

AM I WALKING "AFTER THE SPIRIT" OR "AFTER THE FLESH"?

It is important to know how I answer the question, because:

Romans 8:5 they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. [KJV]

As a consequence:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. [KJV]

And the condemnation thus avoided is death itself (that is, separation from God):

Romans 8:6 to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [ESV]

Because:

Romans 8:7 the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [ESV]

Continuing to walk in the flesh eventually produces the works of the flesh:

Galatians 5:19–21a Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ^{21a}envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [HCSB]

Whereas:

Galatians 5:22–25 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. [HCSB]

Hence, it is important that I align my walk with the spirit well before the works of the flesh are produced and become manifest.

How may I do so?

It helped me to consider the episode of Jesus teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum:

John 6:54a–56 "Those who eat my body and drink my blood have eternal life. ⁵⁵My body is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my body and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them." [ERV]

Many of the disciples that had been following Him found the teaching unacceptable:

John 6:60 When Jesus' followers heard this,

many of them said, "This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?" [ERV]

As a consequence:

John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [ESV]

Thus many stopped walking with Jesus. Rather than trust the Lord beyond their understanding, they had decided to rely on their common sense, their traditions and their fleshly interpretation of His words. In this case, the choice for them had not been between virtue and sin: rather, between Jesus and reliance on themselves — on their own flesh.

They chose self; departed from Him and no longer walked with and in His Spirit.

Hence, I may reflect whether my relationship with Jesus is one of continuous and immanent communication and trust in Him and His Spirit or whether I — *de facto* — segregate some of my activities or thoughts away from Him and walk by myself in my flesh: not necessarily walking into sin — yet — but away from the Lord.

Another example, although in much different circumstances, of how one walks can be learned from the first two Kings of Israel: Saul and David, — both were chosen and appointed by God Himself:

1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it over Saul's head. He kissed Saul and said, "I am doing this because the Lord has appointed you to be the ruler over Israel, his special possession." [NLT]

Twenty-seven years later:

1 Samuel 16:13ab So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on. [NLT]

Both Saul and David did disobey the Lord.

God had instructed Saul to destroy completely the Amalekites, including their king Agag, for they had obstructed His purposes all along.

1 Samuel 15:3 "Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys." [NLT]

However, after the Lord had granted him many military victories, success led Saul to become confident in his own judgment, rather than trusting wholly in the Lord's commands.

1 Samuel 15:9 Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the

cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs — everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality. [NLT]

David, enjoying the fruits of military successes, was in tranquility in his kingdom when he sinned:

2 Samuel 11:2, 4-5 Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. ⁵Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant." [NLT]

Then David commanded Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to return from the battlefield and attempted to convince him to have sexual intercourse with her and thus claim paternity. When the attempt failed, David sent a letter to Joab, his battlefield commander, to murder Uriah:

2 Samuel 11:15 The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed." [NLT]

When confronted with his sin, immediately and without excuses:

2 Samuel 12:13ab Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord" [NLT]

From the beginning and all along, David was:

Acts 13:22b a man about whom God said, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do." [NLT]

Hence, although a sinner, David was close to the heart of God and to His Spirit. Because of his immediate confession:

2 Samuel 12:13c Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." [NASB]

His sin was immediately taken away and so thoroughly wiped out that, at the end of his life, David could sing:

2 Samuel 22:21-24 The LORD rewarded me for doing right; he restored me because of my innocence. ²²For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. ²³I have followed all his regulations; I have never abandoned his decrees. ²⁴I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin. [NLT]

Not so King Saul: when confronted with his transgression,

1 Samuel 15:20-21 Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." [NKJV]

Saul denied his sin and sought to construct rational excuses built on his own authority.

He falsely represented his complete obedience; categorized the obvious falsehood as something insignificant that "the people" did and manufactured a feigned last-minute justification of sacrifices to the Lord, in order to cover his transgression.

The Spirit of God abandoned him: Saul no longer walked in the Spirit, but in his flesh; later he died miserably, as a suicide.

It is not that David's sin was judged to be less grievous than Saul's; rather that David was walking in the spirit of God and Saul was walking in the flesh of his self: David walked humbly before God, Saul walked proud of himself and his accomplishments.

Hence: am I walking in the Spirit?

When I commit a transgression, do I immediately confess and repent before the Lord or do I say: "I can explain that"?

When the word of the Lord to me is contrary to my opinion or habit or tradition, do I set it aside as an allegory, a metaphor, some nonsense from old times or do I seek His face and trust that He is the truth?

It does not mean that I ask the Lord what to do for every decision, but it means that the Lord is present in every moment of my day and that I am never on my own and "away from Him."

If I walk in the flesh and away from His spirit, the Lord won't compel me, He will simply ask:

John 6:67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" [NKJV]

If I walk in the spirit, I shall answer straight away, as Peter did:

John 6:68-69 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [NKJV]