

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: November 22, 2009

Living Consistent With A New Identity: Walk By The Spirit

by Dan Trygg

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.... 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. ²⁴ And 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." Galatians 5:16-18,22-25

God has made available to us an entirely different way of living life. We are no longer to continue living as we did before we knew Jesus. When we yielded to Him as our Savior and Master, God gave us an incredible gift. He gave us life from above. We were born from above, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:3-8; Tit. 3:5,6). At that point, the righteousness of Christ was applied to us, and we became offspring of God, born of His nature, born of His very sperm (Rom. 4:3-5; I Jn. 3:1,2,9). This has introduced a new dynamic into our being. The old, fleshly nature still remains until Christ returns, but our identity and citizenship has changed. At the core of our being, we have become new people, new creatures. We were sinners by nature and by choice, and we were under the dominion of the kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13; Eph. 5:8). Now, we are citizens of the kingdom of God, holy ones or "saints", part of God's very family, children of light whose destiny and inheritance is with God (Col. 1:12; Eph. 2:19).

This present world system is corrupted with sin, deception and rebellion toward God. We formerly lived according to its influence, according to the ways we have been taught since childhood (cf. I Pet. 1:18). It was pretty much all we knew, so we learned to live pursuing those things and experiences we were encouraged to believe would be gratifying and fulfilling. Paul puts it this way, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³ among whom we all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3). Notice the two areas which tend to govern or determine our behavior, "the desires of the flesh and of the mind".

The "desires of the flesh" indicate that we tend to live for sensual comfort and pleasure. Comfort and pleasure, while parts of God's original plan and provision for humankind, have been taken out of the proper context of relationship with Him to become ends in themselves. Pleasure and comfort were meant to enhance our relationship with God. These blessings were to draw our attention to our Creator, Who gave them to us and made us able to enjoy them, and give Him thanks, honor and praise. Instead, we tend to ignore or suppress our awareness of God, and give ourselves to pursuing sensual pleasure and comfort without any regard for Him (Rom. 1:18-25). This is the way we used to live, ...the way those who do not know God tend to navigate through life (Tit. 3:3; I Pet.4:3). Their perceptions of God and life have been darkened, so they tend to avoid dealing with their inner pain or emptiness, and seek sensual pleasure and stimulation as a distraction or medication (Eph. 4:17-19).

When we first come to Christ, our minds are similarly darkened, but the light has dawned (Prov. 4:18), and we can at least begin to renew our thinking (Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:2). Unfortunately, the "desires of the mind" are still very strong in us. Actually, the word translated "mind" is plural. It may be better translated as "indulging in the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts". We tend to live out what we think works, ...what we think is beneficial for us, ...what we think is going to be fun or entertaining, ...what we think will keep us from the uncomfortable state of boredom. This is all based upon our understanding, which has largely been the by-product of growing up in our culture, conditioned by our families and our life experiences. When we live by the desires of our thoughts, we pull from our understanding of what is good, profitable and pleasurable to do. If our understanding is truly "darkened", however, then we are not going to perceive the whole picture accurately. People tend to choose to do what they think will benefit them the most, short term or long term.

Both of these sources which previously governed our behavior are affected by sin, and are unreliable. Note that both of these sources that commonly inform and drive human behavior have been divorced from any relationship with God. To live the old way is to live independently. We act as if we have the answers on our own, or that we are self-sufficient. We do what we want, what we think is best.

Repeatedly, the scripture admonishes us to no longer allow ourselves to be led by fleshly desires (Rom. 6:12; 13:14; II Tim. 2:22; Tit. 2:12; I Pet. 1:14; 2:11; 4:1-3). In fact, God warns that through fleshly desires many believers will be led astray, or get stuck in their spiritual development (Mk. 4:19; I Tim. 6:9; II Tim. 3:6; 4:3; II Pet.

2:18; 3:3; Jude 1:16,18). This is serious business for Christians! Peter states it quite strongly, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from fleshly desires *that wage war against the soul*” (I Pet. 2:11). **Following fleshly desires will not only distract us, and render us ineffective, they will kill us.** We need to stop playing with the enemy!

Similarly, our *natural thoughts* are not as God’s thoughts, nor are our ways like His (Isa. 55:8,9). Our hearts are deceitful, corrupted by sin (Jer. 17:9). *The evil within us affects our judgment, even leading us to make foolish and insane decisions* (Ecc. 9:3). *If we want to walk with God, we cannot rely upon our own understanding* (Prov. 3:5,6). There is a definite difference between *setting our minds* on the things of God, or on things from a human perspective, a fleshly mind, or even a mind *set* on earthly things (Matt. 16:23; Rom. 8:5-7; Phil. 3:19). **The mind set on the flesh is opposed to the things of God**, and leads to death. **It is also possible to be deceived by so-called spiritual experiences, if we get inflated with self-importance by a fleshly mind** (Col. 2:18). Similarly, there will be believers whose *minds are corrupted*, who are argumentative and become obsessed with godliness as a means of getting wealth (I Tim. 6:5). Their focus is on earthly things, not things of the kingdom. We are to have nothing to do with such people.

We are to *love God with all of our minds* (Matt. 22:37), which means that **we don’t stop using our minds, but they need to be oriented in the right direction.** They are to get their input and instruction from the living God, both from His revealed word and from the Holy Spirit. Whereas *we are to renew our minds*, ...reprogramming our general understanding of life, God and His will from the revealed truth of the scriptures..., we are *not* to rely only upon *our* human judgment for this. **Aside from the Bible, there is another source of information to guide us through life, the leading of the Holy Spirit.** Paul sets the notion of being led by the Spirit in direct opposition to the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16,17). Similarly, a mind set on the Spirit is diametrically opposed to a mind set on the flesh, or on earthly things (Rom. 8:2-14; cf. Phil. 3:13-21; Col. 3:2). **Jesus specifically mentioned that He was sending the Spirit to be a Counselor like Him** (Jn. 14:16). **The word translated as “counselor” in that verse means “one-called-alongside-to-help”.** This implies several things. First, **it implies that we will need help.** We can’t handle things, or figure things out, on our own. Secondly, **God has assigned someone to assist us.** Thirdly, **we must ask for his help.** Finally, Jesus gives us another important piece of information about this “helper” in the next verse, “He ...will be *in* you”. **He dwells inside the believer!** In Jn. 7:38,39 Jesus described how the Spirit would flow “out from your belly”. The word “belly” meant the entire body cavity. Figuratively, it referred to the seat of thought, emotion and choice, especially deep and more intimate feelings. **The Helper speaks to us from the deep places of our being. Instead of living for comfort and pleasure, or simply out from our understanding, we can receive guidance from Him.**

Who is this Helper? The “Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:17). Note also that Jesus says that the “world” (i.e., those who do not know God) does not have this resource of information and guidance. This would help explain why Paul says that a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. **To an unbeliever the perspective brought by the Spirit seems foolish**, and he cannot understand the teaching or guidance of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14). It is as foreign as trying to explain what you see to a person who has been blind from birth. **Someone led by the Spirit is being guided by a source of information and direction that others are not aware of.** No wonder they can’t figure out why a Spirit-led person thinks or acts as he or she does! It is a mystery to them, because they don’t receive the same revelations or directions that the Spirit-led person is able to receive (I Cor. 2:15,16).

The Spirit has come to reveal to us the things God has made available to us (Jn. 16:14; I Cor. 2:12). He leads us in truth, and communicates what *He* receives for us from the Father (Jn. 16:13). **He also communicates to the Father on our behalf**, in ways that are acceptable to Him (Rom. 8:26). **He reveals mysteries**, things hidden from the awareness of other people. **He empowers us to do things that are not possible by our own strength** (I Cor. 12:4-11; 14:24,25; cf. Acts 13:9-11). He empowers us to witness, even giving us what to say at the moment of opportunity (Jn. 15:26,27; Acts 1:8; Matt. 10:19,20). **He gives words of specific direction to guide us to accomplish God’s purposes** (e.g., Acts 8:29; 10:19,20; 13:2). Such specific, personal words of direction or counsel from God (Gk. – *rhēma*) are called the “sword of the Spirit”, given and used to fight spiritual battles (Eph. 6:17). **More than just information, however, the Spirit fills our emptiness, and gives us life that we do not have in ourselves** (Jn. 6:63; 7:38,39; II Cor. 3:5,6).

Being led by the Spirit is presented as a normative experience for Christians. It is something that is available to every child of God (Acts 2:38,39; Rom. 8:9-17; Gal. 4:4-7; 5:16-25). **The early Christians expected it.** If believers were *not* experiencing the Holy Spirit, they sought God about it (Acts 8:14-17). **Being able to hear from and respond to the Spirit is the key to victory over sin and self.** If we are not hearing from, and being led by the Spirit, we are not benefiting from our inheritance in Christ. **It is essential that we pray to know the reality of God in our lives** (Eph. 1:15-20), and that we dedicate ourselves to receiving the opening of this relationship in our experience.