

Life in the Spirit

When you hear the words: “Life in the Spirit” what comes to mind? Do you think of a manifestation of some kind? Do you picture a heart representing our own heart filled up with living water? Perhaps you see a shadowy presence surrounding you? Do you see Jesus walking next to you?

Do you believe it is a series of rules that we follow to make us more Spiritual? Is it a set of tasks we must do?

Perhaps, you look beyond the surface into what Life in the Spirit means with regards to your attitudes, actions and behaviors.

Well... hold on tight because this is going to be fun, enlightening and enriching! We are going to press into God’s Word and discover what “Life in the Spirit” really means...

Okay Let’s press in...

The Law and Grace

What is the Law? (Leviticus 26:46; Exodus 19; Romans 9:4)

When we speak of the Law in the context of Scripture we are speaking about the commandments that God gave to Moses regarding how the people of God were to conduct themselves. It was constructed of three separate pieces:

- The Ten Commandments
- The Ordinances
- The Worship System

The law included interactions between the people, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the offerings and the celebrations/festivals. (Exodus 20-40; Leviticus 1-7; Leviticus 23)

Primarily we study the Law in the first five books of the bible, which is referred to as the “Pentateuch”.

The law was put into place as a tutor for the people of Israel and for us as the New Israel to recognize that no one could live up to its requirements, no one could fulfill all of its aspects; No one that is except for Jesus Christ. The law leads the people of God to the conclusion that they cannot fulfill Gods requirements for righteousness within themselves. In short, there is nothing that they can do to earn their salvation. The law points Gods children to his Son.

What did Jesus have to say about the law?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 NIV: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

This does not mean we are still under the law but that Jesus has fulfilled for us God the Father's requirements for righteousness.

Jesus also tells us how we are to move forward. When Jesus was asked which commandment was greatest he had this to say in Matthew 22:38-40: "...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus distilled the Law down to two commandments: The first five show God's grace in how we are to interact with him and the second five show his grace on how we are to interact with each other. Jesus has clarified the intent of how we are to live. So are we still subject to the law?

NO, the two commandments that Christ gave us tell us simply that we must love God and each other. We are no longer bound to the penalty for our sin. Jesus has paid the price for us with his blood.

So when we read in Matthew 5:18 "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" he is referring to his life, death, resurrection and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Now not all agree with this interpretation. Some believe this to be until the heavens and earth pass away. This has the potential then to deny the work of the cross. This brings me to a clarifying point.

Was Jesus referring to the Mosaic Law as referred to in Matthew 5:18 or was Jesus referring to the Moral Law? If we subscribe to the Mosaic Law interpretation then we must see the law as an ideal not an expectation. Failing to do so means that the freedom Christ granted us with his blood is worthless as we are still slaves to the law. This interpretation does not line up with the good news of Christ; He came to set us free.

If we believe that the Mosaic Law ended when Christ said on the cross, "It is finished" then we have freedom! But... now what do we do with the two commandments that Christ gave us about loving God and each other; they are a distillation of the Ten Commandments?

We must ask ourselves, did Jesus fulfill the requirement of the law in Matthew 5:17 or are the believers still bound to the law because of Matthew 5:18?

Now, consider with me one other possibility here... What if what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:18 was not the Mosaic Law at all, but rather the moral law of God. Moral laws are based on God's holy nature; they are holy, just and totally unchanging. Moral law does not point people to Christ however; it merely illustrates the fallen nature of mankind in light of the righteousness of the Father. So... if Christ was saying the Law of Moses was complete when he said it is finished, his blood paid for us and we take on his robes of righteousness. At the point of our conversion to Christianity we are instantaneously sanctified. This has occurred because Christ fulfilled all the law that we are sanctified and righteous before God the Father; which is consistent with scripture. We are then under the rule of Christ.

So... what if he is referring to the moral law of God?

Same thing, we are righteous because of his righteousness imputed to us through the work of the cross.

So how can Jesus do this? Isn't it a contradiction?

Nope, Matthew 28:18 states: "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

So what Jesus did is take the punishment for violation of the law away from us and pointed us to the nature of God without fear or need of further atonement. We are now free to love God and love each other without fear of divine retribution for our failure, when we fall short of the mark.

Jesus' moral imperative to us is to love God and love each other. In fact, it is his commandment. In John 15:12 Jesus says: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you"

On the cross:

- Jesus redeemed us – He bought us with his blood
- Jesus propitiated us – He took our place, took our sin and bore our punishment
- Jesus justified us – Because of his sacrifice we are no longer responsible to pay for our transgressions, Jesus has paid in full
- Jesus reconciled us – Because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us we are once again in right relationship with the Father

We have Grace!

What is that?

Grace is the free and unmerited favour of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings.

Unmerited... Christ did it all for us! It is finished; nothing else is required.

As each of us grows in our Christian walk, the Holy Spirit does his restorative work within us and brings about the likeness of Christ within us. Christ gave us those two commandments because they reflect the moral law of God. As we become more like him we take on his moral stature. Romans 3:20 says: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." Note there is no more guilt or condemnation. John 3:17 Tells us: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Folks, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us on this amazing journey. In John 16:13-15 we read: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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 glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you"

Jesus died for us and shed his blood upon the cross, not because we deserved it but because he loves us. If that is not unmerited favour I don't know what is...

Okay so we have covered the Mosaic Law, Moral Law and Jesus work on the cross, which bestowed grace upon us. Now let us turn our attention to what Paul the apostle has to say about Grace.

The Argument Paul makes for Grace alone

In Ephesians 2:8-10 we read: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

In Galatians 2:15-16 we read: "'We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

Paul begins by bringing us a reality check. He explains simply that justification is by faith not by law. He then points out that we cannot gain Gods favour by anything we do.

When Paul says: "... a person is not justified by the works of the law..." he is saying that we cannot claim to have earned grace and salvation based on the promise that those who observe the law will be considered righteous. No one except Christ can do this. We are told in 1 John 1:8 "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." So no one can earn salvation through trying to

adhere to the law it is impossible. Paul gives us the answer when he says: "...but by faith in Jesus Christ..."

In this simple statement, Paul has shown us that any grace we have received from God was not based on our merit but rather was from Jesus; because of this no one can boast or claim that they deserve salvation from God.

If we consider that the Mosaic Law was instituted as our tutor and proceed backwards to Abraham, who precedes the law by a considerable period of time. We go all the way back to Genesis 15:6 where we read: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" so we find that the precedent under which righteousness occurs is not through any of our works, but by faith in God.

Clearly God was using the Mosaic Law to point the way to Christ when his people strayed from the truth. Paul knew this and understood it well. The message of the Good news of Jesus was that we simply have to believe on the Lord Jesus. John 3:16 tells us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Nothing more is required. It is God's gift of unmerited favour. It is grace.

The pitfall of Legalism

The root of legalism is certainly pride. While the legalist usually doesn't realize they have the problem, they attempt to set standards for others based on their personal interpretation of the Word of God. They try to live up to a form of self-atonement and worse inflict this practice on others.

For some people, the reason why they can never change is because all they do is scold their heart. ~Tim Keller

Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will. ~Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Legalism: Focusing on and crediting your own obedience as the main source of your [practical] holiness. ~Darrin Patrick

J. Stowell, the Christian author has pointed out what he calls The Ten Flaws of Legalism:

1. New laws continually need to be invented for new situations.
2. Accountability to God is replaced by accountability to men.
3. It reduces a person's ability to personally discern.
4. It creates a judgmental spirit.
5. It confuses personal preferences with the divine will of God.
6. It produces inconsistencies.
7. It creates a false standard of righteousness.
8. It becomes a burden.
9. It is strictly external, never internal.

10. And it was and is rejected by Christ.

Likewise, as I was studying various resources on the Internet, I came across the following really useful summary by C. J. Mahney; wherein, he describes eight points of what living in legalism looks like. I found his synopsis excellent and so I will share it with you today:

1. You are more aware of and effected by your past sins than the finished work of Christ.
2. You are more aware of areas you need to grow in than the finished work of Christ. In other words, you figure that if you can just spin enough "discs" (Bible reading, prayer life, meditation, family worship, serving others, church ministry) on your fingers then you're more accepted with God.
3. You live thinking, believing, and feeling that God is disappointed with you.
4. You assume His acceptance is dependent upon your obedience.
5. You experience regular condemnation.
6. Your sin in the morning ruins/condemns everything you might seek to do for the Lord that day.
7. You have an undue concern of what others think about you.
8. You lack joy. You think that joy in the Christian life is based on your worthiness rather than the finished work of Christ.

So now you know the flaws of living by law over grace; and you know what legalism looks like. Next let's look at some questions you can ask yourself to determine if you are living by grace or if you are bound by legalism:

1. Am I a saved sinner or a new creation in Christ who still sins?
2. Do I determine my relationship to God by how much I am sinning or do I trust in the work of the cross to cover my sins and believe that Jesus blood can cover my sin completely?
3. When I pray, do I spend most of my time repenting for my failures or basking in his presence?

Living life in the Spirit Explained

In Galatians 5:16-18 the apostle Paul said: "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law."

As we approach Paul's response in Galatians 5:16 we see that the command to "live by the Spirit" is the core of Paul's message. Paul established that Christian life starts with the Spirit.

In Galatians 3:2-3 Paul says:

"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?"

Then in Galatians 4:6-7 we read:

"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

Next in Galatians 4:29:

"Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now."

So the Holy Spirit is the source of our Christian life and it holds the power to sustain it. We are no longer slaves to sin but are new creations in Christ Jesus. We are sons and daughters as well as heirs in his inheritance. We are not born slaves to the law but as heirs in the grace and authority of Jesus.

Now turn with me to John 16:13-15

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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 glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Now, if we acknowledge that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to draw us to Christ and guide us into all truth, that it is Christ who saves us (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit who does his restorative work within us bringing us joy and peace (Romans 15:13). We must then conclude that Christian life starts in the Spirit and that living in the

Spirit is a walk of faith believing in Jesus while the Holy Spirit teaches us and guides us into all truth.

Receipt of Spiritual Gifts

When we have chosen to live in the Spirit, we are given gifts from the Holy Spirit; that are essential to that life. Consider with me 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 where it says: "To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." These gifts give us the tools that we need to be effective and live joyful and abundant lives in the Spirit.

So what does life in the Spirit look like?

- Well Christ said that he came to give us life and life more abundantly. (John 10:10)
- Our advocate (the Holy Spirit) would be with us. We would not be alone (John 15:26)
- He would lead us and guide us (Romans 8:14; Acts 8:29)
- He would help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26)
- He would cause us to come alive inside (1 Peter 3:18; John 6:63)
- We walk free from the Law (Romans 8:2)
- We reap a spiritual harvest (Galatians 6:8)
- Rivers of living water will flow out of us (John 7:37-39)
- We become fertile soil (Isaiah 44:3-4)
- He eliminates condemnation (Romans 8:1)
- He testifies that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)
- The Spirit unites the Christian and the Community of Believers (Ephesians 2:19-22)

...and there are many more exciting aspects for you to seek out and discover. Some of these are also benefits, so it might be worthwhile at this point to look at the benefits of living life in the Spirit.

The Benefits of Living Life in the Spirit

Well first off, when we live life in the Spirit we produce the fruit of the Spirit. Let's look at the gifts of the Spirit that are produced in our lives as we walk in the Spirit - Galatians 5:22-25:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"

We have the benefits of a far better quality of life, our relationships with others are better and our own nature is improved.

When we live in the Spirit we live in clarity walk in liberty and experience true freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us:

“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

When we live in the Spirit we live condemnation free. Our past cannot be used against us any longer. Romans 8:1 – “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”

In fact this whole chapter of Romans details benefits of life in the Spirit. Take a few moments and read Romans 8:1-17 and look for the following benefits:

Verses 1-4 – Freedom from the law

Verses 5-8 – Freedom from the flesh

Verses 9-13 – Resurrection power flowing on the inside

Verses 14-15 – Adoption by God

Verses 16-17 – The Spirit confirms our Son-ship to God and our inheritance with Christ.

When we consider the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring us and bringing about the likeness of Christ within us, the benefits are truly enumerable. It is out of our living life in the Spirit that we build relationship with God and draw closer to what he would have us be. It is out of our daily relationship with our Lord that the gifts flow and the quality of our lives is improved. We begin to live life and life more abundantly (John 10:10) in which we are truly empowered to be persons of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Summary:

When we attempt to live by the law we are basically fundamentally unhappy. The law has taught us that we cannot ever fulfill its expectations. Christ came to give us life and life more abundantly and so, as we live life in the Spirit, we produce the fruit of the Spirit. This drastically improves the quality of our lives.

The Holy Spirit even provides us with gifts, which empower us and enable us to lead better lives. Jesus has provided everything we need to live a joy filled life in him. In fact, we are sons and daughters, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and even his special possession.

We give up a life of slavery to the flesh for an abundant, productive life of freedom. This sounds like a no brainer to me.

Just think about how a life in the Spirit is radically different for a life lived in the flesh.

When we live a life in the Spirit we are imbued with virtue, wisdom and the grace of Christ. A life lived in the Spirit is filled with:

- Prayer
- Devotion to the Word of God
- Fellowship
- Praise and worship
- Gifts of the Spirit
- Fruit of the Spirit

A life in the Spirit leads to life and a life lead in the flesh leads to death.

Paul has told us about the acts of the flesh – Galatians 5:19-21

“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”

Clearly a life in the Spirit is preferable when we look at the fruit produced by each.

When we embrace life in the Spirit, we embrace Christ and the Holy Spirit does the work of bringing about the likeness of Christ within us. We move forward living abundantly, condemnation free and having the assurance that our debt and our failures have already been taken into account and paid for. We are truly free. We are free to live a life that means something... we can live a life of servant-hood to God and to one another.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son and what he has done for us. We thank you Jesus that you have sent the Holy Spirit to us to lead us and guide us into all truth. We thank you Lord that you have spelled out for us the benefits of life in the Spirit and the pitfalls of living in the flesh.

Dear precious Lord, today we ask for your Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts and our lives. We ask and surrender to your will Jesus and we ask that your Holy Spirit will bring about your likeness within us as we willingly reject our fleshly nature and embrace the abundant life you have set before us.