

Walking in the Spirit

by J.C. Philpot

The key to enjoying the presence of God and having clear evidences is to walk after the Spirit, following the leadings and teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: John 16:13, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:5, Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:25, Colossians 3:2, 1 Peter 2:11, 1 John 3:21

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on Romans 8:1, highlighting the contrast between walking after the flesh and walking after the Spirit. He explains that walking after the flesh involves following the desires and inclinations of our fallen nature inherited from Adam, whether in gross sins or false religious practices. Conversely, walking after the Spirit entails being led, guided, and taught by the Holy Spirit in pursuing Christ, truth, prayer, faith, hope, love, contrition, comfort, spiritual-mindedness, and separation from the world. Philpot emphasizes the necessity of walking after the Spirit for true godliness, happiness, and assurance of salvation, warning against the dangers of walking after the flesh even for believers.

Transcript

(an excerpt from J. C. Philpot's sermon, "No Condemnation", preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on March 30, 1862)

"Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1

This description consists of two points, which I shall have to lay open.

First, what the saint of God does not walk after.

Secondly, what he does walk after.

A. Walking after the FLESH.

"He walks not after the flesh." Two things here demand our earnest inquiry.

1. What is meant by the flesh.

2. What is meant by walking after the flesh.

1. What are we to understand by the expression "the FLESH?" This word takes in the whole of that fallen nature, both in body and soul, which we have inherited from our first parent. It does not, therefore, mean merely those gross, sensual lusts, which are so sad a part of our original inheritance, but embraces every faculty of body and mind which we possess as children of Adam.

2. To WALK after the flesh, carries with it the idea of the flesh going before us, as our leader, guide, and example, and our following close in its footsteps, so that wherever it drags or draws we move after it, as the needle after the magnet. To walk, then, after the flesh, is to move step by step in implicit obedience to the commands of the flesh, the lusts of the flesh, the inclinations of the flesh, and the desires of the flesh, whatever shape they assume, whatever garb they wear, whatever name they may bear. See how wide a net these words cast forth; how thick the crop, how wide the sweep, how sharp the edge of this scythe! Can any of the fallen children of Adam escape being taken by this net? Who is there, from peer to peasant, who must not fall before this keen scythe? All will admit that those who walk after the lusts of the flesh, who are abandoned to the grosser sins of our nature, have no manifested mark of being in Christ Jesus. The common moral sense of men, the voice of natural conscience, the outspoken verdict of society at large, all proclaim, as with one voice, that sin and religion cannot be yoke-fellows.

But are the grosser and more manifest sinners the only people who may be said to walk after the flesh? Does not all human religion, in all its varied forms and shapes, come under the sweep of this all-devouring sword? Yes; every one who is entangled in and led by a fleshly religion, walks as much after the flesh as those who are abandoned to its grosser indulgences. Sad it is, yet not more sad than true, that false religion has slain its thousands, if open sin has slain its ten thousands. This, perhaps, you would all here assent to if I were to confine myself to the lower ground of that common religion which does not even clothe itself in a gospel dress; which has not learned so much as the voice of Jacob, but wears alike the garments and speaks in the tones of Esau. But what will you say, if I bring you on higher ground, and take you as you sit under the sound of the gospel? There is a fleshly faith and a fleshly hope and a fleshly love among those of a sounder creed and purer language than the common religionists of the day; and a man that walks after this carnal faith and hope and love in the very courts of the Lord's house, is as much walking after the flesh as though he lived and died a drunkard on the ale-house bench. Our earthly Zion is overrun with a fleshly confidence which is but presumption; a fleshly knowledge which is but ignorance; and a fleshly talk which is but boasting. But to walk after the flesh, whether it be in the grosser or more refined sense of the term, is the same in the sight of God.

To walk, then, after the flesh is to be ever pursuing, desiring, and doing the things that please the flesh, whatever aspect that flesh may wear or whatever dress it may assume, whether molded and fashioned after the grosser and more flagrant ways of the profane world, or the more refined and deceptive religion of the professing church.

B. Walking in the SPIRIT.

I have already shown that to walk after a thing, in the language of Scripture, means to pursue it with desire, and to do so habitually. Thus we read of "mockers walking after their ungodly lusts" (Jude 18) as a mark of the wicked, and a "walking after the commandments" of the Lord (2 John 6) as a mark of the righteous. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to walk as the Spirit leads, guides, directs, and teaches. The flesh is the motive power to those who are in the flesh; the Spirit is the moving influence to those who are in Christ Jesus. But let me open this point a little more fully.

1. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to walk after and in a revealed Christ- not a Christ in the letter, but a Christ in the Spirit; not a Christ in the word only, but a Christ in the heart, formed there the hope of glory. The work of the Spirit is to reveal Christ, to glorify him, and make him precious to believing hearts; to apply his blood to the conscience, to discover his righteousness, and to shed abroad his love. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to follow his gracious discoveries of the Lord Jesus to the heart, and to realize them by a living experience of their sweetness and blessedness.

2. But again, the Spirit leads into all truth. This was the promise given by Christ to his disciples- "Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13.) It is impossible for us to know the truth savingly and experimentally, except the blessed Spirit guides us, as it were, into the very bosom of it. Until then its beauty and blessedness, its liberating, sanctifying influence are hidden from our sight. But if I am guided by the Spirit into all truth, if he himself condescends to lead me into the truth as it is in Jesus, and enable me to walk in the truth as he leads me into it, then I may be said to walk after the Spirit.

3. But again, the Spirit is spoken of in the word of truth as an Intercessor, teaching us how to pray and what to pray for; no, he himself is represented as "interceding for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." If, then, I pray in the Spirit, I walk after the Spirit, for I walk in that path of prayer and supplication in which he is pleased to lead me. He has promised to help my infirmities; and therefore if I find my many infirmities helped by his grace and overcome by his power, then too I may be said to walk after the Spirit.

4. But the Spirit is also the author of faith, hope, and love, for these are fruits and graces which spring from his work upon the heart. If, then, I believe in Jesus with a spiritual faith, if I hope in him with a spiritual hope, and love him with a spiritual love, I walk after the Spirit; for the Spirit moves me both to will and to do those things; and as he leads I follow.

5. But the Spirit is also a Spirit of contrition, of brokenness, of humility, of godly sorrow for sin and honest confession of it. If, then, I am ever blessed with humility, contrition, repentance, and godly sorrow for sin, I walk after the Spirit.

6. But the Spirit is also the Comforter of God's people, for that is the name which our blessed Lord himself gave him. So that if he ever comforts your heart with his choice consolations, and you walk after his comfort, desiring to drink into it, and following after everything which may promote it, you follow in the steps in which the Comforter leads you.

7. But if we walk after the Spirit, we shall also be spiritually-minded, which is life and peace; our affections will be fixed upon heavenly realities where Jesus sits at the right hand of God; for all this is his special work, and nothing short of his power and influence can produce it. If then we are favored at any time with this spirituality of mind and these heavenly affections, it is a proof that we are walking after the Spirit.

8. But again, through the weakness of the flesh and the power of temptation, we often fall into a state of coldness, darkness, hardness, and even miserable carelessness in the things of God. Then the Spirit has to revive our drooping graces, bring us out of this miserable state of carnality and death, to lead us to the fountain once opened for all sin and uncleanness in the blood of the Lamb, to renew our hope, strengthen our faith, and impart to us fresh confidence. As we then walk in the light, life, and power of these gracious revivals, we walk after the Spirit.

9. But the Spirit also brings the children of God out of the world, separates them from its maxims, pleasures, and pursuits, draws their heart into union with the Son of God, tramples earth under their feet, and gives them grace to mortify the whole body of sin and death. As then they are enabled by his power to do these things, they walk after the Spirit.

In this walking after the Spirit lies much, if not all, of the power of godliness. Nor indeed is there any real happiness or comfort without it. For immediately that we cease to walk after the Spirit, we walk after the flesh, we lose our evidences, we can no longer see our signs, and all the sweet promises of the gospel and our interest in them are hidden from view. Thus we find by soul experience that if we walk after the flesh we shall die, not indeed eternally, but as to any enjoyment of heavenly blessings; but if through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body we shall live.

Now see the necessity of this, as I may call it, gracious caveat, this holy proviso. A man might be so deluded by sin and Satan as to say, without any divine warrant, "I am in Christ Jesus; there is no condemnation to me." My friend, let me put in the Spirit's caveat, let me look at your walk, for that must be the ruling test. How are you walking? Are you walking after the flesh? Is that your ruling influence and directing guide? Are you buried in the world; are you sunk in covetousness; is your heart uplifted with pride; are you doing, daily doing the things that are contrary to godliness? My friend, yours is a vain religion, an empty confidence which may prove your eternal destruction. You may talk of being in Christ and one with Christ; but your walk contradicts it. You are still in the flesh, and therefore you cannot please God.

Or take even a saint of God entangled for a time in almost a similar snare- even he may be for a time so blinded and hardened by a snare of Satan as to say, "Well, though I do slip and stumble about, and give way a good deal to the movements and influences of my carnal mind, it does not at all diminish my confidence. Once in Christ, always in Christ, is my motto." O, my friend, you have got into a vain confidence. If your conscience were tender, you would see you were standing on very dangerous ground. The Lord send a chastising scourge to bring you back, for at present you are sadly out of the way. You may despise the doubts and fears of those whom you call weaklings; but the very doubts and fears and misgivings of God's saints, are often employed as so many gracious whips in the hand of God, to bring back wanderers into the path of truth and righteousness; for the Holy Spirit has given us this description of a Christian walk, not only to comfort the saints of God, but as a mark to show the way in which all true believers must tread to maintain their evidences alive and warm in their breast.

But time admonishes me to draw to a close. Blessed are they who are in Christ Jesus, and more blessed still are they who have the sweet confidence of it. But depend upon it, if we are to enjoy this sweet confidence, it must be by walking after the Spirit. Directly we lose sight of the leadings and teachings of that blessed Guide and Comforter, get into self, and begin to walk after the flesh, we lose our confidence, our hope sinks, and our faith is sadly dashed. See, therefore, the mercy and blessedness of being enabled to walk after the Spirit, that you may be enabled to enjoy the presence of God, to have your evidences clear, and to be favored with that holy assurance, of which John speaks, "If our heart does not condemn us, then have we confidence towards God." (1 John 3:21.) But I will add one word for those who have not this confidence, and yet have a living faith in the Son of God. "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

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