

“The Desires – Flesh & Spirit”
Pastor Wally Contreras
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“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25)

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Pastor Wally said that the Bible is “weighty” when it considers such things as God’s mercy and grace. Webster’s 1828 Dictionary defines weighty to mean “Important; forcible; momentous; adapted to turn the balance in the mind, or to convince”. We believe in the infallibility of Scripture. We believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. What makes such beliefs regarding the Bible important to me and why?

R.C. Sproul once pointed out that to “walk by the Spirit” “produces a manner of life characterized by love for God and neighbor, the two great commandments (Matt. 22:34–40)”. So, what does my “manner of life” characterize and why?

John Calvin comments, “If we would obey the Spirit, we must labor, and fight, and apply our utmost energy; and we must begin with self-denial.” Walking by the Holy Spirit is the denial of the self and one’s fleshly desires and turning to Christ to follow His example, asking the Spirit to enable us to do so. Are there some desires of the flesh (cravings) that I am following today? If so, what? If not, why not?

What do I do/what should I do when I find desires of the flesh in my life?

In speaking about Galatians 5:18 (“If you are led by the Spirit you are not under law.”) John Piper said that “[i]f Paul had said, ‘If you follow the Spirit you are not under law,’ it would have been true, but in using the passive voice (‘If you are led’) he emphasizes the Spirit’s work, not ours. The Spirit is not a leader like the pace car in the ‘Daytona 500.’ He is a leader like a locomotive on a train. We do not follow in our strength. We are led by his power. So ‘walk by the Spirit’ means stay hooked up to the divine source of power and go wherever he leads.” How does having the emphasis on the correct source of power impact my view regarding any expected outcome in my life?

Piper went on to say that “Verse 17 says, ‘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 to prevent you from doing what you would.’ The main thing to learn from this verse is that Christians experience a struggle within. If you said to yourself when I was describing the flesh, ‘Well, I have a lot of that still left in me,’ it does not necessarily mean you aren’t a Christian. A Christian is not a person who experiences no bad desires. A Christian is a person who is at war with those desires by the power of the Spirit.” Do I see what is happening between the flesh and the Spirit in my life as a war? Or is it more like a fist fight? Or is it an inconvenience? Or am I asking what conflict? Explain.

Galatians 5:18: “If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.” John Piper said that “[t]his does not mean you don’t have to fulfill God’s law. You do. That’s what verses 13 and 14 said, ‘Through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” And Romans 8:3–4 say, “God condemned sin in the flesh in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Therefore, not being under law does not mean we don’t have to fulfill the law. It means that, when we are led by the locomotive of the Spirit, we cruise on the railroad track of the law as a joyful way of life and are not left to climb it like a ladder in our own strength from underneath. When we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the punishment or the oppression of the law because what the law requires the Spirit produces; namely, love. Notice verse 22: the first and all-encompassing fruit of the Spirit is love, which verse 14 says fulfills the whole law... You walk by the Spirit when your heart is resting in the promises of God. The Spirit reigns over the flesh in your life when you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you and now is working everything together for your good.” Is it possible to live a life filled with stress and excitement and a life of rest and peace? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Discuss Pastor Wally’s assertion that the flesh desires things that lead to sin while the Spirit wants things that lead to holiness and serving and loving others.

Can sin and holiness co-exist? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Do I live my life as if they can? (e.g., it was just a little white lie...a little sin, not one of those “biggies”)

John MacArthur told this story: “In the summer of 1872 near Dublin, Ireland, two prominent evangelists were discussing ministry. The two men were the British evangelist Henry Varley and the renowned American evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Their conversation contains one of the best-remembered quotes attributed to the life and times of Moody. The remark affected him for the rest of his life. The morning after an all-night prayer meeting, as the two men strolled around the grounds of the mansion where the meeting had been held, Varley uttered a brief but thought-provoking statement to Moody. This is how Moody recorded it in one of his diaries: “The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.”...A man! Varley meant any man. Varley didn't say he had to be educated, or brilliant, or anything else. Just a man. Well, by the Holy Spirit in me I'll be that man... If one Christian's informal remarks to another believer—especially to one who was already a prominent leader—could stir that individual's thinking so much regarding sanctification and effective service, the words ought also to stir believers like us. This episode from the life of Moody encourages us to wrestle with the issue of what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit...When you surrender to the control of God's Spirit, you'll find Him producing amazing things in you—things that are entirely of His doing. Paul calls those marvelous blessings the fruit of the Spirit, and they are: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). The person who is Spirit-filled and who bears the Spirit's fruit is the person who belongs to Christ and who has “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit,” Paul continued, “let us also walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:24-25). To be filled by and walk in the Spirit is to fulfill your ultimate potential of your life on earth as one of God's children.” Have I “wrestle with the issue of what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit” lately?

What “amazing things” has the Holy Spirit produced in me?

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25) So, assuming that the first part of this “if/then” statement is true, how do I do the “then” portion of keeping in step with the Spirit?