

# Walking in the Fountain of Life

by Peter John Schrock

Everyone has been called to follow Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet when so many people come from a life of following their own desires for 20 years or more, they often do not know what it means to walk in the Spirit. There is a distinct difference between walking in the flesh and walking by the Spirit, but many times, Paul's and other biblical writers' language can either seem a bit confusing or vague to someone accustomed to the world's ways. The people of this world speak from the viewpoint of the world and do not listen to those who speak from God. As a result, people who do not grow up reading the Bible have never heard about "walking after the flesh" or "abiding in Christ." On the other hand, oftentimes those who have grown up reading the Bible settle for a shallow reality when it comes to these deep truths. All too often, these people make the assumption that since they are believers they are inherently walking in the Spirit. Sadly this is far from the truth. Even the Galatians were instructed by Paul, in chapter five, that if they are alive by the Spirit, they should keep in step with the Spirit. The warning found later in chapter six of Galatians indicates that the flesh is still present enough for a believer to feed it, and from it, reap corruption (vs. 8). People who are "in Christ" are capable of operating in a fleshly way just as the Corinthians were when Paul addressed them in chapter three of his first letter. Nevertheless, all who are in Christ have what they need for victory in every situation over fleshly and unspiritual ways of living.

"I am the vine; you [disciples] are the branches. If man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you [disciples] can do nothing." Jesus spoke to his disciples in the fifteenth chapter of John on the night before he was crucified, a sobering reality. Apart from their source of life, they would not even sprout leaves. This truth is very important for believers today. Only

through being tapped into the vine of Christ is anyone able to bear good fruit. It does not matter if someone is a disciple of Christ or not. If they do not remain intimately connected to Christ, they will be powerless. Jesus' statement is forever true: "Apart from me you can do nothing." Having this realization is a key to understanding the war that goes on inside believers' hearts as they seek to follow Jesus' Spirit.

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, resulting in that these things you [Galatians] do are not the things you would wish to do" (Galatians 5:17). In this passage, Paul addresses the struggle of the Galatians who did not always accomplish what they wanted. This passage may seem confusing to those who know there is power to overcome in every circumstance. However, it does not have to be. Paul is not making a universal statement that the flesh keeps all believers from doing what they want. Rather, he is addressing something that happened to the Galatians. In the Greek language when an author uses the word "you", he is not addressing a universal reader. For there is no such usage of the word "you" in biblical Greek. In Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, Daniel B. Wallace explains an example of this in reference to John chapter four verse eleven: "The woman is not asking, 'where do you get this living water?' as if to refer to herself (i.e., 'Where does one get this living water?'). She is asking where Jesus keeps it or, more colloquially, 'Where have you got this living water?'" (1996, pg 393). Likewise in Galatians, Paul is not making a generic statement of being overcome by the flesh, instead he is addressing something that happened to the Galatians. This does not mean that these words are not applicable today. Rather they give insight into what can be a problem for present day believers. The flesh is only crucified and rendered powerless as long as one is

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walking in the Spirit: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Through the Spirit, people are able put to death the practices of the body, (Romans 8:13) but that does not mean their flesh is gone. If at any point they stop walking in step with the Spirit, their natural default is the opposing, warring member, the flesh. Even people who want to please God, if they walk according to the flesh, will only find themselves doing the very things they hate (Romans 7:14-25).

Who or what is the flesh? People have approached what Paul is saying from several different perspectives. NIV Bible translators, trying to simplify the matter, chose to eliminate this terminology by inconsistently translating it “sinful nature” in selected locations where skin and bloody tissue was not the obvious meaning. But at times even the NIV translators could not deny that, in several instances, the word does mean “flesh” in a literal, physical sense. Since this translation is considered legitimate, many people have taken Paul to be only speaking about skin and bloody tissue. Either simplification will only limit the extent of what Paul is saying or completely miss what he is trying to communicate. A better way of viewing “the flesh” is simply to see it as the part of a human being that relates to the physical world through natural perceptions and reasoning. Such a picture can include skin and tissue at times, but is not limited to it. One example of this part of a human is their ability to see and comprehend what they are looking at. This is not evil by any means, but it is simply part of the flesh. Due to what happened in the Garden of Eden, sin has marred the flesh’s ability to properly discern the world around itself. The solution to this problem is found only in Christ. Sin has made the flesh selfish and hostile toward God, but when the Spirit breaths life into it and takes control, the flesh dies (Romans 8:7-14; Galatians 5:24). Not that it literally dies, for those who belong to Jesus can still see and comprehend the physical world. Nevertheless, the flesh is dead in a practical sense because such an individual no longer draws conclusions and makes decisions based upon its marred capabilities. Instead, they operate according to the Spirit of God and they draw their conclusions of the world around them based upon spiritual perceptions and understandings. The flesh is not gone, but it only functions in subjection to the Spirit: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives

in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

In the previous passage Paul acknowledges his own existence [the chief of sinners (1Timothy 1:15)], but he also states that it is no longer Paul who lives, but Christ. Paul did not walk around as the Chief of Sinners constantly doing things God hated, but Paul did know what he was apart from Christ and that the way he was living had nothing to do with his own ability to please God. The power came from Christ dwelling in him and living through him. Similarly, all believers can be partakers of this same power, but how do they know whether they are walking in the Spirit or still functioning in the old way of the flesh?

Some think, as long as things are going smoothly in their lives, they are walking in the Spirit and when difficult things happen, they must have done something wrong or are simply heading down the wrong path. In John chapter nine, the disciples fell into the this same category when they asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus responded with a startling perspective that believers need to lay hold of in order to walk in the Spirit: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Paul learned this same principle when Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Therefore Paul goes on to declare that he delights in difficulties, persecutions, and other trials that come as a result of following Christ. Paul delighted in these hardships because it showed that the good fruit in his life was not controlled by circumstances, but in his powerful connection to Christ. Difficulties arise from simply following Jesus and many times those trials do not have anything to do with persecution. This can be seen very clearly as Lord allowed Paul to go without food, get in shipwrecks, and even get bitten by snakes. Hardships, happen for a number of reasons. Sometimes they come because the Lord is testing a person’s faith. Other times they arise because someone is rebellious to God or offensive to those around them. By themselves, outward difficulties give no indication whether or not a person is walking in the Spirit.

“...Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inward-

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ly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). If someone wants to know if they are walking in the Spirit, they simply need to see if they are inwardly receiving power to bear outward fruit: “...for a tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33) “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience/longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness/trust, gentleness/meekness, and self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). If the true fruit of the Spirit is coming forth from the heart of a person, they are walking in the Spirit. If not, they are still walking according to the flesh: “To be fleshly minded is death, but to be Spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

Many times the fruits of the Spirit are sought out by believers without going to the source from which they flow. Such pursuits only result in condemnation and stress. No one can produce the life of Christ apart from having that source of life flowing through them. “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...” (John 7:38-39). Practically speaking, Jesus is saying that an overpowering realization of God’s love, a deep satisfaction of His way being best, and a calm sense of rest is present and flowing from inside those in whom the Spirit is dwelling. This flow is the sap from the vine which produces the new life one lives in Christ. In fact, having this flow of life coming into one’s flesh is the power which puts sin to death (Romans 8:11-13) and is the essence of what it means to abide in God. “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). It is not that believers find a deep connection to their Father by abiding in THEIR love for Him, but by abiding in HIS love for them. “...this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us...” (1 John 4:10). The Father’s love for His children, which produces confidence and peace, is the fountain that wells up to eternal life. This fountain is the source by which believers live and find direction for their lives.

In the Old Testament the Israelites found direction from the Lord as they followed the Cloud by day and the Fire by night:

On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud

covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped. At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they remained in camp; then according to the command of the LORD they set out. And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses. (Numbers 9:15-23)

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The direction and timing in which a Spiritual person walks are foolishness to those operating in the flesh. For the Spiritual man does not walk by sight, but in the Spirit of God and by faith. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14) Though in the past there was a visible cloud which led the people of Israel in the desert, today many times the cloud is not visible and so appears to the natural mind that those who are born of the Spirit are foolishly chasing after the wind. Nevertheless, even the unspiritual mind can not deny the power of God at work when they see the true fruit of the Spirit coming forth from someone’s life. This fruit can only come forth from consistently abiding within the spring of living water and the

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nurturing sap of the vine. No one can consistently abide in the fountain of life unless they follow the Lord like the Israelites did in the desert.

When that fountain of God's love and peace lifts<sup>1</sup> from within a believer they too must break camp and follow the flow of life to its next place of rest. This is keeping in step with the Spirit, for the Spirit of God does not follow believers, rather believers follow the Spirit. Jesus explained this when he said, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant also be..." (John 12:26) It's not that Jesus is where his servants go, rather it is, "Where I am, there will my servant also be." Many people think they can live the Christian life going where they please; rationalizing what God wants them to do. Such a person is trying to lead the Spirit of God around instead of simply following. Certainly, believers do have freedom to make choices, but only within the bounds of where the Spirit has determined for them to camp. This need not be something confusing or bizarre. When the flow of peace and love is present, believers are free to do as they see fit to please the Lord, but if the flow of peace and love departs, they too must depart from their ideas to follow the Spirit. Believers must gain a consciousness of the river of living water (i.e. the Holy Spirit) which spews forth love, confidence, and peace and to let it govern all the activities of life. Paul instructs believers to walk this way in Colossians 3:15 when he says, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..." Those who have let the flow of the life-giving sap of Christ govern the very center of their being have found "the way of peace" to which Zechariah prophesied in Luke 1:79. Also within this fountain, believers find the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light. No longer do they need let the weight of hard decision fall upon them. Rather, they can simply wait on the Lord to decide, and follow wherever His cloud of peace is going. If the cloud does not move then neither should a believer. This can require great patients at times, but it is absolutely essential in order to remain in the Spirit. Those who rush a head will only find themselves separated from their source of power and destined for bad fruit.

1 "...love and peace lifts..." Not to say that the Spirit departs from the heart of a believer, rather there becomes an unsettled feeling (a lack of perfect peace and rest) indicating that the Spirit is leading the believer away from their present actions or thoughts.

Why do so many in believing circles struggle with anxiety, being unloving, and other bad fruit that does not please the Lord? Why are they not consistently abounding in the fruit of the Spirit? The answer to this question can be found when looking at the parable of the sower and the seed. This parable deals with why people do not produce abundant crops of good fruit when the word of God comes to them. First this parable addresses those who never attempt to follow God. Then it addresses other people who try, but do not thrive in difficult times. Next it speaks of a group of people who seem to be rooted, but their lives are not producing the mature fruit of the Spirit. Lastly, it explains how some people bear fruit with endurance and produce an abundant crop. The first three of these groups of people have things that keep them from being abounding fruitful believers. Until these hindrances are laid aside (Hebrews 12:1), these people will never be able to go beyond their current stagnation. (Note: Though the parable itself seems to be addressing when the word of God comes to someone at a specific time, we should never think that the word of God or as Matthew puts it, "the word of the kingdom" is only sown once in a person's life. Those in tight circles of believers probably have the word sown to them daily. How they live indicates the kind of soil on which the seed is falling.)

The first group of people Jesus addresses are those who just do not seem to get it. In fact this is what Jesus says their problem is in Mathew 13:19: they do not understand. Some of these people like to spend time with believers and though they keep good company, the fruit of their lives shows they do not have any intimacy with Christ.

The second group of people are those who seem serious, but do not have endurance in the face of struggles. Their problem rests at the basic foundation of their walk with the Lord. "...the righteous shall live by faith or trust..." (Hebrews 10:38). (Faith that God will reward those who serve him is trusting Him and the Greek word for faith also means trust.) These people possess the same problem the disciples had when they walked with Jesus. They did not trust him. When the storm came and Jesus was sleeping, they panicked and became fearful. They walked by sight, not by trust. The natural default of people is to live according to their fleshly faculties when they do not trust where the Spring of living water is moving. When someone refuses to obey the word of the

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kingdom: follow and serve the King, they get left behind and lose their connection with the nurturing sap of the vine. As a result, they find themselves without power to produce the fruit of the Spirit and they end up doing the very things that they hate because "...apart from [Christ they] can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The third group of people seem to be rooted, but are not producing an abundant harvest of righteousness. As the explanation of the parable states, this happened because other things in their lives had choked the simplicity of knowing and following Jesus. People have worries and cares about all sorts of things. It could be performing tasks at a job, seeking honor from men, chasing after hobbies, or even pursuing religious activities and doctrines. Many times the weeds that choke people are not obvious. Otherwise they would have been quickly uprooted and would have had little effect on their lives. If something is sprouting apart from the nurturing sap of Christ, it only produces death. Those who are not on guard about what is growing in their hearts and lives will never be able to abound in the grace of God.

What is the solution to a lack of faith and a choked-out life? PRAYER and HUMILITY! "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13).

The Father is full of love as he waits to bless those who ask of him, but He "...opposes the proud..." (James 4:6). Many times this is the main reason why people who ask, seek, and knock do not receive and find the grace of God. They either believe THEIR direction of walking is better than the Spirit's, or they believe the things growing in their life are of as much or greater importance than simply abiding in the love and peace of Christ. Such is the downfall of those who are poorly rooted or choked out. The ones who are lacking faith will only grow deeper roots when they humble themselves and accept direction from the river of living water over the natural tendencies of their flesh. Likewise, those who are being choked out need simply to humbly believe that the things they are valuing are not important to Christ and therefore need to be weeded out of their lives. Once people have humbled themselves, the Father will graciously give them the powerful walk with Christ they seek. For He "...gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Without having the River of Life (i.e. the Holy Spirit) bringing a fresh sense of God's love for his people, a confidence that He has everything under control, and an overall awareness of His rest, no one will ever be able to find the power to live like Christ in this world. Those to whom the Spirit has come upon must keep in step with the Spirit. For only by being enduringly tapped into the vine, will any person ever bear much fruit. Apart from Christ, people are like withered up branches, salt without taste, and fields which only produce thorns. They remain in darkness, groveling around seeking to satisfy their fleshly desires. For "to be fleshly minded is death, but to be Spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).