

How to Walk by the Spirit

by Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee's sermon teaches how to walk by the Spirit, emphasizing the importance of understanding the human spirit and its role in spiritual warfare and authority.

Scripture: Proverbs 16:32, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Corinthians 12:13, 1 Corinthians 15:45, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 2:2, Philippians 1:27, 1 Peter 1:13

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Walking In The Spirit"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the necessity of understanding and walking by the Spirit to engage in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. He explains that the human spirit is the organ through which the Holy Spirit operates, and that many Christians fail to recognize the distinction between the spirit and the soul, leading to a soulish walk rather than a spiritual one. Nee urges believers to cultivate a strong spirit, which is essential for victory over sin and Satan, and to maintain a clear and unclouded spirit to discern God's will. He highlights the importance of ruling the spirit and being in constant cooperation with the Holy Spirit to experience true spiritual authority and power. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the spirit life and the active choice to walk in the Spirit daily.

Transcript

(The following is an article by Jessie Penn-Lewis, "Spiritual Things to the Spiritual." It originally appeared in The Overcomer, Vol. 3, published by The "Overcomer" Office, Leicester, England, September 1911. The editor of The Overcomer was Jessie Penn-Lewis. The title, "How to Walk by the Spirit," was provided by Watchman Nee.)

The aggressive warfare against the powers of darkness is essentially a spirit conflict, and the "natural man" knows nothing about it. It is to be understood only by spiritual men and women, hence the importance of knowing what is the meaning of the term "spiritual," and how to walk in the spirit. We have put a capital S on the word spirit in the New Testament, where often it reads with a small s, or we have done that in the mind, by reading in the large S--referring to the Holy Spirit--in places where there should be a small s. The large S so read in by the majority of us, has hidden the fact that we have a human spirit, which is the organ for the Holy Spirit, and the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. (See "The Place of the Indwelling Spirit," in May Overcomer.) In the shrine of that spirit comes all His divine light, and leading. Not having understood clearly about the human spirit, we have not known how to co-operate with the Holy Spirit, and when He has come into our spirits, we have thought everything He had to say to us, must be

given to the mind, with the result that we have mainly walked "after the soul," and not "after the spirit."

It will help you if I show you clearly from the Word of God what the spirit life is, and how to walk in it. First of all let us turn to 1 Cor. ii. 11, where Paul says, "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the SPIRIT of the man, which is in him?" Here we have the statement that the "spirit of the man" alone has knowledge of the man; and "even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God." None can know about God, only as the Spirit which is of God comes from God to reveal Him and His mind, to the believer, through the medium of his human spirit. The human spirit is the organ for the reception of the Spirit of God, and through which He reveals truth to the mind, and gives the knowledge of God. Hence, continues Paul, "We received not the spirit of the world." There is a "spirit of the world." People forget that. They ticket the world as "things," but there is a "spirit" of the world, and some "spirit" must work in us--either the Spirit which is of God, or "spirits" instigated by Satan, i.e., the "spirit of the world," the "spirit of error," etc. How can you know the way to shut your spirit against all these spirits outside in the world, unless you understand how to co-operate WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD in the things of God?

You must shut your spirit to the influence of the world-spirit, as well as shut your mind to world thoughts and ways. You may have the "spirit of the world" in you without outwardly appearing to be worldly, hence the importance of understanding the teaching given by Paul in 1 Cor. ii. and iii. "We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the THINGS that are freely given to us of God. Which THINGS we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Here is Paul speaking of "THINGS" i.e., substantial facts in the spiritual realm, not of theories, opinions, visions, illusions, but "things," and the Holy Spirit actually giving words to describe these things, to "spiritual" men, able to apprehend them--"interpreting SPIRITUAL things to SPIRITUAL men...for the natural man (lit. "man of soul") receiveth not the things of the spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Now you see the place of the spirit in man, in regard to the things of God, and the necessity of our becoming spiritual men--men of spirit--not men of "soul," i.e., "the natural man," the man who seeks to apprehend spiritual things with his natural mind, which the Apostle emphatically declares he cannot do.

From various expressions used by Paul it also appears that the spirit of man is a distinct entity, or organism, if I may use that word. (Gall has a chapter on "The physiology of the spirit" in "Primeval Man Unveiled.") See 1 Cor. v. 3-4, "Ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus." He does not refer there to the Holy Spirit, but to his own spirit. In ch. xiv. 14, he adds a distinct action of the human spirit: "my spirit prayeth." In Rom. xii. 11, there is described both a characteristic of, and action of the spirit--"Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"--and in 1 Peter iii. 4, you read of a "meek and quiet spirit"--again descriptive characteristics.

We also read of a "cool spirit" in Proverbs, the "heat of spirit" in Ezekiel, while it is said of John the Baptist that as a result of his wilderness time of fellowship with God, he got a "strong spirit," strong enough to go and face Herod, and to proclaim a message which was objectional to Jew and Gentile. We are needing for this spiritual warfare with principalities and powers, just such a strong spirit; a cool spirit, a fervent spirit, a spirit ruled, for "he that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city" in co-action with the Spirit of God.

The trouble to-day is the lack of knowledge of the spirit. Men are so "soulish," and even Christians walk as 'natural' men, viewing everything from the natural standpoint--"of the earth, earthy"--with only the natural

vision. Or, on the other hand, "spiritual" men do not understand how to "rule the spirit"; how to keep it "cool," as well as "fervent"; nor do they realize the danger of the power of darkness interfering with their spirits; nor the temptations of the spiritual sphere from forces of evil working upon, or driving their spirit out of steady co-operation with the Holy Spirit. If you get this light from God's Book, you will be able to read everything to-day without perplexity. You will see that the "spirit of the age"--Ephes. ii. 2--is a driving spirit, and that the forces of the spiritual realm have come upon us, demanding an understanding of what these forces are, and how we are to meet them.

Next, notice the powers of the human spirit. The spirit is capable of feeling. Paul said his "spirit" was refreshed. He did not say that his heart was refreshed, but his spirit. In one of his missionary journeys he says he was "pressed in spirit," showing that there is a pressure of spirit, which requires an understanding of what it means, so as to know thereby the leading of God. A great deal of our supposed "spiritual experiences" are soulish, that is to say they take place in the realm of feeling. Our demand is for something we can "feel" in the soulish realm, and not for something we may KNOW in the inner shrine of the Spirit.

Paul knew he was "bound" in the spirit, and that indicated, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him. He knew, too, when his spirit was released, and the pressure and difficulties had passed away. As clearly as you understand the senses of the body, he understood the actions of his spirit, and of the Holy Spirit in and through his spirit as His channel. Through eyes and ears you understand the physical realm, and through the spirit you know the spiritual realm, and read the communications of God's will made known by the Holy Spirit (Rom. viii. 16), which are always in harmony with the Word of God.

Again, Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," and that magnifying came into the soul-realm; but she added "my SPIRIT hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." In Acts xix. 21, "Paul PURPOSED IN SPIRIT to go to Jerusalem." That is a very different thing from purposing in the mind, for it includes a knowledge of God's will in the spirit, and a purpose to do it. Our Lord Jesus Christ was "troubled IN SPIRIT," and when He went to the grave of Lazarus, we read in the margin that "He groaned in Himself with INDIGNATION IN HIS SPIRIT." Such an indignation in the spirit precedes an outbursting of victory over the powers of darkness. He stood by the grave of Lazarus, and with a loud voice, said, "Lazarus, come forth!" He went to that grave with His Spirit groaning with indignation against the prince of death, and in the outflashing of that indignation, Lazarus was loosed from the captivity of death, and raised to life.

In this story of Lazarus we have a glimpse of the source of spiritual authority over the powers of darkness. It is not the authority of words, nor the authority of Christ given to the natural man; but the authority of Christ communicated through the Spirit of God in action through the spiritual man. Those who take the aggressive against the Prince of this world in their own soul power, will find their words empty of spiritual force (see 1 Cor. iv. 20).

Now notice further that the spirit of the man is under the control of the will: The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets"--subject to the control of the will. Again note the words of Solomon, "He that ruleth his spirit." You, as a new creation in Christ, joined to Him in spirit, must rule the mind (1 Pet. i. 13), rule the body (1 Cor. ix. 27), rule the spirit. If you fail to rule the spirit, the spirit can carry you beyond God's measure, as much as the soul can carry you out of control. In many things we hear of to-day about ecstatic experiences, there is an element of great danger, lest the spirits of these believers are carried beyond the control of the will. It is almost a new danger in the Church of Jesus Christ which we have now

to face. The Church has been so carnal in the past, that now when numbers are becoming "spiritual," the danger lies in not knowing the laws of the spirit, and the forces in the spiritual realm able to affect the spirit, as the thought-world affects the soul.

In the life of the spiritual man, the first thing is the new birth: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." In the new birth we get a renewed spirit. Again it is written, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, and spirit." Apparently there is a constant cleansing of the spirit needed. Our Lord "poured out His SOUL unto death," but He "committed" His SPIRIT to His Father. The soulish part of us must likewise be poured out to death, if the spirit is to be brought into essential union with God.

This separation of the spirit, from, what an old writer calls "the entanglements of the soul," is set forth in Heb. iv. 12, "The word of God is quick and powerful...dividing soul and spirit." How often we are conscious of so much mixture in even consecrated believers, and how rarely you can meet a pure spirit; how often there comes a word, or action, first from the spirit, and then from the soul part, the emotions, the intellect, or the mind. As the spirit is brought into pure union with God, it becomes sensitive to the touch of "soul," either in yourself, or in others. You will meet the "soul" element as if it were some little bit of hard substance which checks the flow of your spirit. Or you will discover it in the varying states of your own life: at one time there will be communion with God, when the spirit is open to Him, and thus full of light; then without any apparent cause a veil falls over it, and it is dark. That is just the action of the soul, you have gone back into the soul life, out of the light into the dark. Hence the importance of learning that position in Christ where the spirit is continually dominant. Let us look at this for a moment.

Paul says "The God of peace sanctify you...spirit, soul and body." God in the spirit sanctifying the soul, controlling and dominating the body. Fausset--a Commentator of authority--says, that "In the three fold division of man's being, body, soul and spirit, the due state in God's design is, that the spirit which is the recipient of the Holy Spirit, uniting man to God, should be first and rule the soul, which stands intermediate between body and spirit. In the natural man the spirit is sunk into subserviency to the animal soul, which is earthly in motives and aims. The carnal sinks still lower, for in this the flesh, the lowest element rules. Not having the Spirit means that in the natural man, the spirit which is the highest part, and ought to be the reservoir of the Holy Spirit, is not so, and therefore the spirit is not in the state that God wants it to be."

From this clear statement you will understand that the spirit must be first, and dominate the soul, and through the soul control the body. The "spirit man" is he who has the spirit in its due order, ruling soul and body. To become "spiritual"--i.e., under the rule of the spirit, the word of God needs to divide the soul, and spirit. For at first--when the man is a "natural man"--the spirit is sunk into the soul, netted round as it were, and all bound up in the soul. Sometimes the spirit gets a little light, and breaks into freedom, then the soul again predominates, and becomes like a thick film covering the light of the spirit. These phases affect the countenance--when the spirit sinks down into the soul the face becomes shadowed from within, and when the spirit rises to the place of control, the face is full of light. In truth the outer man is, what John describes as a "lampstand," to hold the light that comes from the spirit, which is meant to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the light of God.

Now the devil knows all about this, for he has studied man for a long time. He has observed, that when in meetings you have sung a spiritual song, you have broken into victory, and the spirit has ruled, then you have gone away to look upon a world that seemed different because all the dark shadows have disappeared in the light of God. With this knowledge, he comes a long to the children of God who have the

Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and he brings all the weights he can bring, stirs up all the troubles he can, and puts them on the spirit, and as these heavy weights press upon the spirit and presses it down into the soul, you lose your testimony, and the ringing song of victory; all because you do not understand what he is doing.

To keep the spirit in real victory in union with Christ, you must understand the approach of the enemy, and know what he brings. This leads us to the spirit-warfare, we have in mind--expressed in crude language doubtless, but expressing something that is real. We want to get at this: what is victory, where is victory, how can we walk in victory?

The spirit is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells, and everything that God does in you comes from the spirit. It is through our spirit He works out to soul and body, not from outside in! The devil knows this, though we do not, and he brings things from the outside life to burden the spirit within. From the outside he also gives supernatural power, working upon the emotions and the senses, and gets hold of the bodies even of the children of God. It will help you to detect and to discern for yourself, to know that everything that the Spirit of God does, is through the organ of your spirit. It is in your spirit that you learn to know God for the spirit is the sanctuary, the shrine, the organ of the Holy Spirit, and it is there that He bears His witness--"The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." We have seen that the first thing the Holy Spirit does in regeneration is to give a renewed spirit, when you are "born of the Spirit," and you receive the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of sonship, when from your spirit comes the cry, "Father!" Then you know God as your Father. Then you next receive the Holy Spirit as a Person, as the Sanctifier, and He fills your spirit and makes it the shrine where He dwells, and the centre from which He works, and in that shrine He brings you into union with Christ when you become "joined to the Lord, one spirit." From the centre of the spirit He wields the Word of God, and cuts away the soul's entanglements with the knife of the Word; and as you obey that Word and submit to its requirements, the spirit becomes clarified, and drawn away from the soul-envelope into a deeper, closer, essential, perfect union with Christ the risen and ascended Lord. It is only in this real union of one spirit with Christ, that He is able to exercise His authority through you over spiritual foes.

In the light of these facts about the spirit of man, and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the eighth of Romans is simply wonderful: "If we walk in the spirit," "if ye live in the spirit," "the mind of the spirit is life," "ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit." "The mind of the flesh is death." "The minding of the spirit is life and peace. At the back of all these words can be seen the PERSONAL VOLITION of the man, as the helm of the ship, so to speak, at the centre. The ACTIVE EXERCISE OF THE WILL, moment by moment, determining his obedience to the mind of God through the Spirit, or his walk "after the flesh."

It is not a state you are brought into, but a position, where you have to choose every moment what you will do. Therefore it is important that you understand what is flesh, and what is spirit, since you have to hourly decide which you will obey.

In 1 Cor. xv. [45] we read, "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the second Adam a life-giving spirit." All the life you get from the first Adam is soul, and all the life you get from the new Adam is spirit. First that which is natural, or soulish, and then "that which is spiritual," for there is a "natural body," and there is a "spiritual body." So that the Church will be prepared for translation by being brought to know this spirit life, where the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT QUICKENS THE MORTAL BODY. Through all the tossing and the tumult and the suffering, God is preparing His Church for the coming of Jesus Christ; and through travail and often bitter tears, God's children are pressing on to know all that He can do for them.

When the spirit gets to its right place of predominance, united to Christ, and filled with the Spirit of God, and joined to the Lord, one spirit, "the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, will quicken your mortal body by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." The devil just now is contending for the bodies, and for the mind of God's children. Did Christ not say to Peter "Satan hath obtained you by asking, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not?" He did not say "I have prayed that you should not go into it;" but "I have let you go into it; you are so self-confident, Peter; you boasted that if all would forsake Me you would not, and I had to let Satan have you to sift you, and to break that self-confidence from you." That was souliness in Peter, it was not of the spirit; and so he was sifted and prepared for his Pentecost in the judgment hall of Pilate.

How could God have used Peter if he had not got rid of his self-confidence first. All Peter's impulses, that wild devotion, that something about Peter that made him go headlong out of the ship towards his Master--God had to get it out of him. You would not say that Satan cannot touch a child of God, if you carefully read the Bible. Paul was a child of God, and yet he said he had a "messenger of Satan" to beat him, to keep him from being exalted above measure through the abundance of God's revelations to his spirit. Through Satan's buffetings and siftings, the children of God will advance into the knowledge of union with Christ, and victory over sin and Satan, which will prepare them for the Lord's coming.

What is the basis of this walk after the spirit? CALVARY. We must take our position with Christ in death, according to the sixth of Romans, crucified with Christ, we must know victory over sin, before we can talk about victory over Satan. Because Satan holds through sin, and it is only on the ground of the cross, standing there crucified with Christ, that you can dare take your position of victory over Satan. Romans vi. is the basis of victory.

In its practical outworkings you will see the need of avoiding a clouded spirit, because if you get a shadow, you will lose that keen spirit light which illuminates the mind, and shows you what to do. If the spirit is kept in clear unbroken victory, dominant over soul and body, the mind is given clear perception to detect the Spirit's leading; for "they that are led of the Spirit are the sons of God."

You know how to avoid sin, but do you know how to avoid weights? The devil knows that a shadow on your spirit will suit his purpose as well as anything else, so he does all he can to bring troublesome things to you in order to shadow your spirit. There is no outflow from a compressed spirit. It is absolutely essential for revival that the spirit shall be free, for thus only is the outflow continual. The law for keeping the spirit in victory is that it must be always going out; it must never turn back upon itself. Because these powers of darkness are outside, and they are always seeking to press you in. The enemy tries to accuse you, and get you occupied with yourself, and thus to lose all aggressive power against him; but you have to go out against him all the time.

But you say, "They won't let me pray in the prayer meeting; how can I always go out against him?" But you have a world-wide sphere in the prayer life, your spirit can go out in victorious prayer against all the powers of darkness, persistently, steadily for the whole church of Christ. ("Quiet Talks on Prayer", by S. D. Gordon, gives much light on this.) That will keep your spirit going out. The truth is you either must go out against what is outside, or else what is outside will come in, and crush you down.

Some of you have no flow now in testimony. In the Revival days your spirit was free. How easy it was then to speak; but, alas! the attacks, the conflict, the opposition, and the difficulties, have come like a great thick wall of clay, and the poor spirit has gone back into prison to be locked up and bound and

compressed, so that it cannot move; and you have lost the power to perceive the will of God, and you don't know what to do. Let us ask God for liberation from all the accumulated weights that crush you down in spirit, so that you may enter into a sphere of mightier work in the unseen realm. Though you cannot pray in the prayer meetings, God calls you into a spirit union with Himself, that in prayer you may drive these forces of darkness back. It is a mightier work than anything else, and that field is open to any of you. The closing of the prayer meeting door against you can drive you to pray for Wales as you never prayed before. If you understood how to walk in the spirit, if you knew how to detect God's will in the spirit, that is possible for you.

Though absent in the body from them, Paul told the Corinthians that he was "present in spirit." Again he said to the believers, "Stand fast in one spirit, striving with one soul for the truth of the gospel." "Ye are all made to drink of one Spirit," ye are a "habitation of God through the Spirit." Endeavouring to keep the "unity of the spirit" in the bond of peace, "praying in the spirit," "fellowship in the spirit." It is "all in the spirit," and if the church of Jesus Christ was united in the spirit, there is no power of darkness that could stand before her. She would be fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.

Do you see in the light of this what is the matter with the prayer meetings? This great thick cloud of the powers of darkness comes down on the prayer meeting, and because you do not know how to fight in spirit through that wall, you are defeated. Satan tells you that God is not listening to you. Oh! if you knew how to penetrate through. Someone has said, "The Lord Jesus Christ has gone through the plane of the prince of the power of the air, and sat down on God's right hand, praying and keeping the way open for His people. The only way through is a blood-marked way; He is keeping open the way through the hosts of darkness." "Having boldness to enter by the blood"--a blood-marked way. If you have once known that life with Christ in God (for "ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God"), cease to walk after the natural man, the man of flesh. Learn to live in spirit with Christ on the Throne, and live the will of God as you learn it there. Your spirit must remain there, for that is the ascension place--"joined to the Lord, one spirit," and from that place you must understand how to resist everything that comes to you from the powers of darkness, direct, and indirect through men. Be determined that the one thing that you will do is to keep your spirit clear with God, so that you know the will of God. God must work out His own plans in His own way; and your one thing is to know Him, to live and walk in the spirit with Him, to obey His word, to refuse to have clouds that will shadow your spirit-fellowship with God, who is Spirit. That is the place of authority, and power over all the power of the enemy.

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