

Sunday September 20, 2020
 Lesson 3: Life in the Spirit
 Scripture: Romans 8: 1-11

Context:

Our lesson continues in the Book of Romans as we move to chapter eight, a chapter focused on the working of the trinity, with particular focus on the work of the Holy Spirit. Our purpose in today's lesson will be to reflect on how we can cultivate life in the Spirit and to transform our selfishness. The transforming work of the Spirit enables us to experience peace and understanding.

To understand this passage, one must examine what Paul means when he uses the word "body." When Paul uses the word "body," (Greek: *soma*), he is not just imagining the human form of the body pertaining to the flesh.¹ For Paul and his world, "flesh" goes beyond human bodies to also refer to our orientation to our world, which is dominated by rebellion and sin.² The Spirit helps to guide the body to the places it needs to be and signifies how God is at work holistically with an individual.

Thus, Paul begins to make an exclamation concerning how the body is guided by the Spirit and how humanity is transformed. He begins by establishing the Lordship of Jesus Christ and how the atoning death of Jesus fulfilled the Law. In doing so, the Law expounded upon love and how the flesh is given an opportunity to a rectified relationship with God.³ Jesus gives a new way of living in the flesh and with those around us.

Next, Paul dives into how those changes take place in the flesh. For those guided by the Spirit, life is not just based on our solo desires or cravings. Those who only think of themselves are led to paths of death, cutting off self from God and others. When people only think of themselves, they cannot truly please or honor God.

Next, Paul praises those he is addressing and reminds them they are not self-centered. Even if they are self-centered, Paul uses an excellent rhetoric device to help motivate them to move away from selfishness. He reminds them of how God's Spirit lives within them. Their body is no longer oriented to just thinking of their needs and desires. Instead they are attuned to how Jesus has transformed them and led them to a new place. Because of Jesus, they have a new life in which they can live as servants of Christ. The Spirit will guide them and because of this good news, they may share the gospel with all people in how they live.

The focus for Paul is how these transformed lives lead them to a life of peace. As Spirit filled people, they will be able to experience the peace of Christ. The fruit will be in how they live their lives and get along with each other in community.

¹ Achtemeier, Paul J. "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for First and Second Kings*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 132.

² *Ibid.*, 133.

³ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

Application

What comes to your mind when you think of the word “peace?” For me, there are several things. I think about the beauty of a sunrise with many colors swirling together and the juxtaposition of the moon and stars with the rising sun. I think of the tender sounds of nature like birds calling and the rustle of falling leaves. I imagine still bodies of water, so tranquil and beautiful. I see a dog curled up beside a rocking chair looking for their owner to reach down and pet them as they read and sip coffee.

One might wonder how this word or these images correspond with the word peace and the focus of today’s lesson on selfishness. Isn’t it selfish to waste time looking at the sunrise when there are things to tend to? And isn’t selfish not to focus on other’s needs and simply sit on the porch with one’s dog? The world might tell us not to dawdle or dwell with nature when there is a cry for human needs to be met.

Or maybe what our text is reminding us is how vital these moments of peace and grace are so that we are not truly selfish or cut off from God. When we take the moments to tend to our bodily needs, we are affirming God’s goodness and how the Spirit might be calling for us to look inside of ourselves and tend to the soul. Often if we are so busy focusing on our to-do lists or how to make other people happy, we actually become more selfish. Everything is about what we can achieve or who we can make love us. We end up becoming reckless, not paying attention to this one and precious life God has given us.

All around us, we receive signals demanding all that we have without realizing how our souls are at risk. We focus so much on thinking of the things of this world, we do not pay attention to our walk with Christ or how God created us to rest and to take breaks. We worship gods like wealth, prestige, and busyness. They demand everything of us and we give everything we have to those gods without realizing the places where the Spirit might be nudging us to go somewhere different.

An attitude of life in the Spirit leads us to think about ways in which we can feel God’s peace and seek ways to nurture our soul. We block out the demands of the world so that we can focus on God and how we are in need of restoration. As we do, we find we are transformed. We begin to appreciate those moments of peace and quiet where we can hear and experience the greatness of God, the abiding presence who holds us when we have no other place to go.

In Edwin Friedman’s book “Failure of Nerve,” he talks of how at times leaders who do the right and ethical thing may be at times called “selfish.” They do the hard right things to move forward, even if it upsets people or leads to them being labeled as “heartless” or “self-centered.” The ploy of course is to emotionally cajole them into caving to the needs of others who are doing things truly out of selfish motives. Yet these leaders know that nothing is worth the cost of sacrificing their peace to appease and accommodate others who want them to trade their values or convictions. Instead, peace comes from doing the right thing and trusting the Spirit to lead them to a better and healthier place. Often these leaders are intentional at finding places and disciplines to help them experience God’s peace.

How do you carve out moments for peace and tranquility for yourself? Why is it important for everyone to find those places where they can experience God’s peace? What are the ways and the scriptures to remind you of God’s peace? How can you create healthy boundaries with others so that you can focus on your relationship with God? How does living in the Spirit lead to peace for you even in the midst of conflict?

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