spirit: Fall in love with the Spirit. Fall in love with what he is wanting to do in you. Fall in love with all he has done in you. Fall in love with how much he values you and cares for you. Third rule of walking in the Spirit: Never forget rules 1 and 2.

CONCLUSION

One final thing: When we “walk in the Spirit,” we begin to resemble the One whose Spirit it is that we're walking in. In other words, we begin to resemble the Father; we begin to look like and sound like and act like the Son. That's the whole point of walking in the Spirit: God's outcome. Again, back to marriage: The more time we're with each other, the more we become like each other. We become God's more and more each day as we spend our lives with him. And the more we do with him, the more we want to do with him. Love, remember?

Folks, life in Christ, life in his Spirit, is the greatest life I have ever known; nothing else is even close. It is the life that our loving Heavenly Father wants us to know. It's the only life that matters. Let's pray!