

How Does A Christian Grow? A Dispensational Theology of the Spiritual Life (Part 2 of 3: Walking By the Spirit)

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The previous article in this three-part series posed the question, “Why do the same people always seem to line up together on opposite sides even when interpreting different Scripture passages?” The verses themselves might appear to have little intrinsic relationship, yet the same theologians and the same commentators consistently gather together on the same sides of theological issues when facing off in doctrinal and hermeneutical debates. The reality of this conundrum is never more apparent than in disagreements between Calvinists and Arminians, dispensationalists and nondispensationalists, lordship and free grace advocates.

The answer to this perplexing question is discovered in the theological presuppositions which, though seemingly unrelated to the passage at hand, frequently shape an interpreter’s framework resulting in interpretive decisions consistent with one theological camp or another. Yet, sometimes a theologian in one camp will inconsistently develop an interpretation more consistent with another camp. Often this is because of undetected presuppositions that shape the interpretation of a passage. The result might produce a dispensationalist who unwittingly holds to an interpretation of a passage which is built on assumptions consistent with another theological system, and inconsistent with the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.¹

While wrestling with the interpretive options available for understanding our Lord’s discourse on the vine (John 15:1–10), it becomes apparent there are two broad groupings: the first understand “abide” to be soteriological—all believers abide, unbelievers do not; the second understand “abide” to describe the believer’s ongoing fellowship with Christ. Closer analysis revealed that those who held to the former position—“abiding is believing”—have other views in common including an emphasis on the Old Testament use of the vine imagery to describe the spiritual status of Israel: just as corporate Israel was composed of believer and unbeliever, so too must the vine in John 15. In contrast, those who hold to the latter position—“abiding is fellowship”—do not emphasize the Old Testament vine analogy as hermeneutically determinative for John 15. For the most part these commentators were not only dispensational, but also free grace in their approach to soteriological and sanctification models.²

¹ The threefold *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is: a distinction between God’s plan for Israel and the church, a consistent literal hermeneutic, and the doxological purpose of God in human history. Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 39–41.

² Free grace advocates affirm that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, that assurance of salvation can be certain in this life based on the knowledge one has believed Christ died as a substitute for one’s sins, and that, failure to persevere does not indicate a person’s saved status. Lordship salvation, to the contrary, is the consistent development from the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints which affirms that salvation is by faith in Christ, but then adds that genuine faith manifests discernible works in the life of the believer, the absence of which suggests a nonsaving faith. Thus, one cannot truly know he has eternal life until death, since a person might eventually fall away from faith, reject Christ, and not persevere, thus indicating a nongenuine or nonsaving faith. Some Reformed theologians, such as James Montgomery Boice and Arthur Pink do hold to the view that abiding is fellowship, but in the view of this writer that is just as inconsistent with their presuppositions as the ‘abiding is believing’ view is inconsistent with the presuppositions of dispensational theology.

Since a consistent distinction between Israel and the church is part of the *sine qua non* of traditional dispensational theology, it was concluded that to understand abiding as the believer's ongoing fellowship with Christ is most consistent with a dispensational theology. Exegetical analysis further demonstrates that the ‘abiding is fellowship’ interpretation fits the lexical, syntactical data in the passage, along with historical cultural information on viticulture from first century Palestine, while the “abiding is believing” interpretation is insupportable exegetically.

One presupposition that affects interpretation and frequently explains this alignment is the relationship of the church to Israel. According to the conclusions of the previous article the following logic developed: if a central factor in the interpretation is related to maintaining a consistent distinction between Israel and the church, and the subject of John 15 is sanctification and not justification, then there must be an approach to the post-salvation spiritual life of the believer that is consistent with dispensational theology. This conclusion indicates that dispensational theology does not merely affect eschatology and ecclesiology, as some assert, but also has a precise impact on experiential sanctification.³ In addition, dispensationalism has certain distinctive views concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church-age believer. Since pneumatology is foundational to understanding sanctification, then, of necessity, a dispensational sanctification consistent with a dispensational view of Israel, the church, and pneumatology must exist. Part two of this paper will develop key elements in dispensational sanctification by comparing the conclusions from John 15—abiding is fellowship and fellowship is necessary and indispensable for spiritual growth and fruit production—with other New Testament passages describing the fructification in the life of the believer.

Conclusions from the Vine

The first conclusion drawn from the exegesis of John 15 is that abiding in Christ means to have fellowship with Christ. Though the term fellowship is not used in John 15, “fellowship” is used in 1 John as a synonym for μένω (*ménō*), “abide.” How consistently a theologian applies the distinction between Israel and the church impacts not only the interpretation of John 15, but 1 John also. *Ménō* (abide) is a key term occurring thirteen times in 1 John; how this term is interpreted significantly impacts the meaning of the epistle. Those who understand abide to mean believe understand 1 John to be about tests of faith, contrasting the genuine believer with the unbeliever.⁴ On the other hand, those who take “abide” as fellowship understand 1 John to be discussing fellowship of the believer, contrasting the carnal believer with the spiritual believer.

Fellowship translates κοινωνία (*koinōnia*), which “denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond. It expresses a two-sided relation. . . . As with *koinōnéō*, emphasis may be on

³ John F. Walvoord, “The Augustinian–Dispensational View,” in, *Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 199–226.

⁴ The editors of the NET Bible include a note explaining “abide” in 1 John 2:4. “‘Abide’ has become in some circles almost a ‘technical term’ for some sort of special intimate fellowship or close relationship between the Christian and God, so that one may speak of Christians who are ‘abiding’ and Christians who are not. It is accurate to say the word indicates a close, intimate (and permanent) relationship between the believer and God. However, it is very important to note that for the author of the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles *every* genuine Christian has this type of relationship with God, and the person who does not have this type of relationship (cf. 2 John 9) is not a believer at all (in spite of what he or she may claim).” Unfortunately, they are guilty of reading their theology into 2 John 9 as well.

either the giving or the receiving.”⁵ John used this word three times in the introduction to his first epistle (1 John 1:3, 6, 7). The emphasis is similar to “abide” which also describes mutual fellowship: the believer abides in Christ, Christ abides in the believer (John 15:4–5). In his first epistle, the apostle John revealed three characteristics of fellowship with Christ: first, fellowship is based on a correct view of the undiminished deity and true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–4); second, fellowship with God and walking in darkness are mutually exclusive (1 John 1:5); and third, fellowship is synonymous with walking in the light (1 John 1:7).⁶

Abiding and fellowship have identical characteristics. The apostle describes abiding as walking “in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6) and is “in the light” (1 John 2:10).⁷ Jesus always walked in the light. The believer who abides does the will of God (1 John 2:17). Further, abiding is based on believing the message about Christ that they heard from the beginning (1 John 2:24). “What was from the beginning” (1 John 1:1), John proclaimed “that you might have fellowship with us.” Abiding in Christ is tantamount to fellowship with Christ.

The second conclusion derived from the discourse on the vine (John 15:1–6) is that, in that passage, there are three categories of Christians. The first category consists of those who do not abide and whom the Lord disciplines in this life, even to the extent of suffering the sin unto death (1 John 5:16). The second consists of immature believers who abide, but have not yet produced fruit. The third consists of mature believers who abide and produce more fruit or much fruit.

Christians who do not abide	are disciplined
Christians who abide,	immature and have yet to produce fruit
Christians who abide,	mature, and produce more or much fruit

As a plant must grow over an extended period before it is able to produce fruit, the same is true for the believer. Just as it is inaccurate to refer to the leafy growth of a plant as fruit, so too, it is incorrect to refer to the spiritual growth of a believer as fruit. Fruit comes only as the believer advances toward maturity.

The third conclusion from John 15 is that the believer may either abide in Christ or not. Abiding is an absolute status. This is consistent with the meaning of *meno* “to continue, remain, stay.” Believers either abide in Christ or fail to abide in Christ, but they do not partially abide and partially leave. One cannot both abide and not abide at the same time. Usage of “abide” makes this absolute status clear (Matthew 10:11; 11:23; 26:38; Luke 9:4; John 3:36; 4:40; Acts 2:7).

⁵ Friedrich Hauck, *Koinōnia*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–74), 3:797.

⁶ John Niemelä, “Finding True North in 1 John,” *CTS Journal* 6 (July–September 2000): 39–40, shows why the first person plural of 1 John 1 relates first to John himself, then the apostolic community.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1977).

These conclusions may be put together in the following syllogism:

- 1) Abiding means to have fellowship with Christ;
 - 2) A believer either abides or not;
 - 3) Therefore, at any point in time a believer either has fellowship with Christ or not.
- Fellowship is an absolute status, not a relative or partial status. Believers cannot be partly in fellowship and partly out of fellowship.

Jesus' discourse on the vine emphasizes fruit production in the believer as a result of abiding in Christ. In John 15 Jesus stated that abiding in Him is the necessary and only condition for fruit production. In Galatians 5:16–26, the apostle Paul states that walking by the Spirit is the necessary and only condition for fruit production. This parallel indicates that both walking by the Spirit and abiding in Christ describe the necessary conditions for maintaining fellowship with Christ. If abiding were synonymous with believing, then walking by the Spirit would also be synonymous with believing. Completely illogical!

Walking Produces Fruit

The Galatian Context

In Galatians 5:16–26 the Apostle Paul explains the significance of the Holy Spirit for the believer's spiritual advance. With perhaps the exception of Romans 8, no other chapter of Scripture is as salient for explaining this advance. To grasp the impact of Galatians 5:16, this verse must be understood within the context of the argument of the epistle.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

In the development of his argument to the Galatians, Paul first establishes the ground of justification in chapters 1 and 2 by making clear that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone and not by the works of the law (Gal. 2:20). Following that, Paul then addressed the question about whether the believer's spiritual growth is through faith or the works of the Law. To focus their attention he pointedly asks: "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal. 3:2). The expected answer is "hearing with faith" (cf., Gal. 2:14b; Rom. 10:17). "Law" refers to the Mosaic Law and the teaching of the Judaizers that wrongly instructed the Christians that only full obedience to the Mosaic Law would allow them to fully enter into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. This obedience to the Law included both the moral law and the ceremonial law. Paul countered by teaching that observance of moral and ceremonial precepts can never provide any sinner with the quality of righteousness necessary for justification (Gal. 3:10–12, 21; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The Epistle to the Galatians, most likely the first of Paul's letters, centers the attention of the reader on two dominant themes: (1) the justification of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ apart

from legal works, and (2) the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling energizer of the spiritual life in Christ.⁸

Paul then shifted his subject from justification to sanctification with another rhetorical question: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3)? He established two antithetical word pairs: begun–perfected and Spirit–flesh. The next place these key words are found along with the verb “perfected” is in Galatians 5:16, where Paul commanded the believer to “Walk by the Spirit and you will not perfect the deeds of the flesh.”

The first phrase, “having begun by the Spirit,” reminded them of the how they became Christians: a new life created by God the Holy Spirit at the instant they believed the gospel began their new spiritual life. At the time of Paul’s writing to them, the Holy Spirit had already regenerated the Galatians. No creature can regenerate himself, only God can do this (John 1:13). For this reason, salvation is *by means* of faith, not *because* of faith.⁹ When an individual expresses faith alone in Christ alone, the Holy Spirit instantly imputes God’s perfect righteousness to the new creature in Christ and declares him righteous. At the same time he is regenerated and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:18, 20; Gal. 2:16, 20). The believer has received a new life from the Holy Spirit that the Spirit must nourish and develop. The new spiritual life begins not from the works of the Law, but through faith and is generated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“Being perfected” (Gal. 3:3) is an ambiguous translation for the Greek verb, $\square\pi\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (*epiteleo*). This word is an intensification of the cognate verb $\tau\acute{e}l\acute{e}\omega$ (*teleo*), found later in Galatians 5:16, where it describes the result of walking by the Spirit. *Epiteleo* means “to perform,” “to establish,” “to finish,” or “to bring to completion.”¹⁰ The Galatian believers began their Christian life through a work of the Holy Spirit, but they were now attempting to grow to spiritual maturity through dependence on their own human ability through the works of the Law. The passive voice of the verb indicates the believer does not bring himself to maturity, but, by following certain protocols, the Holy Spirit matures him.

Moral though the Galatians efforts might have been, such attempts were illegitimate. Morality is never sufficient to control the sin nature. Spiritual growth and the advance to spiritual maturity can come only by dependence on the Holy Spirit. If not, this activity is a pseudo-spiritual activity that originates from the flesh. Paul desired the Galatians to understand that everything in life derives from either one or the other (cf., Col. 2:6).

The main point of Paul’s rhetorical question here, however, has to do with the incongruity of beginning one’s Christian life on one basis (“with the Spirit”) and then shifting somewhere in progress to another basis (“by human effort”). What Paul wants his converts to see is that the

⁸ S. Lewis Johnson, “Role Distinctions in the church, Galatians 3:28,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 150.

⁹ The preposition *dia* (“through”) with the genitive has an instrumental meaning, not a causal one in Ephesians 2:8–9. This indicates that faith is the *means*, not the *cause* of salvation.

¹⁰ Gerhard Delling, *Epiteleo*, TDNT, 8:61.

Christian life is one that starts, is maintained, and comes to culmination only through dependence on the activity of God's Spirit (cf., 5:25; also see Phil 1:6, where the same verbs $\square\nu\alpha\rho\xi\mu\omega$ and $\square\nu\pi\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega$ appear and where the point is made that completion of the Christian life comes about on the same basis as its inception, viz. by God's working).¹¹

Paul emphasized the antithesis between the production of the Spirit and the work of the flesh (the sin nature). Paul clearly used "flesh" ($\sigma\alpha\rho\xi$, *sark*) with an ethical dimension beginning in Galatians 3:3. A Christian can clearly conduct an ethical, [Mosaic] law-abiding life, yet the results are unacceptable to God. Isaiah emphasized that *our righteous deeds* not our unrighteous deeds are like a *filthy garment* (Isa. 64:6). Failure to take into account the reality that the sin nature can produce morality has led to much confusion and distortion in teaching about the spiritual life. Likewise, unbelievers can live ethical lives, in many cases superior to the ethics of believers. A believer may also do good things: read his Bible, pray, memorize Scripture, give money, but in the power of the flesh, just as an unbeliever can do these things. Only when walking by the Spirit can these same deeds have a supernatural enablement.

In Romans chapter 6, Paul made clear that everything the unbeliever does derives from the sin nature. The unbeliever is born enslaved to the sin nature. Only subsequent to salvation can the believer make a choice free from this tyrant. Therefore, all the unbeliever does—good, bad, moral, immoral—proceeds from a fallen sinful nature.¹² Paul implies that a believer can distinguish between the good and moral that the sin nature generates, and what the Holy Spirit produces through the believer. This standard cannot be subjective, but must be objectively verifiable. How can the believer determine if his attempts to apply Scripture come from the flesh or the sin nature?

The contrast between flesh and Spirit is not the only contrast in Galatians, nor in Romans. The juxtaposition of these categories demonstrates the unique characteristics of the spiritual life of the church age.

Law	Grace
Works	Faith
Slavery	Freedom
Flesh	Spirit

A life that emphasizes Law and works (i.e., simple human morality as the means to spiritual growth) is in fact slavery to the sin nature.

Paul reminded the Galatians that since they did not begin their new life by *obedience* to ceremonial or moral law, the subsequent growth of this new spiritual life is not by *observing* the ceremonial or moral law. Both the inception of the spiritual life and subsequent growth in that life, come from the source of the Holy Spirit. This does not exclude morality, but recognizes that morality is not synonymous with Spirit empowered obedience to God's Word. If it were, then the

¹¹ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 103–4.

¹² Romans 7:5 makes it clear that even the attempt to live a moral life on the basis of the Law, arouses the passions of the sin nature. Morality, therefore, is not sufficient to control the sin nature.

Galatians would have demonstrated this by their own legalistic attempts. Instead, the result was calamitous. As the apostle Paul had discovered in his own life, an emphasis on legal obedience and morality generates arrogance, covetousness, and numerous other mental and emotional sins. These sins then culminate in overt sins. Morality alone is never sufficient to control the lust of the sin nature because that same fallen nature produces human morality. Only ethical obedience to the precepts of Scripture in dependence on God the Holy Spirit has value for spiritual growth.

This argument can be presented in the form of a syllogism: (1) Everything the unbeliever does derives from his position in bondage to the sin nature and proceeds from the sin nature (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 6:6, 17, 18); (2) The unbeliever can live a moral, ethical life; therefore, (3) Simple human morality may be the product of the sin nature. Only a supernatural source can produce the virtues and Christlike character unique to the Christian life.

Since it is not enough simply to do the right thing, or live a moral life, the believer must have some gauge or criterion to determine whether his morality derives from the production of the flesh, as did the Galatians' morality, or the Holy Spirit. Since moral reformation might be self-induced through a merely human act of the will, how is the believer to discern the difference between morality and spiritual growth? Paul answered this through the command to walk by means of the Spirit. Accordingly, he went on to answer the question, How does the believer apply this mandate?

The Unique Mandate of Love

Galatians 5:16 elucidates why Paul made dependence on the Holy Spirit essential to the spiritual life. The moral qualities produced by mere human ability cannot approximate the ethical virtues which only God can produce in the Christian's life in the church age. The highest of these virtues is love. Paul reminded the Galatians of this standard in Galatians 5:13–15. The new freedom they have in Christ is not self-serving. Just the opposite is true. Freedom in Christ is freedom from the bondage of sin (Gal. 5:1; Rom. 6:17) and freedom from the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:11–13; 23–25; 4:7; Rom. 6:14). The Lord liberates each believer from the self-serving orientation of the sin nature so that he is now free to love as Christ loves.

When he stressed love, Paul quoted not from Jesus' statement in the upper room (John 13:34), but from Leviticus 19:18. He quotes from the Law because obedience to the Mosaic Law was the central issue with the Galatians. Paul's point was to show that under the Old Testament, believers never fulfilled the command as stated.¹³ In the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, saved Jews had a spiritual life based on simple adherence to the ethical and ceremonial precepts of the law. However, they were unable to live up to the Law by means of human ability alone.

Notice the differences between the commands in Leviticus 19:18 and John 13:34–35. First, in the Leviticus passage, the object of love is the neighbor whom Jesus defined in the parable of the Good Samaritan as any other human being regardless of spiritual status. Second, the standard,

¹³ An *a fortiori* argument is implied. An *a fortiori* argument is a logical argument that reasons from an accepted greater truth to conclude the veracity of a lesser truth. If no one on the basis of the Law (human morality alone) could apply the lesser mandate of loving others as themselves, then no one on the basis of human morality can apply the superior mandate of John 13:34–35.

expressed by the comparative particle “as” ($\square\zeta$, *hos*), is the individual himself (Gal. 5:14). Jesus radically transformed this command. In John 13:34–35 he states,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

No longer is the object one’s neighbor (a member of the covenant community of Israel), but “one another,” that is, Christians, members of the body of Christ. And the standard by which the love is measured is no longer “as you love yourselves,” but “as I have loved you.” This love is the unique calling card of the disciple, the maturing believer. Human effort cannot generate this love; only God the Holy Spirit working in the life of the believer can produce this love. Yet, how can the believer love in this way?

Paul answered that question in his mandate to the Galatians, “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). Some observations must be made regarding Galatians 5:16–5:25. First, this passage is a single thought unit whose purpose is to demonstrate how the believer can fulfill the mandate to love. This explains the priority of love in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Second, the apostle made four parallel statements that help clarify the subject: “walk [*περιπατέω*, *peripateo*] by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16), “led by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:18), “live by the Spirit,” and “walk [*στοιχέω*, *stoicheo*, “follow, stay in step with”] by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). Third, it is when the Christian maintains the condition of walking by the Spirit that the Holy Spirit produces character transformations in the believer. The conclusion expresses the answer to Galatians 3:3: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in [by] the Spirit, are you now being perfected [brought to maturity] in [by] the flesh?” The apostle concluded that if they “live by the Spirit” (and they do because they are regenerate), they must also “walk (the continuation of the spiritual life) by the Spirit.” That is, if they have been adopted into the family of God (and they were), they need to live like a member of the family of God.

The Holy Spirit against the Flesh

The grammatical construction of Galatians 5:16 is crucial to understanding the dynamics of spiritual growth. The present active imperative of “walk” (*περιπατέω*, *peripateo*) stresses a habit that should characterize the believer’s attitudes and actions.¹⁴ The nuance here is most likely customary, implying, “simply continue.”¹⁵ “Walking by the Spirit” should be the ongoing, habitual lifestyle of the believer. The nature of the verb itself, “to walk,” even in its metaphorical use, “to conduct oneself,” involves action on the part of the subject. The activeness of the subject is further demonstrated by the parallel verb, “to be led” (Gal. 5:18) which likewise necessitates the act of following, as do the verbs “living” and “staying in step with” (5:25). The nature of these active verbs anticipates a noun of means or manner.¹⁶ The anarthrous dative of “Spirit”

¹⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 721.

¹⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 722.

¹⁶ “The dative of *pneuma* (“Spirit”) suggests both origin and instrumentality (“by the Spirit”) and, therefore, a quality of life that differs from both a nomistic and a libertine lifestyle.” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 244–45.

(πνεῦμα, *pneúma*) supplies this expectation.¹⁷ The Christian life is not a passive waiting for growth that automatically happens. The believer must consciously decide to depend on the Holy Spirit as he lives life.

Though some suggest that the dative here should have a locative nuance, this meaning would render the concept passive, “in [side] the Holy Spirit.” However, the action is not like the believer’s status “in Christ,” which is passive, emphasizing his possessions in Christ and the reality of his having been united with Christ at salvation (Rom. 6:1–3). The use of the dative of *pneúma* (“Spirit”) in context further supports the notion of means, or instrument.¹⁸ It was demonstrated earlier that Galatians 5:16 begins to provide a positive answer to the implicit question of Galatians 3:3: How does the believer grow to completion in the spiritual life? In this light, an anarthrous dative related to salvation cannot be understood as a locative sense: a person is not saved “in” the Spirit, but regenerated “by means of” the Spirit. A locative sense renders the concept too passive and opens the door wide to a quasi mystical “let go and let God” approach as if by simply being “in the sphere of the Spirit,” growth will automatically ensue divorced from the active volition of the believer.¹⁹

Paul continuously stressed that the believer lives his postsalvation life through the instrumentality, or by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Paul used the instrumental dative for *pneúma* five more times after Galatians 3:3 in the epistle. In Galatians 5:5, the NASB translates the dative as “through,” but makes the genitive of “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) sound as if it had an instrumental nuance. A better translation is, “For we [believers] by means of the Spirit [not Law] through [or from the source of] faith are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” In Galatians chapter 5, believers are led *by means of* the Holy Spirit (5:18); are to *live by means of* the Holy Spirit (5:25a), and are to *walk in line by means of* the Holy Spirit (5:25b).

¹⁷The grammatical category, *dative of personal agency*, does not apply here simply because the noun in the dative, the Holy Spirit, is a distinct person. The personality of the noun does not affect the grammatical categories of *personal agency* and *impersonal means*, but the noun’s grammatical function within the sentence. See Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 165–166.

¹⁸ James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963–), 240.

¹⁹J. Dwight Pentecost writes in *The Divine Comforter* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 197–98: The words “in the Spirit” may not bring the full meaning to our minds that Paul intended, for he is not saying, “you walk in the general sphere of the things of the Spirit, and ye will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” That certainly would be true, but a far stronger teaching is: “You be walking by means of the Spirit.” “By means of the Spirit” points out the support or the strength by which a man walks. I don’t believe I ever see a man who has a limb in a cast, or one who has to take each step with crutches, without this verse coming to mind very graphically, for the man who has suffered an injury to a limb, so that that limb cannot support him, must find some other means of support, lest he fall. The spiritual principle is identical. We have no power of ourselves. We must depend upon something, or upon someone for support, and if we take our steps in conscious dependence on the support given by the Holy Spirit, so that we are continually walking by means of the support of the Holy Spirit, we will not fall. We will be manifesting the fruits of the Spirit; we will be manifesting the life of Christ as it is reproduced in the believer by the power of the Spirit of God. But just as soon as we depend on our own strength or trust our own will, we will go down in ignominious defeat and disgrace. Paul’s exhortation, then, is: “You be continually walking by means of the Spirit, and ye shall not then fulfill the lust of the flesh.” On the authority of the Word of God we can say that the only antidote to the life of the flesh is the life lived by the power of the Spirit of God. There is no other alternative. It is either the life lived by the flesh, or the life lived by the power of the Spirit of God.” Cf., Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 164; and John F. Walvoord, *The Spirit at Work Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), 64.

Finally, the process delineated by Paul logically necessitates an instrumental understanding because he emphasized divine enablement—apart from dependence on the Holy Spirit there will be no fruit in the believer’s life. The context of the passage describes the mechanics of production. The result is the transformation of the believer’s character into the character of Christ. This is described by the manifold fruit of Galatians 5:22–23. Since the context describes the necessary conditions for the result, then instrumentality makes sense. The believer is to walk by means of the Holy Spirit, that is, to live in dependence on the Holy Spirit. That this is a choice and is not automatic is emphasized in the remainder of the verse.

“And you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.” The implications of the syntax in this clause are profound. The verb is in the aorist passive subjunctive and is negated by οὐ μή (*ou me*) (“not”); the strongest form of denial possible in the Greek.²⁰ When the believer walks by means of the Spirit, it is impossible for him to bring to completion, or fulfillment, the lusts of the flesh. Fulfilling the lust of the flesh and walking by means of the Spirit are mutually exclusive alternatives. The believer at any moment either depends on the divine provision in the Holy Spirit, or his own innate ability that has its ultimate source in the sin nature.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul commands the believer to walk by means of the Spirit. This imperative is followed by οὐ μή with the subjunctive, which is an emphatic negation used here as a strong promise. The flesh and Spirit are so contrary to one another that a walk by the Spirit automatically excludes a fulfillment of the baser desires. Victory is available to every Christian.²¹

The next question might be: How, then, can a believer who is walking by the Spirit sin? First, he must stop walking by the Spirit. According to Paul, whether the believer is fully conscious of his volitional act, whenever he sins, be it mental, emotional, verbal, or overt, he has already made a decision to stop depending on the Holy Spirit.²² The promise implicit in this mandate is that as long as the believer consciously depends on the Holy Spirit, he will not sin. The following section covers how a believer accomplishes that dependence.

It is obvious from this verse that the Spirit and the flesh are polar opposites and mutually exclusive. A believer walks either by one or by the other. A believer cannot be walking mostly by the Spirit with a few occasional unknown or unintentional sins. Toussaint clarifies,

In this entire epistle two alternatives are set before Paul’s Christian readers. Either they may walk under law or under grace. These same two choices are open in Galatians 5:16–23. A walk under law necessitates a walk by means of the flesh (cf. Gal 3:2–3; 4:23). At the same time a life lived in the grace system automatically involves faith and the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 3:2–3, 5; 4:29). It is for this reason that the contrast here is between the flesh and the Spirit; they are the two driving forces in each of the two systems of law and grace.²³

²⁰ Moulton and Turner, *Grammar: Syntax*, 95.

²¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Contrast between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5,” *BSac* 123 (October–December 1966): 314.

²² James 1:14–15 suggests the process of sin. “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” Once the believer chooses to stop walking, then, and only then, does lust conceive sin.

²³ Toussaint, “Contrast,” 312.

Evidence of this dichotomy is then described in the various character qualities listed in Galatians 5:19–23. The fruit is the result of the believer’s process of walking in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Fruit is character produced by the Holy Spirit, not the believer. The believer is to abide in Christ, and to walk by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit produces the fruit. The believer may also stop walking by the Holy Spirit and begin operating by means of the flesh, or the sin nature. These are the only two options. Therefore, when this principle is compared to the conclusions from John 15 and 1 John, it is clear that abiding in Christ and walking by means of the Holy Spirit describe how the believer maintains fellowship. In contrast, not abiding and operating by the sin nature describe the believer who has broken fellowship with God by living in self-dependence.

In John 15 the conclusion was reached that a believer could be fruitful only by abiding in Christ. In Galatians 5:16–26 Paul stated that fruit production is the result of walking by the Spirit. Thus we see three things. First, in both cases only two mutually exclusive options are open to the believer: a believer either abides or not, either walks by the Spirit or according to the flesh. Second, both walking by means of the Spirit and abiding in Christ emphasize divine dependency as the sole basis for producing fruit. Third, both walking by means of the Spirit and abiding in Christ express an intimacy or fellowship with the divine person which is not present when the believer is not abiding or walking. Thus it must be concluded that abiding in Christ and walking by the Spirit express overlapping or parallel concepts that are facets of the same dependency which is the key to spiritual growth.

These conclusions must now be related to another category of walking: *walking in the light*.

Walking in the Light

Numerous passages use walking as a metaphor for how a person lives life. A noun in the dative or with an $\square v$ (*en*—“in” or “by means of”) clause often accompanies the verb “walk.” The exegete must pay close attention to the context to determine the precise nuance. In Galatians the nuance of instrumentality is necessary because of the nature of the verbs, the description of the action, and the parallel between nouns in the simple dative that were parallel to noun objects of the preposition *en*. In 1 John 1 the apostle did not use a simple dative. Instead, John used the preposition *en* for more precision—“in the darkness” ($\square v \tau \square \sigma k \circ t e i$, *en to skotei*) and “in the light” ($\square v \tau \square \varphi \omega t \square$, *en to photei*)—to describe two opposing walks of the believer’s experience (1 John 1:6,7). The question should be asked: Do these clauses indicate sphere or instrumentality? Both are grammatically possible. The parallel comparison, “as He is in the Light,” uses the same Greek construction and suggests the interpreter should treat them the same. Further, John’s use of *en* (“in”) indicates that he has a locative connotation in mind (1 John 2:9–11).²⁴

²⁴ As stated earlier when discussing the simple dative of *pneuma* (“Spirit”) in Galatians 5:16, walking suggests the idea of instrumentality, but Galatians clearly presents the Spirit as the enabler, the One who produces fruit, thus instrumentality. In 1 John the idea of Light, suggests sphere, not enablement.

As with Paul's mutually exclusive categories of walking by the Spirit or walking according to the sin nature, John expressed the mutually exclusive walks of life as either darkness or light (1 John 1:6, 7). Having fellowship with God is impossible when walking in the darkness.

Commentators with a framework grounded in replacement theology attempt to identify walking in darkness with the unbeliever and walking in the light with the believer. However, as has been demonstrated, walking in the light is connected to fellowship with God in these verses, and fellowship is synonymous with abiding in 1 John. This connects 1 John 1:6, 7 to the hermeneutical issue in John 15. If abiding is equivalent to believing (as most replacement theologians argue), then the interpretation of walking in the light in 1 John is radically altered. Yet since abiding is fellowship, then walking in the light must also be fellowship. The believer can either walk in darkness or walk in light. Paul's development of walking in Ephesians 4–6 supports this.

“As children of light” (Eph. 5:8). The Christian life is covered extensively in Ephesians under the metaphor of walking. Five times the apostle uses the verb *peripateo* (“to walk”), three of them in Ephesians chapter five. The first is to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2). The Greek preposition *en* (“in”), one may translate as a locative (“in the sphere of”) or instrumental (“by means of”). If locative, then the idea would be in the state or sphere of love, a more passive idea. Yet, the remainder of the verse suggests the idea of means or instrumentality, which expresses dependence. If this is the case, then it changes what appears to be the meaning of the verse as taken by most commentators. Virtually no explanations are found in the technical commentaries on how to understand the *en* clause. However, Lincoln comes close when he states, “In fact, the imitation of God turns out to be the imitation of Christ, as in the motivating clause it is the latter’s love and self-giving that are the ground and the norm for the behavior required of believers.”²⁵

In his comment Lincoln recognizes that “in love” expressed the means or motivation for the believer’s love.²⁶ However, The standard for understanding love is Christ’s love demonstrated at the cross in enduring the suffering on our behalf. Love then was His means and motive. But not abstract love, but love for us and ultimately love for the Father. The active voice of the verb suggests that Christ’s active love for God the Father, to fulfill His plan and to provide salvation for mankind, was the primary motive that kept him on the cross (Heb. 12:3). Thus he endured not “in love,” but “by means of love.” Love for God the Father enabled Him to endure the indescribable suffering for our sins on the cross. This shows that certain means or instruments aid the believer’s walk. The Holy Spirit is one; and a second is our love for God motivates our ongoing walk.

Walking by means of love is then parallel with the next command to “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). This mandate follows the statement about the believer’s former position as darkness with their new position as “light in the Lord.” Believers are born in the realm of darkness and become sons of the light only at the instant of faith alone in Christ alone (John

²⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 311.

²⁶ The phrase “in love” is found thirteen times in the Greek New Testament.

12:36). Walking in the light, as John observed, is not automatic. The new believer can surely continue to walk in darkness instead of living on the basis of who he now is as a member of God's family, possessing a new nature, and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.

The metaphor of light is used two ways in Scripture: first, to portray the holiness, righteousness, and absolute perfection of God in whom there is no sin (darkness)(1 John 1:5) and second, to describe enlightenment from the revelation of God, His person, perfections, and plan (Psa. 36:9; 119:105, 130; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6). In Him there is no darkness. John emphasizes that walking in darkness breaks fellowship with God. Some suggest that only known sin breaks fellowship with God, or sin revealed to the individual by the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Yet, how much sin violates the absolute standard of God's perfection? Does sin violate only that righteous standard when the act is known to be sin, or the sin is intentional? The answer must be that any sin, known, unknown, intentional or not, violates the standard of God's absolute righteousness. The light of God's Word and the Light, His Son, reveals the standard. The believer is to walk consistently with God's person and perfections as revealed in the light of His Word. Whenever he sins, he paralyzes his walk.

In Ephesians 5 Paul again, juxtaposes these mutually exclusive walks of the believer. These are absolute states. Other contrasts are also present in Ephesians 5. The believer may imitate God or not (5:1), walk by means of love or not (5:2), have improper conduct or not (5:3, 4), be disobedient or not (5:6), and walk as children of light or as approving deeds of darkness (5:7–13). Paul shifts the metaphor of light from light as divine perfection to light as the revelation of that perfection that exposes sin (5:13–14). This introduces the informational aspect of one's walk—the revelation of God's Word—that informs the believer of divine absolutes, mandates, and methods for living the Christian life. Only through His Word and as the Holy Spirit teaches him, can a believer learn of God's plan and procedures.

The Holy Spirit is crucial in this process. Jesus called Him the “Spirit of truth” (14:17) and the “*Helper*” (*παράκλητος*, *parakletos*, John 14:26). Then our Lord used the title “the Spirit of truth” in apposition to “the Helper” (John 15:26) showing that the Holy Spirit would help the believer understand truth. The role of the Holy Spirit would be in the revelation, communication, understanding, retention, and recall of the principles of the Word of God (John 16:13; 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:9–14). As the believer learns under the teaching ministry of God the Holy Spirit, he develops wisdom. Wisdom is application of the Word. So again, Ephesians 5:15–17 reveals an absolute contrast, wisdom as opposed to foolishness.

Abiding, walking by the Holy Spirit, walking by means of love, walking in the light, walking as a child of the Light, and walking with wisdom—all represent the believer who is growing and advancing in the spiritual life. However, how does the believer come to understand these mechanics and the doctrines they represent? Can he do that on his own? When Ephesians 5:18 is compared with Colossians 3:16 then the crucial dynamic for the spiritual life is readily apparent. The context of Ephesians 5 reveals a dynamic that is both *parallel with* the absolute state of walking in the Light and, in itself, *tantamount to* walking by means of the Holy Spirit.

²⁷ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 60–62.

Since the walk by means of the Holy Spirit describes one facet of our divine dependence, abiding in Christ and fellowship with him describes another. Therefore it now becomes clear that the filling by the Spirit characterizes the believer who is abiding in Christ and walking by the Spirit. Thus a consistent distinction between Israel and the church in John 15 ultimately leads to recognition of absolute states in the Christian life. Lewis Sperry Chafer, that dean of dispensational theologians, recognized this years ago:

By various terms the Bible teaches that there are two classes of Christians: those who “abide in Christ,” and those who “abide not”; those who are “walking in the light,” and those who “walk in darkness”; those who “walk by the Spirit,” and those who “walk as men”; those who “walk in newness of life,” and those who “walk after the flesh”; those who have the Spirit “in” and “upon” them, and those who have the Spirit “in” them, but not “upon” them; those who are “spiritual” and those who are “carnal”; those who are filled with the Spirit,” and those who are not. All this has to do with the quality of daily life of saved people and is in no way a contrast between the saved and the unsaved.²⁸

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Many have written on this verse, including its background and interpretation. Two salient points must be noted. First, Paul’s imperative directed toward the believer’s volition indicates the possibility of only two options, either obedience or disobedience to the command. Once again this mandate fits the scenario of absolute states: one is either filled, or not. Second, Paul draws his contrast with wine. The issue is not control, but instrumentality.²⁹ The Greek mystery religions, including that of Dionysus, proposed certain means for uniting with the gods, wine being one of those means. The use of the simple dative suggests wine as the means of drunkenness, which filled the devotee with the spirit of Dionysus.³⁰ The parallel with the Spirit indicates a filling by means of the Spirit. The dative of *pneuma* (“Spirit”) rules out content, which would require a genitive of content. The Holy Spirit is not the content of the filling, the believer does not get more of the Spirit in the filling, but rather the Holy Spirit fills the believer *with* something.³¹

We discover the content of the filling in Colossians 3:16, a parallel passage. The apostle Paul mandates, “Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you.” The results are teaching, admonishing, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, thankfulness, and transformed relationships in the home and at work (Col. 3:16–24). Identical results which follow the command to be filled by means of the Spirit (Eph. 5:19–6:9). Paul gives two seemingly distinct commands which in turn produce identical results. Comparison of these two passages yields the following.

²⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 41.

²⁹ Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Dionysian Background of Ephesians 5:18,” *BSac* 136 (July–September 1979): 256. Cf. T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 161, for further documentation on this unexpected instrumental usage. He also comments, “But the use of *en* with πληρόω (*pleróō*) to express the content with which a thing is filled would be quite unexampled.”

³⁰ W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 148–202.

³¹ For a sound discussion explaining the inadequacies of the position that this is locative, that is, “in the [human] spirit,” see, Clifford Rapp Jr, “Ephesians 5:18—Holy Spirit or Human Spirit?” *CTS Journal* 2 (Spring/ Summer 1996), 6–12.

The Holy Spirit fills the believer with the Word of God. The believer, then, when walking by means of the Holy Spirit, is filled with the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, who then uses that Word to transform his thinking and life. As the believer learns the Word under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit then takes the Word and stores it into the believer's soul for future application. Only when the believer, walking by the Spirit, then applies the stored Word from his soul, either in his thinking or actions, does the Holy Spirit then use this to strengthen or edify the believer's soul, in effect, maturing the believer. On the other hand, the believer may also choose to not walk by the Spirit and disobey or violate the Word the Spirit is filling him with. At this point sin ensues. The believer is no longer abiding in Christ or walking in the light so the ongoing fellowship with God is broken. Now the believer walks according to the flesh, walks as a fool, and walks in darkness. No longer following the Holy Spirit's lead, he is also no longer following in the Spirit's footsteps. The results of this walk in darkness are the works of the flesh. Such a believer stymies the production of the fruit of the Spirit.

There is nothing mystical or magical about this process. Any believer may learn doctrine that is useable in his spiritual growth, but God's Word has value for spiritual growth only when in right relationship with the Holy Spirit.³² This does not involve some mystical takeover of the believer's volition, or "letting go and letting God." That indeed would be the result, if Paul used a genitive of content in Ephesians 5:18. However, the instrumental dative emphasizes the Holy Spirit as the ultimate means of sanctification. The idea is not control, but influence. The Spirit does not operate in a vacuum, but always in conjunction with the Word of God, the light of divine revelation. Neither works apart from the other. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit without equal emphasis on learning and applying the principles of revelation would inevitably lead the believer to a subjective mystical approach. In contrast, emphasis on study apart from the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit leads to knowledge for knowledge's sake, a merely academic emphasis confusing human morality with spiritual growth produced by the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

This second article has built on the conclusions of the first. The first article established from John 15 that three types of Christians exist: first, those abiding in Christ who are young and have not yet produced fruit; second, those abiding in Christ and in whom fruit is produced; and third, those who do not abide in Christ and come under divine discipline. Abiding is synonymous with fellowship. In broad terms, there are only two categories of Christians, those who abide and those who do not. Paul described the latter as carnal Christians, those who are characterized by the flesh or sin nature. (1 Cor. 3:1–3).

Knowingly or not, those who interpret abiding as tantamount to believing, erect their position on a view using the vine analogy for Israel in the Old Testament as the hermeneutical grid for understanding the vine of John 15. This view is inconsistent with a main tenet of dispensationalism. Moreover, this interpretation rejects the notion of a permanently carnal believer. Thus, an "abiding is fellowship" view and an understanding of two categories of

³² When the believer is out of fellowship, the doctrine learned is only academically perceived, and, apart from the walk by the Spirit, is not profitable for spiritual growth. To become profitable for spiritual growth the believer must first return to a walk by means of the Spirit, which is tantamount to abiding, or restoration of fellowship.

believers is more consistent with dispensational distinctives. Dispensationalists who reject the doctrine of the carnal Christian are inconsistent with their own theological system.

Building on this understanding of “abiding as fellowship” with Christ, this current article links abiding to walking by the Spirit and walking in the light. A comparison of Galatians 3:3 with Galatians 5:16 also reveals that the believer’s postsalvation life develops or advances by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Though the Word commands each believer to walk by means of the Holy Spirit, one can still sin and even remain in sin for the remainder of his life.

Walking by the Holy Spirit and walking according to the flesh are mutually exclusive states. The believer either walks by means of the Spirit or not. Walking by means of the Spirit happens when the believer fills his soul with Scripture, which the Holy Spirit can recall to mind for application. Application of the truth then leads to transformed lives in which the Spirit produces the fruit of the character of Christ.

Part three of this series will investigate how a Christian disrupts his abiding walk with the Holy Spirit, and how the believer recovers from walking in darkness.

—To be continued—