

Notes for the Ones Called–Out to Meet

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Setting Our Minds On Living By The Holy Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ...¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--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.¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God.” Rom. 8:9,10,12-15

Romans 3 and 4 describe how God had justified us by His grace through the redemption paid by Christ on our behalf. This deliverance is available as a gift to anyone who accepts it by honest, sincere faith. The Lord has restored us to a reconciled relationship with Him, and opened up to us the gracious strength to overcome the trials of life (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:16). He did all this when we were helpless to save ourselves. This demonstration of His love assures us of His commitment to us (5:6-11). The last part of chapter 5 compares the overpowering effect of Christ's sacrifice to that of Adam's sin. Romans 6 and 7 then describe how our union with Christ in His death and resurrection made freedom possible. We no longer are bound to sin as our master, because our old self was put to death with Jesus, and our new self is free to live for God. In the same way, we were freed from the Law, having fulfilled its demands by being put to death with Jesus. Now we are free to be joined to Christ, that we might bear fruit for God. In the end of chapter 7, Paul describes his frustrating experience of trying to live by the Law. Although he wanted to do the right thing, the power of sin within him was actually aroused by the Law and caused him to lose perspective and do the very thing he hated. He saw his plight as hopeless. God, however, saved him.

Paul begins the eighth chapter by declaring that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Why? Because the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set them free from the principle of sin and death. How were they set free? Jesus' sacrifice showed that sin had to be dealt with. Sin was not something that was insignificant or passé. God could not just ignore it. It required the sacrifice of His own Son to judge sin and to break its hold on us. Let there be no misunderstanding. God is not soft on sin. He condemned sin, and will always condemn sin. But, He loved us enough to deal with sin through Jesus, so that we could escape the judgment of His wrath on sin and be able to walk free from its dominating hold on our lives. This freedom from sin comes by living according to an entirely new power, which is introduced into our lives when we are born from above. This is the power of the Holy Spirit. The requirement of the Law was legally fulfilled by our death with Jesus, and we are no longer under its jurisdiction. God's purpose, however, was not to just cover our sin problem. He still wants righteousness from us. The righteous requirement of the Law will be practically fulfilled as we respond to the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit within us. That is why verse 4 ends with, “the ones not walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” We have the choice of which influence to live by. We can walk in our flesh, or we can walk in the Spirit.

In case we forgot about this choice, or the consequences that follow, Paul reminds us that the ones being according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but the ones being according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. We can either be fleshly (carnal – I Cor. 3:1-3) or spiritual (I Cor. 2:12-16). We can live with a fleshly orientation and focus, or a spiritual one. Be aware, however, that the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit brings life and peace (vs. 6). The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, because it is not yielded or submissive to God's Law, in fact, it is not able to do so (due to the power of sin operating within the flesh). Finally, the ones being in the flesh are not able to please God (vs. 8). Now, in Christ we crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24), so why should we live any longer according to it? The desires of the flesh are set in opposition to the Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:16,17). The actions of the flesh are immorality, idolatry, relational strife, divisiveness, and self-medicating escapism (Gal. 5:20,21; Eph. 4:19). Sowing toward the flesh brings rottenness to our lives (Gal. 6:7,8). Why, then, do we still choose to go there? We have no obligation, requirement or indebtedness to live according to the flesh any more (Rom. 8:12). The Bible says that if we do choose to live according to the flesh, however, we are about to experience death; but if we instead, in conjunction with the Spirit, choose to put to death the practices of the body, we will live (Rom. 8:13). It is not in our best interest to continue to live according to the flesh. Even though it seems to be momentarily enticing, it actually causes us more grief than blessing.

Why do we continue to continue to live according to the flesh?

(1.) **Ignorance.** Mostly, it is because we don't know any better. We may not even know that we can live differently. We may not realize that God expects more from us now that we are Christians. There is a lot of poor

theology out there that leads us to believe that being a Christian *just* means that we can be forgiven of our sins. No! A thousand times, “NO!” Paul said it this way, “May it never be!” Grace is *not* given so that we can continue in sin. *Grace is given to bring us into a place where we can escape the power of sin and live differently, “...to bear fruit for God.”* God is expecting change. He is expecting growth. Just as ignorance was the reason Christians still live under sin and Law (“...do you not know...” - Rom. 6:3; 7:1), it is also the primary reason we keep living according to the flesh.

(2.) Spiritual dullness. This is a by-product of immaturity (Heb. 5:11; I Cor. 3:1-3). A person may know that God expects more from them, but seem to be unable to perceive the spiritual insights necessary to make change and enter into the life of the Spirit. Note that this is not a factor of time as a Christian, but of *application* (Heb. 5:12-14).

(3.) Habit. In Eph. 4:22, Paul speaks of our “former manner of life”. This recognizes the fact that we have established patterns of living which must be changed, if growth is going to happen. Some of these are even generational, ...that, is they were handed down to us by our parents (I Pet. 1:18). Habits are familiar, regular patterns in our lives that we can sometimes follow on autopilot. They are programmed responses to situations and circumstances which we follow like a knee-jerk reaction. When we get stuck in such unconscious patterns, we are not open to God’s intervention. We are not even looking for Him. We are just following the program that is established in our lives.

(4.) Conformity. Romans 12:2 says that there are pressures from the world system which tend to program our patterns of living to be within certain acceptable limits. If we do not act as expected, often there are negative social consequences to pay. We may be ridiculed, rejected, shunned or even persecuted. We are also *rewarded for “fitting in” with the cultural group we are a part of.* We are pressured to become like others to be accepted and liked. This pressure to conform is rooted in the fleshly fear of man, and keeps us from stepping out in the Spirit.

(5.) Complacency or a Careless Attitude. The Scripture is full of passages warning about the danger to those who become lackadaisical or carelessly stagnant in their spiritual lives (Prov. 1:32; Isa. 32:9-11; Zeph. 1:12). Such care-less-ness keeps us from moving out of the flesh toward discovering life in the Spirit.

(6.) Willfully Choosing the Pleasures of Sin. The Bible clearly teaches that there is pleasure to be found in sin, for a time (Heb. 11:25). People wouldn’t sin if there was no pleasure in it. In order to follow God, however, we must put aside anything that is sinful or displeasing to Him. In the last days there will be many who will be “lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God”. They will hold to a “form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (II Tim. 3:4; cf. Phil. 3:18,19).

(7.) Unbelief. At the core of most of these hindrances is a fundamental unbelief in the reality of God. There is unbelief both in regard to the promises *and* the warnings of God regarding living according to the flesh or the Spirit. People don’t believe God will act, either to support or correct.

What about living according to the Spirit? Paul begins by saying that **we are “in the Spirit”, if we have Jesus** (Rom. 8:9). **Our identity has changed.** We are no longer “of” or “in” the rebellious flesh, but we are “of” and “in” the Spirit of Christ, and God’s Spirit dwells within us. **Our obligation is no longer to the flesh, to live by its leadings, but to the Spirit. We are to put to death those fleshly practices and seek to be led by the Spirit.** Our real identity is made visible *as* we are led by the Spirit of God.

How do we learn to be led by the Spirit?

(1.) Repent or Change Your Mind About What God Has For You In This Area. We must put aside our ignorance and unbelief, and trust that *the Spirit does indeed live inside of us* (if you are a Christian), and that *He wants to guide and empower us.*

(2.) Set Your Mind On The Things Of The Spirit. This implies *learning all you can* about what God has made available to you in Christ, and *watching for His activity* in your life. This would imply studying and meditating on the Scriptures, as well as interacting with like-minded believers and seeking God in prayer.

(3.) Choose to Put to Death Any Sinful Practices. This is another kind of repentance. Wherever you know God wants you to change something, resolve to do it *by His strength and leading.* Another word picture used in the Scriptures is to break up the fallow ground of your heart (Jer. 4:1-4; Hos. 10:12). This is a reference to the need to plow up the soil before planting new seed. Ephesians 4:22-24 describes how we need to *put off* the old self and its practices, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and then *put on* the new self (Col. 3:5-15). We can’t put on *new* things unless we are willing to jettison the *old.*

(4.) Test Out By Experimentation To Discover The Spirit’s Leading. Romans 12:2 says that we must “prove” what the will of God is. That word means to “test out by experimentation”. In other words, if we think we may be being prompted by the Spirit to do or say something, and it is not contradictory to the character of God, the only way to really find out is to take a risk and see what happens. Through such risks we will learn to discern what is the Spirit from what is not.