

St. Paul urges us to walk by the Spirit. That is to say, follow the Spirit. Seek first what the Holy Spirit gives. The Holy Spirit gives forgiveness of sins won by Christ's bitter suffering and death in your place. He makes you a member of God's kingdom and credits you with the righteousness of Christ, which covers up all your guilt. He rules your heart with his grace. And with this, he produces love, joy, and peace. He makes us patient, kind, good, faithful, and gentle, even as he gives us self-control. This is the path of righteousness on which the Holy Spirit leads us. It is the way of holiness.

Paul distinguishes this way of holiness from the ways of the world and the sinful flesh. He calls these the elementary ways of the world (Gal 4:3). Jesus calls it all Mammon. They are worldly concerns and desires. Paul says that before we knew Christ we were slaves to these elementary ways. We were serving this Mammon. But as Jesus says, you can't serve two masters. The elementary ways of the world teach us to invest our time and energy into getting ahead in this life. As we rely on our own understanding, we remain slaves to our own desires. And Jesus shows how this only makes us anxious and worried about what tomorrow will bring. It makes us obsess over what we will eat and what we will wear.

To make someone holy is to set someone apart. The Holy Spirit makes us holy. He sets us apart from the ways of the world. And he teaches us to seek after what only Christ can give. He teaches us to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

The kingdom of God isn't so much a place as it is God's activity. God reigns. Jesus teaches us to seek this reign. Seek the activity of God in your life. Strive to hold onto his righteousness. This righteousness can't be earned by you, no matter how much you toil and sweat in this life. It is a free gift in Jesus Christ. It is what Jesus himself has done. He has borne in himself all judgment against your sins. He has been raised from the dead. And the Holy Spirit gives you everything Jesus has won for you. He gives it to you in baptism. He gives it to you in the body and blood of Jesus. He gives it to you in the preaching of his gospel. He gives it all to you. He even gives you the faith to believe it, and he strengthens you in that same faith. He gives you eternal life, inviting you to live every day under the reign of God's grace in Jesus Christ. To have all of this is what it means to live by the Spirit.

So Paul tells us also to follow the Spirit. Walk on the path he has given you. Seek first what he gives. Pursue every good thing he promises to produce in you. In other words, be holy.

You can't be holy because of what you do. You can only be holy because of what the Spirit gives you. He gives you eternal life in Jesus Christ. It follows that he guides you to walk in this life. Walk on the way prepared for you by God. Let's now consider how the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk on this way of holiness, which has been set apart for us.

Let us not get conceited, challenging or getting jealous of one another. The way, which has been set apart by God, is not driven by rivalries. We know that we are righteous solely because of God's grace and favor in Jesus Christ. We stand righteous before God only through faith in his promise. This is apart from any works we have done in the past or will do in the future. We therefore know that there is nothing we have that we didn't also receive. God has given us all good gifts purely out of his fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in us. We therefore have no need to set up rivalries. Your business, your talents, your children and family – all of it has come from God's gracious hand. This is the insight we receive from God when we have been declared righteous through faith in Christ. This great gift of God's Son given up for us all also leads us to recognize that all things we have

are free gifts from God. When God reigns in us, he sets us free from worrying about being better than one another or keeping up with the Joneses.

Now, if God's kingdom, righteousness, and all good things have been given to you freely by God's grace in Jesus Christ, then how does this affect the way you see the weakness of your fellow Christian? When you see him doing something wrong, you know that you would be doing something even worse if it weren't for God's mercy. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit, you would still be a slave to Mammon and all the basic ways of this dying world. It is by giving you this insight that the Holy Spirit shapes your attitude toward those who have fallen into error. So Paul says, "If you find anyone doing wrong, you who have the Spirit should set him right. But be gentle and keep an eye on yourself, since you may be tempted too."

Living under the reign of Christ and his righteousness continues to shape the way we see our fellow Christians. As he bore our burdens of sin and death on the cross, he has taught us to love one another in the same way. *Help one another carry these burdens.* This is how we follow what Christ has taught us.

Paul tells us to bear one another's burdens. Help one another carry the burdens God places on each of us. But then he says, "Everyone will have to carry his own burden." He seems to be contradicting himself. But he isn't contradicting himself at all. He is teaching us that each will be accountable for his own life. God calls you to help and encourage your fellow Christian. Correct him with gentleness when he goes astray. Comfort him with the gospel when he is mourning over his sins. Be patient with him. Pray for him. Rejoice with him in the happy times and mourn with him in the sad times. But know this. While you are called to help your brother in Christ, you can't live the Christian life for him. You aren't Christ. You aren't the Holy Spirit. You can't create faith in anyone's heart. Only the Word of God can do this. If we lose sight of this, then we think that we are the ones in control. But we know that in and of ourselves we are nothing but dust and ashes. When we walk on the way set apart for us by the Spirit of God, then we learn not to fool ourselves into thinking that we are anything more. When we bear with one another, forgiving one another, helping one another, the Holy Spirit guides us to recognize all the more that our true worth is found only in Christ. Our boast is not in our own strength. It is in the weakness of Christ's suffering. It is in his blood, which alone declares us righteous.

The reason congregations are supposed to provide for their pastors is not because they see some worldly worth in them. They aren't making a financial investment. And yet, they are making an investment. They are sowing a seed. But the worth and value of this seed is hidden from the eyes of the world. Sure, there are some things the world can recognize as valuable. If carried out faithfully, the Ministry of the Word certainly promotes good morals. It encourages healthy marriages. It improves reading, singing, and other useful skills as both young and old learn the Bible, hymns, and the liturgy. This makes for good culture. But if morals, music, and stability are what make the Ministry of the Word so valuable, then the world can easily find other alternatives. These alternative ministries and services might even seem more efficient in bringing about results. But if all we care about is what seems expedient to our own desires, then we will reap only destruction.

Christians, on the other hand, invest in something much greater, set apart from all this world counts as valuable. Christians stake their entire lives on the promise of the gospel. They know that they need the forgiveness of their sins more than fame, salvation more than possessions, and the nurturing of their faith more than food or clothing.

When you support the Ministry in this place, when you teach your children to pray, learn, and talk about Jesus, when you love those who gather with you around the gospel and sacraments, when you confess what you have been taught about your salvation, and when you set this message of the gospel as the treasure above all treasures, then you are not investing in what is here today and gone tomorrow. You are sowing the seed given by the Holy Spirit. By this seed of his gospel, he promises eternal life. He causes you to live under Christ and his kingdom, serving him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

When we walk on this way set apart for us, we have hope. It is hope grounded in the fact that Jesus is risen from dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. We can therefore be certain of where this way of holiness is leading. We know its end, because it has already been given to us in Christ. We look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. This is our hope. And this hope will not disappoint us. So Paul encourages us not to get tired of doing good. He tells us not to get tired, because he knows how tiring it can often be. You do your duty. You bear with the weaknesses of your fellow Christians. You strive to live at peace with one another, to raise your children to confess their Savior, and to help those in need. And you pray. Yet, who notices? The investment doesn't seem to pay off. But Paul tells us not to lose heart. Don't worry about tomorrow. Because you know how this all ends. There is laid up for you an inheritance in heaven, secured by the blood, death, and resurrection of your Lord. So don't give up. Don't despair. At the right time, when no one expects it, Jesus will return to take us home. Then there will be no pain, no burdens, no slavery, no worries, no sin, no death. This is what the Holy Spirit is preparing us for right now.

Finally, Paul teaches us that the way of holiness involves doing good to all people. This includes those who lie about us, ignorant about what we as Christians believe. But this especially includes those who are part of the household of faith. Those who are members of the family of believers, our fellow confessors of Jesus Christ gathering around his Word and sacraments – these people take priority. These are to be our delight above all others. Because these are the ones who will spend eternity with us as we worship our Savior in everlasting light. Seek what they seek. Follow the Lord whom they follow. Hold onto the promise they hope in. And walk with them on the way of holiness. Let us pray:

O Christ, You give a living fountain,
Your Spirit in Your precious Word,
Whose streams shall lead us to Your Mountain
Where neither death nor threats are heard.
As faith receives Your righteousness,
We walk the way of holiness.

This way is led by Your good Spirit
Who guards us in this wilderness,
Through all the troubles we inherit
And all our fears and bitterness,
To seek Your kingdom's righteousness
And stay the course of holiness.

Now grant us grace, O blessed Savior,
To walk this way in hope assured,
That, resting in Your Father's favor,
We'll reap what Your own blood secured.
Thus, when we rise, Your name we'll bless,
The source of life and holiness! Amen