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GREEN



WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

STARTER KIT

When you became a Christian, Christ indwelt you through the person of the Holy Spirit. I know neither the how nor the where, but I do know that the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence carries with it the assurance of our salvation. "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

We are now God's possession, and the Holy Spirit is, in effect, the down payment on His purchased property—that would be you. Like the idea expressed through the marriage ceremony, receiving Christ is a one-time decision. We don't awake each morning to a fresh need to say, "I do"; once was enough. Having received Christ, we became children of God. "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

In theory I could tell my parents that I no longer wished to be in their family, but I can never change the reality that I am their son. It's an established fact on the basis of my birth. I can sever our fellowship but not our relationship. And as there was not one thing we did to earn our salvation, so there is nothing we can ever do to lose it—we are eternally Christ's. But the Holy Spirit is more than simply an assurance of our salvation. It is through the Spirit that God enables and empowers us to live the Christian life.

THE SPIRIT COMES TO GLORIFY CHRIST

As we experience the blessings of the Spirit, we can lose sight of Jesus—and we never want to do that. We need to remember that the Spirit works in us to glorify Christ.

"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16:13-14).

The Spirit-filled life is the Christ-centered, Christ-directed, life.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Walking is a process and not an event. Clearly there are events, moments in time, when God empowers us in a special way. But the normative Christian life is predominantly a process, a walk. And the Spirit's influence in our lives is typically not an overwhelming, overpowering presence but a more subtle influence. If we get an overpowering experience—Score! Icing on the cake! Christmas morning! It's an additive, but not essential, blessing.

The normative Christian life is not an overpowering event but is daily seeking to do those things that increase the Spirit's influence and decrease the hindrances to that influence. So how, exactly, does the Holy Spirit exert control and influence over our lives, and what is our role in the process? Perhaps the most helpful passage in Scripture for answering these questions is this one in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Be very careful ... how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.



Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-20)

One is compelled to ask, “What does getting drunk on wine have to do with being filled with the Spirit?” Well, obviously they are opposite alternatives, but they must share some base of similarity, or else why couple them together? The link between them, or the similarity they share, is in the idea of influence. They are both foreign entities that, when internalized, influence our behavior.

In fact, this is not the only time Scripture places them side by side. In the coming of the Holy Spirit, it was suspected that the Spirit-filled believers “had too much wine” (Acts 2:13), because of the similarity of influence.

Of course, there are many important differences between alcohol and the Holy Spirit. Alcohol’s influence leads to greater enslavement, while the Spirit gives great freedom. Alcohol eclipses our personality, while the Spirit reanimates it. And Satan uses alcohol to control us as God controls us through the Spirit. Still, alcohol provides an example of a foreign influence (albeit a bad one) that can affect our will and behavior.

As demonstrated by alcohol, control is always a question of degrees. There are things we can do that hinder the Spirit’s influence and things we can do to increase sensitivity to the Spirit’s leading. This is at the heart of walking in step—or being filled—with the Spirit. (The word “filled” means filled like a sail, not filled like a cup. When we think about the sail metaphor, we rightly think about adjusting ourselves to catch the existing wind of the Spirit. When we think about filling a cup, we wrongly think about increasing the amount of the Spirit like pouring in more of a drink.)

So, what constitutes the Spirit-filled life? What leads to the Spirit having maximum influence over our lives? This is not comprehensive, but what follow are the primary vehicles affecting the Spirit’s influence upon our thoughts, heart, will, and emotions.

LORDSHIP

How does one become more drunk? (Or should I say drunker?) One consumes more alcohol. In the case

of the Holy Spirit, we have all of Him that we will ever have. So the major determinant of the Spirit’s influence is how much of us we let Him consume, meaning how much of our lives we allow Him to control.

The question we must ask ourselves is this: Do we desire to live for Christ in every area of our life (dating, vocation, relationships, and so on)? We sometimes call this a “lordship” decision.

It is often when we relinquish these areas, like a drain coming unclogged, that we experience a special empowerment, or increased influence of the Lord.

This frequently happens during revival. While the new degree of influence can create a powerful experience, equilibrium soon follows, and the Spirit’s influence becomes normative as we continue to stay yielded to the Lord’s direction. Again, following Paul’s alcohol analogy, for a consistent drinker or smoker, alcohol and nicotine in the bloodstream at some point normalizes, sans elation.

Lordship is a declaration to follow Christ wherever He leads, to whatever end. This commitment, like any commitment, initiates an ongoing process. Over time we’ll discover deeper roots of sin and uncover areas disconnected from His control. In submitting these areas to Christ, we continue in, and affirm, His lordship and our commitment to live under it.

CONFESSION

Throughout the day, week, and year there are times when we make choices to sin. Sin is seizure of control. We take control of the direction of our life and steer it toward our sinful wants and desires. Confession cleanses and removes the barrier of sin, and it places the control of our life back under the Spirit’s subtle but determining influence.

RELIANCE (UNCEASING PRAYER)

Throughout each day we experience neediness, weakness, and lack in the form of anxiety, loneliness, insecurity, trials, unholy desires, negative feelings, and so on. All of us have a natural inclination to meet these needs through reliance on something. Watch cigarette smokers. Every time they sense a need in their life, they light up. If they feel lonely, they light up. If they feel scared or nervous, they light up. If they need confidence, they light up. And while we might



not smoke, we can find ourselves doing the same thing with food, lust, shopping, music, coffee, or any number of other things.

Choosing throughout the day to turn to the Lord for wisdom, patience, empowerment, companionship, security, confidence, and every other need is called humble reliance. As the smoker is aided by nicotine's influence, so the believer can experience the Spirit's influence. Instead of turning to whatever it is we turn to, we connect with God: "Oh Lord, I'm nervous. Will You please strengthen me?" "Oh Lord, will You please give me wisdom?" All day long, like smoking a pack of cigarettes, we turn to the Lord. This is the idea of reliance and it is vital to experiencing the Spirit's influence.

(I apologize for all the drinking and smoking analogies, but the Scripture is the foundation for them, and they are helpful in understanding influence.)

RENEWING OUR MINDS

The Spirit's influence is always refreshed, directed, and supported by prayer and time in the Scriptures. Through both of these He leads and renews our thinking.

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

If you've ever been to a college party or bar, you'll get this concept rather easily. It's the idea of atmosphere: the room is dark; the music is pulsing; clothes and conversation are sexually suggestive; and alcohol sands down inhibitions. An atmosphere has been created that's conducive to sin. Though no one forces you to drink, lust, or gossip, they don't have to. Just bask in the music and the glow of the lava lamp long enough, and you want to.

Going back to our Spirit-filled passage (Ephesians 5:19-20) again, notice what it says: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The description Paul gave is of an environment conducive to the empowering influence of the Holy Spirit. As we worship, give thanks, praise God, and sing, our hearts become like that party, only in a very good way. An environment is created where the

Lord can freely reign, a channel for Him to affect our thoughts, actions, and emotions.

COMMUNITY

Last, it is in community with other Christians that we experience a dynamic of the Spirit-filled life that we can never experience alone, because we encounter the indwelling Spirit through the lives of others, and through them we are energized, empowered, and directed.

IN SUMMARY

Participating in these activities daily constitutes walking in step with the Spirit, or walking in the Spirit. The degree to which we participate is the degree to which the Spirit has influence upon us. Whether the Spirit's influence is a slow IV drip or a flowing river depends on our participation in the spiritual life.