

## CHAPTER 19

A summary of the doctrine...

### **“WALKING BY THE SPIRIT”**

by Donald W. Ekstrand

**In Gal 5:16 Paul says, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”**

To walk *in* or *by* the Spirit is to allow Him to direct the way in which you live your life; it is to make decisions in the light of His holiness; it is to remain in communion with Him; it is to be occupied with the person of Christ, because the Spirit’s ministry is to engage us “*intimately*” with the Lord Jesus. Carefully note – walking by the Spirit is *not* a mystical, trans-like state in which the believer enters and mysteriously lives; nor is it some kind of far out, ethereal experience as some have postulated – any such thinking along those lines is completely “cultic” in its orientation. To walk by the Spirit is to live under the direction of the Holy Spirit and to walk by faith in God’s Word. Consider for a moment what Jesus taught His disciples the night before He went to the cross – He told them He was going to return to heaven, but would send *His Spirit* to live within them to guide and instruct them in much the same way He had. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete* – this Greek word means the Holy Spirit is “called alongside” to *Help, Comfort, and Counsel*; since His function is to *Guide and Instruct* in the truth, He is referred to as the *Spirit of truth* (Jn 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Scripture tells us it is only by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that we are able to grasp and understand spiritual truth (Acts 16:14; 1 Cor 2:12-14). So to walk in the Spirit is to live in the light of truth, and walk by faith in God’s Word.

**When we walk in the Spirit, the flesh or “self-life” is rejected and treated as dead.** We cannot be occupied with both Christ and sin at the same time; so being led by the Spirit means being lifted above the flesh and being occupied with Jesus. It should be noted, the verse that immediately follows this injunction (Gal 5:17ff) shows that the “flesh” is still present in the believer’s life; thus the idea of the eradication of the sinful nature is refuted. ***Awareness, Reliance and Dependence*** are key words when it comes to giving definition to walking in the Spirit – walking in the Spirit involves *a conscious awareness of His presence, and a conscious reliance and dependence upon Him to guide and direct our lives.* The knowledge of His abiding presence, and this reliance and dependence is clearly taught in Scripture. Since the parameters of walking in the Spirit are revealed to us in God’s Word, we embrace these truths by “*faith,*” and we “*act upon them*” with an attitude of submission to God’s will (Jam 1:22).

**Therefore to be occupied with the things of the Spirit, is to be occupied with “living a life of faith.”**

The walk of faith is one in which we submit to the truths of Scripture – it amounts to studying, believing, trusting, obeying, and affirming those truths. I want to strongly emphasize the concept of “***affirming truth,***” because, in a nutshell, that is the essence of faith; *you affirm the truths of scripture over and over again, until they find complete peace and rest in your soul* – this involves wrestling with the truth, meditating upon it, and confirming it with other passages of Scripture. When you fully affirm a particular truth it will settle confidently and peacefully in your soul. So when you really believe a truth, you are able to confidently “lean upon it with all your weight” (Prv 3:5-6). The most incredible truth any believer can affirm is the fact that “*God really loves them.*” Sadly, most Christians question God’s love for them, because deep down they know they really aren’t “*lovely*” – but that is not the issue! The truth is, no human being is lovely! God does not love us because we are lovely – He loves us because *He is love!* Knowing that truth is incredibly liberating! And *nothing* we do can make God love us more, or make God love us less. That is the wonderful reality of the God we worship. Affirm the truth of that reality every day of your life! Only when you truly believe that God really loves you, will it transform your life!!!

**Paul said, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit”** (Eph 5:18), and “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you” (Col 3:16); essentially, the *Spirit* and the *Word* are one and the same in these two verses. Paul said, “the life I now live, *I live by faith*” (Gal 2:20); “we live and walk by *faith*, not by *sight*” (2 Cor 5:7). We must *believe* what God says in His Word. Just as we began the Christian life “by the Spirit,” so also are we to live the Christian life (Gal 3:3; Col 2:6) – “since we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:24). We were “justified by faith” (Gal 3:24); we “live by faith” (Gal 3:11); and we received “the promise of the Spirit by faith” (Gal 3:14). “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!” (1 Jn 5:4). We walk in the Spirit (live by faith in the Word) when we obey Christ from the heart (Gal 5:8-10). We are to live life by being occupied with the things of Christ in every respect – “to live is Christ,” says Paul (Phil 1:21).

**We are transformed by the “renewing of our minds” – by faith** (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23). We walk in the Spirit when we *love Christ* with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and give allegiance and preeminence to Him in all things (Col 3:18). Said Paul, “Keep seeking those things which are above, where Christ is; set your minds on things above, not on the things of this world” (Col 3:1-2)... we are transformed and renewed through a true knowledge of Christ (by faith) (Col 3:10)... we are to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Col 3:17)... and “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). God has not called us to impurity, but to sanctification and holiness (1 Th 4:7). We are to “pray without ceasing” and “give thanks in all things” (1 Th 5:17-18). The goal of our instruction, writes Paul, “is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a *sincere faith*” (1 Tim 1:5). We are to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). Only a life of faith “*pleases God*” (Heb 11:6). We are to be “doers of the word and not merely hearers” (Jam 1:22). This is pure and undefiled religion – “caring for those in need” (Jam 1:27). “Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 Jn 3:18). “Faith without works is useless” (Jam 2:20). “Long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation” (1 Pet 2:2). “Sanctify Christ as Master in your hearts” (1 Pet 3:15). “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). “Fix your eyes on *Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2). We walk in the Spirit through a life of Bible study, prayer, conscious submission to His will, worship, fellowship, obedience, serving, and witnessing. To walk *effectively* in the Spirit is to do these things *habitually*.

**The Spirit and the flesh are in constant conflict.** God could have removed the “*fleshly nature*” (the sin disposition) from believers at the time of their conversion, but He did not choose to do so. Why? He wanted to keep us continually mindful of our own sinfulness and weakness... He wanted to keep us continually dependent on Christ as our High Priest and Advocate... and He wanted us to continually praise the One who saved such undeserving ones. Instead of removing the old nature, God gave us His own Holy Spirit to dwell in us. God’s Spirit and our flesh are perpetually at war, and will continue to be at war until we are taken home to heaven. The believer’s part in the conflict is to “*yield to the Spirit.*”

**“Walking in the Spirit” is the essence of our stewardship in God’s divine economy,** and is the criteria by which God will evaluate each of us as believers. Paul made “walking in the Spirit” the central element of the believer’s responsibility. The Old Covenant saints were expected to glorify God by living in conformity to the *Mosaic Law*; today, God’s children are required to glorify God by walking in the *Spirit*. Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit lives within every born-again believer, but not every believer lives in submission to the Spirit; possessing the Holy Spirit is not sufficient – believers must allow the Spirit to possess them (Cf. Ananias & Sapphira in Acts 5:3). The word “walk” is a New Testament metaphor for “live,” as illustrated by Paul – “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works... that we should *walk* in them” (Eph 2:10). To walk in the Spirit means to live in complete submission to the control of the indwelling Spirit of God (Rom 6:12-13). “Walking in the Spirit” is the opposite of “walking in the

flesh” – Paul contrasted the results of these “two walks” in his letter to the Galatians (5:19-23). Walking in the Spirit accomplishes the following:

1. It prevents walking in the flesh, which is our “*default mode*” (Rom 6:12-13; Gal 5:16).
2. It proclaims God’s glory because we submit to His stewardship in this economy (1 Cor 6:19-20).
3. It preserves the grace principle, which we forfeit if we default to the flesh (Gal 5:4; Jam 4:3-10).
4. It prevents death, the natural result of anything accomplished in the flesh (Rom 6:23; 7:5,24; 8:2-7).  
(*the fruit of the flesh is death; nothing of the flesh has any eternal value; it is simply rubbish*)

**As a believer submits to the Spirit’s control, he moves forward in his spiritual life.** Step by step the Spirit moves him from where he is toward where God wants him to be. Though the *Spirit* is the source of all holy living, it is the *believer* who is commanded to walk (Gal 5:16). This *apparent paradox* of the divine and the human is seen throughout all aspects of salvation (Jn 6:35-40; Phil 2:12-13). Both in the justifying work of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, “*man’s will is active*” and commitment is called for. The Christian is not to sit on the sidelines, as it were, and simply watch the Holy Spirit do battle for him (Rom 6:11-13; Gal 6:9-10). The believer who is led by the Holy Spirit must be willing to go where the Spirit guides him and do what the Spirit leads him to do. The life we live when we walk by the Spirit is the “*Christlike life*,” it is the life whereby the believer’s thoughts are saturated with the truth and love of Christ, and with a heartfelt desire to be like Him in every way. It is to live in “*continual consciousness*” (that is faith) of His presence and His will, “letting the word of Christ richly dwell in him” (that is faith) (Col 3:16). When the believer fails to walk by the Spirit, he “*walks by the flesh*” – there are no other options. The flesh is that part of a believer that functions apart from and against the Holy Spirit; it actually stands against the work of the Spirit in the believer’s heart (Gal 5:17); in short, the flesh is the believer’s propensity to “*walk in sin*,” and live according to the dictates of his selfish fallen nature.

**The most effective way for a Christian to strongly oppose the flesh is to “starve it” to death** – “to make no provision for it with regard to its lusts” (Rom 13:14). The surest way to *fall into sin* is to allow oneself to be in situations where inevitable temptation exists – “don’t go near her house!” (Prv 5:8; 7:25); therefore, the safest way to *avoid sin* is to avoid situations that are likely to pose temptations. A believer who is not actively involved in resisting evil and seeking to do good, obviously is *not* being “led by the Spirit” – the faithful believer is not an observer, but a “*good soldier of Christ*” who is engaged in the “active service” of his Lord (2 Tim 2:3-4)... “he runs in such a way that he might win... he buffets his body and makes it his slave” (1 Cor 9:24-27). The Christian life involves both the *believer’s* yieldedness and commitment, and the *Spirit’s* guidance and power (Gal 2:20; Phil 2:12-13). Though this mystery consists of a paradoxical balance that cannot be fully understood or explained, it can be fully experienced.

**How do believers “Walk by the Spirit”?** Walking in the Spirit is both simple and profound. Being born again is so simple a child can experience it; yet it is so profound theologians cannot plumb its depths. Bill Bright, the late founder of *Campus Crusade for Christ*, pointed out that there are three things necessary for walking in the Spirit – Desire, Confession, and Yielding.”

1. **Desire** – Walking in the Spirit begins with “desire.” Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt 5:6). Although He was speaking about a different type of filling, the principle is the same. To live in the “new nature” rather than the “old nature” (our default mode), *we must pursue life in the Spirit*. This is the reason for Paul’s imperatives: “walk in the Spirit;” “be filled with the Spirit;” “put off the old man;” “put on the new man” (Gal 5:16; Eph 5:18; 4:22, 24). If we simply respond to life as it comes, without a determination to walk in the Spirit,

inevitably, we will lapse into the ungodly carnal behavior of the old sin nature – *walking in the flesh is both natural and easy; it is our “default mode.”* Don’t be fooled by the popular “*automatic cruise-control*” kind of Christianity that is being so widely preached today – where you just sit back, enjoy the ride, and let God do it all! – this theological teaching is not only rubbish, it is dangerous! (Phil 2:12; 3:14; 1 Tim 3:15b; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:1-5; 4:1-3).

2. **Confession** – Walking in the Spirit requires “confession of sins.” Sin interrupts fellowship with God; hence, believers must confess their sins to maintain their intimacy with God. Confessing sins means “to agree with God from the heart about our sins;” literally, “to say the same thing about our sins that God says about them.” The application is this: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). Incidentally, “*sin*” is *that which is “not of faith”* (Rom 14:23) – therefore any time we are “living for ourselves,” it is sin, because we are called to live for Christ; hence, sin is not just doing something that is “overtly evil,” as many believers think – it is living without giving primacy to the will of God in any matter; it is to disregard God’s input. God requires that we acknowledge the nature of what we have done and how offensive it is to Him; much the same as parents require of their children (parents want their children to “agree with them” that poor behavior is “wrong” – that is confession). The indwelling Holy Spirit “convicts us of sin” – if we “fully agree” with Him, the Father then “cleanses” us of all unrighteousness. The key to confession is “*removing self*” from the throne, and “*placing Christ*” on the throne.
3. **Yielding** – Walking in the Spirit requires “yielding control of one’s life to the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit does not take control of our lives without us yielding that control to Him. Once we have genuinely confessed (agreed with God from the heart about our sin), the resultant effect is that we are then prepared to “*surrender control*” of our lives to the Holy Spirit. If we have regard for iniquity in our hearts (i.e., living life our way), “the Lord will not hear us” and take over (Ps 66:18). You cannot serve “God and mammon” (self). When the Spirit takes control, He directs what we do and what we experience... He teaches us what is needed for life... He provides experiences He wants us to have... and He leads us down the road to maturity. This control remains until believers re-exercise their own control and live according to their own desires, thereby rescinding the authority delegated to the Spirit. “*Cruise control*” on an automobile illustrates this principle well. Once a driver activates it, he removes his foot (his will) from the gas pedal. The cruise control governs the vehicle’s speed until the driver steps on the brake or accelerator to over-ride it. To restore the Spirit’s control, a believer must “remove his foot” from the gas pedal of life (confess) and “submit (yield) to the Holy Spirit.”

### **Achieving “spiritual maturity” requires a consistent walk under the control of the Holy Spirit.**

Living according to the flesh (carnality) results in spiritual immaturity (1 Cor 3:1-3; and Heb 5:11-14).

Spirituality requires regular maintenance – Bill Bright called this process “***spiritual breathing.***” Our bodies require us to *exhale impurities* (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the lungs, and *inhale oxygen* that is carried throughout our cells to maintain physical life. Similarly, spiritual life requires us to confess (*exhale*) that which produces death, and yield to the Spirit (*inhale*) who produces life. Spiritual breathing is required every time we permit an impurity to enter our spiritual lives – which is “often!”

**A corollary of walking in the Spirit is being “Filled with the Spirit”** – this is an extremely significant ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves the Spirit’s empowering people to do things they are incapable of doing by themselves – living the “God-life.” The Apostle Paul exhorts us “not be drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). People filled with wine are prompted to do foolish things that they otherwise *would not do*; on the other hand, believers filled with the Holy Spirit are empowered to do

significant things that they otherwise *could not do*. The resultant effect of “walking in the Spirit” is living a life that produces the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). Therefore, in every area of stewardship, it is imperative to acknowledge that it is the Holy Spirit who makes the effort efficacious. Though we are told to diligently study the Word – should we interpret it correctly, it is because of the teaching or illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, when we struggle to be faithful in the discipline of prayer – should our prayers prove effectual, it is because of the Holy Spirit’s intercession for us. In the same way, when we “walk in the Spirit,” it is God Himself who lives His life in and through us (Gal 2:20).

**Another aspect of the believer’s Spirit-filled walk is that of “Praising God”** – C. S. Lewis writes in his book *“Reflections on the Psalms”* that he actually found the Scriptural command to “*praise God*” a stumbling block for him (Lewis, pp. 90-98). The suggestion that *God Himself demanded it* seemed troublesome to him. He noted how much we despise the crowds around the filthy rich and the celebrity, who gratify that demand. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way – “Praise the Lord!” “O praise the Lord with me!” Worse still was the statement put into God’s own mouth – “Whoever offers Me thanks and praise, he honors Me” (Ps 50:23). It was hideously like saying, “What I most want is to be told that I am wonderful and great.” In Psalm 54 the poet begins with “save me,” and then adds an inducement, “I will give sacrifices to and praise Thy Name” (Ps 54:6). Again and again the speaker asks to be saved from death on the grounds that if God lets His supplicants die, “*He will not get anymore praise*” from them, because the spirits in Sheol cannot praise (Ps 30:10; 88:10; 119:175). The mere quantity of praise seemed to count – “*seven times a day do I praise Thee*” (Ps 119:164). It was extremely distressing. It made me think what I least wanted to think... gratitude to God, reverence to Him, obedience to Him, I thought I could understand, but not this *perpetual eulogy*.

**C. S. Lewis goes on to say that he found it best to approach the idea that God “demands” praise** from the perspective of *admiration*. He writes, “*God is that Object to admire*” – which is simply to be awake and to have entered the real world. The incomplete lives of those who are tone deaf, those who have never been in love, never known true friendship, never cared for a good book, never enjoyed the feel of the morning air on their cheeks, are faint images of it. By the way God does not only “*demand*” praise as the supremely beautiful and all-satisfying Object, He “*commands*” it as Lawgiver. The Jews were told to “sacrifice” – as Christians we are under obligation to “go to church.” Says Lewis: “*I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men.*” Though it is not the only way, for many people the “fair beauty of the Lord” is revealed chiefly or only while they worship Him together – in the central act of our worship it is God who gives and we who receive. The miserable idea that God should in any sense need or crave our worship, is akin to asking our dog to “bark approval” of our written books. Of such an absurd Deity one can’t even conceive.

**“The most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me,”** writes Lewis. “I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. *I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.*” The world rings with praise – readers praising their favorite poet, lovers their mistresses, walkers praising the countryside, sportsmen their favorite games and fellow competitors – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, cars, horses, universities, mountains, flowers, gardens, political leaders, scholars. *I had not noticed how the humblest minds praised most, while the malcontents praised least.* The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works. The healthy could praise a very modest meal. Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. Says Lewis, “I had not noticed either, that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it!” – “Isn’t she lovely?” “Wasn’t it glorious?” “Don’t you think that is magnificent?” “Isn’t that great?”

## WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

(Supplementary Notes)

The Greek word “walk” is *peripateo*; it is a compound word that is made up of two words – the preposition *peri* means “about, concerning, around;” and the main verb *pateo* means “to tread, to walk along” – thus *peripateo* means “to stroll or walk about.” This Greek term is used ninety-five times in the New Testament as a metaphor for “live,” as illustrated by Paul in Ephesians: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should **walk** in them” (Eph 2:10). As stated earlier, to “walk in the Spirit” is to live in complete submission to the control of God’s indwelling presence – “we are not to let sin reign in our mortal body that we should obey its lusts, and we are not to present our members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; instead, we are to present ourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom 6:12-13).

**The figurative meaning of “walking” refers to conduct –**

- ~Believers are to conduct their way of life in the paths indicated by God (2 Kg 20:3).
- ~The sons of righteousness walk in the light, rather than walk in darkness (1 Jn 1:7).
- ~The heathen way of life is to walk according to the flesh (Rom 8:4; Eph 2:2; 1 Cor 3:3).
- ~Believers are to...

walk in Christ (Col 2:6 – that is our “position” in Christ)

walk according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4 – according to His leading)

walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16 – that is the realm in which we are to walk)

walk in love (Rom 14:15; Eph 5:2; 2 Jn 1:6 – that is the essence of a godly walk)

walk as children of light (Eph 5:8 – that is the sphere in which we are to walk)

walk in good works (Eph 2:10 – our lives are to produce fruit)

walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4 – we are to live in this new reality)

walk in a way that pleases God (1 Th 4:1 – by obeying God we please Him)

walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7 – we must trust God and walk accordingly)

walk in the light and walk in the truth (1 Jn 1:7; 2 Jn 1:4; 3 Jn 1:3)

(the whole way in which one lives proves fellowship with God – 1 Jn 1:6ff; 2:6)

walk in a manner worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1; 1 Th 2:12; Col 1:10)

(conduct your life in a way that corresponds with your high and holy calling)

**Applying this figuratively** – Imagine yourself “*walking with a friend down a path*” where you find yourself continually dialoging and sharing with that person. Notice, you are not just silently walking beside this person with very little communication taking place... where a disquieting silence is only interrupted by him telling you to do something. Also notice you are “*walking together in the same direction*” – you don’t wander away from your friend off the path, and start walking with someone else; you walk together with your friend. The reality that underlies all of this is that you are “*enjoying the intimacy of the other person’s company*” – furthermore, this is your very best friend and he loves you unconditionally. This is a description of “how” you are to live as a believer. This is the essence of walking *with* God... walking *in* the Spirit... walking *by* the Spirit... or walking *according to* the Spirit – don’t let the prepositions create a difference in your mind as to what this *walk* means (all of these translations or expressions are equally valid). “Draw near to God – *walk with Him* – and He will draw near to you!” (Jam 4:8; Jn 15:13-15).

**The psalmist in telling everyone to “praise God”** is simply doing what all men do when they speak of what they *care about*. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment – it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are – the delight is incomplete until it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch... or to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. *To praise something means the object is fully appreciated and our delight has attained its perfect development.* The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine of “*Heaven,*” where angels now, and men hereafter, are *perpetually employed in praising God.* To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – so drunk with love that bliss flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression. Remember, “*man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!*” To fully enjoy God is to glorify Him – therefore, in commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to really *enjoy Him!* As for the element of bargaining in the Psalms – “*Do this and I will praise You*” – that silly dash of paganism certainly existed. Remember, the flame does not ascend from the altar pure. Furthermore, you and I are not in a position to criticize even the crudest psalmists on this score. C. S. Lewis says, “I have often on my knees been shocked to find what sort of thoughts I have... what infantile placations I was really offering... obviously, there is a pagan, savage heart in me somewhere” (Lewis, pp. 97-98; also cf. Ps 50:21).

**Another corollary of walking in the Spirit is that of living according to the “will of God,”** and the only way to know the mind or the will of God is to know the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15; Jam 1:22; 1 Pet 1:23; 2:2) – they alone give us an understanding of His ways, His will and His purposes. Through the agency of *God’s Word* the Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth, thus the Spirit plays an instrumental role in helping us know and understand God’s will for our lives (1 Cor 2:12; Jn 16:13; 1 Jn 2:27). Scripture teaches us a number of things that should characterize our lives as Christians – here is just a short list of things that are “*the stated will of God*” for us:

- ~ “It is God’s will that we believe in His Son” – Jn 6:40; Jn 1:13; Eph 1:5
- ~ “Understand what His will is” – Eph 5:17; Col 1:9; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17
- ~ “Be willing to do His will” – Jn 7:17
- ~ “Take up our cross (die to our own will) and follow Christ” – Mt 16:24
- ~ “Lose our life (die to our own will) for the sake of Christ” – Mt 16:25; Lk 14:26-27; Jn 12:24-25
- ~ “Die daily to our own will” – Rom 6:5; 8:36; 1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 4:11; Eph 4:22-24
- ~ “Obey His will” – Jn 14:15, 21; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Jn 5:3
- ~ “Walk by faith” – Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20; 3:11; Eph 4:23; Col 3:2; 2 Tim 6:12; Jam 1:22; Heb 12:2
- ~ “Sanctify and purify ourselves” – Phil 2:12; 3:14; 1 Th 4:3; 1 Tim 4:7; 6:12; Heb 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:2; 1 Jn 3:3
- ~ “Live for Christ” – Rom 11:36; 14:8; 1 Cor 8:6; Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21; Col 3:23; 1 Pet 4:2
- ~ “Serve Christ and serve one another” – Rom 6:18, 22; 1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-12, 16; Eph 6:5-6; Jam 1:27
- ~ “Walk according to His Spirit” – Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16; Eph 5:18; Col 3:16
- ~ “Be thankful in all things” – Eph 5:20; Phil 4:6; Col 3:17; 1 Th 5:18
- ~ “Seek His Kingdom and His righteousness above all else” – Mt 6:33
- ~ “Love one another” – Jn 13:34; Gal 6:2; Phil 2:4-5; 1 Tim 1:5; 1 Jn 3:16, 18; 4:7
- ~ “Do not forsake assembling with other believers” – Heb 10:25
- ~ “Be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that you might prove what His will is” – Rom 12:2; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18

**When the Lord Jesus taught His disciples “how to pray,”** He told them the bottom line in praying was that all of their requests were to be subservient to the “*will of God*” – there was to be the subjugation of their will to the will of the Father. Jesus Himself modeled this when He poured out His heart to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross – “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not My will, but *Thy will* be done” (Mt 26:39). In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus gives His disciples a “*model*” by which to pattern their prayers. In the verses that immediately precede this passage He told them how “not” to pray – First, they were not to pray in order to be *seen by others* that they might impress them (Mt 6:5); instead, they were to pray in private, in secret (Mt 6:6)... Second, their prayers were not to consist of *vain repetitions* (Mt 6:7); God only wants to hear the sincere expressions of the believer’s heart, not just a bunch of words, no matter how pious or lovely they may sound. Furthermore, since God already knows what we need, even before we ask Him, then it is reasonable to ask the question, “*Why should we pray at all?*” The reason is twofold: *in prayer we acknowledge our need and dependence on God*, and *through prayer we align our will with His will*. Hence prayer is essentially the basis of communicating what is in our heart to God. It should also be noted that God does things in answer to prayer that He would not otherwise do – writes James: “you have not, because you ask not” (Jam 4:2). James also tells us, “the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much” (Jam 5:16). With that said, let us look at the various components of the “*prayer model*” Jesus gave to His disciples – they include:

- 1. The recognition of God’s preeminence** (v. 9) – All our prayers should be addressed to God the Father in acknowledgement of His sovereignty over all creation. The main verb of verse 9 is an imperative, thus the petitioner is literally saying, “*May Your name be hallowed*” – that is, “May Your name be revered, for You alone are holy.” So when we pray we begin by first ascribing praise and honor to God who is so worthy of it – this is the *attitude* with which we are to pray. By acknowledging His preeminence, we are reminding ourselves just who it is we are praying to – the *Creator* of all things... and who we are as supplicants – His *creatures*; not the autonomous beings our flesh wants us to think we are; the fact is, we are mere mortals, only a breath away from the grave; furthermore, we don’t even have a say in when we draw our last breath – that happens according to God’s plan (Ps 139:16; Lk 12:20). Reflect upon that when you are inclined to think God simply exists to *serve you* – how diabolical can the mind of man be to actually think that that might be the case?
- 2. The advancement of God’s kingdom** (v. 10) – After we worship God for who He is, we should pray for the advancement of His cause, putting His interests (His kingdom) first; after all, everything that exists is His. Prayer is not a matter of getting “*our will*” done in heaven, but of getting “*God’s will*” done on earth. Perhaps that is the reason so many Christians are disappointed in their prayer life – they never seem to get what they want from God no matter how much they beg Him. Prayer is not about getting “our will” done – it’s about getting “God’s will” done (Mt 6:10; 26:39; Jam 4:3) – and therein lies the problem. By definition, being dedicated to God’s will is being opposed to Satan’s will, and anything that is contrary to God’s will. Therefore, to pray “*Thy will be done*” is to rebel against the worldly idea that sin is normal and inevitable and should therefore be acquiesced to or at least tolerated. It is to rebel against the world system of ungodliness, the dishonoring and rejecting of Christ, and the disobedience of believers. To accept “*what is,*” is to abandon a Christian view of God and His plan for redemptive history. You should also notice there are *no singular pronouns* in this prayer – thus, it is important to remember that we are part of God’s worldwide family of believers. Our primary concern must be that God’s answer will ultimately be a blessing to all of His people in some way. So in this petition we acknowledge that God knows what is best and that we surrender our will to His – hence, many have rightly defined prayer as “*the aligning of our will with God’s will.*”



3. **The request for daily sustenance** (v. 11) – Once we have placed God’s concerns first, we are then ready to bring our own individual *needs* before Him. Obviously, God is concerned about our needs and knows them even before we mention them (Mt 6:8,32). This petition acknowledges our absolute *dependence on God* for daily needs – both spiritual and physical. The expression “*daily bread*” is a reminder of God’s supply of “*manna*” to the children of Israel when they wandered in the wilderness – as His children now, we also have need of His daily supply in our lives.
  
1. **The request for forgiveness and our forgiveness of others** (v. 12) – This petition refers to the parental forgiveness that is necessary if the *experience of joyful fellowship* with our Father is to be maintained. If we as believers are *not willing to forgive* those who wrong us, how can we expect to enjoy the sweet fellowship and forgiveness of the Father? Why should God forgive us if we are unwilling to forgive others? An unforgiving spirit is an unloving sinful spirit – God’s call upon our lives is that we reflect His character, and not be *hypocrites*. How can we even ask for mercy if we are not willing to be merciful? How can we express hate and expect to receive love? Scripture is very clear on this: we cannot expect to be the recipients of God’s loving mercy, if we are not willing to extend mercy to others (Ps 66:18; Mt 5:21-24; 18:33; Eph 4:32; Jam 2:13).
  
5. **The request for protection from temptation and evil** (v. 13) – The request, “not to be led into temptation,” at first may appear to contradict what James teaches – “God does not tempt anyone” (Jam 1:13). However, God does *allow* His people to be tested and tried and tempted by Satan. In this petition we are asking God to “guide us so that we will not get out of His will and get involved in a situation of temptation” (1 Jn 5:18), or get involved in a situation of tempting God so that He must miraculously rescue us (Mt 4:5-7). This petition is similar to the one Jesus gave to Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before He went to the cross – He said to them, “*Pray that you may not enter into temptation*” (Mt 26:41). Therefore, this petition expresses a healthy distrust of one’s own ability to resist temptations or to stand up under trial, and acknowledges *complete dependence* on the Lord for preservation. The heart’s cry of all who desperately desire to be “kept from the power of sin and Satan” in their life, is that God would “*deliver them from evil.*”

**In light of the foregoing, it becomes readily apparent that as believers here in the West,** we have developed a strange way of looking at the Christian life – at the forefront of our concerns is that our lives be comfortable, happy and trouble-free. When our circumstances prove difficult and challenging, we ask God to “*change them*”... when we become sick and don’t feel good, we ask God to “*heal us*”... when the road we travel becomes too bumpy for us, we ask God to “*make it smooth*” – in short, nearly all of our requests are self-serving with the goal of “*making life more enjoyable, and making us feel better.*” By the way, it is “natural” for us to pray this way, because that is our self-centered nature – it naturally argues: “Who in their right mind enjoys being miserable and unhappy?” The problem here is ***the believer’s focus*** – our primary focus is on *ourselves* – not *God*. Western Christianity has developed a ***theology of life*** that essentially is *self-centered* – not *God-centered*. The God of the Bible becomes our “*Loving Caretaker*” – He is there to take care of us... to manage our lives for us... to protect us... to provide for us... and, principally, to keep us happy, fat and satisfied. What a great God! The benevolent lover of our souls! No!!! That is the God of our *desires*... not the God of the Bible!!! (cf. Jn 6:66-69).

**With that in mind, let’s return to the subject at hand – “the will of God.”** Let’s begin by carefully defining those absolute realities that underlie the governance of the universe – “*God’s interests*” are first and foremost – not “our interests,” as we want to think. “*God’s kingdom*” is to be the focus, not “our kingdom;” “*God’s will*” is preeminent, not “our will.” The problem with western Christianity is

that we dedicate the vast majority of our spiritual energies to our own “*self-interests*” – to our own personal happiness and our overall well-being; if you don’t believe that, monitor all of your thoughts throughout the course of a day. Our primary problem as believers, is that it is very difficult for us to get our eyes off of ourselves – *we are obsessed with ourselves* – that’s the functional reality of indwelling sin (Rom 7:14-21). The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to, “Fix our eyes on *Christ*, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). That injunction identifies the solution – instead of focusing on *ourselves*, we are to focus on *Christ*. The Great Commandment tells us that we are to “Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind;” and that a second is like it – we are to “Love our neighbor as ourselves” (Mt 22:37-39). For some reason, the western church in the last half of the twentieth century began embracing and teaching something called “*self-esteem theology*.” Essentially it says, “we must first learn to love ourselves if we are ever going to learn to love others.” The problem, according to this way of thinking, is that “*we don’t love ourselves enough*” – if we would just learn to love ourselves more, we would start loving others more! Therefore, all we need to do is learn to “*love ourselves more!*” That’s the solution! No!!! That is not the solution!!! That is the problem!!!

**Scripture is very clear on this – our problem is not that we don’t love ourselves enough;** everyone loves himself more than anything in the world – and that is the problem! Listen to what Paul has to say to husbands: “Love your wives as your own bodies” (Eph 5:28) – the given here is, “*men love their own bodies*.” We all love ourselves – I didn’t say *like*, I said *love* – obviously, many of us don’t particularly like ourselves. But all of us *care about ourselves* more than anything else in the entire world – *SELF* is our first love – and therein is the problem. What Paul says is this: “*We are to love our wives like we love ourselves*.” Conversely, we are to “*love our neighbor as we love ourselves*.” (Mt 22:39). Paul goes on to say in Philippians, “we are not merely to look out for our own personal interests (which we essentially do non-stop!), but we are to look out for the interests of *others*” (Phil 2:4). Loving God and loving others is where we need to direct our spiritual energies – obviously, this is difficult work for us as believers, because it is not something that is easy or comes natural; it requires the operating presence of the very Spirit of God in our lives (Lk 18:27). Our problem as human beings has never been a “*lack of self-love*” (we have never had any problem with looking out after “number one!”) – it has always been about “*loving God and loving others!*” (i.e., putting others “first”). Incidentally, this is not some radical new understanding of the Christian faith; theologians have been screaming for years at the “self-centeredness” of Western Christianity. I am simply one more voice among thousands who is calling for a return to “*biblical Christianity!*”

**Scripture tells us that our life is to be all about “*GOD*” — *NOT US* –** we are to have a “*God-focus*,” not a “*self-focus*.” For some reason, that statement seems to rub a lot of Christians the wrong way. They rebel against it, because it is too intrusive... and some even argue that it is not reasonable. The Bible, however, emphatically teaches that God made us *FOR HIMSELF* – He didn’t make us to just sit around enjoying His playground and all of the fun stuff He put in it. He made us “*for Himself*” (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 2:10; Rev 1:6) – we were not made “*for us!*” Remember, He is the Creator, and we are the creature – since when does the *creature* (that which is made) define the parameters of its existence? And how is it that he is even able to do so? From whence does his intelligence come? From himself? Is he not the product of the One who made him? And yet, he argues for autonomy? How do such inane thoughts even enter the minds of men? Where does such nonsensical thinking come from? Since when does the *creature* dictate to the *One who made him* what shall be? What are the grounds for such a position? Assuming you are a proponent of that position, how would you litigate your case? Do you really think your case has merit? To see its farcical nature, imagine the following – you become the creator of something, and then “that created thing” actually has you incarcerated, through some judicial

system of sorts, for being morally perverse. I concur, it seems ludicrous to even imagine such a scenario, but that seems to be “moral character” of the defiant soul of man. He just refuses to accept the fact that he is “*the creature*.” I agree this is an absurd argument – but apparently there are many within Christendom who need to hear this message. Let’s return again to the subject at hand: God made us *FOR HIMSELF*, which means *HE IS TO BE OUR REASON FOR LIVING* – not ourselves (Mt 16:24-25; Gal 2:20; Eph 1:4-5; Phil 1:21; 2:13; Heb 13:21). As long we have a “*self-centered independent focus in life*,” we will increasingly find life to be an empty, lonely, unpleasant, unfulfilling experience. Why? Because we were not created for “*self-centered living*” – God created us for Himself and for others, as the Great Commandment clearly states: “You are to love God and love others!” (Mt 22:36-39). Until that becomes *your heart-felt conviction*, you will simply live a life of delusion and spin your wheels spiritually. My advice – stop trying to make a case for your own autonomy; that is a dead-end street! By the way, that is the same road Satan traveled! (read the last chapter of this book!).

**Some go on to argue that God must be a “selfish ogre,” if He just made us for Himself!** After all, if He were really a loving God, He would have given us “*freedom*” to make our own choices, rather than making us bow down and serve Him! Isn’t it amazing how warped our sinful minds are? Contrary to the imperceptive nature of the sinful soul, many believers need to be reminded that God graciously gave us “*complete freedom*” to do whatever we want in life – we are even free to impugn the very character of God with benign nonsense! For those of you who are still convinced that God is a selfish ogre, remind me, if you will, how is God being selfish? I find it ironic that some of you would actually argue from “the most selfish of all vantage points” – who is the *hellion* here who wants “his freedom”? Who is the self-centered egotistical maniac demanding his rights? Here we are – *the served* – accusing the Great Servant of all – *Christ Himself* – of being selfish? (Mt 20:28; Jn 13:14; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:7). How can one logically make such an argument? Think with me for one more moment – Jesus came to this world and emptied Himself of all His prerogatives – including the very glory of heaven itself! – was made in the likeness of lowly man... took on the form of a bond-servant... was mocked and ridiculed and spat upon by ingrates... and then went to the cross and subjected Himself to the cruelest death imaginable – for them! (Phil 2:6-8). I’m not quite seeing how you can call that act “selfish”? Help me here if there is something I am missing in all this. So how is it that we have the audacity to call God “selfish”? It is utterly amazing how twisted and perverse the minds and hearts of men are – but such is his mental condition (Jer 17:9; Rom 1:25; 7:18).

**In a study I did years ago, I was introduced to America’s preeminent psychiatrist – Dr. Karl Menninger;** he was a member of the famous Menninger family of psychiatrists who founded the *Menninger Foundation* and the *Menninger Clinic* in Topeka, Kansas. Dr. Menninger graduated cum laude from Harvard Medical School in 1917. By 1925, he had attracted enough investors to build the *Menninger Sanitarium*. After World War II, Karl Menninger was instrumental in founding the *Winter Veterans Administration Hospital* in Topeka – it became the largest psychiatric training center in the world. In 1981, Menninger was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Jimmy Carter. Menninger wrote a number of influential books including *The Human Mind*, *The Crime of Punishment*, and *The Myth of Mental Illness*. I state the foregoing for a purpose – Dr. Menninger believed the vast majority of the so-called “*mentally ill*” were only “slightly different” from the so-called “*mentally healthy*,” and that their problems were not at all what many so-called “*professionals*” were making them out to be – in most cases, Menninger actually felt professional psychiatric diagnosis was a *medical fraud*. Obviously, that’s a pretty strong indictment against many of those in the psychiatric community. To continue – Menninger had gained nationwide acclaim for his ability to *help patients* who were struggling with mental illness – i.e., depressed mood, loss of interest, feelings of guilt or low self-worth,

disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration – as a result he was being inundated with requests by people seeking his help. He took on thousands of patients, but only with the understanding that they would “promise to follow his advice” – if they would not make such a promise, he would not see them. Menninger believed the vast majority of individuals who were struggling with psychological problems, were so *self-absorbed and obsessed with themselves that it had made them sick!* When he would meet with a patient, this is what he would instruct them to do – “Go down south of the tracks... find someone who really needs help... then help meet that person’s need.” Invariably, Menninger found, the person’s psychological problems would vanish overnight! Menninger believed it was critically important that people get their focus onto something or someone other than *themselves* – in short, “*Get your eyes off yourself!*” Isn’t it amazing how even a secular psychologist can stumble upon a universal truth? Self-centered living is destructive! It will ruin your life! So stop focusing on yourself, and start focusing on Christ and others – God commands you to “*Love Him and love others!*” (1 Jn 3:16-18; Gal 5:6; 6:2, 7-10). Obviously, I am not an authority on “mental illness,” but I do believe in listening to the admonitions of Scripture – walk according to the expressed will of God, and become that person God wants you to be. By the way, you *will* reap what you sow (2 Cor 9:6-11).