

The Necessity of Following the Spirit: Having a Faith that LIVES!

- - Contrasted With Doing "Religious Activities" - -

The flesh (or corrupt nature) wants us to use our bodies for the purpose of gratifying the flesh's desires. But those who now live by (are controlled by) the Spirit must use their bodies for the purpose of doing what the *Spirit* desires. It's an *obligation* we have, not merely one *option* among many. Paul warns us that people who live "according to the flesh" *will die* (spiritual death). It doesn't matter whether the person *claims* to be "Spirit-filled"... if that person does not live the change that he *claims* has occurred within him (a change from following the flesh to following the Spirit), his claims are nothing more than self-deception: *he will die*. It is the person who *follows* the Spirit's leading - not merely claiming to have the Spirit within him - who is the child of God (Romans 8:12-14). If you continue to serve sin as your master (even if your "service" is nothing more than the *absence* of serving God), you are its slave, no matter how stubbornly you may claim that the opposite is true.

So what is your obligation? It is this: Kill the body's misdeeds; make it submit to you (in keeping with the leading of the Spirit); make your body a living sacrifice; honor God with it. Some of the passages that mention these things are: Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (chapter 10 gives examples of those who did *not* do it); Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Those who belong to God will be willing to obey God - to do what he commands. This is because the change in their hearts has actually occurred - just as the Bible says it does. However, this doesn't mean that their obedience will be perfect and complete. But the *willingness to obey* will be present, and the "*practice*" of obedience will increase, as the person grows in Christ (Philippians 2:13). They won't call obedience "legalism," but rather, "freedom" (Psalm 119:45; James 1:25) - *freedom from the slavery of sin*.

Is "following the Spirit" (obedience to God) a burden to you?

One's attitude is a reflection of one's heart. Is obedience a burden to you, or a joy and delight?

Obedience could be a burden for different reasons. First, it could be a burden if you do not really belong to God. In the Old Testament, when the nation of Israel had turned away from God, they began to consider obedience to his laws a burden.

Micah 6:3 - "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me."

Malachi 1:13 - And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it [the Lord's "table" of sacrifices] contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD.

Obedience could also become a burden if the activities you consider "obedience to God" are actually of human origin. Many of the church activities that exist today were invented by people, not by God. It is possible that, in your attempt to "follow the Spirit," you have actually become preoccupied with man-made teachings and religious activities - things which God never commanded you to do. As far as God is concerned, you do *not* have to do them! Rid yourself of some of these man-made activities - these burdens! Free yourself, so that you can do what God has in store for you! Of course, the modern "pharisees" and religious leaders may get upset if you don't follow their man-made rules; but you will ultimately be accountable to God, not to them!

Luke 11:46 - Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

God's laws are NOT burdensome. Look at what he says about his commands:

Matthew 11:28,30 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery [i.e., to ceremonial rituals that are no longer necessary].

1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...

What constitutes obedience? Our only obligation is to do what the Bible tells us to do. Our total obligation can be summarized by the commands to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). And as far as our "neighbor" is concerned, it includes those we might consider our enemies - compare with Matthew 5:43-47. (God only wants us to treat *others* the same way we want him to treat *us*! We *all*, at one time in our lives, were enemies of God - Romans 5:10.)

As far as our relationship to God is concerned, we do *not* have any obligation to follow man-made religious rules or practices. At times, we may choose to do so, if we conclude that it is for our neighbor's good. But even then, it would not be out of loyalty to the religious practice itself, but out of love for our neighbor. Our loyalty to God and our desire to love others in a way that pleases God would have complete priority over any of these religious practices that many people hold so dear.

The "Good Samaritan" understood love (Luke 10:25-37). We should learn from his example. But there were two other travelers who passed by ahead of him, who also teach us important lessons. They show us that religious activities often go against everything that stands for love for God and neighbor.