

May 12, 2019

Lesson 11: Called to Life in the Spirit

Scripture: Romans 8: 1-14

Context:

We continue on with our series on call with a continued look at the book of Romans. Today's lesson focuses on what it means to live in the Spirit and how we are called to experience the Spirit. This chapter is at the end of Paul's second main section of Paul's letter to Christians in Rome.

Throughout this section Paul focuses on the relationship between the Spirit and the flesh. If there is a main thesis of the section it would be that by his Spirit God has done what the law could not do, namely condemning sin in the flesh through Jesus and allowing the law to be fulfilled by the Spirit's power.¹ Each verse seeks to explain the practical application from this fact.

Paul seeks to explain that those who seek a life in Christ are set free from the law of sin and death. The example that Christ becomes one for all to emulate. When Jesus came to earth, he showed what the human body could do through words and actions.

For humanity that means taking a look at how we live. Those who are selfish think only about their own bodies and their lives. They seek to only think of themselves and do not care who they harm and what happens to those they seek to destroy. This attitude is not only harmful to their own body as they cause dissension and violence. Their behavior is displeasing to God.

However, each person who is of the Spirit and follows Jesus lives differently. The creative power of God brings life to create a new people.² Paul encourages the Romans to keep being a new people and continue their job of being a people in the Spirit. Just as Jesus rose from the dead and had air in his lungs, the same can happen to people even if they once lived in sin. Paul is reminding the people that the bodies that they have been given new life. The Spirit will live in broken people and help to restore them to be the people they were called to be.

Paul endears the audience by using family language to remind them that they are called not to be selfish. To be a member of a family means that a person has certain privileges and responsibilities toward other members of that family as they are the closest of human ties.³ For the Christians in Rome this means that they must see themselves as a family and put to death actions that will destroy them. If they are selfish, they will perish. If they are selfless, they will live and thrive. All who are led by God's Spirit will be brothers and sisters with the deepest love and affection for one another.

Application

¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1985), 131.

² *Ibid.*, 136.

³ *Ibid.*, 137.

One of the reasons that Paul's letters remain so prolific for today is because it speaks to the issues that humans deal with every day. In today's scripture reading, we learn about what living in the Spirit looks like. The effects of the Spirit working in one's life are not just inward; they are also outward in nature.

Today's scripture passage focuses on selfishness, an issue that I see continue to creep up time and time again. The older I have gotten, the more I have discovered that one person's selfishness can completely destroy a family, a workplace, and a church. Whenever people want to make decisions that solely benefit their own well being, even if at the expense of others, then the Spirit is being smothered and trampled upon. Thus, chaos ensues and multiple other lives are hurt in the process.

Selfishness is not about taking care of your self physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We all need alone time and we all need healthy boundaries. My personal experiences are that selfishness creeps up when you believe that others need to conform to only your ways of doing things. And if they don't comply, you either bully them or slander them. Time and time again, I have watched as people have gone to great lengths to get what they want without stopping to think about how their words or actions affect others. As they do so, their actions spread like a disease and the body of Christ is broken again and again.

We are called not to just think about ourselves. The Spirit calls us to think about how our attitudes, words, and actions affect others. If you think that your behavior will cause harm to someone else or others, simply do not do it. Chances are that if you have to think about it and it sounds like a bad idea, it probably is a bad idea and you shouldn't pursue it.

To me the most Spirit filled people are those who do not necessarily always agree with someone, but will always stay connected to others. When I think about some of the Christians I look up to the most, they are those who seek to love others and equip people to be all that God has made them to be. They do not seek to tear others down and they follow the rule of do no harm.

As Paul suggests, we are to see all those we meet as brothers and sisters. If you have a sibling, you know that you may not always agree or get along with your sibling. But you are family, through good times and bad times.

How do you watch that your actions are not selfish or harmful to others? How do you respond to the conflict, especially with brothers and sisters in Christ? What are ways that you have felt the Spirit moving you to respond to others? How does your family of origin shape how you respond to other "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ? How can you practice the rule of do no harm in your daily life at home, the workplace, and the church? Who are some "Spirit" filled Christians that you love and admire?

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