

Walking in the Spirit

1 Thessalonians 2:11—12

Paul's doctrine is unique being set apart from the rest of the Bible and specifically for believers today. This idea has been, I believe, established in the last three lessons. Since Paul's 13 books have been written specifically for believers in this Age of Grace, the rest of the Bible has not been written directly for us to obey. This is a hard concept for many to accept being uncomfortable with splitting up Scripture and accepting only a small portion as being our direct instructions. On the other hand, there are also many more problems in not understanding the natural divisions in Scripture.

For instance, when reading about Noah in Genesis should we go out and build a great boat and collect animals? Obviously not since we understand God was speaking directly to Noah during a very specific time in earth's history. The same principle can be applied to Jonah when told to go to Nineveh or Hosea when told to marry a prostitute. These commands from God are easily understood to be directed toward specific people and not to be taken as a personal command.

But yet there are a number of passages in Scripture that many people apply to themselves even though the promise was given to someone else. The examples below were originally given to Israel or a specific person but yet are often taken personally:

Deuteronomy 20:4 For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Malachi 3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

We also find many people elevate the words of Jesus above the rest of Scripture even though God is the author of the entire Bible. Most people are not consistent in obeying Jesus' commands often ignoring the harder ones. Some examples include commands to obey those who sit in the seat of Moses (Matthew 5:17—18; give to whomever asks (Matthew 5:42); store up your treasure in heaven (not earth) (Matthew 6:19, 25—26); and sell all your possessions (Luke 6:30; 12:33). Even though these are direct commands from Jesus, few even try to obey them.

The simple way to understand Scripture is to discern what is written to us, and realize the rest is written for our understanding, edification and learning but not to be taken personally (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6).

The last words of Jesus Christ

Most people trying to follow the Lord's commands miss a very important point. While trying to obey Jesus they miss His last words as spoken through the Apostle Paul. Why is it that people concentrate on the earthly Jesus when He last spoke to us after His ascension and glorification? Paul clearly states he received his Gospel from Jesus Christ and not any other man (Galatians 1:11—12; 16—17). He also is not following the earthly Jesus with His teaching that was meant for Israel (2 Corinthians 5:16). If Paul does not recognize Jesus from the flesh any more then shouldn't we put the earthly Jesus aside and follow the teachings of our risen Lord and Savior?

Paul also tells us that he is our example and a pattern for us to walk in and imitate just as he followed Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9). Paul calls himself our example and prototype because he was the first one in the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 1:15—16). Note that many

translations state Paul was the foremost of sinners but the Greek word *protos* means prototype. Paul was a prototype for those following him into the Body of Christ. Since Paul is our pattern to follow, it's important to follow his teaching in our daily walk with the Lord. Following any other instruction (as the examples above) will not only confuse but also will stunt your spiritual growth (Romans 16:17).

Our walk

I believe it should be the goal of every believer to be Christ-like. As Romans 8:29 says, we were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. This idea of being Christ-like is contained in Philippians 2 when it speaks of Christ humbling Himself under the Father, being obedient in all things. Becoming Christ-like involves living your life for Christ at the expense of self. This is where it is critically important to understand what Paul says about the subject for it is only from him that we learn what God desires (Ephesians 4:11—16).

The first thing we need to understand is our position in Him as believers. Paul says we have died in Christ (Romans 6:4). Even though God sees the old self as having been put to death, experientially we still struggle with the old nature (Romans 7). This struggle is an indication that we are truly saved. Galatians 2:20 states the old nature is dead (crucified) with Christ. Jesus Christ now controls our new life. Ephesians goes even further by saying we are actually seen as being blessed with every spiritual blessing (1:3), we have an inheritance (1:11), sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13) and are seated with Christ (2:6).

Paul then makes the point that since you are saved, having received Christ Jesus, so now you should walk in Him (Colossians 2:6). Ephesians 5:8 says that we were formerly darkness but now we are light therefore we need to walk as children of light. This walk is not about the flesh trying harder but rather about considering the flesh (old nature) as being dead but your new nature alive unto God through our relationship with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11). It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to please God (Galatians 5:16, 25). The evidence that we are walking by the power of the Holy Spirit is when we bear the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22—23).

Our whole life should be spent keeping the flesh dead so that we will allow the Holy Spirit to bear fruit in us for God's glory. The old nature needs to be taken off and the new nature must be put on (Ephesians 4:22—24). This is the process of sanctification. We are holy (sanctified) positionally (in God's eyes because of Jesus Christ) but we now need to reach this perfect level of sanctification experientially (in our daily walk). This is only possible if we give ourselves to God, not conforming to the world but being transformed by the daily renewing of our mind (Romans 12:1—2). This sums up God's will for the believer's life. We need to be filled with the knowledge of God's will by studying the Pauline Epistles so that we will be able to walk in a manner that will please the Lord (Colossians 1:9—10). This is not done in the flesh for there is nothing in the flesh that would please God. Only when we allow the Holy Spirit to control us will we be bearing fruit in our good works.

Wrong walk

1 John 1:9 is an example of following the wrong doctrine for our daily walk. This verse is taken as a way for us to set our relationship right with God after we have sinned, this in spite of Ephesians 1:6—8 stating our sins have been already forgiven. The idea of relational or familial sin seems to be a man-made concept to explain this verse. John actually wrote this to guide believing Israel through the Tribulation. Verse 6 speaks of those who are walking in darkness. This is impossible for the believer in this age because we are walking in light (Ephesians 5:8; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:5). Instead of continually keeping a list of sins to confess it would be much more beneficial to get up and run the race without looking back (Philippians 3:12—14; 1 Corinthians 9:24—27).

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