

12. Living by the Spirit (4Q 2011—Galatians)

Biblical material: Gal. 5:16–25; Deut. 13:4, 5; Rom. 7:14–24; Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Matt. 22:35–40.

Quotes

- You are only as spiritual as you are scriptural. *Myron Augsburger*
- Spiritual things are against the stream; heaven is up the hill. *Richard Sibbes*
- Real spirituality always has an outcome. *Oswald J. Smith*
- All Christ's gifts are like himself, spiritual and heavenly. *Thomas Brooks*
- Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin. *John Wesley*
- Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life. *Buddha*
- It is the unseen and the spiritual in people that determines the outward and the actual. *Oswald Chambers*
- We do not need more intellectual power, we need more spiritual power. We do not need more of the things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen. *Calvin Coolidge*
- I've only paid lip service to a spiritual life. *Sting*

Questions

How do we know if we are “living by the Spirit”? What does this mean anyway? How do we know if we are spiritual when we can only measure behavior? How can this lead us astray? If we have chosen to live by the Spirit, why isn't it working? How do we play out the great controversy in our lives? How do we demonstrate the truth about God?

Bible summary

Gal. 5:16-25 contrasts the life led by the Spirit with one that follows our sinful nature. The truth is self-evident: we know this from our own personal experience. Recognizing the different results from our choices of how to live, these two verses are key: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.” Gal. 5:24, 25 NLT.

Deut. 13:4, 5 tells us to follow only the true God. The famous passage from Romans 7 well describes our own experience: the good we want to do, we end up not doing, while the bad we don't want to do—that's what we do! But as Jer. 7:9, 10 remind us, you can't follow the way of evil and then come to worship God as if there's nothing wrong. It's as if you make all these promises to God and then go out and break them (Hos. 4:2). What are the two most important commandments? Love God, and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40).

Comment

What is birth? Arrival, beginning, start. Life entering into the world. The commencement of our time on earth is such a traumatic process, yet one which is to be desired. It means total change for the baby, from the time spent in mother's womb to a new and totally different time.

So is this spiritual “re-birth.” Jesus wants us to see how different the life in the Spirit really is. It is not a fixing of the present. It is not an adjustment to the present way of life. It is a completely new experience, a completely new life.

Through the baptism of the Spirit, we begin a totally different life in Jesus. This is what Jesus wants us to understand. Our belief in him means a radical revolution in our way of life, our thoughts, our behaviour. We simply cannot go on living as we have before. We are new creatures in Christ.

Accepting Jesus doesn’t just make us a bit better than we were before. It doesn’t make our former life more acceptable to God. He doesn’t just fix some loose screws.

We are *re-made*. That’s what Jesus wants. Now that may take a little time, and we may not choose to be re-made in this way, but that is God’s plan for us.

And if we do have that change, then we understand that we take part in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are buried with him in baptism, and raised with him into newness of life. And that newness of life is to walk with God, to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to be clothed with Christ himself.

The question comes to all of us as we consider living in the Spirit: what will your spiritual birth lead to? Will you soon grow sick, and fall victim to one of the many spiritual diseases? For those who have already known the re-birth, are you still alive? And for those who look to the future, will you leave your decision until too late, and experience a stillborn re-birth.

Or will you have a wonderful, fulfilling life with your Saviour and re-creator, a life full of the spirit, with a firm confidence that will see you through to the end?

Ellen White Comments

The whole spiritual life is molded by our conceptions of God; and if we cherish erroneous views of His character, our souls will sustain injury. We should see in God one who yearns toward the children of men, longing to do them good. {RH January 14, 1890}

We need to have higher and more distinct views of the character of Christ, to lead us to copy his example... We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God’s character. We have lessons to learn of Jesus’ love. {RH April 5, 1887}

There are many who have but an imperfect understanding of the character of God. They think of Him as stern and arbitrary, and when the fact is presented that God is love, it is a difficult matter for these souls to lay aside their false conceptions of God. But if they do not let the word of truth in, rooting out the thorns, the briars will start up afresh, and choke out the good word of God; their religious experience will be dwarfed, for the evil of their hearts will overtop the tender plant of truth, and shut away the spiritual atmosphere. {RH June 21, 1892}

For thousands of years, men had been in thralldom to a degenerating power. Satan had perverted their conceptions of God, and of the plan and work of salvation. He had brought their minds so fully under his control that every heavenly attribute had been well-nigh destroyed. Of himself, man had not one thought nor impulse of a spiritual nature. He could do nothing to save himself. Only as Christ should draw him, could he take one step in repentance or reform. {YI, March 19, 1903}

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