

## The Spirit of Holiness

August 18th, 2013

Romans 8:1-14

*<sup>9</sup>You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. <sup>12</sup>So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*

I wonder if I could get a pretty quick consensus on this statement: there are many people who say they are Christians, but in reality they are not; that is, *saying* you're a Christian doesn't mean you actually *are* one. Matthew 7:21-23 seems to make that point pretty clearly. Assuming we can agree on that, the important follow-up, then, is: what makes a Christian a Christian? How does one actually know if they truly do belong to Jesus?

There are several ways to answer this question, but the answer of this text is, you have the Holy Spirit. **Let's read verses 1-14 of Romans 8**, and you'll notice that both positively (v.14) and negatively (v.9), Paul highlights the indwelling and leading of the Holy Spirit as the way to know we belong to Jesus, as children of God. This seems significant, because we're not accustomed to thinking and talking like this. We'll gravitate to, "Have you prayed to receive Christ," or "Are you trusting that Christ died for your sins on the cross," and this is important, but it's not what Paul presses on us here.

The crucial question this morning is, Do you have the Spirit? If that is the crucial question, then another crucial question is, What evidences would we be looking for to know whether or not the Spirit is in us? Last week we saw one evidence, that the Spirit testifies to our spirit and produces a deep, heart-felt assurance that we are God's children, and the Spirit produces in us the deep, heart-cry, "Abba, Father!"

## **The Spirit Empowering Jesus in Temptation**

Now today we'll see in this same passage another very important evidence (again, for the purpose of praise and pursuit) of the Holy Spirit's work in us, and evidence that He is in us and that we are being led by Him. But first, let's turn back to Luke 4 and see this working of the Spirit in Jesus' own life. After Jesus' baptism: "<sup>1</sup>And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil." I won't read the whole passage, but when the temptations were finished, Luke tells us, "<sup>14</sup>And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee..."

So here we have Jesus engaged in a forty day fast, meeting Satan in the flesh, and He stares him down, resists every temptation, the Word of God is pouring forth from Him, and we may be inclined to say, "Well, that's Jesus. I can't do battle with temptation like that, I'm just a sinner, you know, 'what I want to do I cannot do'." No! That's is Jesus, but that's Jesus filled with the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit. Which Spirit? The same Spirit that is in you, the Spirit that empowered Jesus to do battle with Satan and raised Him from the dead is in you, giving life to your mortal body.

And this is what we want to dig into more today and see the dynamics of how this works. Last week we saw He is the Spirit of adoption; today we will see that He is the Spirit of Holiness, arming and empowering us to put sin to death and live lives that are set apart (ie, holy) for God's glory and praise. And we'll do that today with the language of being led by the Spirit (v.14). Specifically, we'll see the nature of being led by the Spirit and the urgency of being led by the Spirit. Next week we'll come back and address the practice of being led by the Spirit (that is, what it means, why it's so important, and, next week: how it actually works).

## **The Nature of Being Led by the Spirit**

First, let's consider the nature of being led by the Spirit. That is, what does it actually mean to be led by the Spirit? From the introduction you have probably figured that it has something to do with putting sin to death, and that's right, but I want you to see it very clearly in this passage, because I believe there is a lot of confusion and ignorance on this matter. It's very common, when talking about being led by the Spirit, to talk about His guidance over decisions we have to make: "I'm being led to this college, or to this spouse, or to this church, or this job." That would be an awkward way to read and understand this verse: "All who are led by the Spirit to the right job are sons of God."

There's certainly a sense in which God's people will lean on the direction and leading of the Spirit in all those areas, but that is not at all the emphasis or focus of this text. You can see it clearly in the connection between verses 13-14: "<sup>13</sup>If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>*For* [because, this is the basis or explanation of verse 13] all who are [thus] led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." When you kill sin by trusting in and treasuring the fatherly care of God more than what sin offers, you are being led by the Spirit.

The evidence that you are children of God (v.14) is that the Holy Spirit leads you into war with your sin. The children of God hate sin, because the Spirit leads them this way. That is, He gives them new spiritual tastes and preferences and values and desires. So if you want to know whether you're being led by the Spirit, ask: do you fight sin in your life, or do you feel blasé about sin in your life? Let's be careful to not use this language of being led by the Spirit as a spiritual-sounding way of carrying out the desires of own flesh. The Spirit leads us by bringing us into warfare with our sinful nature, "the flesh", that innate impulse to make everything all about me. The flesh is an "all-about-me" complex.

## **The Urgency of Being Led by the Spirit**

Now, having seen what it means to be led by the Spirit, this passage also tells us something about the urgency of being led by the Spirit. Life and death, heaven and hell, eternal pleasure with God and eternal separation from God are at stake in whether we are led by the Spirit in this way. This makes being led by the Spirit an urgent matter: "<sup>12</sup>So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

The key statement here is verse 13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." The "dying" here is eternal death and judgment. We know that, because *everyone* -- whether you live according to the flesh or not -- dies a physical death. So the death this verse warns about is something more, something that happens only to *some* and not to others. That is why I say life and death, heaven and hell, are at stake in whether you are led by the Spirit.

Now I need to make very clear how this can be so, lest we begin to think that our salvation is earned by our sin-killing. That is emphatically *not* what Paul is teaching. We know that not only from what Paul has written in Romans 3-5 on justification by faith alone, but from what he says right here at the beginning of this chapter:

*"<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

The verdict "no condemnation" is not because of something you did in obedience to the law, but something that God did: He sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and condemned sin (whose sin? Ours!) in

the flesh (whose flesh? Jesus'!) so that the penalty of sin might be paid for, fully and forever ("There is *now* no condemnation..."). We need not fear that salvation is obtained through your diligent (even Spirit-wrought) sin-killing!

What do we make, then, of this warning? Putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit -- the daily practice of killing sin in your life -- is the result of and the evidence that you are justified by faith alone, apart from works of the law. If you are making war on your sin (ie, being led by the Spirit) you show that you have been united with Christ by faith alone. As one theologian has put it, "If you are not at odds with sin, you are not at home with Jesus, *not* because being at odds with sin makes you at home with Jesus, but because being at home with Jesus makes you at odds with sin." Union with Jesus necessarily and inevitably disunites you from His rivals.

### **Set Free by the Spirit**

And what makes this reality so is the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the link between the gospel of Jesus' death in your place, securing God's eternal, unthwartable covenant love for you, and your sin-killing, holiness-pursuing walk today. The power for a sin-killing life comes through the sin-bearing death of Christ, because in His death He didn't just buy you *pardon* from sin's guilt, but *power* to free you from sin's enslaving tyranny:

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That's why the war against the deeds of the body (v.13) is waged "by the Spirit." We'll talk about the practical side of this next week. But for now, let us love that by grace, through Christ, this can be said of you:

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In Christ, by faith, you have "Luke 4" power to resist temptation and work out your salvation from "the deeds of the body" (lust, greed, envy, self-pity, anger, impatience, shame, despair, etc.) with fear and trembling, knowing that Almighty God is engaging all His infinite energy to work in you that which is pleasing in His sight. And that infinite energy comes to you through the Holy Spirit who resides in all of you who belong to Jesus. Give Him praise for His ministry in and through you, and pursue this experience with Spirit-wrought vigilance.