

“Life in the Spirit”

“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 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. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”
Romans 8:12-17(NASB)

Paul has introduced the greatest cross roads with which anyone will ever be confronted. Do I live unto the flesh? Do I live unto the Spirit?

Paul says some definite things about the flesh:

- 1) When your mind is set on this “flesh” you are of the “flesh” (8:5a).
- 2) When your mind is set on the “flesh” you are focused on death (8:6a).
- 3) When your mind is set on the flesh you are hostile to God (8:7a).
- 4) When your mind is set on the flesh you will not and cannot subject yourself to the law of God (8:7b).
- 5) When your mind is set on the flesh you cannot please God (8:8).

Now he re-emphasizes the point. In verse 13 he says literally, “if we live according to the flesh we are on the verge of death”. The flesh is one option. A lot of people are taking that option. But in Christ, Paul says, there is another way. There is life in the Spirit. In chapter 8, verses 12 thru 17 Paul offers 5 road signs or traits of life in the Spirit....

Putting to death the misdeeds of the body (8:13).

Paul knew the challenges presented by the ongoing life in this world, despite our eternal destiny. He wrote the Corinthians, *‘I beat my body and make it my slave to that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize’* (I Cor. 9:27). Paul understood the power of disciplined grace. Personal discipline that sanctifies oneself, commits to prayer, studies the Word are all aimed at life in the Spirit.

Richard Foster speaks of this disciplined grace: “Our ordinary method of dealing with ingrained sin is to launch a frontal attack. We rely on our willpower and determination. Whatever may be the issue for us – anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, substance abuse – we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it. But the struggle is all in vain, and we find ourselves once again morally bankrupt or, worse yet, so proud of our external righteousness that “whitened sepulchers” is a mild description of our condition. ...”We ... want to make it quite clear we cannot free and purify our own heart by exerting our own will.” “Celebration of Discipline”

Putting to death the misdeeds of the body is not a return to the law. This is not a new legalism. This is submission to the perfect love of the Holy Spirit. This is putting ourselves on collision course with the Spirit and letting Him change the way we live.

Being led by the Spirit (8:14).

There is a very subtle step forward in Paul’s teaching. Up to this point the apostle has spoken of the Spirit simply as a *power* through which believers mortify sin: now he speaks of Him as a gracious, loving *Guide*, whose “leading” - enjoyed by all indwelt by the Spirit - shows that they also are “sons of God.”

Years ago I bought a hand held GPS guide. I was hunting in the National Forest and didn’t want to get lost in the woods. At the time it was cutting edge. I could get out and mark my location. Then I could wonder around all day and follow a little arrow right back to my truck. The first time the GPS contradicted my sense of direction there was a battle. Do I trust myself or the technology in the GPS. There was an act of faith to trust that GPS. If I had trusted skilled woodsman’s instinct I’d still be wondering around the woods, lost!

Being led by the Spirit is the faith statement of the Spirit - filled believer. We believe the Holy Spirit is leading us. This is a commitment statement of the Spirit – filled believer. In those moments when we sense the leading of the Holy Spirit – we will obey. Those moments will come when we are living life in the Spirit.

Deep Relationship with the Father (8:15).

This is an emotionally intense cry. The sense is reminiscent of Jesus' cry in Gethsemane. "Abba" further draws that connection. In Galatians 4:6 this cry is said to proceed from *the Spirit* in us, drawing forth the loving exclamation in our hearts. In Romans 8:15 it is said to proceed from *our own hearts* under the vitalizing energy of the Spirit, as the very element of the new life in believers.

Life in the Spirit is the promise of relationship, emotional intimacy with the Father. It can't take the place of lost relationships in this world. But neither is it fleeting or temporary or fragile. This is a new level of conversation with God the Father. This is the heart cry before the Father that only the Holy Spirit can bring about. This is the conversation of a loving child with a loving parent. It is the heart bearing, absolutely transparent cry to the Father. This represents a new level of praying.

The Witness of the Spirit (8:16).

"Witness" is a big word to Paul. We see it in chapter 1 and verse 9, God is his witness. In this picture the Spirit pleads the case of Christ, the Father with our own spirit. He gives us the assurance of our walk with God.

Few subjects are more Wesleyan than the Witness of the Spirit:

"By 'the testimony of the Spirit' I mean an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

(Wesley sermon "Witness of the Spirit")

"But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption? ... I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. 'Hereby know we that we are of God' in either sense, 'by the Spirit that he hath given us.' We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit." (Letter by Wesley)

"The witness of sanctification as well as of justification is the privilege of God's children. And you may have the one always clear as well as the other if you walk humbly and closely with God."

(Letter by Wesley)

The Witness of the Spirit, the calm assurance that I am His and He is mine. Assurance that cannot be taken away. Peace, joy and confidence that others may not see or know. Living in the full assurance of our faith, this is life in the Spirit.

Suffering & Glorified together with Christ (8:17).

Now Paul gets excited. He uses three double compound words in a row. He's on a roll. He's flat gitty. "Joint heirs" "Joint in suffering" "Joint in glory or approval as by God". We are joint heirs if we are joint sufferers with God that we might be joint in glory and approval.

Consider the fate of the Apostles and close disciples of Jesus.

- James the brother of John was beheaded in A.D. 44.
- Philip was thrown into prison and later crucified (A.D. 54).
- Matthew the tax collector was slain with a halberd (a shafted weapon with an axe-like cutting blade and a speared end).
- James brother of the Lord suffered martyrdom at the age of ninety-four by being beaten and stoned by the Jews.
- Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

- Andrew was crucified on a cross at Edessa.
- Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria.
- Peter, the apostle, was sought by Nero to be put to death. Jerome wrote that Peter was crucified with his head down and his feet up.
- Paul was really persecuted several times. He was scourged, stoned, and finally, Nero had him beheaded by a sword.
- Jude was crucified at Edessa in A.D. 72.
- Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and then crucified by idolaters.
- Thomas excited the rage of the pagan priests and was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.
- Luke was hanged on an olive tree by the idolatrous priests of Greece.
- Simon the Zealot was crucified in A.D. 74.
- John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, was sent from Ephesus to Rome where he was put into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by a miracle, without injury, but was then banished to the Isle of Patmos and there he wrote the book of Revelation.

Life in the Spirit means suffering & glorified together with Christ. A student is not above His teacher. This is the price of following Jesus Christ. There is a cost physically, emotionally, financially of following Jesus Christ. Following Him has cost others their very life. Inherent in that cost is the glory of walking with Jesus Christ. If it's not costing you something to follow Jesus you're probably not following Jesus Christ. We are joint heirs, the suffering is tied to the glory.

Life in the Spirit:

- Putting to death the misdeeds of the body
- Being led by the Spirit
- Deep Relationship with the Father
- The Witness of the Spirit
- Suffering & Glorified together with Christ

These are the road signs of life in the Spirit according to the Apostle Paul. How is your journey? Hopefully these are familiar mile markers for you. Don't miss your destination by failing to read the road signs.