

Self-Control: WALK by the Spirit.®

But I say, walk by the Spirit,
and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.
Gal. 3:16

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I. Introduction

On October 12, 1998, Mary Peragine wrote in the “Opinion” Section of Bergen County, New Jersey’s newspaper, The Record, “President Clinton evidently has no self-control. Self-discipline is a key characteristic of a good leader. Without self-discipline, a president cannot put the interests of the nation above his own. For the good of the country, Clinton must resign or be impeached.” Unfortunately, the nation didn’t agree with her. President Clinton did get impeached, but he wasn’t the loser. Self-control and morality were the losers.

Just when this nation thought it had gotten past this scandal, President Clinton’s wife, Hillary, explained to the world in August, 1999, that her husband was a victim of an emotionally abusive childhood that led him to his adulterous behavior. When all the verbiage is cut away from Hillary’s statement, she has told us that Bill’s mother made him do it!

Following this line of “thinking,” I have to be honest and admit that Bill Clinton made me write this paper. Without the scandal he caused, someone else would have made me write on a different subject. I am also not responsible for the quality of this work because, even as I write, I am a victim without the self-control necessary to produce the kind of work I desire to produce. Let me explain. It all started in my childhood...

II. Secular Self-Control

The secular world view says that all people have "good intentions" which they fall short of achieving. They create many classifications of unwanted behavior, such as ordinary bad habits, selfishness, sins, disorders, addictions, compulsions, obsessions, etc. These behaviors may range from controllable to uncontrollable depending on the extent to which a person practices them.

Lipson and Perkins wrote a book explaining why people don't behave the way they intend to behave. They classify how behavior is "blocked," i.e. why many don't have self-control in one or more areas of their lives. Their approach is representative of the current thinking in this area.

They assume that behavior is the result of many forces. This includes the will, which pushes and pulls us in many directions. They abhor the concept of "will power." They say that much self-help advice is very simple and correct, yet useless. It can't be implemented since the will is not strong enough to make the changes. However, if the forces that block a person's good intentions were understood, they could counter those forces and do what they intended to do. They classified five different kinds of blocks.

1. **A strong force in the environment may block intended or desired behavior; it overpowers the will.** These are the constant temptations. Examples: A strong attraction to chocolate ruins Bill's diet. A desire to have fun keeps Bill from getting his counseling paper done. When these forces overwhelm one's best intentions, it is said that the person is weak-willed. These authors say that will power is frequently weak, usually over-estimated, and a false hope. Instead of "will," we use our brain to devise ways of containing these strong forces.

2. **Some strong external forces are hidden from us, and, thus, since we can't combat them handily, they easily block our intended behavior.** We know the forces are there only because we see the results. Example: Our grades in college are D's and F's (the ability is there but we fail because college is the parent's choice, not ours). To understand these external blocks, we must seriously search for the reasons, the hidden forces. When we accurately see the hidden forces (not easy), we have a better chance of getting back in control.
3. **Besides strong external forces, there are strong forces generated by our own self-evaluations.** Example: During a conversation, you may panic thinking, "If I say something they'll know how dumb I am." Thoughts and feelings about ourselves are powerful forces that frequently block us from our intended behavior. By observing our internal dialogue and self-appraisals, we can gain better control over these blocks.
4. **There are activities that can "control" us: eating, drinking, listening to music, watching TV, sex, internet, athletics, and even cleaning the house can control us once we get started. Becoming addicted to these activities block us from doing other things.** These controlling activities may have a relatively weak initial attraction for us but, once we give ourselves over to the activity, their control can hold us.
5. **Blocks occur when a complex set of forces pushes us in certain directions.** Examples: A person creates more problems drinking to avoid problems. An over-protective parent produces a more and more helpless child. These are self-closing systems and this vicious circle occurs in many situations. Complex but powerful and mostly hidden forces are pushing these people in disastrous directions.

This is a quick summary of some of the secular world's view of out-of-control behavior. Washton and Boundy make the point that many of our self-help efforts are directed at the bad habit and not at the block or real underlying problem. For example, it is common to see drinking or smoking or over eating or procrastination or TV addiction as the problem, while, in truth, the more basic problem is the hurt, anxiety, emptiness,

frustration, shame, etc. (feelings and thoughts), which the drinking, eating, escaping behaviors attempt to relieve. These unwanted surface behaviors are not the real problems; they are attempted solutions! The underlying feelings are the problems! Having the will power to stop the unwanted habits is not enough.

The world's solutions to these problems are complex and involve many concepts:

- Intentionality, the motivation for short-term vs. long-term goals
- Cognitive strategies
- Eliminating conditions that undermine the "will"
- Eliminating emotional reactions that overpower best intentions
- Eliminating strategies for intentional or unintentional self-deception and the development of false beliefs (such as the smoker who doesn't believe smoking will hurt him)
- Uncovering and eliminating unconscious motives

There are debates about each of these areas including the question of whether or not self-control is even possible. While the 1970's and 1980's saw a rise in the cognitive approach to solving human problems, the 1990's have been a decade for holistic approaches to self-control that incorporate feelings, emotions, and external forces as foundational causes for human behavior.

III. Biblical Self-Control

The concept of biblical self-control is found in multiple places in the New Testament. The Greek word is ἐγκράτεια (“egkrateia”) and means “to exercise complete control over one’s desires and actions”.¹ As Vine’s states, “the various powers bestowed by God upon man are capable of abuse; the right use demands the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God”.² The term can apply to the general condition of a person’s life, i.e. they exhibit “self-control.” The term can also apply to the antithesis, “they are out-of-control,” or it can apply primarily to a specific area in their life (e.g. they are out-of-control sexually) with side-effects that affect every other area of their life. Both views will be assumed as we work through the subject.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians gives us excellent teaching on the lack of biblical self-control as well as how to attain biblical self-control. In Gal. 3:3 Paul introduces our subject and some key terms pertaining to self-control.

A. *Challenge facing all Christians*

† Galatians 3:3

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Paul begins verse 3 with the incredulous and rhetorical question, “Are you so foolish?” Vines says this “signifies not understanding, not applying the mind. It signifies senseless, unworthy lack of understanding. See Unwise!”³ In other words, Paul is asking, “Are you so stupid?” Paul then answers by telling them what they were being so foolish about: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” This question contrasts two key elements in the battle for self control: Spirit and flesh.

This is not the place to cover every ministry of the Holy Spirit, but it is very important to remember that our Christian life began in the Holy Spirit. He convicted us of our sin, brought us to repentance, and energized the faith that saved us. He has sealed us for eternal life; He is our guarantee of eternity with our Lord Jesus Christ. Through His ministry, the Holy Spirit rescued us “from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, Jesus Christ.” That is how we have “begun by the Spirit.” The forthcoming contrast shows that we are to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit too.

In verse 3, Paul contrasts the implied Spirit-led life with human effort by using the question, “are you now being perfected by the flesh?” “Perfected” means “brought to completion.” Having just covered the first aspect of our salvation, justification, which was completed in the past, Paul moves to the second aspect of salvation, sanctification. In sanctification we are kept by Jesus Christ, our advocate and intercessor, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The third aspect of salvation, glorification, is not covered here.

Paul’s contrast condemns the idea of sanctification by human effort spawned from our unredeemed humanity. Paul is asking, “Are you now being sanctified, i.e. brought to spiritual completion by the flesh?” The word “flesh” is the Greek word, *σαρκὶ* (“sarx”), and it has three uses in the New Testament. First, flesh can mean our physical body. John 1:14 says “And the Word became flesh,” meaning that the Word, Jesus Christ took on a physical, human body. After His resurrection Jesus confirmed his physical resurrection saying, “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Luke 24:39). Second, flesh can mean our fallen-ness, i.e. our unredeemed humanity. This is

where sin exists in us – in the body and mind. Our unredeemed flesh expresses itself in our thoughts, actions, and feelings. It is the moral and spiritual weakness still hanging on to our unredeemed humanity. If we are entirely “in the flesh,” we are unsaved (Rom. 7:5). As a Christian, Paul states our earthly condition when he writes, “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is not*.” (Romans 7:17-18). Paul is saying there’s a new man, a new “I” living in me, but this new man is in the old flesh. The flesh is the bridge that the world uses to reach us. The flesh and “the world” are closely related. They complement each other. They both serve the same master – Satan. They both serve the same purpose – evil. Therefore they both fight the same foe – God. Before we were saved, our old nature was in harmony with our flesh. Now we have a new nature. Now we have the Holy Spirit and He is fighting the flesh! As a Christian, our ultimate victory over the flesh is guaranteed. However, until that time of victory, our struggle with the flesh is guaranteed also. The third New Testament usage of the word flesh takes the meaning “human effort.” This is effort on our own to accomplish the supernatural. It is trying to use our unredeemed flesh to accomplish God’s sanctification.

Paul is telling us that our salvation, in its initiation, was the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our spiritual living must be a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit too. We must live our Christian life in the power of the Spirit! One of the most serious mistakes Christians make is trying to “get sanctified”, i.e. “grow spiritually,” without the Holy Spirit. That is, we use false, worthless human solutions that replace the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We try to replace the work of God with human effort! An excellent Old

Testament example is in the Book of Jeremiah where God indicts Israel for turning from Him to idolatry. God says they are hewing for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:11-13). Hewing a cistern took great effort, as these often went forty feet deep! God says that these self-hewn cisterns are worthless because they “can hold no water.” All that effort led to a cistern that did absolutely nothing as it failed at its basic, intended purpose. Metaphorically, God was telling them that their idolatry, i.e. their religious self-effort, did absolutely nothing for them spiritually! We must let the Holy Spirit sanctify us. If we do not let the Holy Spirit do His work, then we either quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thes. 5:19) by refusing to respond to His leading or we grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) by our sin and disobedience. The key to Christian living, i.e. self-control, is to be perfected by the Holy Spirit, i.e. Spirit-controlled. If we try to offer human solutions to spiritual problems, the result will be to grow more like the world than like Jesus Christ.

B. Command for all Christians

† Galatians 5:16

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Having raised the concern of self-effort in Galatians 3, Paul returns to the subject in-depth in Galatians 5 to tell us how to “get perfected” by the Holy Spirit. In verse 16 Paul sets forth the most basic, fundamental truth for all Christian living: “walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh”! Paul has just concluded two chapters on justification by faith alone and has now turned to applying this doctrine to Christian living. He is showing us the sanctification that results from justification. The immediately preceding verses show us how we are called to the freedom to obey God

and, now, Paul is going to show us how starting in verse 16.

Paul begins verse 16 with the command “walk by the Spirit.” This is a command to walk *continually* by the Spirit. Paul is saying that the Christian life is like a walk, unfolding one step at a time. Every step we take is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. The metaphor of walking carries the meaning of a habitual, constant pattern of life. As Christians, we already have the indwelling Spirit (Rom 8:9, 1 Cor. 6:19). Paul is saying that we are simply to respond, step-by-step, moment-by-moment, day-by-day to His power and direction. The metaphor of walking boils down to self-control in daily conduct. There is never a time when you just “arrive” and you are permanently spiritual. We never totally overcome sin. But, we can overcome sin as a pattern of life by walking in the Spirit. “Walk” is the general term by which the Christian life is defined in Scripture. Other parts of the New Testament tell us we are to:

- † Walk in purity (Rom. 13:13 in negation),
- † Walk content with the place God has called us to in life (1 Cor. 7:17),
- † Walk in faith (2 Co. 5:7),
- † Walk in the good works that God has prepared (Eph. 2:10),
- † Walk in a manner worthy of your calling (Eph. 4:1-3) which includes humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance to one another in love, preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,
- † Walk differently than the unsaved (Eph. 4:17-32),
- † Walk in light: goodness, righteousness and truth (Eph. 5:8-9),
- † Walk as wise men; making the most of our time (Eph. 5:15-16),
- † Walk the same way Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2:6),
- † Walk according to God’s commandments which shows our love for Him (2 Jn. 6),
- † Walk in truth (3 Jn. 3-4)

How are we going to do all these? There is only one way – by walking by the Spirit.

The above list defines the daily life of a Christian. It is the Spirit who produces all of these results. You can take the whole of Christian life and reduce it to this – walk by the

Spirit. You can take all of the commands of the New Testament and reduce them to walking by the Spirit. That includes self-control. Christian self-control is accomplished by walking by the Spirit. The sum of it all is – walk by the Spirit!

Paul continues in verse 16 saying that, if you walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. “Carry out” means to fulfill or finish. In other words, if you walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of your flesh to their fulfillment. “Desires” (KJV calls them “lusts”) means the desires, cravings, longings, evil yearnings, etc., for what is forbidden. These are our fleshly passions and lusts. The word carries the idea of the desires being very personal and strong.

Paul has set forth a principle here and follows in verse 17 with an important point. In verse 17, Paul says that this is not an easy principle to live out! There is a conflict here.

C. Conflict in all Christians (Gal 5:17-23)

† Galatians 5:17-18

17 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. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

1. Conflict Defined (v.17-18)

Paul says that the conflict we all face is that our flesh sets its desire against the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit sets its desire against the flesh! This conflict was assumed in verse 16 and Paul now explains it. When we became Christians we became a new creation. We were crucified with Christ and now a new “I” lives. However, sin still exists because we are new creatures captive in unredeemed flesh.

Until we are glorified, we will have a battle with our unredeemed flesh. Paul says here in verse 17 that there is so much opposition by our flesh that “you may not do the things you please.” This is the Christian battle that Paul laments about in Romans 7:14-25.

All of our sin arises from our flesh. Every wrong action, reaction, idea, word, emotion, and attitude is from the flesh. The flesh is the bridge by which the world and Satan reach us. The flesh desires that we disobey God, that we doubt and distrust God, and that we become useless to God. The flesh desires that we lack self-control, have relationship problems, marriage problems, family problems, anxiety, fear, pride, anger, bitterness, hatred, worry, etc. In other words, the flesh desires that we sin and that our sin control our life so that we lose our witness for God. It desires everything that is the opposite of what the Holy Spirit desires for us.

So, we must find some means to subdue, control, the flesh. Since all of our problems, all of our sin for which we seek solutions, is caused by the flesh, then the solution to everything is to overcome the flesh! The only way to overcome the flesh is to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). We cannot offer human solutions for spiritual problems. Spiritual answers are not found in psychology, methodology, human effort, good ideas, clever plans, systems, etc. The way to overcome the driving, compelling, overwhelming desires of the flesh is to walk by the Spirit. The idea that we can come up with some human solution to our problems is not Scriptural; it is foolish (Gal. 3:3). A human solution is just more of the flesh. The flesh is not only our unredeemed humanness, but also all of our human effort. It is that natural effort, independent of God, that is weak, helpless and sinful! Psychology is just a human answer! All self-help, pragmatic solutions for spiritual problems are the flesh at work! We have to remember that the

flesh is not going to control the flesh! If we have a problem and we turn to anything on the human level, we are adding fuel to the fire! But, if we walk by the Spirit we will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

Paul adds, in verse 18, that if we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the Law. This is almost equivalent to verse 16. “Under the Law” means law-keeping which is human effort, or as Paul said in Gal 3:3, “being perfected by the flesh.” That’s what the Judaizers were convincing the Galatians to do. He’s continuing to destroy the idea of using the flesh for any spiritual means. Verse 18 says that if we are being led by Holy Spirit then we are not going to be trapped in a system where, by human effort, we are trying to attain spiritual goals.

2. Conflict Categorized and Contrasted (Gal 5:19-23)

† Galatians 5:19-21

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:
immorality, impurity, sensuality,
20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of
anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,
21 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.

In these verses, Paul gives an open-ended list of the “deeds of the flesh” – a list of sinful behaviors that come from the flesh. He begins verse 19 stating, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident.” It is important to see that the following list of deeds are not produced by a lack of self-esteem, a tragic childhood, etc. These are deeds of the flesh. This list can be categorized as follows:

† **Sexual behavior:** immorality, impurity, sensuality

† **False Religion:** idolatry, sorcery

† **Relationship Problems:** enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of

- anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying
- † **Drinking, Public orgies:** drunkenness, carousing
- † **Every other problem in a Christian's life:** and things like these

Remembering that Paul said in verse 16 that, if we walk by the Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh, it can be said that the solution to each of those “deeds of the flesh” is to walk by the Spirit. For example, if you have

- † Sexual behavior problems - Walk by the Spirit!
- † Idolatry problems (e.g. worshipping money, etc.) – Walk by the Spirit!
- † Drug problems (sorcery) – Walk by the Spirit!
- † Relationship problems - Walk by the Spirit!
- † Marriage problems - Walk by the Spirit!
- † Strife problems (not getting along with people in general) - Walk by the Spirit!
- † Anger problems - Walk by the Spirit!
- † Drinking problems - Walk by the Spirit!

We can find all of our problems here! They are all the flesh! Paul really closes the door on this subject at the end of verse 21 by saying that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God! In other words, these are the patterns of an unsaved person. If they are the unbroken patterns of our life then we aren't Christians!

However, Paul then contrasts, in verses 22 and 23, the results realized the Christian who walks by the Spirit:

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

This list is one of the most studied lists of Christian attributes found in the New Testament. Here, Paul epitomizes everything a Christian desires to become during his earthly walk. Included in this list is self-control. Here, self-control has reference to

restraining passions and appetites. It is important to note that Paul clearly lists self-control as attained through the Holy Spirit and not through self-effort. If your life is out-of-control, the only solution is to walk by the Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is self-control! It is also important to note that the antithesis of any of the other items on the list constitutes a lack of self-control in that particular area. Considering each antithesis, the same approach can be taken with verse 23 that was used with verses 19-21. For example, if you have problems loving people, walk by the Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is love. If you are full of fear, walk by the Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is peace.

Regaining self-control in a particular area of life or overall is straightforward. Walk by the Spirit and you will put off the desires of the flesh, you will put on godly living and you will be blessed by the fruit of the Spirit. The problem with any Christian lacking self-control is the problem of not living God's way. Self-effort is useless because the only one who can overcome the flesh is the Holy Spirit.

D. Conclusion for all Christians (Gal 5:24-25)

† Galatians 5:24-25

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Paul draws our subject to conclusion in verses 24-25. He begins with a reason for walking by the Spirit that appeals to every Christian, by calling us "those who belong to Christ Jesus" and in verse 25 refers to us as those who "live by the Spirit." In verse 24 he reminds us doctrinally that a Christian is one who has already "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Paul is stating that "positionally," that is, factually, before

God, the flesh is dead. Its power is broken in us. The problem of the flesh setting its desire against the Spirit is a practical problem that doesn't have to occur if we choose to walk by the Spirit. Then, in verse 25 he exhorts us to walk by the Spirit. He is saying that we should remember to whom we belong, who empowers our spiritual life, and, thereby, be motivated to live like the people we are by walking by the Spirit.

The biblical answer to self-control is Spirit-control. The term "self-control" is a general biblical term concerning the restraint of the desires of the flesh. In Galatians 5:16-25, Paul has taught us that the only way to not live out the desires of the flesh is to walk by the Spirit. In the next section we will discuss how this is accomplished.

IV. Counseling a Christian without Self-Control: WALK by the Spirit

A. Plan-Do-Check-Act

Paul's command is to "walk by the Spirit." This is a command to *continually* walk by the Spirit. Paul is saying that the Christian life is like a walk, unfolding one step at a time. Every step we take is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. The metaphor of walking carries the meaning of a habitual, constant pattern of life. As Christians, we already have the indwelling Spirit (Rom 8:9, 1 Cor. 6:19). Paul is saying that we are simply to respond, step-by-step, moment-by-moment, day-by-day to His power and direction. The metaphor of walking boils down to daily conduct. There is never a time when you just arrive and you are permanently spiritual. We never totally overcome sin. But we can overcome sin as a pattern of life by walking in the Spirit. To help a Christian who lacks self-control to walk in this way, we must counsel them to develop a pattern of continual improvement in their Christian walk. They are going to experience failures in their attempts to regain control as well as things that they try to do that do not work. A familiar approach to continual improvement borrowed from the area of Manufacturing Quality Control is known as the "Plan-Do-Check-Act" process. This should be the overall process that a person follows to regain self-control.

1. Plan

The plan that will be proposed here is called "W_A_L_K by the Spirit" and will be detailed in the next major section. First, the most important characteristic of the plan is that it is biblical. Second, the plan should be focused on the area of life that is out-of-control. For

example, if the person is struggling with sexual sin, then 1Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 6 are important passages to be a part of the plan. These passages need to be memorized, studied, meditated upon, prayed through, and lived out. Third, if the counselee has general areas of spiritual maturity that have contributed to his fall into habitual sin, then it is also important for him to have a plan to grow spiritually in those areas.

2. Do

The next step is a straight-forward, carrying out of the plan. Change will not occur unless action is taken. Every aspect of the plan must be carried out in the power of the Spirit.

3. Check

This is the step where most people fail. First, while executing the plan (“Do”), the counselee must constantly assess how well he is following the plan. No plan will work if it is not followed, yet many people are willing to commit to a plan that will resolve a serious sin problem in their life and then not follow the plan. How many times have counselees returned to the next session without having done the homework from the previous week?! Second, the counselee must assess how well the plan is working. There may have been items missing from the plan that need to be added or items that really weren’t specified clearly so that they could be followed. For

example, if the counselee discovers that he needs to “put-off” something that wasn’t previously considered, this needs to be added to the plan. Or, if the item to be put off wasn’t really clearly defined, he needs to stop and think through all of the aspects of that item and make sure it is completely being covered. In the area of sexual sin, he may have to not only get rid of the cable TV, but also the TV itself! In whatever areas the plan is not working, modifications need to be made. This is the critical refinement step in the loop where the plan is improved so that biblical change can be attained.

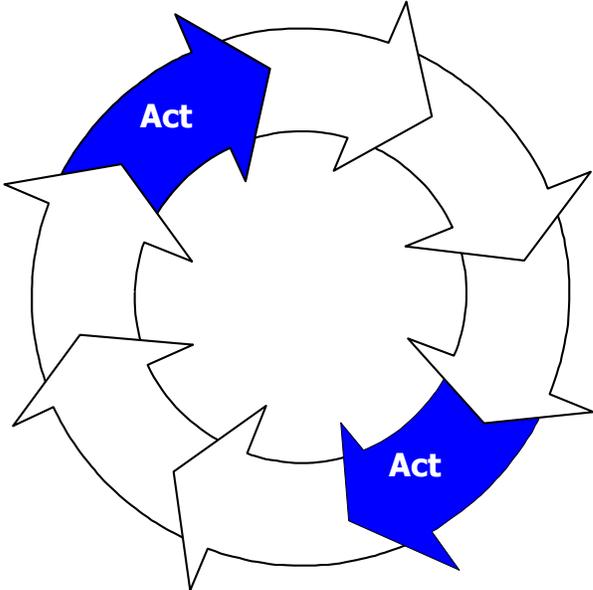
4. Act

All of the changes to the plan must then be put into action! This is the same as the “do” step only with the revised plan to execute. It is vitally important to implement every aspect of putting off and putting on that are in the plan. It is amazing how the flesh can convince us that part of the plan isn’t needed and can be put aside. Yet, at the time when we were carefully considering the actions that needed to be taken to regain self-control, every aspect of the plan was considered necessary to ensuring that self-control was regained.

As shown in the inserted picture below, these four steps are meant to be carried out in a continual looping manner. After the initial four steps, the counselee returns to step one and, if necessary, creates a new plan or possibly only makes modifications to the

current plan. This process continues until the counselor and counselee agree that self-control has been regained and is firmly in-place with a proper Spirit-led, biblical foundation.

Plan-Do-Check-Act Process



B. W_A_L_K by the Spirit

I am calling the basic plan proposed for counseling someone back to self-control

“W_A_L_K”:

- † **W = Word:** Let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you
- † **A = Ask:** Pray in the Spirit
- † **L = Led:** Led by the Spirit (Yield, Put on)
- † **K = Kill:** Kill the deeds of the flesh (Mortify, Put Off)

1. W: Word of Christ richly dwell in you (Col 3:16, Eph 5:18-19)

† **Colossians 3:16**

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.

The self-controlled Christian life begins with the Word of Christ filling us up. The word “richly” means abundantly or filled up! The word “dwell” means to be at home in and to influence for good. When someone is “at home” he is not a stranger! He is well-known and comfortable there. When the Word of Christ richly dwells in us, no matter what life experience we face, we will be able to respond biblically, i.e. according to the will and mind of God. A mind that is dominated by the Word of God leads to a person whose actions are dominated by the will of God. In fact, Scripture is replete with commands to be knowledgeable. In the Old Testament, Israel was destroyed for lack of knowledge. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ said over and over, “Do you not know?” The epistles cover our need for knowledge extensively.

Additionally, Eph. 5:18-19 are parallel verses to Col. 3:16 that provide additional insight:

† **Ephesians 5:18-19**

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,
19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Being filled with the Spirit is exactly the same thing as letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly because the results are the same (all the way through the family verses!). As the Word moves through our heart and mind, the Spirit of God uses it to direct our life. The Word of Christ, at home in us, is the “handle” by which the Holy Spirit leads us. It is not hard to understand that a person with the Word dwelling in them, filled with the Spirit, is going to enjoy the fruit of the Spirit, instead of carrying out the desires of the flesh.

The results of letting the Word of Christ dwell richly in us are knowledge (“with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another”), outward expressions of Christian joy (“with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing”), and a thankful heart (“with thankfulness in your hearts to God”). In both Colossians and Ephesians, Paul uses this command as the basis for application in marriage, family, and work life.

2. A: Ask (Rom 8:26) = Pray in the Spirit

† **Romans 8:26**

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

The second part of the plan is prayer. This is also another vital ministry of the Holy Spirit. There are several keys to an effective prayer life. First, we need to ask according to God’s will (1 John 5:14). Second, we need to ask in Jesus’ name so that God may be glorified in His Son (John 14:13-14) and so that our joy may be made full

(John 16:24). Third, we need to ask with Christ's words abiding in us (John 15:7).

As we spend time in the Word and prayer, communing with the living God, building an intimate relationship with Him, learning His word, we are in a position where Holy Spirit can move us down the path of sanctification, helping us walk as He wants us to walk. That is the path of self-control.

3. L: Led by the Spirit (Gal 5:16,18) = Yield to the Spirit

† Galatians 5:16

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

† Galatians 5:18

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

We let the Spirit lead and we follow. To be led by the Spirit we have to yield our will to His. "Under the Law" in verse 18 means to be under human effort. If we are being led by the Spirit we are not living by human effort. Jesus gave His will over to God (John 5:30) and taught us to pray for the Father's will to be done here on earth (Matt. 6:10). As always, He is our perfect example. Day-by-day we need to learn the Word of God, pray for God's guidance, and yield our will to God. We need to trust God and do it His way.

4. **K: Kill the deeds of the flesh (Rom 8:13)**

† **Romans 8:13**

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

† **Ephesians 4:17-23**

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,

18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,

21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

The Christian life is not a “let go and let God” life. The commands of the Bible are not given for God to hear Himself talk! We are commanded to participate in the Christian life. Paul clearly states that we are to put to death the deeds of the body and to “lay aside the old self.” This part of the plan goes hand-in-hand with letting the Holy Spirit lead us in obedience to God’s commands. On the one hand we “put off” the old sinful behavior that was our lack-of-self-control problem and on the other hand we “put on” godly behavior and work at it until it is our daily walk.

In conclusion, counseling a person back to self-control is a combination of the Plan-Do-Check-Act process that works with the plan that I have called W_A_L_K. The intent is to establish a well-defined, Spirit-led path for the counselee to follow that will lead them to a mature, Spirit-controlled, Christian walk that is pleasing to God.

1Liddell, H. G., and Scott, *Abridged Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1992.

2Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

3Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.