

Chapter Seven

The Wilderness Christian and Why He Doesn't Walk In the Spirit

“¹⁶ *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:16-26).

Twice in this text Paul admonishes believers to “walk in the Spirit.” The word “walk” refers to a way of life. It means to abide in Christ, to live in the circle of truth defined by the Word of God. It speaks about a life of obedience to God’s Word.

Paul is contrasting the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. He is contrasting the Age of Law to the Age of Grace. Under the Law, the circle of truth was defined but the Law could not empower anyone to obey. The Law could not enable the believer to translate God’s commands into the language of living. The Law could only touch the outward man, not the inner man. Religious externalism was the result. Although the talk was translated into a walk, the majority of the time the walk was only a form of externalism.

The admonition is necessary because our tendency is to try to live in the power of our own flesh. The result will be externalism. We cannot *walk in the Spirit* until we learn to *live in the Spirit*. The word “walk” refers more to *what we are to be* than what we are to do. The word “Spirit” relates the means of being what Christ wants us to be.

One of the central reasons why many local churches are failing to fulfill the Great Commission is because they are Wilderness Christians. They have never learned to “walk in the Spirit.” They are usually running ahead of God (*like the Jews at Ai in Joshua chapter 7*) or complaining about the impossibility of the task before them (*like the Jews at Kadesh-Barnea*). In either case they are defeated before they start. God’s work will not get done.

Many Christians are confused about what it means to “walk in the Spirit.” They think it is some overwhelming religious experience that will finally lift them above every trial or difficulty in life. The discouragement slaps us in the face when the next day arrives with its new trials and defeats and we need a *greater* spiritual experience. It reduces Christianity to nothing but one adrenaline high seeking after another.

This type of Christian will go to some religious seminar, or travel to hear some great preacher. The crowds fill him with excitement. The music is loud and stirring. The preacher’s words seem to reach out, grab his heart and squeeze. He will go forward at the invitation, determined he has finally made the decision which will once for all change

his life. There he is, on the mountain top with God. Then Monday comes along and he finds himself back in the valley again.

Roller Coaster rides can be fun, exciting, even thrilling, but if that is the history of your Christianity it is about time you learn to “walk in the Spirit.” You may ride that Roller Coaster for a number of years and continue to find it exciting, but eventually you will be setting in your pew yawning, bored and disgusted with it all.

Even the wilderness wandering Jews got bored with miracles. They even began to murmur and complain against the doldrums of the miracles. I can just hear them. *Manna from heaven? Been there, done that! Cloud by day and pillar of fire by night? Already seen that!* What made them that way? Selfishness! They were using God to get what they wanted, not serving Him to give Him what He wanted. Their focus was wrong, therefore they never learned the everyday practice of just walking in the Spirit.

Defining the Walk (The four P’s). This is the theology behind walking in the Spirit.

In Matthew 4:19, Christ said “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The words “follow me” define the expectations of the believers walk. Jesus never expected us to go it alone. That is why He gave us the Holy Spirit. Becoming a follower of Christ (*a disciple*) is God’s intended *pattern* for all believers.

God’s *purpose* is that we will be “fishers of men.” His *pattern* for us to follow in order to accomplish that, is to be like Christ. Most Christians never realize either His *pattern* or *purpose* because they never learn to “walk in the Spirit.”

The only way to practically realize God’s *pattern* and *purpose* is to access His *power* in the *Person* of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Pattern, Purpose, Power, Person).

When the believer learns to co-operatively yield his life to the indwelling Holy Spirit (*meaning active co-operation, not passive yielding*) each moment of each day, the Person of the Holy Spirit will empower the believer to follow Christ (pattern) and become a “fisher of men” (purpose). To “walk in the Spirit” implies a partnership relationship and defines the believer’s fellowship with the Godhead.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (I John 1:7)

Wilderness Christians want a Christianity without battles or trials. Since that is how they define Christianity, they will never do anything that even looks like it might be difficult.

Have you ever been prompted of the Holy Spirit to tell someone about Christ, but didn’t do it because you were afraid they might say something to hurt your feelings? You will never lead someone to Christ!

Did you decide to stay out of a small group Bible study because you don’t want to be accountable to other Christians for your relationship with Christ and what you are doing to serve Him? You will never grow beyond being a baby in Christ!

Have you ever been asked to help disciple someone, but refused because you didn’t think you were ready? You will never be ready!

Your Christianity is shut-up behind the walls you have made. Your Christianity is locked up behind the doors you have closed. God won't open doors for the person holding onto the doorknob with both feet braced against the wall. God will open the doors of opportunity when you open the door of your will.

God blesses those in motion. You will never walk on the water until you get out of the boat.

God isn't keeping you in the wilderness. You are! When you learn to "*walk in the Spirit*" you will be able to get out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

Externalism is defined as doing without being (Galatians 5:1)

Read Matthew 23:13 and 23-26. Christ condemned the Scribes and Pharisees of Israel for this. He called them *hypocrites* because of it. Why were these Jews who Christ speaks to, such miserable failures at evangelism?

Read Matthew 23:23. We should do what God says, but *doing* what God says without *being* what God says is worthless.

Read Matthew 23:24 again. Wilderness Christians never lead people to Christ because they are "blind guides." Wilderness Christians are "blind guides" because they take in camel sized portions of truth, but never recognize that the purpose of that truth is to show them the ground rules for their relationship with the Lord.

Their focus is on ground rules, rather than their relationship with the Lord. (*That does not mean the ground rules are un-important.*) Therefore, what they take in is overwhelmingly out of proportion to what they produce. Even that small amount is torture for them.

You cannot teach people how to be followers of Christ when your emphasis is on doing over being (Matthew 23:25-26). The reason so many Christians remain Wilderness Christians is they never make the necessary *spiritual transitions*.

They never make the transition *from being saved to knowing truth*. Learning truth requires a level of commitment they have not made. Of those few who diligently study God's Word, many of them never make the *transition from knowing to doing*.

Those who make the transition from knowing to doing, usually burn out because they never make the final *transition from doing to being*. Their doing is done in the flesh without the holy and intimate relationship with God necessary to produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Read Gal. 5:22-24. Because they never make this last transition, their Christian life reverts back to the dead ritual of endless Church services and Bible studies. Even the effort to know and do will come to a stop, because they find no satisfaction or fulfillment in that kind of Christianity. Ultimately they end up wandering in the wilderness all of their Christian life (if we dare call it that).

This describes a large majority of Christian lives. The good news is it does not have to continue that way. Making each of these transitions takes increased levels of commitment. You can evaluate where you are in your spiritual growth simply by knowing where you are in these transitions. Once you are saved, you must commit yourself to knowing, and doing what you know.

Although growing in knowledge and doing what God says should never come to an end, the joy of it all comes when it all flows naturally from our intimate love for the

Lord (relationship or being). There is a simple way to know when you have made this transition.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (I John 5:3)

When the work of knowing God’s Word and doing what He says is not a burden, you have the kind of relationship with the Lord that will keep you out of the wilderness. You will be walking in the Spirit.

Chapter Seven

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the word “walk” refer to in Galatians 5:16 and 25? Do you think its emphasis is more on doing or being?
2. What is it called when someone tries to live the Christian life in his own power?
 - A. What lesson can we learn about this from Joshua chapter seven from Israel’s experience at Ai?
 - B. What lesson can we learn about this from Numbers chapters 13 and 14 from Israel’s failure at Kadesh-Barnea?
3. What are the four P’s that define what it means to “walk in the Spirit” and what is the significance of each of them?
4. Use each of the above four words in a one sentence definition of walking in the Spirit.
5. How do *Wilderness Christians* practically define Christianity?
6. Read Galatians 5:1. **Externalism is defined as doing without _____.**
7. List three necessary transitions in spiritual growth after salvation before a person will ever walk in the Spirit?
8. According to 1 John 5:3, how will you know when the last transition is a reality of your life?