

THE ACTIVE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
(SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2012)

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:27-32; Rom. 8:9-11

Introduction

Is the Holy Spirit still at work today in you and in the life of this congregation?

We remember and celebrate what is today the most significant event in church history following the ascension of Jesus Christ – the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in either A.D. 30 or 33.

When you read the book of Acts, the presence of the Holy Spirit is unmistakable and powerfully recorded.

Acts 2 – there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2 – Peter preaches one of the greatest evangelistic sermons and 3,000 souls were saved and added to the number of believers.

Acts 3 – Peter and John are asked for alms by a man lame from birth and Peter brings healing in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Acts 4 – The apostles who not long before had all deserted Jesus at his arrest now stand before the religious leaders with incredible boldness. The religious leaders knew that Peter and John had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

Acts 4:31 records the end of what must have been the most exciting prayer meeting in history.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Is the Holy Spirit still at work in our own lives?

There should be plenty of evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in us and among us. We will not see all the same signs that we read in the book of Acts, but the presence of the Holy Spirit must be evident if we truly belong to Jesus Christ.

Christ's resurrection is the triumph over sin and death, and the world, and yet as believers we are often discouraged by our remaining sin, we are frustrated with the decay of our bodies, and we may even fear our own deaths. However, it is through the working of the Holy Spirit that you are given assurance and comfort in each of

these concerns. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that you can do anything that is truly pleasing to God.

If you are in Christ, then live with certainty that the Holy Spirit is still active in your life.

We will consider from verses 9-11, three points related to the presence the Holy Spirit's work.

1. You are no longer in the flesh (9)
2. Though your body is dying, the Spirit is life (10)
3. Your mortal bodies will be given new life (11)

1. You Are No Longer in the Flesh (9)

Look again at verses 8 and 9. ⁸ **So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** ⁹ **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**

The word flesh is found 13 times in the first 13 verses of Romans 8, though it doesn't have the same meaning each time that it is used. Verse 3 states Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, meaning that He had a physical body like our physical bodies yet without sin. But since our sinful nature is so closely linked with our physical bodies, flesh is often used to speak of our fallen, sinful, and rebellious natures which control and dominate along with the powerful forces of the world. Those who are in the flesh are controlled by their fallen, sinful, and rebellious natures and the world's system. There is no ultimate free-will for those in the flesh. And those who live in the flesh cannot please God.

Think of the blind lawyer, Chen, who recently was allowed to come to the US. After serving 4 years in prison on bogus charges, Chen was placed under house arrest or soft detention starting in September 2010. This house arrest still involved horrible treatment. He and his wife were beaten, electrical power was cut to their house, and metal sheets were placed over the windows of their house. His daughter's toys were also confiscated as part of the harassment against his family. This was hardly a condition of freedom even though he had served the sentence imposed on him.

In a similar way there is no freedom for those controlled by the flesh. There is absolutely no freedom to please God. There is only bondage. And what makes this bondage even worse is that those who are so controlled by the flesh find pleasure in their bondage.

And God finds no satisfaction or pleasure even in the supposed good things that they might do, because those who are controlled by the flesh are at war with God.

Now as a believer you are also troubled by the remaining power of sin. If you are honest you too know the sinful desires that plague you. If you kept a running total of every impure thought, every foolish or inappropriate word, every worry, and every sinful action, you would cry out like David, my sins are more than the hairs of my head.

And indeed it may seem that you go through periods of time where you struggle even more against sin and the remaining elements of bondage to the flesh. There seem to be both those periods of victory and those periods where you find yourself with more defeats than you would like to admit. Though you don't like to dwell on these realities, they are a part of our Christian experience.

But thankfully this is not the entire picture. Paul says, **but you are not in the flesh BUT in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit dwells in you.** Now before we look at the *if* part of Paul's words, consider what this statement means in light of verse 8. Because the Holy Spirit lives in you, you can truly please God. The reason that you can please God is not simply because you can do good things. Even unbelievers can do good things viewed from merely an external perspective. The reason that you can please God is because the Spirit dwells in you. And that means that when you truly do something good it is because of the Holy Spirit's work in your life, which means that God the Father is pleased with you and finds satisfaction in you, despite the fact that your obedience is not perfect and never will be perfect. **God finds pleasure in you because the Holy Spirit dwells in you.** God the Father finds pleasure in you because you are in His Son in whom He is well-pleased. It is God the Father's great love for Jesus that means He also loves you with a love much greater than you so often realize.

Every time you find victory over sin and every time you see in your life a motivation to do what is right according to God's Word, you should be reminded that this is a sign of the Spirit's work in your life. When you call out to God in prayer, that is also a sign of the Spirit's work in your life. Also your frustration with your remaining sin is an indication that the Holy Spirit is working in you, conforming you more and more into the image of His Son. **The triumph of Christ over sin and death is a present reality in our lives through the working of the Holy Spirit.** There should be abundant evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in your life.

No, we don't have the full victory at this point, but we have been given as Paul says in verse 23, the firstfruits of the Spirit, which means we eagerly wait for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Now what does Paul mean by his words, **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you?** Paul is not suggesting that the believers in Rome doubt their salvation, but he is encouraging them to make sure that indeed there is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives, and then to live in terms of the Spirit's work. And in this chapter

Paul especially speaks about the evidence that the Holy Spirit truly dwells within us. He doesn't speak of tongues or miracles, but he does speak of true signs of the Spirit's work. We will give greater attention to these signs next week, if God wills, but look now at verses 13-16.

First verse 13. One evidence of the Holy Spirit's indwelling is seen in how you deal with temptation. If in temptation you seek help from the Holy Spirit, than you have evidence of the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

Second verse 14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. Are you looking to be guided by God's Word and the working of the Holy Spirit? Do you seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit? If so, then this is further evidence and assurance. A **third** evidence is given in verse **15**. We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but rather we have been given the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. If you call out to God sincerely as your Father, then this is also assurance of the Spirit's indwelling.

And **fourth**, verse **16**. The Holy Spirit works directly in your heart giving you assurance that you are a child of God.

If these evidences are present in your life and you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation and are seeking to turn from all known sin, then you can have assurance of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in your life. It means that God is working in your life with the same power that raised Christ from the dead. There should be great certainty of the Holy Spirit's work in your life. Oh, what joy this should be to you.

But if the evidence of the Spirit's working and indwelling is not found, then as the second part of verse 9 states, you do not belong to Christ. Though there can be periods of doubt and even periods of turning away, the presence of the Holy Spirit cannot be totally absent if you are in Christ. A life that has been truly changed by Christ cannot be a life that simply follows the sinful desires of the world. Rather than find assurance in empty slogans such as **Once saved always saved** or **I invited Jesus into my heart when I was a child**, God calls for you to carefully and humbly examine your life. Is your testimony that you are trusting in Jesus Christ genuine?

It may be that God worked in a saving way when you were quite young. You may never have known a day where you did not trust in Christ for salvation. That may be the testimony of some here today. But with that testimony will also be the present working of the Holy Spirit. This is where your assurance is found especially as the Holy Spirit directs you to God's Word.

2. Though your body is dying, the Spirit is life. (10)

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Look again at verse 9. Paul has spoken of the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and now Christ. Paul is certainly not being careless with his language nor is Paul simply seeking to have variety in his writing. The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of Christ because the Holy Spirit in all His fullness was poured on Christ. Since we have received a portion of the Holy Spirit's working we have received as it were the Spirit of Christ. And since the Holy Spirit has been sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of God.

Verse 9 speaks of being in the Spirit – that is you live in terms of the domain and control of the Holy Spirit and verse 9 speaks of the Spirit dwelling in you. Verse 10 speaks also of Christ being in you.

Scripture never speaks of **asking Jesus into our hearts**, but it does certainly speak of Christ dwelling in us. In Eph. 3:17 Paul prayed for the Ephesian church “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Col. 1:27 declares, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Again, what assurance these words are to be. We are in Christ and He is in us. This language describes not only why we have assurance of salvation but how you are to live your life each day. Do you give frequent attention to these descriptions? They are given for your encouragement. These descriptions also present the challenge in terms of living consistently according to what is here described.

Paul uses another **if** statement in verse 10, but again the purpose is not to cause doubt, but to have you consider the significance of this reality, though you also are encouraged as in verse 9 to make sure that this is indeed the case. Now Paul is not saying in the second half of verse 10 that the two things he discusses are the result of Christ indwelling us. Rather he is calling into contrast the two statements in the second half of verse 10. **On the one hand**, the body is dead because of sin, but because Christ indwells us, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Even in the midst of celebrating the resurrection of Christ you are well aware of the presence of death in your life. Though your body is alive, it is dead in the sense that you are under the sentence of death. Even when you are in the prime of your life, you are as it were on death row, waiting for that eventual sentence of death to be carried out. And the reason that we are the living dead is because of sin, and the punishment of death that all sin brings.

Matthew Henry in his commentary wrote, “Methinks, were there no other argument, **love to our bodies should make us hate sin**, because it is such an enemy to our bodies. The death even of the bodies of the saints is a remaining token of God's displeasure against sin.”¹

¹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 2212 (comment on Rom. 8:10).

Now Paul is not simply encouraging you to think morbid thoughts or to know that you are going to die, but rather he is presenting a contrast. Since Christ dwells in you, even though you are ultimately frail, sometimes sick, and definitely going to die, you will one day live again because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is Life because of righteousness. Some Bible translations have the word spirit in lowercase letters, referring to our human spirit, but I don't think that is what Paul is referring to. The contrast is not that even though the body will die, your soul will keep on living.

The contrast is that although you will rightfully die because of your own sin, you have been given the Holy Spirit who is life, because of righteousness. It is not entirely clear what Paul is meaning by the expression because of righteousness, but it is placed in contrast with sin. **Our bodies are dead because of sin.** But the Spirit is life **because of righteousness.** Because Christ has fully satisfied the righteous demands of God's Law, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your life means that even in death, you have life and your body will live again.

In a book on preaching I have been rereading the example of William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army was discussed. Booth was warned at the age of 26 by his doctor that he would not survive a year as an evangelist. Booth was an insomniac; his stomach was always in pain. His secretary wore a special uniform that included a coat that had 43 pockets. These pockets kept items that Booth routinely needed, mostly for his health. Despite all this, Booth lived to 83 and was a powerful preacher till the end of his life.²

Not every sick believer may have this same testimony, but what a blessing to know that even though your physical body may be very weak and troubled with disease, the Holy Spirit in you is life. Some of God's most productive servants have been those most troubled by illness and weakness. Though it is right to pray for physical strength, physical strength should never be your assurance or boast. If you are physically well and strong today, praise God, but don't boast in that strength. It is the Holy Spirit in you that is to be your strength. Pray for an abundance of Spirit-given strength so that you may do God's Will and powerfully serve Him.

3. Your mortal bodies will be given new life (11).

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

² Greg Scharf, *Prepared to Preach*, 87.

This is the climax of Paul's argument in this section and he again structures it in terms of an if-then structure. Though Paul says a great deal on the work of the Holy Spirit, the focus of this great chapter is the assurance and hope that you are to have through the Holy Spirit's work. **If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then consider what this means for your own mortal bodies, Paul is saying.** Because God raised Christ from the dead, and because we have the Spirit of Christ, you have 100% assurance and hope that your own mortal body will be raised through the same working of the Holy Spirit.

It has been rightfully stated that the surest fact in all of history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Cor. 15 we see that not only was Jesus raised to new life, but that he gave abundant proof of this very fact. Paul writes that first Jesus appeared to Cephas or Peter. And we know that from the gospels, that even before appearing to Peter, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and then to other women. And then Christ made an appearance to the other 11 disciples. He made another appearance to over 500 brethren at one time. Jesus was seen by His brother James and then the other apostles. And last of all he was seen by the Apostle Paul. There is no doubt that Christ was raised to new life. It wasn't just the ideas or spirit of Christ that rose again, but Christ in His physical body.

When Christ appeared to His frightened disciples, he told them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?"³⁹ Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

The great blessing that we have in the New Covenant is the complete assurance of our own resurrections because of the resurrection of Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was once invited by a leading Pharisee to come over for a meal on the Sabbath day, a story that is told in Luke 14. At that meal, Jesus healed a man with who suffered from dropsy, a disease that causes the buildup of fluid in the body. He then told a parable about the importance of humility. It is better to sit in a place of low honor and be asked to move up to a better table, than to sit in a place of high honor and have to be asked to move to a lower position. And then in verses 12-14, Jesus gave another teaching to those who were present at the meal. "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid."¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."¹⁴ **And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."**

Do you see how the resurrection is to be the foundation of good things that you would do? The hope of the resurrection is not just an end-of-your-life hope or when you are sick. The hope of the resurrection should encourage everything that you would do for God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

If you are in Christ, then live with certainty that the Holy Spirit is still active in your life.

Certainty and Challenge.

Prayer

Hymn: 602

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.