

Led of the Spirit

Spirit Led

In Galatians 5:16-18, Paul wrote,

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 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. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

I have serious doubts as to whether Paul is contrasting the lust of the flesh with the Holy Spirit. I realize the word “Spirit,” is capitalized, which alludes to the Holy Spirit, but I also realize that this is nothing more than an opinion of translators, and they have been incorrect a time or two. Rather, I believe the context dictates that Paul is discussing the conflict between one’s flesh (the outer man) and one’s spirit (the inner man). We are a dual-natured person (2 Cor. 4:16); as such, Satan seeks to use one’s flesh as a means of dominating his mind and spirit by doing what the flesh craves instead of his spirit, instructed by the word of God, controlling his flesh.

For example, when Paul said, “I buffet my body” (1 Cor. 9:27 ASV), he was alluding to himself personally as a Christian whose flesh was constantly struggling to gain the advantage so that he wanted to do what the flesh wants and not what his spirit knew best as guided by the gospel. Thus, when one allows his inward man to control him, then he does not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

In fact, the denominational concept is that the Holy Spirit dominates and controls one’s life. If the Holy Spirit controlled the flesh personally, then how could one ever sin? The Holy Spirit would be guilty of falling down on His job and allowing one to sin! Yet, one sins whenever the flesh affects and controls the inward self—heart and mind (cf. 2 Cor. 1:12). The flesh influences his mind and thinking to the degree that it controls the way that he acts. Thus, one must be sure that he does not allow the flesh to get the upper hand and control him so that he does whatever the flesh desires instead of what the mind, directed and influenced by the gospel of Christ, tells him what to do. Therefore, the influence of the gospel in one’s mind and heart should dominate and control one’s life.

In fact, the ever-growing danger in the church today is that brethren are talking about the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit helping people overcome sin. Some say it helps them overcome carnality. I heard of one man who enumerated six or seven things that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enabled him to do. As a result, it is only a matter of time before they end up accepting the impossibility of apostasy. That is a strange development! How did people in the Old Testament live holy lives without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? How did they manage to live and serve God faithfully? They did so through the teaching of the law, the prophets and the instructions of God (Ps. 119:11). Why do we think it is any different today?

What did Paul mean when he said, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31)? There is a battle that is ongoing, seeking to keep the flesh in check by the continual study of the Bible and by filling our minds and hearts with it (Ps. 119:11). If one keeps his mind and thoughts filled with the word of God, then he keeps the flesh in check. When he does not, then the flesh gets the upper hand and leads him into sin by fulfilling the lust of the flesh.

In Romans 7:7-20, Paul even said that they fought this same battle under the Old Testament. Today, as we are living under the new covenant, it is only through being in Christ and the provisions that God made for everyone in Him that one is able to do what he ought to do. One's own spirit is to be in control of his flesh, leading him. This is why "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21) are serious matters. This is what it means when Paul says that we are "led of the Spirit."