

“LIVING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

July 14, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 8:4b-11

What are you living for? Why do you get up every morning? Why do you keep doing what you keep doing? What do you want out of life?

What do most people want out of life? Basically, to make enough money or have enough money so they can enjoy all the good things money provides, creature comforts, conveniences, and pleasures. To be able to enjoy life, to have fun. Isn't that really what it all boils down to, the pursuit of pleasure. And the desire to be fulfilled, to be satisfied.

And nothing like the summer to bring all of this out in all of us. Summer is the time we look forward to, to enjoy ourselves, have some fun, take some time off, go on vacation, get away from it all, get outside and enjoy all the good things of life, time with family and friends.

And what is so wrong with all of those things? They are good things from God. We are looking forward to enjoying these things with our family. The trouble comes if that is all we want, all we pursue, all we think about. This life and no more.

What are you living for? Who are you living for?

So you say you are a Christian. What difference does that make? How does that make you any different from everyone else, from your non-believing friend or neighbor? What's the difference between a Christian in name only, and a Christian who is really living as a Christian?

Paul divides humanity into two groups and shows us the contrast between them. There are two roads, two paths, two directions, two ways of living. You have the mindset according to the kind of person you are and the path you are following.

There are those with a mind set on fleshly, worldly, selfish things. What does the flesh do? What does Paul say about the flesh? The fleshly mind is attached to the things of the flesh. They are addicted to the world and to the flesh. They have submitted themselves to worldly interests and sensual desires.

The mind-set of the flesh thinks about the flesh and fleshly desires.

It is hostile to God. Why? Because it worships idols rather than God (remember Romans 1?).

It doesn't submit to God. Why? Because it rebels against God. It hates/rejects His authority.

It cannot please God. Why? Because it is trapped in slavery to sin and can't escape, and has no desire to please God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

It is selfish, self-centered, my will be done.

I Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

This old nature was us before our death and resurrection in Christ, when we lived under the control of sin and self and carnal appetites.

Ephesians 2:1-3 You were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Ephesians 2:12 You were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Ephesians 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

In the flesh there is no life, we are all dead men walking. We are servants of sin, dead in our sins and trespasses.

What is the alternative? Is there another reality for humanity?

But ...

Notice all the buts. But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

This is the basic definition of a Christian.

“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” We do not belong to Christ if we do not have the Spirit of Christ. We are not Christians if we do not have the Spirit of Christ.

A Christian is a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who enters in enabling us to repent and believe, it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates our cold, dead hearts, opens our blind eyes and deaf ears, who gives us spiritual awareness of spiritual things.

Paul is writing to the church in Rome, to Christians, so why does he say if? Paul does this a lot in his letters to Christians and Christian churches. Three times Paul says if.

Romans 8:9-10 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. 10 But *if* Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 *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.

Why does Paul not assume we are Christians, why does he sow this little seed of doubt?

Because complacency is the enemy of our sanctification and Paul wants us to ask ourselves the question do I have the Spirit, am I a Christian. Paul wants us to examine ourselves and wonder to ourselves if we are a Christian.

Are you sure? Don't be complacent, don't be nonchalant, don't be lukewarm or wishy washy.

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Holy Spirit's work is to resurrect us from our dead ways and make us holy, make us like Christ.

God killed us in Christ and then raised us from the dead by joining us to the resurrected Christ. The Spirit cannot dwell in a person without bring about a resurrection. That is what He does. This is a guarantee. So though we struggle with indwelling sin, we know that our mortal bodies will be raised in the end.

Romans 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The power of the indwelling Spirit is real power, life giving and life changing power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power in us available to raise us from living in and by the flesh and pursuing death.

The Holy Spirit renews our minds, *gives us a new mind*, a new mindset.

Having the Spirit of Christ in us gives us the likeness and life of Christ in us, the growing likeness by the growing fruit of the Holy Spirit. You have a sense of new life, and a sure and certain hope of eternal life.

Paul is always challenging and encouraging us. Do you bear the marks of being sons and daughters of God? Do you bear the marks of being regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you bear the marks of an increasing Christ-likeness? Do you desire the things of God?

What does a mind set on the Spirit think about?

A mind set on the Spirit is like the mind of a lover thinking about his beloved. Spontaneous thoughts, thoughts throughout the day, thoughts sometimes of gratitude, sometimes of joy. A mind set on the Spirit thinks about pleasing God more than self.

A mind set on the Spirit lives before God, mindful of God, of His presence, His peace, His provision, under His authority, wanting what He wants more than what I want.

A mind set on the Spirit will include God in his decisions and plans, he will think about what God would have him do, what will most glorify God.

A mind set on the Spirit has not arrived, but is pressing on, striving, moving ever upward, further up and further in, that long obedience in the same direction.

A mind set on the Spirit knows that Satan is constantly trying to get our mind off the Spirit, so the Spirit mindful mind is discerning, vigilant, fighting the lies and deception and distractions of the enemy of our souls. The Spirit puts on the armor of God for the fight.

A mind set on the Spirit thinks about the wisdom of the Spirit, teaching us and guiding us in the truth, in what is good and right. It searches out His wisdom in Scripture and thinks on it.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

James 3:17 The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

A mind set on the Spirit thinks about the power of the Spirit, that same power that raised Jesus from the dead, which is power to raise us to life, power to fight our indwelling sin, power to overcome fear, doubt, anxiety, power to forgive, power to love others who are not easy to love.

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

This power is meant to make you holy. The Spirit is a holy Spirit and where the Spirit is, there holiness is at work. This means you are being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ, conformed to the will of Christ, putting what is unholy behind you.

The mind set on the Spirit thinks about the promises of God, promises to be with us always in any and every circumstance.

Philippians 4:6-9 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The mind set on the Spirit has peace, the peace of God.

A mind set on the Spirit thinks about confession and repentance and forgiveness and humility, that will be the focus of our next text in two weeks.

The Spirit is always at work in the lives of Christians, we must always wait with patience and groaning until the final remains of sin are abolished from our mortal bodies, and He brings to completion the good works He has begun.

This table reminds us of our on going need for spiritual food and drink, for spiritual strength in our fight against sin.

This table reminds us of our encouragement and hope that are in Christ who is for us, seen in what He has done for us.

This table reminds us that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is at work in us.

This table reminds us of the profound reality of our union with Christ as we participate in the body and blood of Christ, of our participation in His death and resurrection, that He is in us and we are in Him.

This table reminds us of why we need the Holy Spirit, so that we can walk and live according to the Spirit filled with His life and peace, His power and righteousness, with His spiritual food.

Come with repentant and believing and joyful hearts.