



The Holy Spirit – like Jesus – in holiness

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Readings

Gal 5:13-26

John 14:15-21

We are continuing to learn more about the Holy Spirit today and about how he helps us to live more like Jesus.

The Spirit who was poured out in the sound of a mighty wind with what looked like tongues of flame on each of those the first disciples at Pentecost

The Spirit who Jesus calls the Comforter – literally, the Paraclete – the one who comes alongside. He is like living water.

He's the Spirit of truth: the one who reveals Jesus to the world; who convicts the world of sin; and who teaches us all the things that Jesus taught us. In simplistic terms the Spirit is the personal presence of Jesus in the Christian.

The same Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation to bring life, brings new birth and life to us as Christians, as Jesus explains to Nicodemus in John chapter 3,

And even though Saint Paul explains that the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to each Christian, the church, certainly the Anglican church has sadly been wary of using them, such is the unpredictable nature of the Spirit's life giving work, but we're going to take a look gifts like speaking in tongues, words of

knowledge, prophecy, healing.... over the next few weeks in our Sunday morning worship :

Conversely the idea of the Holy Spirit producing good fruit comes much more easily to us.

Who wouldn't want to be loving, know joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

And yet the reality is that most often most of us don't produce that sort of fruit even though we long to do so!

And Saint Paul knows this. Have a look with me verse 17:

for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, **so that you do not do what you want.**

In Romans 7 he utters a similar cry of despair: For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

So how do we do it? What does this living in the Spirit mean? How can I allow, how can I work with the Holy Spirit to allow Jesus Christ's holiness to grow in me as I long to do?

Many of us have been led to believe that we have a choice of just two ways to live.

One option is just to do as we please.

We simply follow our natural urges – what Paul describes as our sinful nature; where we follow the lusts of the flesh. Some of these are described in this fifth chapter of Galatians:

sexual immorality – sex with anyone who is not your husband or wife - impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

And by adding that phrase 'and the like', **Paul may not have yet mentioned some of the ways that you are tempted to slide towards even if you are a Christian...**

For, strange as it might seem, the Galatians were a subset of people like this -but who were Christians! But since they have been taught that as Christians they no longer needed to live by the Jewish moral code or law; that they were free to live however they wanted, they were beginning to slide into living in these ways.

Saint Augustine once described the Christian life whereby we can “Love God and do whatever we please”. The Galatian Christians had just forgotten the love God bit and what that meant: Hence Paul saying in 13 and 14:

You my brothers and sisters were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

So, if one way of living, could be described as “do as you please”, what is the other way that enables us to serve one another in love?

I think many of us would consider the alternative way of living as “**try as hard as I can to please God**”, to try hard to do as Jesus urges us: “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. [Mt 5]

We want to please the Lord who loves us, who died for us, and so we try harder and harder to do just that – like practising hard to do our gymnastics. We work hard at being more patient and even pray for more patience.

We work hard to be self-controlled and pray for self-control. We even make little rules to help us do that – the two nights a week without rule...whether that is beer, or double cream...

We want to be generous but begin to use rules to make it easier - perhaps decide that we will give a tithe, 10% of our money away and be happy that we're being generous...

None of this is wrong in itself but, misguidedly, we can begin to rely on the little rules we've made, becoming legalistic in our Christian living, and we can also easily slide into beginning to believe that if we work really hard at this we can stay in God's good books.

But we won't. Because it's doesn't work like that . We are simply not able to please him all the time by ensuring we stick to a moral code, which is why, thank God, that we are not made right before God by what we do but by our faith in Jesus.

And as well as being pointless, it's utterly exhausting to simply keep trying to produce the fruit of the Spirit ourselves, especially when so often we fail.

Indeed we will have missed the whole point of the Christian life in which Jesus calls us to life in all its fullness and freedom.

So if the first choice we have is to "do what we please".

the second option is "try as hard as I can to please God myself"

is there after all a third way?

There is. **Walking in step with the Spirit as Paul tries to explain to us here in Galatians**, and also a great deal about it in the book of Romans.

We need to take in these truths:

1 as Christians , our old self, sinful nature is dead.

The old self, which Paul describes as our sinful nature, is the part of us that quite naturally takes pleasure in rotten fruit has a significant selfish and self centred power. Whilst it is still alive and kicking we will still be bound to it, drawn to it's voice. And if we are simply trying harder to produce fruit of the Spirit

without doing anything about our old self, then we are still bound and will never be free.

But the good news is that:

v 24 "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires". As Christians, our sinful nature has died and has no more power over us. This is what Jesus did on the cross for us and it is also what we chose to do, agreed to let happen....

2 So our old self is dead but we have a new self. And the new self, which the Holy Spirit confers on us is our new life in Christ, our born again nature.

But there's more still! Paul writes this in Galatians 2: 20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but **Christ lives in me** I have a new nature, and by his Holy Spirit. Christ lives in me – and in you.

But even with this new self, new life, even with Christ living his life in me, practically, how do we manage it, how do we walk in step with the Spirit?

Three things to do:

First is to remember that there is training we can do to help us. Remember to train with the Spiritual disciplines of regular prayer, worship, bible study, fasting, giving, spending time in solitude. Not the same as trying harder to be good, but it is

working in order for us to stay more in tune with the Lord to see better where his footsteps are leading.

Second is Every morning, and every time you remember to, remind yourself that your old nature is dead, that you are free to live in the new. 2 Cor 10:5 – we take captive every thought for Christ. Christian experience, including that of St Paul, is that there is a daily battle to keep telling the devil or our own dead self that they no longer have any power over us.

And finally, Paul here in Galatians 5 talks of walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, living in the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit.

So if we can get into spiritual training, learn to remember the truth that our old self is dead and has no more power over us,

Then, in faith, we have to have courage to step into that holy new way of living, following the Spirit's lead, and walk in step with the Spirit

I'm reminded of the frail page struggling through the snow behind good King Wenceslas....

Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."

"Mark my footsteps, my good page

Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."
In his master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed

So, to conclude

How can we live the holy lives we want to for God?

It **is** about practice and perseverance, but it's not about trying harder. It's about trusting, about actively **Walking in step with the Spirit**

v 25: since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

But, as the Chinese Pastor, Watchman Nee reminds us, the Christian life is **not a changed life but an exchanged life.**

Remember Paul says "I no longer live, but **Christ lives in me.**"

It is about following the Spirit's lead, but it is also about letting Jesus, by the Holy Spirit actually live in me.

It's as if the Spirit is like the Sat Nav in the car, we have to follow his lead at every turn.

AND it also like having Jesus, by his Spirit as our co driver too. To empower us, so that we too might live life in all its fullness – like Jesus, for Jesus.