

**MY** son is in the prime of his life. He's an avid rock climber and in excellent physical condition. I am amazed at the things he is able to climb. He's like Spider Man. For the past eight years he's been working out regularly and taking supplements (none of that dangerous stuff). I used to think he was wasting his money, but I soon came to understand that youth alone wouldn't give him the finger strength needed to climb a 200-foot vertical rock face.

Until recently I pictured Jesus much as I saw my son. Loren had his youth, but Jesus was God. Surely he had all the power he would ever need. After all, he created everything. I knew he needed to get away from time to time to be refreshed by the Father, but for some reason I thought the Holy Spirit was more for us than for him. That changed when I conducted a study on the Holy Spirit. Passage after passage told how Jesus was

- filled by the Spirit.
- led by the Spirit.
- anointed by the Spirit.
- empowered by the Spirit.

Consider these accounts of Jesus' dependence on the Holy Spirit (emphasis added). "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was *led about by the Spirit* in the desert" (Luke 4:1). The Holy Spirit directed him to enter the wilderness and led him when he got there. "Jesus returned to Galilee *in the power of the Spirit*" (Luke 4:14). "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.'*" (Luke 4:16-18).

## Depending on the Spirit

If God in human form required the Spirit's power, how much more dependent am I?

### What about Me?

When I finished the study I was faced with a startling realization. If God in human form required the Spirit's power, how much more dependent am I?

A recent episode drove the point home. It seemed easy enough. Remove the old ceiling fan, then assemble and install the new one. I completed the project in half an hour. The fan blades rotated perfectly. Only one problem. The lights connected to the fan no longer worked. Two hours and a few sparks later, I was scanning the yellow pages. I needed help. Then it hit me. I hadn't prayed. I didn't think I needed any help. I couldn't believe I had slipped back into the old "I've got it covered" mode after the lessons I had recently learned about walking in the Spirit. The truth of 1 Corinthians 10:12 smacked me between the eyes. "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (*New King James Version*).

The episode reminded me of the internal conflicts I had been trying to resolve prior to my study. I thought I had met God's basic expectations. I enjoyed regular quiet times. I looked for opportunities to share my faith. I exercised my spiritual gifts in my church. So why was I feeling defeated? Why was I frustrated by my lack of spiritual progress? Why was I battling the same temptations I faced a year ago? I thought I would be a better Christian by avoiding certain things and doing others, but it wasn't working. My mind knew it had the power to overcome, but my body wasn't getting the message. I understood what the Bible says about the flesh and the Spirit, but something wasn't connecting. Why did the flesh seem to be winning most of the battles? Where was the freedom?

### Winning the Battle

The turning point came when someone asked me if I thought I was a better person today than I was the day I was saved. My response was, "Of course I am. I don't do the things I used to do. I am maturing. I'm more interested in spiritual things than I used to be. I try my best to obey God. He expects me to be improving. No, I'm not where I'd like to be, but I'm moving in the right direction."

If you can relate to my answer, you will probably be shocked to learn that my response was unbiblical. It represented the same confused thinking Paul had to correct with his letter to the Galatians. As he explained, we have only two options for living—in the flesh or in the Spirit. There is no third option (improving the flesh). Find a line of some sort on the floor—a change in materials or a threshold under a door. Picture the flesh on one side and the Spirit on the other. This line will represent the battleground for the war within you—the war between the flesh and the Spirit.

The words in Galatians 5:19-21 represent all the flesh has to offer—things like immorality, impurity, sensuality, and all the rest. These lie within all of us.

As much as it hurts to admit it, we can do nothing worthy of our Lord's praise. Apart from our availability, we have nothing to offer. To make matters worse, I had felt superior to those whose sins were obvious. I wouldn't think of comparing myself to winos, child-molesters, and mass murderers. God, however, says there is no difference between me and them. His standard has always been perfection (Matthew 5:48), and indeed there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Being in the company of the dregs of society stripped away all my pride. Humility suddenly seemed more appropriate.

► By Ed Rogers

### All We'll Ever Need

The "new man" we become at salvation is all on the Spirit side of the line. It represents our new identity. It's the real "new us." It's who we have become in Jesus, described with terms like "righteous" and "holy" (2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:4). When we're on the Spirit side of the line we have it all—love, joy, peace, the works—everything that reflects the "new creation" we became as believers (2 Corinthians 5:17). Here, we are as Adam was before the fall—perfect and complete. Here, we are poised to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, just as he came to Jesus. Doesn't this sound like a good place to be?

Sadly, pride keeps us from admitting what Scripture says is true. We are offended at the thought that we haven't matured or improved in our Christian walk. But if the flesh will always be rotten to the core, and the Spirit is a manifestation of the never-changing God, what, then, is spiritual maturity? Maturity is learning to walk more in the Spirit and less in the flesh. It's that simple. Our spiritual maturity isn't making the flesh better. It's crucifying the flesh daily, choosing not to carry out the deeds of the flesh, but instead walking in the Spirit.

So the next time you find yourself frustrated over your lack of progress in certain areas, remind yourself that your flesh will always be there like a pack of wild dogs clamoring to be fed. Feed the Spirit more than you feed the flesh.

And remember, if God the Son needed the Holy Spirit to minister effectively and to combat Satan and his schemes, how much more do we? ■

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