
LIVING IN THE SPIRIT - THEOLOGY IN ACTION

“The Holy Spirit and me ... we talk.” (aged Pastor friend)

1. Foundations of Our Relationship with the Holy Spirit

“No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Discussion: what springs to mind when we hear the term “walking in the Spirit”?

On a theological level, we have seen that:

- without the Holy Spirit we would not be drawn to saving faith in Jesus Christ and be “born again” (John 3:5-7)
- as Christians we are individually and collectively the dwelling place (“temple”) of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) - He is always with us
- He reveals the spiritual dimension of life that human understanding alone is incapable of grasping (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- He gives us assurance of our relationship with the Father (Romans 8:14-16)
- He brings about life changes (Romans 8:9-11)
- without His guidance we would fall into error - Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where He was tested but prevailed; (Luke 4:1)
- the Holy Spirit equips us to carry out God’s will and calling (Acts 13:2)

“Living in the Holy Spirit” is the “extra dimension” that distinguishes Christians from non-Christians. However, within the broad Christian community there are issues we need to keep in mind:

1. theological “liberals” accept much of the teaching and history of the Bible, but tend to approach it as allegorical, or non-literal, including the concept of a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit
2. conservative evangelicals accept the teaching and history of the Bible, but relegate a lot of it to past centuries and down-play or restrict aspects of the active role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians today
3. some Pentecostal groups emphasise freedoms that the Holy Spirit brings to Christians in the current era, along with His gifts and the importance of personal experience with God, but embrace extremes because they lack depth and neglect balanced teaching

2. What Walking in the Spirit is *Not*

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” (Judges 21:25)

Living in the Spirit is not:

- “over-spiritualizing” everything (circumstances, events, relationships, or the way we interpret the Bible and apply it to our lives)

- calling our ideas the Holy Spirit's ideas (cf Jeremiah 14:14)
- seeking extra-Biblical revelation (Galatians 1:8), including for the purpose of appearing superior to others
- subjectively re-interpreting Christian truth to "fit" our circumstances and basing our values and decisions on our private feelings and experiences (this is the mistake of "existentialists", including post-modernists, who teach that we create our own values and meanings by what we feel works for us)
- artificially separating spiritual life from physical life and dismissing or punishing the latter (first century Gnostics did this, as they believed physical matter, including our bodies, was inherently evil; this led Christians back into sin; it has also re-appeared many times in church history, eg "flagellants")
- separating ourselves from members of the Body of Christ, or sitting in judgement on fellow-Christians, because they are not as committed or as "spiritual" as we are (including taking Psalm 105:15 or 2 Corinthians 6:17 out of context)
- cutting ourselves off from the world around us because we fear compromising our holiness, spirituality or our relationship with the Holy Spirit (citing 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 as a basis for doing so); we cannot afford to be legalistic (Matthew 7:3-5)
- ignoring our Christian obligations, because the physical realm is "inferior" to "higher" spiritual commitments (the Pharisees and scribes did this ; read Matthew 7, eg v. 11)
- over-emphasizing spiritual gifts, "the special abilities the Spirit gives us" (1 Corinthians 12:1) - this was the problem in the Corinthian church and stemmed from pride (eg 1 Corinthians 11:19); cf "It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have." (1 Corinthians 12:11)

3. Hindering the Spirit

The Bible teaches that it is possible to:

- "*quench*" the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19 - σβέννυμι = to extinguish, quench eg a fire or things on fire; to go out, to suppress, stifle)
- "*grieve*" the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30 - λυπέω = to make sorrowful, to affect with sadness, cause grief, to throw into sorrow, to grieve, offend)
- "*resist*" the Spirit (Acts 7:51 - ἀντιπίπτω = to be adverse, oppose, strive against)

How can we hinder the Holy Spirit?

- yielding to sin and indulging in it without seeking His help to overcome
- holding onto unconfessed sin

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- living as though the Spirit is a thing, not a person > ignoring Him on a personal level
 - setting our focus on material things of this life and world and not on God and eternity
 - pride
 - bad relationships with others
 - refusal to forgive (harbouring ill will, being out of fellowship with fellow-Christians)
 - rebellion against godly leadership
 - not obeying when He tells us to do something
 - being slow or reluctant to obey
 - apathy
 - being “too busy”
 - unbelief
 - taking the glory for things that belong to God alone (Isaiah 42:8)
 - lack of prayer (cf Jude 20)
 - neglecting the Word of God that can release faith in our lives
 - ingratitude
 - rushing ahead of God (not waiting)
 - seeking Him only for His gifts, or His touch, not for Himself
 - restricting the relationship to certain times and places, eg at church on Sunday
 - not abiding first and foremost in Jesus Christ
 - attributing His work to others (in the case of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day this went as far as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit)

4. What does Walking in the Spirit Look Like?

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step (στοιχέω = proceed in a row, as the march of a soldier, go in order, to walk, to direct one’s life) with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25)

The Christian life is a pilgrimage, not a once-off event. Our strength as Christians is commensurate with the way we live, and the role of the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day experiences.

During much of Christian history the Holy Spirit has been neglected or marginalised, because Jesus words, “He will not speak of Himself” (John 16:13) have been misunderstood. Let’s not fall into that trap, but learn how to “walk in the Spirit” each day.

What is involved in “keeping in step” with the Holy Spirit?

- organising our lives by the light and revelation we already have, in the Word of God and the life of Jesus > “be holy, as I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16)
 - there are some parts of Christian living for which we do not need any additional revelation
 - living in sin is inconsistent with walking in God’s ways, not matter how much we try to justify it (Romans 3:8; 1 John 1:6, 7)
 - the “roadmap” for our Christian walk has already been drawn by the Holy Spirit in Biblical teaching and examples
- communicating with the Spirit (2-way communication is the key to recognizing His voice; even a “still small voice”; this is essential in any relationship)
 - leading to a more effective prayer life
 - God is alive; He still speaks; He is not silent
- willingly obeying what He tells us, the first time, every time
 - learning His ways (including the methods He uses to “correct” or guide us)
 - helps us avoid confusion
- having a “thirst” for knowing Him (Psalm 42:2; 63:1)
 - not just a casual acquaintance or intermittent interest, or a “needs-based” relationship we turn on and off like a tap, depending on what is happening in our lives
- choosing to set our hearts on Him and rely on Him in our thoughts, words and deeds as the presence of God in our lives (Psalm 27:8)
- seeking Him for wisdom and understanding, and depending on Him (James 1:5);
- being teachable - *“Teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you”* (Moses, Exodus 33:13). *“Teach me your way, O Lord.”* (David, Psalm 27:11; see also Psalm 25:4, 5; 86:11)

allowing Him to produce His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22, 23)

- recognising and acknowledging His presence - we are never *out* of His presence (Psalm 139);
 - however, we need to remain in communication: *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3)

using His gifts (1 Corinthians 12)

- leading to more effective service (ministry)
- honest confession and repentance from sin (sin in our lives is diametrically opposed to walking in the Spirit - see 1 Corinthians 2:14, 3:1; Galatians 5:16, 17, Ephesians 5:18)

- following His leading in decision-making and daily life - the more we obey Him in little things, the easier it will be to do so in big things/hard times

letting Him reveal Christ to our hearts

being open to the understanding He gives into God's Word

responding to Him when He comes to confirm our sonship (Romans 8:14-16)

allowing Him to shed his love abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5)

refusing nagging temptation and claiming His power to overcome sin

claiming His promised power to wrestle against spiritual enemies

- allowing Him to guide our thought life and show us how to take every thought captive and not fall into sin (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5)
- walking by faith, and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- walking in step with fellow-Christians (how odd it would be if we claimed to be in step with the Spirit while being out of fellowship with the Body of Christ, cf 1 John 5:1)

5. The Character of the Spirit in Daily Life

"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. (Acts 13:1-5)

The Holy Spirit wants to be actively involved in our individual and church life:

- appointing leaders (Acts 13:1-5)
- anointing ministers (people who serve) at all levels (eg Stephen, Acts 6:3)
- speaking to individuals and congregations (Acts 13:2-4; 15:8)
- giving wisdom, strength and discernment for practical work
- giving supernatural comfort, hope and joy in times of stress, trial, opposition, disappointment (Acts 9:31; Romans 14:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:6)
- distributing His special gifts, for the benefit of all
- teaching us, as individuals and congregations, in the things that please Him and how to put them into action on a practical level

– while keeping our hearts on eternity (Colossians 3:1; Philippians 3:20)

- keeping us sensitive to the “spiritual” nature of our life and worship
- giving insight into the Scriptures He authored (2 Peter 1:20, 21)
- rooting out sin in our lives (Acts 5)
- giving us boldness to proclaim Christ to our world (Acts 1:8)
- focusing our hearts and desires on the things of God (Romans 8:5) - this involves constant “moments of choice”
- helping us to “test the spirits” (δοκιμάζω = to test, examine, prove, scrutinise, to see whether a thing is genuine or not), “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)

6. What we need to do

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive 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 through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Romans 8:5-11, NIV)

– recognize things that hinder us and deal with them

- set our hearts on the things of God (Romans 8:5)
- value the liberty we have in Christ and not be drawn back to non-Christian values or preferences (Galatians 5:1)
- allow the Holy Spirit to do the “transforming” work in our minds (Romans 12:2) that will result in changes to our lifestyle
- grow a culture of “obedience to the Holy Spirit” in our lives

Discussion: what is the Holy Spirit saying to us? what are we doing about it? are we obediently walking “in step” with Him? are we teachable? do we pray, “Lord, lead me, guide me, show me how to do your will”?