

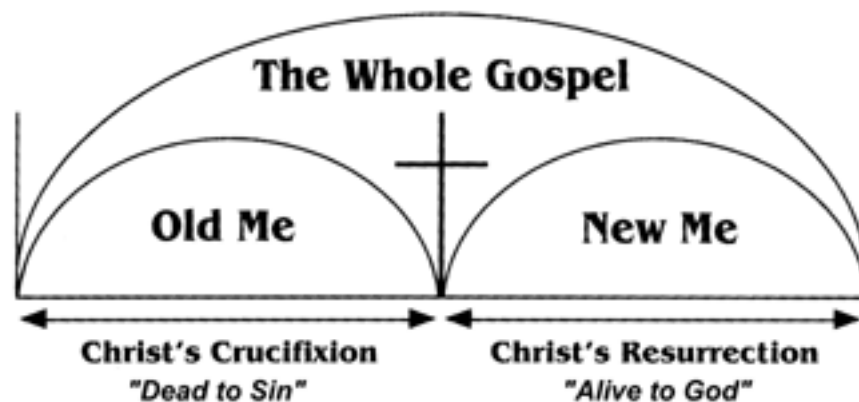
The Power of the Gospel

13

Walking in the Spirit

In the last 12 lessons we have explored how the Gospel has answered each and every problem that obstructed your relationship with God. We have seen how, in the first quarter of the Gospel, God dealt once for all with your sins – the individual *acts* of sin that separated you from God. And we have also seen how, in the second quarter of the Gospel, God dealt ruthlessly with your old self – the *factory* that kept producing those sins in your life.

Now we are well into the third quarter – that part of the Gospel which describes how God has designed for you to live the Christian life. This is the “alive to God” part of the “dead to sin”/“alive to God” equation.



We all know that we have been “saved” in Christ. But it’s important to realize that you have not just been saved *from* something. You have also been saved *to* something. And that something is a life that is “holy and blameless in his sight” (**Ephesians 1:4**). Everything in the first half of the Gospel has been designed by God to deal with the barriers that are against your walking with him. But once those barriers are dealt with, we must now begin to walk!

This new life is wonderfully described in J. B. Phillips’ version of **Romans 8:1-4**:

“No condemnation now hangs over the head of those who are ‘in’ Christ Jesus.

For the new spiritual principle of life ‘in’ Christ Jesus lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin and death. The Law never succeeded in producing righteousness – the failure was always the weakness of human nature. But God has met this by sending his own Son Jesus Christ to live in that human nature which causes the trouble. And, while Christ was actually taking upon himself the sins of men, God condemned the sinful nature. So that we are able to meet the Law’s requirements, so long as we are living no longer by the dictates of the sinful nature, but in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit.”

We encourage you to read for yourself **Romans 8:1-4** in your own Bible. Let’s now apply the principle of Bible study we learned in Lesson 101-09 – to always read a scripture in its context. Let’s read the two verses which immediately precede this passage.

Read Romans 7:24-25

In **verse 24**, Paul brings his description of the problem of the old self to a horrendous climax:

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Then in **verse 25** Paul brings the answer:

“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

And at the end of **verse 25**, Paul then summarizes the whole of **Romans 7:8-25**:

“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

It is in this context that **Romans 8:1-4** begins. In fact, the whole of **Romans 8** is Paul’s elaboration on the declaration he makes in **Romans 7:25**:

“[The answer is] through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Read Romans 7:4-6

These two verses essentially summarize the whole of Paul’s presentation of the Gospel to the Roman Christians. Note how in **verse 4**, Paul says that Gospel’s objective is “that we might bear fruit to God.” This is the result of “the new way of the Spirit.” In contrast, **verse 5** tells us that the result of “the old way of the written code” was “that we bore fruit for death.”

As we saw in a previous lesson, Paul continues in **Romans 7:8-25** to elaborate on what he means by the term “the old way of the written code” he uses in **7:6**. Now, in **Romans 8**, Paul is elaborating on what he means by “the new way of the Spirit.”

Two Ways of Living

There are two ways a Christian can live – a right way and a wrong way. The wrong way is called “walking in the flesh” (KJV) and the right way is called “walking in the Spirit” (KJV). Let’s take a look at both these ways of living.

Walking in the Flesh

Read Romans 8:5-8

The Greek word Paul uses here, translated “sinful nature” by the NIV, literally means “flesh” or “the body”. Paul is talking literally about the body’s physical desires, impulses and tendencies. And so throughout this lesson we will substitute the English word “flesh” for “sinful nature” each time that expression is used by the NIV. “Flesh” is, in fact, the most accurate description of the original meaning Paul is seeking to get across.

The word “flesh,” as it is used in the Bible, sums up the entirety of a life displeasing to God. It involves two things:

- **Self-gratification** – this is what the Bible calls “the desires of the flesh.”
- **Self-effort** – this is what the Bible calls “the arm of the flesh.”

The way of the flesh is a lifestyle focused on self. Expressed as either self-gratification or self-effort (and sometimes a strange mixture of the two), it is totally displeasing to God.

Read Galatians 5:19-21

Paul here lists fifteen “works of the flesh” (KJV):

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Debauchery
- Idolatry
- Witchcraft
- Hatred
- Discord
- Jealousy

The Appetites of the Flesh

God created us with natural appetites in five principal areas:

- **An appetite for food** – We all have an inbuilt physical hunger. But a food appetite out of control leads to gluttony.
- **An appetite for sex** – We each have an inbuilt appetite for physical intimacy. The sexual urge in itself is not evil, but if it begins to master your life, then it can outwork in lust, licentiousness and promiscuity – what the Bible calls “sexual immorality” (read **1 Corinthians 6:9-20**).
- **An appetite for power** – God created you to rule (**Genesis 1:28**). But when this drive to rule is warped by self-centeredness, it becomes a lust for power. It is this appetite that can drive a person into power struggle, violence and the abuse of others.
- **An appetite for comfort** – Our flesh has a strong bias toward protecting “the comfort zone.” We all need rest, sleep and times of leisure. But when sin warps this appetite, it produces laziness and apathy. This appetite is also the root behind most substance abuse.
- **An appetite for excitement** – Most people know this appetite as the “adrenaline rush.” This appetite is the drive behind the roller-coaster ride and the bunji-jump. In its more destructive guises, however, this appetite can also lure a person into compulsive gambling or the stealing of cars for joyrides, to give just two examples.

These five appetites are a key component of what the Bible calls “the flesh.” It’s important to remember that God created these appetites as a part of who we are. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with these appetites in themselves. But when they are warped by a sin bias and begin to dominate your life, they become destructive.

- Fits of rage
- Selfish ambition
- Dissensions
- Factions
- Envy
- Drunkenness
- Orgies

Paul does not intend this to be an exhaustive list, since he adds at the end “and the like.” Yet as varied as each of these expressions of behavior may be, they all have one source – the flesh.

Read Galatians 5:17-18

Here, just before he lists the “works of the flesh,” Paul describes the root cause of these acts.

“For the [flesh] desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the [flesh]. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

Walking in the flesh is the *wrong* way to live the Christian life. Now let’s take a look at the *right* way. For at the end of **Galatians 5:18**, Paul describes God’s intention for your life:

“...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.”

Walking in the Spirit

Walking in the Spirit means allowing God’s Spirit to tell you how to think and how to act. In contrast to the “works of the flesh,” Paul goes on to list the “fruit of the Spirit.”

Read Galatians 5:22-23

Here is a list of the nine “fruit of the Spirit.”

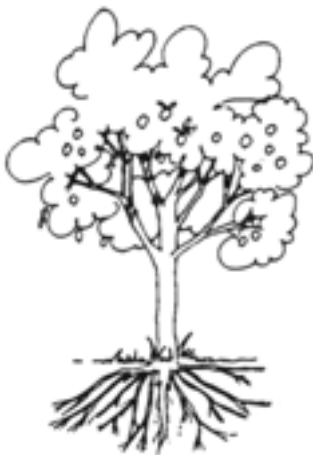
- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

Once again, Paul is not meaning this to be an exhaustive list (he adds other “fruit” of the Spirit elsewhere – see **Ephesians 5:9; Philippians 1:11**).

But notice *whose* fruit these are. These nine characteristics are *not* described as

your fruit. They are, in fact, the fruit of *God's Spirit* in your life. Each of the nine fruit of the Spirit listed here are aspects of God's own nature and character. They are nine characteristics of the likeness of Christ, to which we are being conformed. And they are strongly contrasted with the "works of the flesh," which are specifically the fruit of the flesh-dominated old self.

But, looking at it in another way, these nine "fruit of the Spirit" are also qualities of your new self, because that new self has been "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (**Ephesians 4:24**). It is only the new self that is able to "participate in the divine nature" (**2 Peter 1:4**). It is only the new self that is capable of bearing fruit that pleases God (note **Romans 7:4-5**).



Since Paul is using the picture of a tree bearing fruit to God, let's have look at how a tree bears fruit.

The fruit is the natural product of the life of the tree. If the root is good, then the fruit will be good (**Romans 11:16**). So the starting place for bearing good fruit is not the branches; it is the roots.

- A Christian who lives according to the flesh has his roots deeply planted in self. His motivations, his thoughts and his actions all stem from a basic self-centeredness.
- A Christian who lives according to the Spirit has his roots planted in the Spirit of God. His motivations, his thoughts and his actions all stem from a Christ-centeredness.

In the Gospel, God puts an ax to the root of the flesh, expressed either in self-effort or in self-gratification. And the ax that God puts to that diabolical root is nothing more and nothing less than the Cross of Christ.

Read Galatians 5:24

Now God wants you to put down strong roots into Christ, drawing life from the Holy Spirit so that you will bear fruit pleasing to him.

Read John 15:4-5

The *fruit* of the Spirit is the result of the *root* of the Spirit. If you "remain" (NIV) or "abide" (KJV) in Christ, grafted onto his life, then you will produce good fruit.

"Living in the Spirit" and "remaining in the vine" are equivalent terms. Both express the same meaning of drawing your life from the Spirit of God.

J. B. Phillips, his *The New Testament in Modern English*, brings out the meaning of **John 15:4-5** vividly:

"For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who shares my life and whose

life I share who proves fruitful. For the plain fact is that apart from me you can do nothing at all.”

You and the Holy Spirit

Walking in the Spirit is a partnership between you and the Spirit of God. It is not just you doing it (that is walking in the flesh), nor is it just God doing it, although it is his power which energizes your walk. You do the walking, but your walk is in God's Spirit.

Read Galatians 3:3

Paul chides the Galatian Christians for thinking that they could begin in the Spirit, then go on to attain their goal – being conformed to the likeness of Christ (**Romans 8:29**) – under their own steam. How you begin the Christian life is very important, for God intends for you to continue in the same way you began.

Read Colossians 2:6

If we *begin* in the Spirit (being born into God's family by the Spirit of God), then we are supposed to *continue* in the Spirit (relying upon the Spirit of God to grow into the likeness of Christ).

This cannot be over-stressed. How you begin is how you are to continue. So before we look at how we *walk* in the Spirit, let's take a look at how we *begin* in the Spirit.

Read 1 Peter 1:23

Just as a tree begins its life as a seed, so the Bible describes the beginning of the Christian life. God starts everything off by planting the seed of eternal life in your heart. This is the seed of the Gospel. It contains all the life of God's Spirit. Everything you need to live a life pleasing to God has been given to you in seed-form.

Read 2 Peter 1:3

By now, this verse should be very familiar to you. But never forget the amazing message it carries. Everything you need for life and godliness has *already* been given to you. And the package that it came in was the Holy Spirit.

Wrapped up in the Holy Spirit is the sum total of your salvation, your relationship with God and the power to live a life pleasing to God. The “imperishable seed” is the super-abundance of God's life, which has been sown into your heart through God's Word.

Let's look at a seed for a moment. Imagine you are holding an apple seed in your hand. Does it look in any way like an apple tree? Yet contained within this tiny tree is the life of the apple tree. If given the right conditions – good soil, water and sunlight – that small seed will sprout roots and grow into a large, fruitful tree.

This is similar to what has happened in your life. The Spirit-led life is not some

distant goal that you can only hope you will someday achieve. From Day One of your Christian life, God has intended that you be a Spirit-led Christian. The seed has already been planted in your heart – everything you need to live a life pleasing to God – but now it must begin to send down strong roots into life of God.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit is the “down-payment” of all that God has intended for your life. Just think about it. God has planned for you to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. But this is not “way out there.” You have a foretaste of it right now through the Holy Spirit. It’s all there, in seed-form. What you are in Christ now has to be outworked into every area of your life.

Read Philippians 2:12

This scripture is often misunderstood. At face value, it may seem that Paul is telling us that God’s salvation is not complete. But notice his words. He does not say “work *in* your salvation” but rather “work *out* your salvation” in the context of your relationship with others (see **Philippians 2:14-16**).

The salvation is complete. But it is in seed-form. It needs to grow. It needs to be worked out in every area of your life. God doesn’t just want you to be *saved* by faith; he wants you to learn to *live* by faith (**Romans 1:17**).

Read Philippians 2:13

In this verse lies the key to how you are to “work out your salvation in fear and trembling.”

“...*for it is God* who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

The Greek words Paul uses here literally mean God does “the willing and the doing.” As Marvin Vincent explains:

“Both [the willing and the doing] are from God, and are of one piece, so that he who *wills* inevitably *does*. The willing which is wrought by God, by its own nature and pressure, works out into action.”¹

As Augustine put it:

“We will, but God works the will in us. We work, therefore, but God works the working in us.”²

What this means is simple: your growth as a Christian is a cooperative action between you and God. God has worked his salvation *in* you, but you need to cooperate with God to see that salvation worked *out*.

And lest someone think that this is getting back into self-effort again, let’s establish exactly *how* you are supposed to work out your salvation “with fear and trembling.” There is one and *only one* way to work out your salvation. It is called *walking in the Spirit*.

The New Way of the Spirit

So let's take a look again at the verse that summarizes the whole of the Gospel Paul is presenting to the Roman Christians:

Read again Romans 7:6

When you received the Holy Spirit into your life, he didn't just give you "new birth" into God's family (**1 Peter 1:3**). He also opened up a "new way" of living. This "new way of the Spirit" is what God has intended for your life.

The principal characteristic of walking in the Spirit is *a change of focus*. Turn in your Bible again to the beginning of **Romans 8**:

Read Romans 8:5-8

Here, Paul contrasts the two ways of living by showing the difference in their focus.

The Focus of the Old Way

The focus of the "old way of the written code" is self. The *Amplified Bible* paints this vividly in **verses 5-7**:

"For those who are according to the flesh and controlled by its unholy desires, *set their minds on* and *pursue* those things which gratify the flesh...Now the *mind* of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death – death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter...[That is] because the *mind* of the flesh – with its carnal thoughts and purposes – is hostile to God; for it does not submit to God's Law, indeed it cannot. So then those who are living the life of the flesh – catering to the appetites and impulses of their carnal nature – cannot please or satisfy God, or be acceptable to Him."

Go back and read through the above passage again. This time, note particularly the words in italics – "set their minds on," "pursue" and "mind." If you are living according to the old way of the written code, your mind is set on something – and that something is yourself! If you are still "under law" (**Romans 6:14**), then you will find yourself oscillating between one of two states:

- ➡ Gratifying your flesh
- ➡ Striving to please God

But Paul says that in this condition you actually "*cannot* please or satisfy God." The simple reason for this is that the focus of your life is yourself. The Bible states very clearly that there is only one way to please God.

Read Hebrews 11:6

Faith is the key ingredient to a God-pleasing life. This is because, by its very nature, faith involves a change of focus from yourself to God. Instead of relying on

your own wisdom or strength, faith means you begin relying on God's wisdom and strength. And this is the way of life you have been called to live in!

The Focus of the New Way

Paul goes on in **Romans 8:9** (*Amplified Bible*) to say:

“But you are not living the life of the flesh, you are living the life of the Spirit, if the (Holy) Spirit of God [really] dwells within you – directs and controls you.”

In many of his letters, Paul assumes that the Christian is walking in the Spirit. This is, as far as Paul is concerned, the “normal” Christian life. Anything less is “sub-normal.” We can draw strong encouragement from this, because God has not placed an impossible goal in front of us, but something that is considered “normative” – God’s “norm” for your life. The Gospel releases the power of God to do exactly what God has intended for you (note again **Ephesians 1:4**).

Read again Romans 1:17

Back at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul identifies immediately the nature of the “new way of the Spirit.” Let’s take a look at this verse as it is rendered by a number of translations and paraphrases:

New King James Bible: “For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed *from faith to faith*; as it is written, *‘The just shall live by faith.’*”

New International Version: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is *by faith from first to last*, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

New Living Translation: “This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. *This is accomplished from start to finish by faith*. As the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life.’”

Revised Standard Version: “For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed *through faith for faith*; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

J. B. Phillips’ Translation of the New Testament: “[The Gospel is] God’s plan for imparting righteousness to men, *a process begun and continued by their faith*. For, as the scripture says: The righteous shall live by faith.”

The Living Bible: “This Good News tells us that God makes us ready for heaven—makes us right in God’s sight—when we put our faith and trust in Christ to save us. *This is accomplished from start to finish by faith*. As the Scripture says it, *‘The man who finds life will find it through trusting God.’*”

God’s Word: “God’s approval is revealed in this Good News. *This approval begins and ends with faith* as Scripture says, “The person who has God’s approval will live by faith.”

New Century Version: “The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself—*that it begins and ends with faith*. As the Scripture says, ‘But those who are right with God *will live by trusting in him*.’”

Amplified Bible: “For in the Gospel a righteousness which God ascribes is revealed, *both springing from faith and leading to faith* – disclosed through *the way of faith that arouses to more faith*. As it is written, The man who through faith is just and upright shall live *and shall live by faith*.”

The Amplified Bible goes on to more fully describe this focus of faith in **Romans 8:5-6**:

“...But those who are according to the Spirit and [controlled by the desires] of the Spirit, set their minds on and seek those things which gratify the (Holy) Spirit...But the mind of the (Holy) Spirit is life and soul-peace [both now and forever].”

By its very definition, the Spirit-led life is pleasing to God. Your eyes have turned from self to God, and in this change of focus is released all the resurrection power pent up in the Holy Spirit, who is dwelling in your heart.

Read Hebrews 12:2

The All-Important Question

Ask yourself a very simple and straightforward question:

Where is my focus?

This question lies at the core of the Gospel and sets the pace for your daily walk – whether it be in the flesh or in the Spirit.

The “new way of the Spirit” is based on a life that is “by faith, from first to last.” This faith is like a spiritual magnet, drawing the pleasure of God, for faith presupposes that your eyes are on him.

This is the most important point of this lesson: If you are still trying to patch up your old life, it is *impossible* to walk in the Spirit. If your eyes are fixated on yourself, you simply *cannot* walk in the power of God. By its very nature, walking in the Spirit involves a total change of focus from yourself to God.

In Summary

In closing, let’s take a bird’s eye view of what it means to walk in the flesh and what it means to walk in the Spirit:

- **Walking in the flesh** means allowing *your fleshly appetites* to dictate how you think and act. It means living life (even your life with God) on your own terms. Self is at the center of your actions and reactions. Your focus is squarely on yourself.

➤ **Walking in the Spirit** means allowing *God's Spirit* to dictate how you think and act. It means living life on God's terms, not your own. Christ is in the center of your actions and reactions. Your focus is squarely on the Lord.

In this lesson, we looked at the “what” of walking in the Spirit. In the next lesson, we will look at the “how” of walking in the Spirit and uncover more of the wonder of God's plan for your life – a plan that Paul calls “the new way of the Spirit.”

In closing, let's look at how *The Message* phrases **Romans 8:12-15**:

“So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What's next, Papa?’”

This is what your life in the Lord is now all about: Living in daily expectation of God's loving and powerful participation in your life!

¹ Martin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies, Vol. 3: The Epistles of Paul* (Parson's Technology: Electronic Edition STEP Files, 1998).

² Augustine of Hippo, quoted by Martin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies, Vol. 3: The Epistles of Paul* (Parson's Technology: Electronic Edition STEP Files, 1998).