

Flesh or Spirit

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Every day of our lives, in all of life and service, Christians face a crucial ongoing choice. Will we rely upon the resources of the flesh, or upon the work of the Holy Spirit? In the scriptures, flesh refers to the resources of natural humanity. Lives built upon such spiritual bankruptcy will never develop into the spiritual salt and light that the Lord desires. Lives built by the flesh cannot experience the Christ-centered, Christ-honoring testimony that brings glory to God. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit for our lives to be developed into that which is pleasing in God's sight and useful in His hands.

Walking In The Spirit

The term "walk" is used dozens of times in the New Testament to describe the manner of life a person is leading. "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...if we live in the Spirit, let also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16,25). Walking is a very insightful description of spiritual life. A walk has a beginning and a destination. Our beginning was in a new birth: "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6). Our destination is heaven forever with our Lord and Savior. A good walk is steady and progressive. We are called to be faithful. We are called to press ahead, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil. 3:13-14).

In addition, a walk has many potential adventures along the way. We are likely to encounter stretching challenges and paradoxical blessings: "in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:5,10).

Ultimately, a walk must have an available resource that provides sufficient vitality, strength, guidance, and assurance. Day by day, each step of the way, we are to rely upon the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Every issue of life is to be faced in this manner. Otherwise, the influence of our flesh (our natural humanity) will prevail. In ourselves we are not able to overcome the inadequacies and improper tendencies of the flesh. However, the Holy Spirit is more than able to become our sufficient provider of whatever we need for an effective and fruitful walk.

Flesh vs. Spirit

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). As believers, the Spirit of God dwells within our lives. He is the Spirit of holiness and He desires that we be partakers of His holiness, and thereby walk in godliness. The natural desires of man are not toward holiness, but rather self-indulgence and self-sufficiency. The Apostle Paul confessed, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). "I thank God {it is} through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). This humble turning from self to Christ allows one to walk in the Spirit, living by His victorious resources.

Set Free By The Spirit

There is a destructive tendency that resides in every human being. It is “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). This principle is always pulling people downward into sin and spiritual deadness. God’s remedy is a higher, more powerful principle of “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2) that has made us free from the law of sin and death. The Holy Spirit makes the life that is in Christ Jesus our resource for living. This principle is operating in the life of any new creature in Christ who is not walking according to the flesh, but is walking according to the Spirit. This approach to Christian living is the only one that can liberate us from the internal carnal tendencies that influence us all. In fact, this is the only hope of growing in godliness. Our lives can only measure up to the holy will of God when we are walking in the Spirit, because Christ is then being allowed to express His life through us. Jesus was (and is) the only one who could ever walk fully pleasing to the Father. For a victorious Christian life, we need this same life of Jesus living in and through us now, by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Crucial Choice

The crucial choice that believers in Christ face day by day is between living by the flesh, or living by the Spirit. The difference is facing life by our resources and perspectives or by God’s resources and perspectives. The consequences related to this choice are monumental. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). When a believer allows his mind to be set in a carnal direction, he will be thinking about worldly self-indulgence or religious self-accomplishment. On the other hand, when a follower of Jesus sets his mind on heavenly matters, he will be considering issues of humility (“how much I need the Lord”) or faith (“how great the Lord is”). The works of the flesh will produce all manner of sin as described in Galatians 5:19-21. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit produces “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Conclusion

The choice between living by the flesh or the Spirit is what all believers face every day of our lives. God offers only two options for every issue of life; namely, “live according to the flesh” or “live according to the Spirit.” The Lord desires us to renounce the natural path of the flesh and the disastrous consequences that it brings, and gladly embrace the supernatural path of the Holy Spirit, which brings the undeserved results of His grace at work in our lives.