

How To Walk By The Spirit

We are going to be looking at a number of passages about the will of God for our lives today. It is an exciting topic whether you are a young person or 100 years old. Every believer wants to know, “What is the will of God for me?”

I want to start by talking about a man called Gideon. Gideon was one of two of the greatest judges of Israel. The other was Samson. The first time Gideon is mentioned in Scripture is in Judge 6:11 when the angel of the Lord, a theophany, visited Gideon and called him, “O valiant warrior!” Now, how would you like to be called a valiant warrior by the Lord? That would be a great honor if God called you a valiant warrior. Then Judges 6:14 says that the angel of the Lord told Gideon,

Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you? Judges 6:14 (NASB)



God wants Gideon to defeat the Midianites and deliver Israel. But verse 15 reveals Gideon started objecting by saying his family was unimportant, and that he was the youngest in his family. He was insecure. In verse 16, God said,

Surely, I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man. Judges 6:16 (NASB)

Notice that God said “one man” would defeat the Midianites. Gideon was the one man God would use to defeat the

Midianites! To most people this would seem ridiculous, and it seemed ridiculous to Gideon also (v. 17)! So, he asked for a sign. The angel of the Lord told him to bring an offering and place it on a rock (verse 20). Then in verse 21 the angel of the Lord gave him the sign. The end of the angel’s staff touched the meat and the unleavened bread, and fire sprang from the rock and consumed everything. Immediately, the angel of the Lord vanished. Now that is one very impressive sign! This motivated Gideon to tear down the altars to the false god, Baal, and the goddess Asherah and that made the men of the city angry with him. As a result, Gideon started having doubts about serving God.

So, Gideon asked God for another sign! I thought the first sign was so very incredible. But it is obvious that it was not enough to convince Gideon. We call Gideon’s second sign the sign of the fleece. Here is Gideon’s request.

Then Gideon said to God, “If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.” And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the

ground.” God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground. Judges 6:36-40 (NASB)

Finally, Gideon was convinced that he knew God’s will and that God would be with him. Now I have a question, “How many times did Gideon ask for a sign in order to know God’s will?” The answer is three times! Why did he ask for three signs? Because he had doubts. Yet, God gave Gideon the sign that he needed to know His will. This helps us understand that God will help any believer who seriously desires to know His will; however, the first time should be enough.

URIM AND THUMMIM TO DISCOVER GOD’S WILL. Numbers 27:21 is another passage about knowing God’s will. It tells us that the high priest of Israel would use the Urim and Thummim to discover God’s will. But the Bible does not tell us how it was used to do that.

LOTS WERE USED TO DISCOVER GOD’S WILL. Proverbs 16:33 reveals that sometimes lots were used to discover God’s will. The verse says,

The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the LORD.
Proverbs 16:33 (NASB)

Another passage about using lots to learn God’s will is Acts 1:26. It says that the apostles used lots to determine if Matthias was to replace Judas as an apostle.

PERSONAL ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER GOD’S WILL. Therefore, in my high school years I threw a pair of dice on several occasions in an attempt to discover God’s will about decisions I was going to make. I asked God to have the total on the dice equal a certain value or exceed a certain value. Now, I made the process very holy by praying first and asking God to guide the dice! Yet, when I did not like the result, I rationalized that my prayer was not serious enough. So, I would pray even more seriously and throw the dice a few more times in an attempt to know God’s will. I remember even throwing the dice a number of times and taking the average. I also used an eight ball. On an eight ball, the answers appeared on the bottom. Eventually, I realized I was just manipulating the process, felt convicted and abandoned that process.

Sometime later, I adopted the principle of using “Gideon’s fleece” in order to know God’s will. That is, if Gideon used that technique and God honored it, then why not me? Since then I have discovered that others use Gideon’s fleece also.

ALL OF SCRIPTURE REVEALS GOD’S WILL. But the best way to know God’s will is to learn what God has revealed about His will in Scripture. He has provided specific verses and principles. In my youth I used to think that the red colored words in the gospels were the words that Jesus spoke. But later I learned that He wrote all of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that all of Scripture is God-breathed. All of Scripture is written by God. For example, that means the Ten Commandments reveal God’s will for us.

1 John 3:23 gives us an explicit commandment that reveals God’s will. It says,

This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 1 John 3:23 (NASB)

Here we are commanded to believe in Christ and to love one another. In the verse just before 1 John 3:23 we are told,

... and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 1 John 3:22 (NASB)

Notice the apostle John urges us to obey God’s commandments and to please Him if we want our prayers answered. 2 Corinthians 5:9 is another passage that urges us to do that which pleases the Lord. Ephesians 5:10 also echoes this truth.

... learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Ephesians 5:10 (NASB)

FIVE EXPLICIT WILLS OF GOD. Then one day, I discovered that God has explicitly used the phrases the “will of God,” “God’s will” and the “will of the Lord” five times in the New Testament. Therefore, I want to give you a tour of these five statements.

The Will of God Is That We Suffer. The first one is found in 1 Peter 4:19. It says,

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. 1 Peter 4:19 (NASB)

This is a difficult passage for some Christians to accept. It says that it is God's will for us to suffer on occasions. What may be even more difficult to accept is that believers may suffer even when doing what is right. This was true of Job. Before Job suffered and after he suffered the first time, God said that Job was blameless in all of his ways. Yet, Job suffered again! You can read that in Job 1:8 and in Job 2:3. I think we understand why God has told us about this event. It helps us go through suffering.

The Will of God Is That We Submit To Government. Another explicit statement about the will of God is found in 1 Peter 2:13-15. It says,

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 1 Peter 2:13-15 (NASB)

The point is that it is God's will for us to submit to every level of human government. It is God's will for us to submit to our national, state, county and city officials. So, when we obey the speed limit, we do right. When we pay all of the taxes that we owe the government, we do God's will. Believers do this because we are told that governments are "sent by Him" for the purpose of punishing evil doers. The main purpose of government is to suppress evil. Sadly, this truth is missed today in parts of our country. Now I think we understand why God has told us this truth. God wants us to respect the governments He has established.

The Will of God Is That We Rejoice, Pray and Give Thanks. The third explicit statement about the will of God is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. It says,

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB)

Here we learn that it is God's will for us to always rejoice, pray and give thanks. This is a glorious truth! God is not an unhappy Ogre who is trying to make us miserable. Some Christians seem to think God wants to step on us when we have joy, as if we were just ants. But that is the opposite of the character of God! His way is to encourage us! Jesus said that He came to give us an abundant life. It is God's will that we have joy! I think we understand why God has told this truth too! God wants us to have joy (Philippians 4:4-8).

THE WILL OF GOD IS THAT WE FLEE SEXUAL SINS. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 is the fourth explicit statement about the will of God. It says,

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God . . . So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 8 (NASB)

This means that God wants every believer to flee every form of sexual sin. The word "immorality" comes from the Greek word *porneia*. *Porneia* includes a wide range of sins from prostitution, sexual activity outside of marriage, pedophilia, promiscuity, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, premarital sex and bestiality. I believe pornography is included. So, if you are watching porn—if it is on your computer or in your home—you are living in sin. This is a sin that many Christian men and women are committing. Sexual sins will hinder a believer's spiritual growth, result in guilt and prayers will not be answered because verse 3 says it is God's will that we pursue sanctification. What is sanctification? That is setting ourselves apart from sin. 2 Timothy 2:22 says it this way, "Flee youthful lusts!" I think we understand why God has told us this truth. God wants us to be holy.

THE WILL OF GOD IS WE ARE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. The last explicit statement in Scripture about the "will of God" is found in Ephesians 5:17-18. This passage tells us that it is the will of God that we are filled with the Spirit. This is the main passage for our study. The passage says,

So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit . . . Ephesians 5:17-18 (NASB)

Now notice the apostle Paul wants us to understand that the will of God is that you and I are filled with the Holy Spirit. So far, we have understood each of the statements about the will of God that we have read. But why is this one important? I think we know that the answer is not obvious! So, we must do some digging into Scripture. So, tighten your seat belt and get ready.

Being Filled With the Spirit Is Essential For Every Believer. We are going to discover that being filled with the Spirit is extremely essential for every believer who desires to do the will of God and please our Lord. Also, we are going to discover how to be filled with the Spirit and what the benefits are. I trust that when we are finished, any confusion about being filled with the Spirit will be erased and you will have joy. Now if you already know this important truth, then I hope this is a good reminder. The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1:12-15 said it is good to be reminded.

Believers Are Commanded To Be Filled With the Spirit. The first step to understanding this will of God is to notice that Ephesians 1:1 tells us the book of Ephesians was written to believers. The verse says,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus . . . Ephesians 1:1 (NASB)

Ephesians was also written to every believer in Christ! Paul repeats this truth in Ephesians 1:13 when he adds that every believer in Christ has been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. That is, the Holy Spirit is dwelling within every believer as the promise or guarantee of our eternal life. That is, we are going to heaven. Also, 2 Corinthians 1:22 says God the Father has . . .

. . . sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. 2 Corinthians 1:22 (NASB)

This means that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within every believer as a promise that we are going to heaven. Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6 and Ephesians 3:17 teaches us repeatedly that the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. Therefore, we must ask, “If the Holy Spirit is already living within a believer, then why are we being told to be filled with the Spirit?” The answer to this question is that being filled with the Spirit is something more! It does not happen automatically. This fact becomes even clearer when we discover that the command to be filled with the Spirit is an imperative in the Greek. That is, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. It is not something that happens automatically. It is something in addition to the Spirit indwelling every believer.

HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. Now we are going to learn three extremely valuable principles about how to be filled with the Spirit.

First Principle — Submit to the Holy Spirit. The first principle is that we must submit to the Holy Spirit and the question is, “How do we do that? Let’s start by reading Ephesians 5:18 again.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit . . . Ephesians 5:18 (NASB)

Here the Spirit commands us to do two things. First, we are commanded to not get drunk. That is, we are not to let intoxicating drink control us or fill us up. The point is who controls you and who controls me. The issue is one of control.

The second command is that we are to be filled up with the Holy Spirit. The Greek word that is translated as “filled” is *pleroo*. It refers to being filled up, like a glass filled with water to the point of overflowing. So, believers are not to let alcoholic drinks control us, but we are to let the Holy Spirit control us! This obviously means that we must submit to the Spirit if we are going to let Him control us.

This idea of who controls us is also reinforced by the Greek word “filled” because it is in the passive tense. The Greek passive tense means that someone or something is doing something to us. We receive the action—like someone cutting our hair. This means we are to let the Holy Spirit fill us or control us. Now, how does that happen? I think the answer is very

simple. Remember in Acts 4:27-31, that we are told some early church Christians prayed for boldness to preach the gospel. Then verse 31 says they were filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the gospel with boldness. That was the result of being filled with the Spirit!

So, every morning when I pray, I ask God the Father to have the Holy Spirit take control of me. After I pray, I do not feel any special sensation, but I have seen the Holy Spirit make significant changes in my life over the years. Peter T. O'Brien in his commentary on Ephesians says this about being filled with the Spirit.

... Paul's readers are urged to let the Spirit change them more and more into the image of God and Christ...¹

Notice that Peter O'Brien says we are "to let the Spirit change" us. So, the first principle of being filled with the Spirit is to submit to the Holy Spirit.

Second Principle — Obey God and Confess Your Sins. The second principle about being filled with the Holy Spirit is that we must obey God. This principle is revealed in several ways. First, notice that the word "dissipation" in some Bibles or "debauchery" in other Bibles refers to "out of control behavior." That is what happens when someone is drunk. The point is that we are not to be out of control! Instead, we are to be obeying God.

This is important because in Ephesians 4:30 we are told

that when we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit. We could say we are out of control. Here is Ephesians 4:30.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God... Ephesians 4:30 (NASB)

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 it is reworded as do not quench the Spirit.

Now if you are not sure that our sins grieve the Spirit, just read the verses before and after verse 30. For example, in Ephesians 4:31-32 we are told,



Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians

4:31-32 (NASB)

Notice that a number of sins are mentioned: bitterness, anger, clamor, slander, malice, not being kind to others, not being tender-hearted and not forgiving others. Unfortunately in this list, bitterness and a lack of forgiveness are two major sins of believers. People refuse to forgive for a variety of reasons. As a result, bitterness develops over time. Then they visit a counselor because the bitterness starts to affect their spiritual life and physical bodies. They need help. I do not want us to miss the point of verses 31-32 that these sins grieve the Spirit.

1. Peter T. O'Brien. The Letter to the Ephesians. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Apollos. 1999. p. 392.

Again, we could say that when believers are out of control, we grieve the Spirit.

In the next two verses, Ephesians 5:1-2, believers are urged to imitate God,

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. Ephesians 5:1-2 (NASB)

Then in verses 3-16, believers are urged to not sin again. So, why did Paul emphasize not sinning so much in these verses? The answer is that sin grieves the Spirit. When we sin, the Holy Spirit is hindered in His ministry to believers. I need to quickly add that He is still dwelling in the sinning believer, but the individual believer is not filled with the Spirit at that point.

So, in summary, the second principle to being filled with the Spirit is that we need to obey and please God. When we do sin, we must confess our sins to restore the relationship. So, the first principle of being filled with the Spirit is to submit to God. The second principle is that we are obey God and confess our sins when we are disobedient.

Third Principle — Dwell Richly In Scripture. The third principle about being filled with the Holy Spirit is found by comparing Ephesians 5:18-6:5 with Colossians 3:16-22. But first we will look at Ephesians 5:19-21.

... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Ephesians 5:19-21 (NASB)

Now watch the five action words, which are present participles in the Greek, which refer to ongoing action. They are speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks and submitting to one another. These are five benefits of being filled with the Spirit. Paul says that when believers are filled with the Spirit, they will be speaking and singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to others and to God. This is great news! Next, Paul

says Spirit-filled believers will be singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord. We are also told that Spirit-filled believers are constantly giving thanks to God for what He has done. All of these characteristics were true of King David. He joyfully wrote many psalms of praise as the result of the overflow of his joyful heart. So, if we combine all of these actions together, we have a beautiful picture of a Christian's joyful pattern of life. This does not mean that there is no place for mourning or sorrowing the death of a family member or some evil. What is being described is a pattern of life. Acts 13:52 is a fabulous example of joyful Christians,

And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52 (NASB)

In Luke 10:21 we are also told that Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit. The message of Scripture is that the pattern of life for a believer will be one of joy.

Next Ephesians 5:21 says that the pattern of life of a Spirit-filled believer is one of submitting to others. Humility is a defining mark of a Christian, and submission requires humility. Verse 22 says Spirit-filled wives will be submitting to husbands. Verse 25 says Spirit-filled husbands will be submitting in the sense that they love their wives as they love Christ. Ephesians 6:1 says that children will be obeying their parents and Ephesians 6:5 says that slaves will be submitting to their masters. Today, we should think of this as employees submitting to employers. These are the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now we want to compare this passage to Colossians 3:16.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (NASB)

Here we are urged to let the word of Christ richly dwell within us. The Greek word for "richly" has the idea of very great. This means we are to read, study and study the Word of God. That is the only way the Word of God will richly dwell within us. It is not quality time in the Scriptures for five minutes. Instead,

it is both quantity and quality. So, if we are richly studying the Word of God, watch what happens. Verses 18-22 say,

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives . . . Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord . . . Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth . . . Colossians 3:18-22 (NASB)

Now if we compare these benefits to the benefits in Ephesians 5:18-6:5, what do we discover? We discover that Ephesians 5:17-6:5 and Colossians 3:18-22 are parallel passages. Ephesians 5:17-6:5 says be filled with the Spirit and Colossians 3:16 says to dwell richly in the Word of God. Then the benefits are identical. Dwelling richly in the Word of God produces the same results that being filled with the Spirit produces. The results are identical. This means that being filled with the Spirit and dwelling in the Word of God go together, and the picture that is painted is a joyful one. This gives us the third principle for being filled with the Spirit. We must study and study the Word of God to be filled. This principle is also reinforced by the fact that Hebrews 5:14 says that we need to know the Word of God in order to discern good from evil, or in order to not sin.

In summary, how are we filled with the Spirit? First, we submit to the Holy Spirit. Second, we obey His will and confess our sins when we are disobedient. Third, we must also be studying the Word of God richly.

WALKING BY THE SPIRIT. Now I want to connect another very important passage to Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16. The passage starts at Galatians 5:16.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16 (NASB)

Once again, we are given another command from our Lord. That is, every believer is commanded to be walking in the Spirit. We need to ask, "What is the benefit?" The answer is, we will not be carrying out the desire of the flesh. Now this raises two questions. First, how do we walk in the Spirit? The answer is that walking in the Spirit refers to the moment by moment

filling of the Spirit. That is, walking in the Spirit occurs as we are constantly or repeatedly being filled by the Spirit. This means that when we do not obey or sin, we have stopped walking in the Spirit. Why do we stop walking? Because sin grieves the Holy Spirit. We must then confess our sins to restore our relationship with God. We also stop walking when we take vacations from the Word of God. Being filled is a point in time event and walking is the pattern of life.

The second question is, what does it mean to not be carrying out the desire of the flesh? It means that we will be sinning less and less. This is incredible news! Notice the next verse says,

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Galatians 5:17 (NASB)

Verse 17 says that the Spirit and flesh are at war with one another. The apostle describes the war that we have with sin in Romans 7:14-24. In verse 24 he says that he wants to be free from this body of death. That is, Paul makes it clear that we will never achieve total victory over sin until we die. But walking in the Spirit help us to sin less and less.

What are the deeds of the flesh? It is sin. Here is Galatians 5:19-21.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB)

What are the deeds of the flesh? Sin! So, if we are walking in the Spirit, we will be sinning less and less. The second benefit of walking in the Spirit is given in verses 22-23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

What are these benefits? They are called the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that the first three are love, peace and joy. We have been seeing a lot of joy when we are filled with the Spirit!

CONCLUSION. Let me speak personally for a moment. I have found in my own experience that as I studied the Word of God, confessed my sins and asked the Father to have the Spirit take control of me, I have seen patterns of sin disappear and attitudes change - sometimes quickly. No, I am not perfect. I have also discovered that God then calls my attention to other

sins with which I need to struggle. I will never be perfect in this life and no believer will be perfect, but I have learned that walking in the Spirit works.

So walking in the Spirit is a moment by moment filling of the Spirit and that moment by moment filling occurs as we : 1) dwell in the Word of God richly, 2) obey God and confesses our sins when we sin and 3) ask the Holy Spirit to control us. And as a result, our pattern of life is that we are becoming more like Christ.