

WALK IN THE SPIRIT

- A. Introduction: We're talking about who Jesus is and why He came into this world, according to the New Testament. Remember, the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus—men who walked and talked with Him. For the past several weeks we've been focusing on why Jesus came to earth.
1. Jesus took on a human nature and was born in this world to make it possible for sinful human beings to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. Eph 1:4-5; Heb 2:14-15; John 3:16; etc.
 - a. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus paid for humanity's sins. And, when a person acknowledges Jesus as Savior and Lord, on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial death, God can justify that person. To be justified means to be declared no longer guilty of sin, and restored to right relationship with God.
 - b. Once we are justified, God imparts His life and Spirit to that our innermost being, which makes us more than simply His creation. We become actual sons or daughters of God by a second birth.
 1. John 1:12-13—But to all who believed him and accepted him (Jesus), he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God (NLT).
 2. Almighty God created human beings with the capacity to receive Him (by His life and Spirit) into our being and then to express and glorify Him by showing Him to the world around us.
 3. The Bible uses several terms to describe what happens—new birth, regeneration, Christ in you (union with Christ). Words fall short when we try to describe how the Transcendent, Eternal, Infinite, Holy God interacts with finite, fallen human beings, but each term gives some insight.
 - c. This inward new birth or regeneration is the beginning of a process of transformation that will ultimately restore us to all that God intends us to be—sons and daughters who are like Jesus.
 1. Jesus not only obtained God's family through His death and resurrection, Jesus is also the pattern for the family. We don't become Jesus. We become like Him in His humanity—like Him in holiness and love, character, and power.
 2. We don't lose our individuality or distinct personality—it (we) gets purified, cleansed, and restored. We are conformed to the image of Christ.
 - A. Rom 8:29—For God, in His foreknowledge, chose them (those who love God and are called according to His plan) to bear the family likeness of his Son, that he might be the eldest of a family of many brothers (J. B. Phillips).
 - B. Rom 8:30—He chose them long ago; when the time came he called them, he made them righteous in his sight (justified them), and then lifted them to the splendor of life as his own sons (J. B. Phillips).
 - d. This process of transformation (being restored to what God originally intended before sin damaged the family) is carried out by the Holy Spirit in us.
 2. Becoming like Jesus is not an automatic or instantaneous process, and we must learn to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as the process is underway. Last week we pointed out that this involves:
 - a. A change in the direction of our lives: (Jesus) died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them (II Cor 5:15, NLT).
 - b. A commitment to do the will of God: Jesus summed up God's will in two commands: Love God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:37-39). This love is an action that is expressed through our obedience to God's moral law and our treatment of other people. The Bible is our guide as to the specifics, as well as what this looks like in practice.
 - c. An awareness that God is in you by His Spirit to help you as you choose to do things His way, even when it is difficult: Be even more careful to put into action God's saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to

obey him and the power to do what pleases him (Phil 2:12-13, NLT).

3. In this lesson we're going to elaborate on and add to these points, as we talk about how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works in us to make us increasingly Christlike, increasingly like Jesus.

B. Human nature has been corrupted by sin, going back to Adam, the head of the human race. Salvation is the purification and restoration of human nature by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of the Cross. The Holy Spirit comes into you to restore your entire human nature (all of you), your inward man and your outward man.

1. At the new birth (regeneration) the process of restoration begins. A huge change takes place when we repent and believe the good news of salvation in Jesus. Our innermost being is made alive with God.

a. God, by His life and Spirit indwells our innermost being, and our identity is changed. We become sons and daughters of God, partakers of His uncreated, eternal life (*zoe*) and Spirit.

b. But our mental and emotional faculties are not directly affected by this change. Neither does our behavior automatically change. We still have a natural inclination toward selfishness (to put self above God and others), and we have appetites and desires that are corrupt because of Adam's sin.

1. We must put forth effort to change our attitudes and the way we think. We must get control of our emotions and actions and bring them in line with God's will. Paul the apostle referred to process this as putting on the new man.

2. Eph 4:22-23—Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt corrupt through deceitful desires, and...be renewed in the spirit of you minds. And...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (ESV).

2. II Cor 5:17—Paul wrote that anyone who commits his or her life to Jesus and is born again and is a new creature. What does it mean to be a new creature, in light of the fact that we still have unChristlike thoughts, emotions, and behaviors?

a. To be a new creature does not mean that you are a different person—someone who never existed before. The Greek word that is translated new is *kainos*. This word does not mean something that never existed before. It means new in quality and superior in character.

b. Jesus didn't die to replace you with someone or something else. He died to transform and restore you to what you were meant to be before sin damaged the family.

1. II Cor 5:17—Therefore if any person is (ingrafted) in Christ, the Messiah, he is (a new creature altogether,) a new creation; the old (previous moral and spiritual condition) has passed away.

Behold the fresh and new has come (Amp).

2. The Greek word that is translated passed away doesn't mean cease to exist. It has the idea of passing from one place or condition to another.

A. When Christians struggle with feelings or behavior, people sometimes say: That's not you anymore. Just confess who you are in Christ until those things go away. But, that's incorrect. It actually is you—the as yet unchanged, unrestored portion of your being.

B. We must choose to say no to the inclinations and desires of our corrupted human nature, and make an effort to live according to the what Jesus (through the Bible tells us). We do this with an attitude of dependence on the Holy Spirit to strength and empower us to do so.

3. Sincere Christians, who have truly committed their lives to following Jesus, still experience conflict in their being. Paul urged Christians to walk in (by) the Spirit and not in the flesh.

a. Gal 5:16-17—But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh (ESV).

b. We could do several lessons on this topic. But, for now, consider these points in connection with our present discussion.

1. People struggle with the concept of walking in (or by) the Spirit because they mistakenly think that it is a spiritual state they must somehow achieve—they must get into the Spirit.

2. To walk in or by the Spirit simply means to walk (or act) in accordance with the will of God concerning our behavior. To walk in the flesh means to continue to walk (or act) in accordance with the as yet unchanged parts of your being. Paul describes what the works of the flesh and of the Spirit look like.

A. Flesh—sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these (Gal 5:19-21, NLT, ESV).

B. Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22, NLT). These actions are called fruits. Fruit is outward evidence of the life within.

1. The Holy Spirit is in us to help us love others, be at peace, be joyful, and get control of sinful desires and unChristlike attitudes and thoughts. But we have to exercise our will (chose to say no to them), and then the Holy Spirit strengthens us inwardly to follow through on that choice.

2. Exercise your will doesn't mean try to change by sheer will power alone. Exercise your will means to have a heart attitude of "not my will but your will", with an expectation and dependence on God the Holy Spirit to help you follow through.

c. Some say the solution to the struggles we face as we grow in Christlikeness is less of me and more of Him. Although this idea is well meant, it is not accurate. Salvation is not Jesus replacing you. Salvation is Jesus restoring and perfecting you by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of the Cross.

1. Doesn't the Bible say that I must decrease and Jesus must increase? That idea is based on an out of context verse. John the Baptist made that statement when his disciples came to him, upset that Jesus was baptizing people, and everyone was now going to Him. John 3:26-30

2. John replied: You yourselves know how plainly I told you that I am not the Messiah. I am here to prepare the way for him—that is all (v28, NLT)...He must grow more prominent, I must grow less so (v30, Amp). The word translated decrease means to lessen in rank or influence.

C. Right now, we are finished works in progress. We are God's sons and daughters through faith in Christ and the new birth, but we are not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ in every part of our being. I John 3:2

1. Almighty God is well aware that we are finished works in progress. But He who began a good work in us will complete it (Phil 1:6). And, He deals with us on the basis of our identity—sons and daughters.

a. Paul wrote that through the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross God is now able to "bring his many children into glory...So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters" (Heb 2:10-11, NLT).

b. Just as committing an act of righteousness did not make you righteous before you become God's son or daughter, neither does committing an act of unrighteousness make you unrighteous when you sin as a son or daughter.

2. John recognized that Christians still sin. In the context of acknowledging it when we sin, he wrote: I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father...Jesus Christ (the righteous). He is the sacrifice for our sins (I John 2:1-2, NLT).

a. Note the balance here. You should be striving to live holy lives. However, if you sin, Jesus doesn't have to beg the Father not to punish you or plead with Him to forgive you. John's point is the sacrifice that paid for sin has been made so that you can be forgiven and cleansed. 1.

Paul echoed this idea: For by one offering he perfected forever all those who he is making holy (Heb 10:14, NLT).

2. The Greek word that is translated perfected means to complete or accomplish, to make perfect by reaching the intended goal. The sacrifice needed to make possible our complete cleansing and restoration (the complete cleansing and restoration of our nature) has been made.

- b. Note what John wrote after he said that we are finished works in progress: I John 3:2-3—Yes, dear friends, we are already God’s children, and we can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who believe this will keep themselves pure, just as Christ is pure (NLT).
1. Doing what is right doesn’t earn us anything from God or make us deserving of salvation and blessing. Righteous living (living in a way that is consistent with God’s moral law as revealed in the Bible) is a return to the way it’s supposed to be—sons and daughters who glorify God.
 2. Titus 2:14—(Jesus) gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right (NLT).
- c. Note what John wrote in I John 2:6—Whoever says he abides in Him ought—as a personal debt—to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself (Amp).
1. Note what else he wrote: Dear children, don’t let anyone deceive you about this. When people do what is right, it is because they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous...Those who have been born into God’s family do not sin, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they have been born of God (I John 3:7-9, NLT)...We know that those who have become part of God’s family do not make a practice of sinning (I John 5:18, NLT).
 2. These passages do not mean that if you commit a sin you aren’t saved. The idea is that one who has truly surrendered to the Lord Jesus does not continue to practice sin. They can’t keep sinning because they understand that they are no longer supposed to live the way that they used to live. They understand that they must take up their Cross daily—not my will but yours.
 3. We need to recognize the weight and seriousness of what has happened and is happening to us because of the Cross of Christ and our faith in Him. Almighty God has indwelt us for the purpose of restoring our entire being (our entire nature) to what He always intended—sons and daughters who are Christlike.
 - a. This should inspire awe and reverence in us, along with gratefulness for what God has done and is doing in us, and will do through us. We are representatives of Almighty God to those around us. What kind of picture of Jesus do they get from us?
- b. We have a responsibility to live in a way that glorifies God, and accurately represents Him to the world around us. We need to live with the awareness that God is in us by His Spirit. I Cor 6:19
1. Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of him (Col 1:10, ESV). We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need (Col 1:11, NLT).
 2. Note the balance in this passage. We are to live in a way that befits our Lord, demonstrating fruit (outward evidence of the new life and Spirit in us), with awareness of and dependence on the Holy Spirit in us to strengthen and empower us to walk as Jesus (in His humanity) did.
- D. Conclusion: We have much more to say about all of this next week, but consider one thought as we close.
1. Lessons like this can be difficult to teach and to hear since we all still fall short in terms of living holy lives that fully glorify God. Many sincere people have big struggles with the parts of them that are not yet Christlike, and when we talk about the fact that we shouldn’t sin, they feel condemned.
 2. John 8:1-11—Remember when the religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus? Note what He said to her: Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on, sin no more (v11, ESV).
 - a. Jesus’ point was not to approve of or overlook sin. His point was to produce a change in her life, on the basis of the sacrifice He would soon make at the Cross—save her, or cleanse her from sin and restored her to all that she was meant to be before sin damaged the family?
 - b. How do you think this woman felt after being forgiven by Jesus and exhorted to live a righteous life? Condemned and shamed, or grateful and loved? Much more next week!