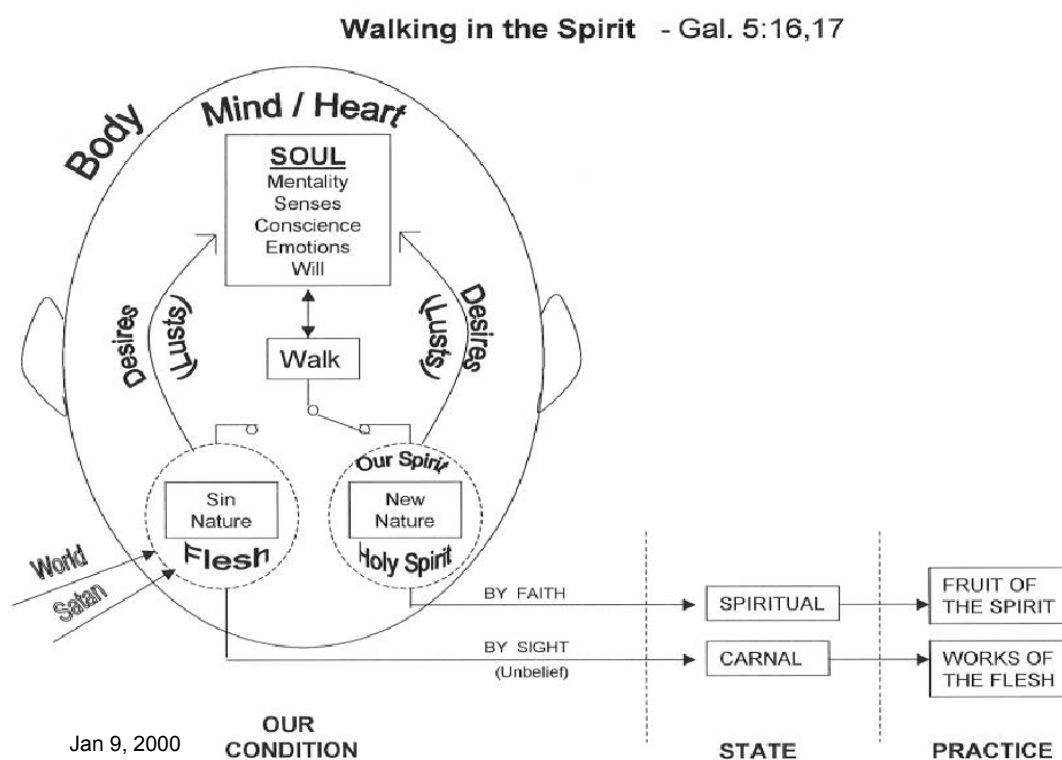


The Will of the Believer, Abiding in Christ & Abiding in the Sin Nature

A prior document entitled, “Old Man, New Man, Old Nature, New Nature, the Will, Faith & Grace”, sought to graciously bring together the biblical teaching on the Old Man, New Man, Old Nature, New Nature, and Will in a manner that provides insight into the character of biblical faith. This document seeks to continue that process by bringing together some aspects of the biblical teaching on the exercise of the believer’s will.

The diagram below, initially prepared by Hal Molloy, shows the believer as having the capacity in this life to either abide in the sin nature or in the new nature, based on Galatians 5:16,17 and John 15:4. That capacity of abiding in either nature is shown with a switch (under the word “Walk”), set so as to show the believer abiding in the new nature.



We would like to clarify what the diagram is representing by pointing out the following:

- 1) The believer may only abide in the sin nature or in the new nature. At no time is there a neutral or ‘gray scale’ position for the believer (Galatians 5:16,17).
- 2) While the diagram represents the truths of Scripture objectively, the believer is always viewing these truths subjectively in daily experience, that is, always viewing these truths from within abiding in either the sin nature or the new nature.
- 3) Though the believer has the capacity to abide in either of the two natures, whether the believer abides in the sin nature or the new nature is not a spiritually neutral matter (Romans 6:23; Galatians 5:18-24). Each place of abiding has a specific outcome.

A Question Of Our Willing And Awareness

In view of what Scripture reveals about living in fellowship with Christ and not in dependence upon the sin nature, what do verses such as these also convey regarding the role of the believer's will? And what kind of awareness of that willing is indicated?

Romans 6:11-13 (NASU)

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Romans 12:1, 2 (NASU)

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Galatians 5:16, 17 (NASU)

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

Regarding Romans 12:1, Thomas Constable has written:

Positively we should "present" or "offer" ourselves to God and ourselves as His tools to fulfill His will (cf. 12:1). **The believer has a choice. We can present ourselves to sin or to God...** [Chester McCalley: presenting *ourselves* should specifically be *our bodies*, since our bodies, being our members, are instruments – Romans 6:13; Romans 12:1]

Similar statements of the spiritual choice before believers have been expressed by others as they have sought to explain and expound upon the above passages.¹ The primary reason for the similar use of words in their explanation (choice, choose, will, volition, etc.) is that the Greek *imperative* verbs translated as “consider” (KJV: reckon), “present” (KJV: yield), and “walk” in the above passages have a fundamental character of making an appeal to the will, calling upon the believer's volition or willing.²

¹ *Notes on Romans* (2006 Ed.), Thomas Constable, pg 67. See also *Treasures from the Greek New Testament*, Kenneth Wuest, pg 99, on Romans 6:11-13; *Major Bible Themes*, Lewis Sperry Chafer & John Walvoord. Pgs 208, 216; *The Three Operative Words*, Chester McCalley, on Romans 6:11-19 (www.wordoftruth.net); *Romans, Verse by Verse*, William Newell, pg 229, on Romans 6:13; *Galatians: God's Antidote to Legalism*, Ron Merryman, pg 96, on Galatians 5:16.

² “Imperative mood:... The mood **expresses action which is volitionally possible and involves the exercise of the will.**”, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, Summers & Sawyer, pg 118; see also *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, Dana & Mantey, pg 174, ¶ 165; *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, Daniel B. Wallace, pgs 485, 486; *A Classification Of Imperatives*, James L. Boyer, pg 1; *New Observations on Voice in the Ancient Greek Verb*, Carl W. Conrad; *Rethinking Greek Verb Tenses...*, Dave Mathewson, pgs 29, 30.

There are other reasons for expressing these and similar biblical passages as a choice, exercise of the will³, etc. but these points of clarification are important to convey:

- 1) Scripture presents these, and quite often, other imperatives in the *present tense*, with the idea of “right now continuing”. Scripture does not convey, alongside these passages, that the believer must be aware - or unaware - of the choice. Instead, the emphasis of Scripture is upon the singular outcome of the choice (“present”, “walk in the Spirit”, etc.). While Scripture presents a great number of imperatives directed towards a specific behavior pattern, the priority decision is always to abide in Christ. God never intends for believers to attempt godly behavior out of the sin nature or with the idea that we alone can simply will godly behavior (Romans 7:7-25, Galatians 5:17).
- 2) Scripture’s repeated message in the present tense verbs, of “right now continuing” does not mean that the believer is to step outside of walking (aka abiding) in the Spirit to continuously reassess one’s walk. If the believer is presently walking in the Spirit, the meaning of Galatians 5:16a is to continue walking in the Spirit. If the believer is walking (aka abiding) in the sin nature, then the exhortation of Scripture is to choose to walk right then in the Spirit, then to continue walking in the Spirit thereafter. See note 5 below for further explanation of what it means to walk in the Spirit..
- 3) Scripture does not simply present to us “the choice” without also presenting to us the spiritual standing (aka eternal position) that we have as believers, with a principal emphasis on the person of Christ and our being “in Him”. The urging to make a choice to walk in the Spirit is on the basis of the revealed spiritual facts. By God’s inspiration the authors of Scripture have ‘painted a picture with words’ that portrays the ‘spiritual landscape’ before the believer that calls us to behold Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- 4) Scripture presents the ‘spiritual atmosphere’ of the believer as always and ever grace. Grace, a fundamental and eternal characteristic of God Himself is the breath we breathe and the motivator of the believer, who, by God’s gracious accomplishment, is “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Though the imperatives of the New Testament are not spiritually and morally neutral options, they do convey the singular choice that the believer is to make, in view of the eternal position God has graciously provided and the power and life that God is providing through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:20, 21).
- 5) The Holy Spirit is always present with us, carrying on a ministry that is ever in the direction of our continuing to walk in fellowship with Christ. The Holy Spirit will minister to us so as to behold Christ, to abide in Him, to fellowship with Him, for His life to be lived in and through us, and for us to stand in our position, which is in Christ. In any moment when we abide in the sin nature, the Holy Spirit will be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) and quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). In any moment when we abide in Christ according to the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit, we will live out, by the work of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- 6) The working of God will always be in the direction of our willing and doing in a manner consistent with the will and character of God (Philippians 2:12,13; 4:8,9). As believers we can, by faith, count upon who we have graciously been made to be “in Christ” and His continuing gracious provision for us.

³ The middle voice of some verbs carries the additional meaning of an appeal to the human will. Scripture also uses words that mean “to will” (i.e., *thelō*), and “the will” (*thelema*).