

MIND THE SPIRIT NOT THE FLESH

- A. Introduction: We are discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as part of a larger discussion about the importance of becoming God-inside minded. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior then God, by His Spirit, has indwelt you. You are the temple or dwelling place of God. I Cor 3:16; I Cor 6:19
1. We've discussed the fact that the Holy Spirit is in you to transform you. God, by the power of His Spirit in you, is working to restore you to what He always intended you to be—a son or daughter of God who is fully conformed to the image of Christ. Rom 8:29,30
 - a. As part of His work in us, the Holy Spirit leads and guides us. Many of us think that being guided by the Spirit means being told whether to turn left or right at the next corner or which house or car to buy. But that's not actually what the Holy Spirit has come to do.
 1. The Holy Spirit is in us to reveal the Living Word of God, Jesus, to us and give us revelation from the written Word of God, the Bible.
 2. The Holy Spirit is in us to guide our conduct as He empower us to obey God and live and walk like Jesus in His humanity. He is the pattern for God's family.
 - b. That doesn't mean we can't get guidance from the Holy Spirit in the specific affairs of life. But His primary concern is that we be conformed to the image of Christ. God is much more interested in you and I developing Christ-like character than He is in what color car we drive.
 2. Last week we began to talk about how the Holy Spirit leads us in the in areas of life where there are no specific Bible passages to direct us, such as where to live, where to work, which church to attend, etc. We made these points.
 - a. In order to learn to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit we must first understand the human makeup. Man is a three part being made up of spirit, soul, and body. I Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12
 1. With our bodies we contact the physical world. Our soul includes our mental and emotional faculties (Ps 42:5,6; Ps 116:7). Our spirit is the portion of our makeup capable of direct communication with God.
 - A. God doesn't speak to us through our physical body (our physical senses). He doesn't speak to our mind or emotions. He communicates with us by His Spirit in our spirit.
 - B. Prov 20:27--God the Holy Ghost communicate with us in and through our spirit where He dwells.
 2. The Holy Spirit most often speaks to us, not through audible words, but through an inward witness or assurance, an inward knowing.
 - A. The leading of the Holy Spirit is very gentle. We would call it a hunch. Each time you follow that leading, that inward hunch, it's easier to perceive the next time.
 - B. His leading usually doesn't seem supernatural in any way. We tend to look for the spectacular (like an audible voice or a vision) and miss the supernatural leading of the Holy Spirit through His inward witness.
 1. The Holy Spirit more often says no or nothing rather than yes. Remember, if you are doing God's will (obeying His written Word) you are in His will. So, He really only needs to alert you if you're about to take a wrong move.
 2. Remember also, in many decisions we gather all the facts we can, make the most reasonable decision based on what we know, all the while maintaining the attitude: I'll change course immediately if you tell me to do so Lord.
 3. There's a lot of misinformation and lack of information about how the Holy Spirit guides us. Many Christians know little or nothing about following the leading of the Holy Spirit. We're working on sorting it out so we can better cooperate with Him. We want to continue the discussion in this lesson.
- B. In Rom 8:1-16 Paul wrote a lengthy passage about the necessity of learning to live in dependence on the power in you, the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Paul stresses the fact that we are born of God, literal sons of

God through new birth.

1. In Rom 8:16 Paul stated that the Holy Spirit bears witness that we are sons of God. He was specifically dealing with the fact that the Holy Spirit assures us we are sons of God. But, in doing so, he gives us insight into how the Holy Spirit communicates with us. He bears witness.
 - a. Beareth witness is one word in the Greek. It means to testify jointly: The Spirit Himself [thus] testifies together with our own spirit, [assuring us] that we are children of God. (Amp)
 - b. Paul's point in the context of his statement is that the Holy Spirit in you testifies to and with your spirit that you are born of God, you are a son of God.
 1. Even though the Holy Spirit is in all who have acknowledged Jesus as Savior and Lord, and even though He is communicating to them through their spirit that they are sons of God, many Christians never get the message.
 2. Many sincere Christians struggle with: "Am I even saved?" How is it that possible when the Holy Spirit is communicating with them inwardly yet they miss the message?
2. We get insight into this through something else Paul wrote. In the context of sharing the wisdom of God with those he preached to, Paul made it clear that God wants to reveal things to us by His Spirit.
 - a. I Cor 2:9-12--Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him" (NLT). Paul declared that God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit. He further states that God has given us His Spirit so that we might know what He has given us. (Lots in this passage; lessons for another time).
 - b. v14--But note that Paul goes on to say that, even though God's Spirit is here to reveal the things of God to us, there are people who can't receive such revelations. He calls them natural men and he contrasts them with spiritual men who do receive insight from God..
 1. What does it mean to be a natural man and a spiritual man? There's a lot in these terms, more than we can discuss now. But note several points. Just three verses down, in the first three verses of chapter 3, he contrasts spiritual people (men who perceive the things of God) with carnal people.
 2. Paul said to those to whom he was writing (Christians living in the city of Corinth) that he couldn't talk to them like spiritual men because they were carnal. Carnal, in the Greek, means pertaining to the flesh.
 - A. Paul was writing to these people because a large amount of unChrist-like behavior taking place among them (lessons for another day). He wrote to exhort them to change their behaviors.
 - B. I Cor 3:3--For you are still (unspiritual, having the nature) of the flesh—under the control of ordinary impulses. For as long as [there are] envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men? (Amp)
 - c. Here's the point for our discussion. People have trouble discerning the inward witness of the Holy Spirit because they are carnal or fleshly.
 1. When a person acknowledges Jesus as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit regenerates his spirit and conforms it to the image of Christ. However, our soul (mind and emotions) and body are not directly affected by the regeneration of our spirit (new birth).
 2. Although our recreated spirit wants to and is able to do the will of God, our flesh not. Therefore, we experience conflict between our spirit (which has been transformed) and our flesh (which is as yet unchanged).
 3. To be carnal means to live according to the dictates of the unchanged parts of your being. This can range from outright sin (such as giving into desires prohibited by God's Word) to basing what you believe on what you see and how you feel rather than on what the Bible says.
 - d. Christians who engage in willful, sinful activities are carnal and cannot perceive the leading of the Holy Spirit in their spirit. Christians who put more stock in what they see and feel also cannot

perceive the inward leading of the Holy Spirit.

3. Let's back up a minute and look at the context of Paul's statement in Romans about being led by the Spirit (Rom 8:1-16). We aren't going to do verse by verse (interest of time). But note these points.

a. v1-4--Unregenerate human beings (those not born of God) aren't capable of keeping God's Law (doing what God wants). Through the new birth the Holy Spirit regenerates us and indwells us to enable and empower us to walk as Jesus walked.

1. But that doesn't mean we automatically live perfect lives. We have to learn to live in dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit in us and the leading of the Holy Spirit. First and foremost, He wants to guide us into holy living.

2. v11-13--The Holy Spirit (the power that raised Christ from the dead and will ultimately fully transform our flesh) is in us now to help us control ourselves. We are under no obligation to follow the dictates of the as yet unchanged parts of our being. We, by the power of the Spirit in us, are to bring an end to the dictates of our flesh.

b. Rom 8:5,6--Note that Paul contrasts those who are carnal and those who are spiritual. Those who are carnal live according to the dictates of their flesh. (lots of lessons for another day)

1. Those who are spiritual live according to the dictates of their spirit which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The determining factor is your mind and where you focus your mental attention.

A. v5--For they who live after the flesh, give their attention to the things of the flesh...but they who live after the spirit, give their attention to spiritual things (Montgomery);

People who are controlled by the spiritual think of what is spiritual (Goodspeed).

B. Rom 8:6--But to set the mind on the flesh brings death, whereas to set the mind on the Spirit brings life and peace (Norlie); Now the mind of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death—death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter. But the mind of the (Holy) Spirit is life and soul-peace

[both now and forever]. (Amp)

2. Minding the flesh means you get your information about reality from your soul (mind and emotions) and your body. Minding the spirit means you get your information about reality from the Holy Spirit. That means, first and foremost, the written Word of God, the Bible.

A. It is the only 100% accurate, reliable source of information from God. Every supposed supernatural occurrence (such as seeing a vision, dreaming a dream, or hearing a voice) must be judged in the light of the Word of God.

B. If you hear a voice and it tells you—I am the Lord. It is my will that you marry your neighbor's wife. She shouldn't have married him. I meant for you to have her—you know you have not heard the voice of God because the message is contrary to the written Word of God.

C. (Next week (hopefully), we'll say some things about visions, dreams, and audible voices.)

4. I realize that when we talk about being guided by the Holy Spirit most of us think of Him telling us what to do, where to go, and how to solve our problems so we can get ahead in life. But that isn't His priority. Being led by the Holy Spirit first means being led into holy living or living like Jesus (the pattern for God's family) did when He was on this earth.

a. As I said earlier, this doesn't mean He won't give us direction in the affairs of life. But the number one way He does so is through the written Word of God which contains principles of wisdom that help us make wise choices in the affairs of life. (We'll talk about some of the more spectacular examples of being led by the Spirit in the Book of Acts next week.)

1. Here's the point for this lesson. If you are a carnal Christian who follows the dictates of the unchanged parts of your being the only direction the Holy Spirit has for you is: stop it.

2. If you don't listen to the revealed Word of God (such as walk in love and treat others the way you want to be treated), then what makes you think the Holy Spirit is going to give you specific direction about which car to buy?

b. My purpose in teaching these kinds of lessons is not to discourage but to encourage through instruction. If you are struggling with your flesh in an area, that doesn't mean you can't receive direction from the Holy Spirit. But we have to be honest with ourselves.

1. What is our motivation? What is our heart set on? Is it on pleasing God above all else, even though we sometimes fall short? If that's your motivation, when you do fail, keep moving forward. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. You'll get there. Phil 1:6
2. If that's not your primary desire, then you do need to make some adjustments.

C. Conclusion: Throughout our lives, our view of reality has been shaped by what we see and feel. That has to change if you are going to become skilled at following the leading of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of life.

1. For most of us, it's the testimony of our emotions and body that drown out the inward witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit in our spirit. The voices of our emotions and body are louder and clearer to us because we aren't familiar with the Holy Spirit. We must become more sensitive to Him.
 - a. This brings us back to renewing our mind. Discerning the inward leading of the Holy Spirit is much more difficult if your mind is not renewed.
 1. Rom 12:2--Christians are instructed to renew our mind "so that you may discern what God's will is—all that is good, acceptable, and perfect (20th Cent).
 2. A renewed mind is a mind that sees things the way God does. God has given us His written Word, the Bible, to show us the way things really are. That in turn helps us cooperate with God more fully as He directs our lives by His Spirit.
 - b. To renew your mind you must become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. It will impart a certainty to you that there is more to reality than what you see and feel in the moment.
 1. Almighty God is perfectly present with you, loving and reigning and upholding all things by the Word of His power. Nothing can come against you that's bigger than Him.
 2. This didn't take Him by surprise. He sees a way to cause it all to serve His purposes and He will see you through until He gets you out.
 - c. We think of living by the flesh as smoking pot or getting drunk. But if you let worry dominate your mind and actions, you're living by the flesh and not the Spirit. Renewing your mind will help you get control.
2. Take time to think about the things we're saying in these lessons. Think about the fact that God by His Spirit is in you to empower you and enable you to walk as Jesus walked.
 - a. Become aware of what's going on in your mind. Are you focusing your attention on what stirs you up emotionally or are you focusing on the way things really are according to God? Are you thanking Him for help and direction before you see it or are you begging Him to do what He has already promised to do: Guide you with His eyes (Ps 32:8)?
 - b. Begin to think in terms of listening to what God through His Word says and not to what you circumstances and emotions are saying. It can be a battle, but it's worth it. Lots more next week!!