

Bible Studies for Life for October 26: The Holy Spirit is essential to a holy life

October 9, 2008

What have we learned about ourselves so far this month? We all are hopeless sinners. God loves us anyway and, therefore, offers us a way to heaven through faith in his son, Jesus. But even when we accept that offer, we find ourselves continuing in sin.

Sin is indeed a problem. Because we inherited a sin nature, there doesn't seem to be much we can do to overcome it. Accepting God's law doesn't help—that just exposes our tendency to sin. Accepting God's grace doesn't help—that just reveals our powerlessness to stop sinning.

Do we have any hope? Or are we just doomed to failure in our attempts to live for God? Does God, who is so perfect that imperfection cannot enter his presence, condemn us?

Our lesson this week addresses these questions. And happily, it gives us hope.

We have the power to overcome sin

All too often, we believe saying is the same as doing. So, if we verbalize a belief, we don't have to act on it. If we confess Jesus is Lord, we can live as we wish because we know our sins are forgiven. And if God convicts us, we can simply bow our heads, confess our shortcomings and then return to our sins.

But such behavior reveals a deeper problem. "Those who live according to

the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires The mind of sinful man is death The sinful mind is hostile to God.” (v. 5-7). When we stop striving for God’s standard in our lives, we turn our backs on him. And once we’ve done that, we no longer live for God, but for sin.

It seems clear we can’t make it to heaven by our own good behavior. That’s why we trust Jesus to make a way for us. But we fail to realize we can’t live for God on our own strength either. We must depend on the Holy Spirit for that.

Jesus begins the process of salvation by offering us a new birth, salvation. In that birth, we are given a new Spirit, the Holy Spirit. “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (v. 9). What we can’t do, the Spirit can do. Where the human spirit fails, God’s Spirit succeeds.

For us, the challenge is learning to lean on the Spirit and allowing him more and more control in our lives. It can seem odd to think of allowing someone else to control our lives, but in truth, we already are under the control of something else. “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

We only have two choices: serve sin and allow sin to control us, or serve God and allow the Holy Spirit to control us.

Learning to live in the Spirit

Part of what makes it so difficult to live in the Spirit is that we are able to compartmentalize our lives. We can be totally submitted to God in one part of our lives and totally submitted to sin in another area. Our goal—and this is what working out our salvation means—is to weed out all the unsubmitted areas until we are in total submission to God. But how do we

do that?

- **Be honest with yourself and God.** Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth. If we are to obey him, we must be honest. Yes, you are a new creation, but you must learn to live like a new creation. Don't be afraid to admit your weaknesses. God loves to be strong where we are weak. Confess those areas and ask for help to change them.

- **Watch your attitude.** Your attitude reflects your heart, and a heart submitted to God can only produce fruit of the Spirit. "The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (v. 6). If you catch yourself displaying a bad attitude, you likely have found an area that isn't submitted to God. But don't just confess it. Turn it over to God and let him help you change.

- **Be realistic.** A house isn't built in a day, and the renovation of your spirit will take some time as well. Sin is a bad habit that must be broken. If you act on instinct, you will likely sin. Instead, slow down and take your time. Think about what you say before you say it. Think about your actions before you act. Ask God for wisdom to measure your thoughts before they turn into actions.

We can be more than conquerors

In Jesus' last teaching session with his disciples, he told them his desire for anyone who wants to follow him: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). When we obey the Spirit, allowing him to transform us, we please God. We also begin to see victory in our Christian walk.

- **We will be able to put to death the "misdeeds of the body."** We can't produce the fruit of the Spirit when we aren't submitted to God. But if we will stop following our own desires and start listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit, sin will lose its grip on us, and we will see more of God's fruit in our lives. By allowing the Holy Spirit to have control,

we become “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (v. 29).

- **Our prayers will become more effective.** All of us have felt at one time or another that we didn’t know how to pray. Fortunately, we don’t have to. If we are submitted to the Holy Spirit, He takes the desires of our heart and presents them to God for us. “But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (v. 26b-27). We only need to worry about the condition of our hearts. God takes care of the rest.

- **We will not be condemned.** From man’s perspective, the greatest benefit of Christianity is the security of knowing our eternal future. It’s a hope we can rest in. So although we continue to sin, we don’t have to fear. Nor does sin have to be our master. By developing new habits, new attitudes and new thought patterns, we can overcome. “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (v. 33).

Our sin nature is real, and we must constantly work to overcome it. Fortunately, though, we aren’t alone in this struggle. God understands our weakness and gives us his own Spirit to help us. Let’s breathe a prayer of thanks. And let’s show our appreciation by listening to and following his promptings. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Discussion questions

- *Have you ever experienced a time when you wanted to do one thing, but you felt a prompting to do something else?*
- Is it practical in today’s fast-paced world to slow down so we have time to listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit?
- What does it mean to “keep in step with the Spirit”?

