

Charismatic Considerations
(Blessings and Responsibilities of the Spirit Filled Life)

The second chapter of the Book of Acts records the descent of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy from the second chapter of the Book of the prophet Joel.

The Spirit of God came down and infilled the believers who were gathered in Jerusalem awaiting what Jesus termed “the promise of the Father.” Acts 2:4 describes this: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” It is traditionally considered that this event coincided with the establishment of the New Testament Church.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Church is one of several topics often subject to controversy because of interpretational differences within the Christian community. My hope is to avoid as much as possible these controversial issues in this presentation of what it means to live in, and to walk in the Spirit.

My conviction, however, is that the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church, the age of the apostles, are not restricted to that period. The Holy Spirit is still available to the individual believer, to the Church body, to the Missionary Society, or to any and every Christian organization, to move and work wondrously in this age of grace prior to the second coming of the Lord. Let us remember too that God is sovereign and transcends any and all preconceived ideas of mankind.

What does it mean to live and walk in the Spirit?

Living in the realm of the redeemed:

Firstly, the Holy Spirit convicts both the saint and the sinner and leads them to repentance. Jesus said, concerning the Holy Spirit, in John 16:8: “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

The grace of God delivers the repentant sinner from the power of darkness and conveys him into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1:13). When this occurs “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” This truth enables the redeemed to live free from condemnation.

Living above the temptations and works of the flesh:

Walking in the Spirit entails having the power to overcome the works of the flesh and the lusts of the flesh. Let us reflect on the following scriptures:

“Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

“If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians. 5:25).

“How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it?” (See Romans 6:1.)

The scripture also declares that we are not debtors to the flesh (Romans 8:12; Galatians 2:20).

If we are truly “walking in the Spirit” we will no longer exhibit those works of the flesh that once characterized our life-style prior to redemption (Ephesians 2:1-3).

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We certainly will not engage in those very evident “works of the flesh” listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Neither, however, should we succumb to those more subtle temptations that may come along at any moment. For example: we will not practice deceit, nor be party to anyone’s deceitful workings. We will not, if truly “walking in the Spirit,” utter questionable jokes or chuckle at them when hearing them. Rather, our spirit will feel deeply grieved. One who is “walking in the Spirit” avoids acting in a manner that is offensive to God or inconsiderate of others.

The very essence of salvation should reveal a holiness of character imparted to us through the Holy Spirit. We become “partakers of the divine nature” (I Peter 1:4). In short, when walking in the Spirit, we are exhibiting a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

Living according to the word of God:

Walking in the Spirit is equivalent to living in accordance with the word of God. The Spirit of God does not lead contrary to the divine revelation of sacred scripture. One cannot say, “The Holy Spirit showed me” or “the Holy Spirit told me” – and then state something that is in violation of the commandments of scripture. God is not divided. There is complete unity in the Godhead. The “show and tell” so to speak of the Holy Spirit will always exhibit, as His script, that which can be revealed by the word of God. After all who is considered the Author of scripture? It is the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:20, 21).

The leading of the Spirit is in every way congruent with the Word. Never will the

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Holy Spirit contradict the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21), nor be in opposition to the headship of Christ. Christ is the head of the Church, the body (Colossians 1:18). The Church, whether corporately, or any individual member of the body, who prays for the leading of the Holy Spirit, is equivalently praying for direction from the governing Head of the church, who is Jesus Christ Himself.

So let the individual believer, or the Church assembly, who desires to know the will of God and to seek the direction of the Holy Spirit be like the Bereans of old who “searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Being a participant in the Great Commission:

Walking in the Spirit also entails becoming an active participant in fulfilling the Great Commission. Jesus said to His disciples, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8). The same text goes on to name some of the local regions of the known world, and concludes with the words, “and to the end of the earth.”

Earlier Jesus had told His disciples to “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15) and to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

All of these mandates or commandments were connected to living in the power of the Holy Spirit; for Jesus Himself told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem first until they were “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

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Acts, the New Testament book of Church history, reveals how the Early Church fulfilled the Great Commission by living and moving in the power of the Holy Spirit in taking the gospel to the various regions of the then-known world. The results were the salvation of souls and miracles of healing and deliverance.

All of us as believers share a part in the Great Commission. In some cases, it is in helping to send forth missionaries to preach the gospel (Romans 10:15). In other cases, it is praying that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers and then offering continued prayer support (Luke 10:2). In other instances it may involve moving out of our comfort zones by leaving home and familiarity to go forth into all the world in accordance with the command of Jesus. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is our portion when we act in obedience to this commandment. No one who is “walking in the Spirit” can totally exclude the “Great Commission” as part of that walk or life-style.

Living in the realm of revelation and foretaste of future glory:

Another characteristic of walking in the Spirit is the benefit of gaining access to a realm of revelation in reference to those things which God has prepared for His children throughout eternity. It is a truth, that when realized, stimulates the believer to press on, enduring whatever comes along in living the Spirit-filled life.

Saint Paul, in quoting an Old Testament text, stated in one of his letters to the Church in Corinth, “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of*

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man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” He followed up that with these words: “But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:9, 10).

This is not a declaration that the Spirit-filled believer has come to the full knowledge and revelation of the things of God, as though he were caught up into the third heaven like the one of whom Paul wrote in II Corinthians 12. What is revealed in this text is that the child of God, who is sensitive to the working of God’s Spirit, is getting a foretaste of the heavenly realm while here on earth and in living the Christian life with all of its earthly demands.

The same human author, by the inspiration of the Spirit, writes of a guarantee or an assurance of the resurrection that is made real and significant by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14; II Corinthians 5:5.) This is part and partial of that foretaste. The scripture states in Romans 8:17 that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. In the Spirit we are already “seated in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6).

Indeed, God has prepared an innumerable bounty of wonderful experiences for the redeemed throughout the ages. In this life the believer will not experience them in their fullness, but he, through the Spirit, can get a “sneak preview” as the saying goes. (Sometimes my sanctified imagination really indulges in this.)

Intercessory prayer can also be cited, indirectly at least, as another example of this. Romans 8:26 states, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with

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groanings which cannot be uttered.”

The believer who is walking in the Spirit may feel the leading of the Holy Spirit to pray about a situation, or simply to pray randomly in the Spirit with these “groanings.” At times testimonials come forth which reveal that the Holy Spirit prompted someone to pray that a need might be met or even that a crisis be avoided in the life of an individual or that a potentially devastating situation be averted.

Believers praying in the Spirit sometimes receive visions which reveal in a symbolic manner the intervention of God and His workings in the lives of individuals or of the Church body.

We do not intellectually understand the working of the Spirit and the deeper things of God, but we know through the witness of the Spirit that God is at work in our lives and we anticipate a greater revelation and understanding when our redemption is complete and we are in His very presence.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of tasting of “the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5). This very appropriately blends into the next point to be considered.

Being a participant in the workings of the Spirit in the Church:

Walking in the Spirit means to live as an effective participant in the life of the Church. What is the purpose for the gathering of the saints, or in today’s vernacular, the attending of a Church service? Certainly we may expect to worship through singing,

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hearing prayers, and receiving a Bible-based sermon and meeting and greeting our fellow saints, etc. Might it be, though, that the individual member is missing a vital dimension of Church life by being (intentionally or otherwise) more of a spectator than a participant?

Saint Paul, when addressing one particular New Testament Church, writes: “Each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation” (I Corinthians 14:26)

The Spirit gives to the corporate body, the Church, gifts or manifestations. This includes inspirational or vocal gifts, gifts of power and miracles and also gifts of revelation and wisdom. All of these edify the body of Christ. (I am not here speaking of discharging duties in reference to appointed positions of leadership in the Church, though these, too, should be done with the anointing of the Spirit.)

It is significant enough for Saint Paul to devote an entire chapter (I Corinthians 12) to list the workings or the Gifts of the Spirit and how they bring unity in the body of Christ and another chapter (I Corinthians 14) to deal with the correct administration of them within the corporate worship service. Each member of the body of Christ should prepare himself to enter the gathering of the saints with an anointing that enables him to participate and contribute according to the leading of the Spirit; and it might be added – “decently and in order.” Once again this may require moving out of one’s comfort zone.

Manifesting the Fruit of the Spirit:

Finally, walking in the Spirit entails bearing fruit – the Fruit of the Spirit as opposed to manifesting the works of the flesh.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). What a contrast to the list of negatives mentioned just prior to that (Galatians 5:19-21)! This fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation or “down to earth” evidence, so to speak, of the life-style of one who is truly living and walking in the Spirit. Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20).

In between those two chapters where the apostle Paul is writing concerning the gifts of the Spirit, he inserts a chapter devoted to “a more excellent way.” This chapter is about love (I Corinthians. 13). The supreme importance therefore of this manifestation is evident. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). From this essential fruit flow the other manifestations of the Spirit.

Let us use our sanctified imaginations and envision a beautiful orchard of fruit trees. If we are to give to these fruits the nine names listed above, what do we see or conceive in our minds - trees bearing beautiful, sweet and delicious fruit? For the most part we probably will. There is, however, sour fruit too. What about that fruit of the Spirit called long-suffering? It can taste sour. Patience does not appear as beautiful or tempting as love, joy or peace. The anointing oil of the Holy Spirit can, however, sweeten this fruit too.

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Self-control, which is akin to self-discipline, may be purely a matter of individual taste; but the Spirit can sweeten this fruit also. Let us reflect on this principle: fruit does not work or struggle to grow. It comes naturally because of its connection with the life-giving source of the tree.

As we live the Spirit-filled life, let us abide in the Vine, where that life flowing sustenance is prevalent and be connected to that life-giving source, through whom only we can produce the fruit of the Spirit.

The benefits and blessings of living in the Spirit are bountiful. Let us not, however, forget the responsibilities too.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

[All scripture quotations were from NKJV]