

**ABIDING IN CHRIST:  
A DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY  
OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE  
(Part 2 of 3)**

by  
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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 commentators group together on the same sides, facing off in theological debates. The reality of this is never more apparent than in disagreements between Calvinists and Arminians, dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists, and lordship and free grace advocates.

We find the answer to this perplexing question 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. However, sometimes a theologian in one camp will inconsistently develop an interpretation more consistent with another camp. Often this is due to undetected presuppositions that shape the interpretation of a passage. The result might produce a dispensationalist who unwittingly holds to the interpretation of a passage that he develops on a presupposition antithetical to dispensationalism.

While wrestling with the interpretive options available for understanding our Lord’s discourse on the vine (John 15:1–10), it became apparent there were two broad groupings: the first understand “abide” to be soteriological—believers abide, unbelievers do not; the second understand abide to describe the believer’s ongoing fellowship with Christ. It was further observed that those who hold to the former position\_‘abiding is

believing’\_had 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 Israel was composed of believer and unbeliever, so too must the vine in John 15. In contrast, those who held to the latter position\_‘abiding is fellowship’\_did not emphasize the Old Testament vine analogy as hermeneutically relevant to John 15. For the most part these commentators were not only dispensational, but also free grace in their approach to soteriological and sanctification models.<sup>1</sup>

Since a consistent distinction between Israel and the Church is part of the *sine qua non* of traditional dispensational theology,<sup>2</sup> we concluded that to understand abiding as the believer’s ongoing fellowship with Christ was most consistent with a dispensational theology. Exegetical analysis further demonstrated that the ‘abiding is fellowship’ interpretation fit the lexical and syntactical data in the passage, while the ‘abiding is believing’ interpretation was insupportable exegetically.

One of the presuppositions that affect interpretation and frequently explain 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 that one has believed that Christ has died as a substitute for one’s sins. Moreover, failure to persevere does not indicate a person’s saved status. Lordship salvation is the consistent development from the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Lordship advocates affirm that salvation is by faith in Christ, but then add that genuine faith manifests discernible works in the life of the believer, the absence of which suggests a non-saving 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 non-genuine or non-saving faith.

<sup>2</sup> 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 purpose of God in human history is doxological. Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 39–41.

the Church, and the subject of John 15 is sanctification and not justification, then third, there must be an approach to the post salvation spiritual life of the believer that is consistent with dispensational theology. Further, this conclusion indicates that dispensational theology does not merely affect eschatology and ecclesiology, as some assert, but has a precise impact on sanctification.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, since dispensationalism also has certain distinctive views on the Holy Spirit, and 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 seek to 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 production of fruit 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, it is used in 1 John as a synonym for *meno*, “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. “Abide” is a key concept occurring thirteen times in 1 John; its interpretation affects 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. On the other hand, those who take “abide” as fellowship

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, “The Augustinian-Dispensational View,” in Melvin E. Dieter, Anthony A. Hoekema, Stanley M. Horton, J. Robertson McQuilkin, and John F. Walvoord, *Five Views of Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 199–226.

understand 1 John to be discussing fellowship of the believer, contrasting the carnal believer with the spiritual believer.

Fellowship translates *koinōnia*, which “denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond. It expresses a two-sided relation . . . As with *koinōneō*, emphasis may be on either the giving or the receiving.”<sup>4</sup> John uses 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 a two-sided relationship: the believer abides in Christ, He abides in the believer (John 15:4–5). In his first epistle the apostle John reveals three characteristics of fellowship with Christ: 1) Fellowship is based on a correct view of the undiminished deity and true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:1–4); 2) Fellowship with God and walking in darkness are mutually exclusive (1:5); and 3) Fellowship is synonymous with walking in the light (1:7).<sup>5</sup>

Abiding and fellowship have identical characteristics. The apostle describes abiding as walking *in the same manner as He walked* (2:6) and is *in the light* (2:10).<sup>6</sup> Surely, 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 is that there are three categories of Christians. The first category

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Hauck, *Koinoneō, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–74), 3:797.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

consists of those who do not abide and whom the Lord disciplines in this life, even to suffering the sin unto death (1 John 5:16). The second consists of young believers who abide, but have not yet produced fruit. The third consists of mature believers who abide and produce fruit.

Christians who do not abide	and are disciplined
Christians who abide,	but have yet to produce fruit
Christians who abide,	Mature, and produce fruit

Just as a plant must grow over an extended period before it can 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 can either abide in Christ or not. Abiding is an absolute status, which is consistent with the meaning of *meno* “to continue, remain, stay.” Believers either remain or fail to remain, but they do not partially remain 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).

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; therefore, 3) At any point in time a believer is either having 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 because of abiding in Christ. This is the goal of the believer’s life and necessary to glorify God. In John chapter fifteen Jesus states that abiding in Him is the necessary and only condition for fruit production. In Galatians chapter five, the apostle Paul states that walking by the Spirit is the necessary and

only condition for fruit production. This parallel indicates that walking by the Spirit and abiding in Christ are tantamount to the same concept. If abiding were synonymous with believing, then walking by the Spirit must also be synonymous with believing. Completely illogical!

## **Walking Produces Fruit**

### *The Galatian Context*

In Galatians 5:16–25 the Apostle Paul explains the significance of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s spiritual advance. With perhaps the exception of Romans chapter eight, no other chapter of Scripture is as significant in explaining this advance. In the development of his argument to the Galatians, Paul first establishes the nature of the Gospel in chapters one and two by making clear that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone (Galatians 2:20). One result of justification is the immediate reception of God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in Galatians 3:2 he 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?* The expected answer is *hearing with faith* (cf., Galatians 2:14b; Romans 10:17). Law refers to the Mosaic Law and the teaching of the Judaizers that wrongly instructed the Christians to obey the Law in order 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 counters by teaching that observance of moral and ceremonial precepts can never provide any sinner with the quality of righteousness necessary for justification (Galatians 3:10–12, 21; 2 Corinthians 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.”<sup>7</sup>

Paul then shifts 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* (Galatians 3:3)? He establishes two antitheses: begun/ perfected and Spirit/ flesh. The next place these concepts are addressed is in Galatians 5:16–25, when Paul explains the dynamic of how the Spirit brings the believer to maturity.

The first phrase, *having begun by the Spirit*, reminds them of the mechanics of salvation: a new life created by God the Holy Spirit began at the instant of faith alone in Christ alone. 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.<sup>8</sup> When an individual expresses faith alone in Christ alone, the Holy Spirit instantly regenerates him and simultaneously imputes God’s perfect righteousness to the new creature in Christ. This imputed righteousness is the cause of salvation. At that same instant, God the Father looks upon the believer’s possession of imputed perfect righteousness and declares him justified (Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 20; Galatians 2:16, 20). Thus, ceremonial and moral acts are inconsequential to justification. The believer has received a new life from the Holy Spirit that the Spirit must then nourish and develop. Just as human morality is inconsequential to salvation, Paul will argue that ethical obedience is neither the means nor the cause of spiritual growth, though it is an effect of spiritual growth.

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

*Being perfected* (Galatians 3:3) is an unfortunate translation for the Greek verb, *epiteleō*. This word is an intensification of the verb found in Galatians 5:16, *teleioō*, describing the result of walking by the Spirit. *Epiteleō* means, “to perform,” “to establish,” “to finish,” or “to bring to completion.”<sup>9</sup> 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. 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 only come by dependence on the Holy Spirit. If not, this activity derives from the flesh. Paul wants the Galatians to understand that everything in life derives from either one or the other (cf., Colossians 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 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 *enarchomai* and *epiteleō* 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).<sup>10</sup>

Paul emphasizes the antithesis between the production of the Spirit and the work of the flesh, the sin nature. Paul clearly uses “flesh” (*sarx*) with an ethical dimension beginning in Galatians

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<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Dellling, *Epiteleō*, *TDNT*, 8:61.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

3:3. A Christian can clearly conduct an ethical, [Mosaic] law-abiding life, yet the results are sin. Isaiah emphasized that it is *our righteous deeds* not our unrighteous deeds that are like a *filthy garment* (Isaiah 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.

In Romans chapter six, Paul makes it clear that everything the unbeliever does comes from the sin nature. The unbeliever is born enslaved to this sin nature. Only subsequent to salvation can the believer make a choice. Therefore, all that the unbeliever does—good, bad, moral, and immoral—proceeds from a fallen sinful nature.<sup>11</sup> Paul implies that a believer can distinguish between the good and moral that the sin nature generates, and that which 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, or 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 flesh.

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<sup>11</sup> 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 enough to control the sin nature.

Paul reminds the Galatians that since they did not receive their new life because of obedience to ceremonial or moral law, the growth of this new spiritual life is not because they observed ceremonial or moral law. Both spiritual life and growth in that life, the apostle bases on the vastly superior work of the Holy Spirit. This does not exclude morality, but recognizes that morality is not synonymous with spiritual growth. If it were, then the 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 (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 6:6, 17, 18); 2) The unbeliever can live a moral, ethical life; therefore, 3) Simple human morality can be the product of the sin nature. A supernatural means produces the virtues and Christ-like 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. Since moral reformation can be self-induced through an act of the will, how can the believer discern the difference between morality and spiritual growth? Paul answers this through the command to walk by means of the Spirit. Accordingly, he now answers the question, How does the believer apply this mandate?

*The Unique Mandate of Love*

In Galatians 5:16 it becomes clear why Paul makes dependence on the Holy Spirit central to the spiritual life. The moral qualities produced by mere human ability cannot approximate the ethical virtues exemplified in the spiritual life God desires for believers in the Church Age. The highest of these virtues is love. Paul reminds 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 (Galatians 5:1; Romans 6:17) and freedom from the law (Galatians 3:11–13; 23–25; 4:7; Romans 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 stresses love, Paul quotes not from Jesus' statement in the upper room (John 13:34), but from Leviticus 19:18. He quotes from the Law because the Mosaic Law is the central issue with the Galatians. Paul's point is to show that under the Old Testament, believers never fulfilled the command as stated.<sup>12</sup> 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.

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, expressed by the comparative particle "as" (*hos*), is the individual himself

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

(Galatians 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 others, but *one another*, i.e., believers. 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 mature believer. Human effort cannot generate this love; only God the Holy Spirit working in the life of the believer can produce this love. Nevertheless, how can the believer love in this way?

Paul answers that question in his mandate to the Galatians, *walk by the Spirit* (Galatians 5:16). Some observations need to be made regarding Galatians 5:16–5:25. First, we must take this passage as one unit whose purpose is to demonstrate how the believer can produce love. This explains the priority of love among the fruit of the Spirit. Second, the apostle makes four parallel statements that help clarify the subject: *walk by the Spirit* (Galatians 5:16), *led by the Spirit* (Galatians 5:18), *live by the Spirit*, and *walk* [follow, stay in step with, be in line with] *by the Spirit* (Galatians 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 concludes 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.

*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” (*peripateō*) stresses a habit that should characterize the believer’s attitudes and actions.<sup>13</sup> The nuance here is most likely customary, implying, “simply continue.”<sup>14</sup> 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” (Galatians 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.<sup>15</sup> The anarthrous dative of “Spirit” (*pneuma*) supplies this expectation.<sup>16</sup> The Christian life is not a passive waiting for growth that automatically happens. The believer must constantly decide to walk by the Spirit.

Though some suggest that the dative here should take a locative nuance, this meaning would render the concept passive, “in 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 our having been united with Christ at salvation (Romans 6:1–3). The use of the dative of “Spirit” in context further supports the notion of means, or instrument. We demonstrated earlier that Galatians 5:16 begins to provide a

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 721.

<sup>14</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 722.

<sup>15</sup> “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.

<sup>16</sup> The 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, *Grammar*, 165–166.

positive answer to the implicit question of 3:3: How does the believer grow to completion in the spiritual life? In this light, we cannot understand an anarthrous dative related to eternal salvation as a locative sense: We are 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 Spirit, growth will automatically ensue divorced from the active volition of the believer.

Paul continuously hammers home that the believer lives his post-salvation life through the instrumentality, or by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Note that Paul uses the dative of means for *pneuma* 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” (*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).

Finally, the process delineated by Paul logically necessitates an instrumental understanding. 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 more sense. The believer is to walk by means of the Holy Spirit, i.e., to live in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. That this is not automatic is emphasized in the remainder of the verse.

*And you will not carry out the desire 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 “not” (*ou mē*);, the strongest form of denial possible in the Greek. 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 *ou mē* 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.<sup>17</sup>

The next question might be: How, then, can a believer who is walking by the Spirit sin? He must first 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 absolutes 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 writes:

In this entire epistle two alternatives are set before Paul's Christian readers. Either they may walk under law or under grace.

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contrast between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *BSac* 123 (October–December 1966): 314.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

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.<sup>19</sup>

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, fellowship, and walking by means of the Holy Spirit all look at the advancing Christian life from the same perspective. In contrast, not abiding, lack of fellowship, and operating by the sin nature describe the believer living in self-dependence. We must now relate these conclusions to another category of walking: *walking in the light*.

### **Walking in the Light**

Numerous passages use walking as a metaphor for the Christian life. A noun in the dative or with an “in” (*en*) clause often accompany “walk.” The exegete must pay close attention to the context in determining the precise nuance. In Galatians, the nuance of instrumentality was necessary due to the nature of the verbs and the description of the action. In 1 John chapter one, the apostle does not use a simple dative. Instead, John opts for “in the darkness” (*en to skotei*) and “in the light” (*en to photei*) to describe two opposing walks of the believer’s experience (1 John 1:6,7). However, do these clauses indicate sphere or

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<sup>19</sup> Toussaint, “Contrast,” 312.

instrumentality? Both are grammatically possible. The 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 "in" (*en*) makes it clear that he has a locative connotation in mind (1 John 2:9–11).<sup>20</sup>

As with Paul's mutually exclusive categories of walking by the Spirit or walking according to the sin nature, John expresses the mutually exclusive walks of life as either darkness or light (1 John 1:6, 7). Having fellowship with God is impossible 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 we have demonstrated, walking in the light is connected to fellowship 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 fifteen. If abiding means 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* (Ephesians 5:8). The Christian life is covered extensively in Ephesians under the metaphor of walking. Five times the apostle uses the verb "to walk" (*peripateō*), three times in Ephesians chapter five. The first is to *walk in love* (Ephesians 5:2). The Greek preposition "in" (*en*), one may translate as a locative or instrumental. 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 a more instrumental idea. The standard for the believer is Christ's love demonstrated at the cross.

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<sup>20</sup> 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.

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 motive that kept him on the cross (Hebrews 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; the active application of love toward fellow believers is another.

Walking by means of love is then parallel with the next command to: *walk as children of light* (Ephesians 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 only become sons of the light at the instant of faith alone in Christ alone (John 12:36). Walking in the light, as John observed, is not automatic. The new believer can surely continue walking 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: 1) to portray the holiness, righteousness, and absolute perfection of God (1 John 1:5) and 2) the revelation of God, His Person, Perfections, and plan (Psalm 36:9; 119:105, 130; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). In Him there is no darkness. John emphasizes that the walk 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.<sup>21</sup> Yet, how much sin violates the absolute standard of God's perfection? Does sin only violate that righteous standard when one is aware of it, or he does it intentionally? The answer is that any sin, known, unknown, intentional or not, violates the standard of God's absolute perfection. 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.

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<sup>21</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 60–62.

In Ephesians chapter five Paul, again, juxtaposes the mutually exclusive walks of the believer. These are absolute states. Other contrasts are also present in Ephesians chapter five. 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* (*paraklētos*, 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 with his understanding of 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 Corinthians 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 and 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 chapter five 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. Since the walk by means of the Holy

Spirit is parallel to abiding in Christ and fellowship, we discover that the filling of the Spirit characterizes abiding in Christ. 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.<sup>22</sup>

*Be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18). Many have written on this verse, including its background and interpretation. We should note two salient points. First, Paul’s imperative directed toward the believer’s volition indicates the possibility of only two options, either obedience or disobedience. 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 41.

<sup>23</sup> 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 *pleroō* to express the content with which a thing is filled would be quite unexampled.”

filled the devotee with the spirit of Dionysus.<sup>24</sup> The parallel with the Spirit indicates a filling by means of the Spirit. The dative of “Spirit” (*pneuma*) 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 (Colossians 3:16–24). Identical consequences follow the filling by means of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:19–6:9). Paul gives two seemingly distinct commands which in turn produce identical results. Comparison of these two passages yields the following.

The Holy Spirit fills the believer with the Word of God. The believer, then, walking by means of the Holy Spirit, applies the Word that transforms his thinking and life. However, the believer can choose to reject the filling of the Spirit. This is synonymous with not walking by the Spirit, at which point sin ensues. The believer is no longer abiding, having fellowship with God, walking in the light, walking by means of love, and advancing in wisdom. Instead, the believer walks according to the flesh, as a fool, and in darkness. No longer does the Holy Spirit lead him, nor does he follow in the Spirit’s footsteps. The results of this walk 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 it has value for spiritual growth only when in right relationship

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<sup>24</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 148–202.

<sup>25</sup> For a sound discussion explaining the inadequacies of the position that this is locative, i.e., “in the [human] spirit,” see, Clifford Rapp, Jr., “Ephesians 5:18—Holy Spirit or Human Spirit?” *CTS Journal* 2 (Spring/ Summer 1996).

with the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> 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. In the first we established from John 15 that three types of Christians exist: 1) those abiding in Christ who are young and have not yet produced fruit, 2) those abiding in Christ and in whom fruit is produced, and 3) those who do not abide in Christ and are removed in divine discipline. We demonstrated that abiding is synonymous with fellowship. In broad terms, there are only two categories of Christians, those who abide and those who do not. Paul describes the latter as carnal Christians (1 Corinthians 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 fifteen. This view is inconsistent with a main tenant of dispensationalism. Moreover, this

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<sup>26</sup> 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.

interpretation rejects the notion of a permanently carnal believer. Thus, an ‘abiding is fellowship’ view and an understanding of two categories of 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 has also revealed that the believer’s post-salvation life develops or advances by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Though the Word commands each believer to walk by means of the Holy Spirit, yet 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 fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and how the believer recovers from walking in darkness.

**--To be continued--**

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