

**March 25, 2020**

**The Scripture Reading**

**Romans 8:6-11**

6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

**The Message**

**Pastor David Lee**

**WHAT WE DO - Live!**

This Lenten series, "What We Do?", speaks to traditional Lenten disciplines - prayer, fasting, meditation on Scripture, and giving to the poor. It is all about what we are doing to bear witness to God, and God's righteousness. This week's topic is "Live." This isn't about living in the flesh. It is about living in the Spirit, God's Spirit.

I came across an article detailing research that was recently conducted at University of Massachusetts Amherst. The research was about how insecticides penetrate the flesh of fruits and vegetables.

When I was a kid, I loved to go to the orchard and take a red ripe apple out of one of the overflowing baskets. My mother would always remind me to rub it on my shirt sleeve. I'd rub until the apple shined, and then relish the crisp burst of juicy ripe apple flesh. That isn't enough these days.

University of Massachusetts Amherst researchers have discovered that the most effective way to wash pesticide residue from fruit and vegetable flesh is with a baking soda and water solution. But its not just a quick rinse. Apples should be soaked for

fifteen minutes, and even then, if poisons have penetrated the skin, no amount of washing can get it out of the flesh.

Researchers have identified a “dirty dozen” that are at greatest risk for harboring poisons, and that includes strawberries, spinach, and apples. There’s also a “clean fifteen” group that are fairly safe. They are the fruits and vegetables with the thickest skin, like cantaloupe and pumpkin.

In the case of our spiritual lives, there is real poison in the world, and our flesh is constantly under assault, at great risk of the poison penetrating not just our flesh, but to the depths of our souls, placing our eternal lives at great risk.

Three questions may help us get answers from the text. First, “What is a mind governed by flesh?”

Paul writes in Romans Chapter 6, “What fruit did you reap at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The outcome of those things is death.” A real good measure of deadly things of the flesh is, “Am I ashamed of it?” Continuing in Chapter 6, Paul says, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord . . . For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Paul gets more specific, about what we do, in Galatians 6, saying, “The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” There is the clear choice - is what I do about bringing me pleasure (pleasing the flesh), or is it about doing the things of God (pleasing the Spirit)? And even more specific in Philippians 3 - about the consequences for people who invest in the things of the world, “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”

I’ve run into people who say, “But I pray. I believe.” Jesus said, “. . . even the demons believe, and shudder (James 2:19). And the author of the Epistle of James, “. . . when you do ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may squander it on your pleasures. You adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be a friend of the world renders himself an enemy of God.”

Paul sums up the problem with life in the flesh, ignoring the things of God, in Romans 1, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts . . . Furthermore, just as they did not think it

worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.”

Our second question is, “What pleases God, if life in the flesh cannot please God?” Psalm 5 asserts, “. . . God is not pleased with wickedness. Where God is, evil people aren’t welcome.” There is some positive evidence in Scripture, “To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness . . .” (Ecclesiastes 2). And then there is this glimpse of what we can do that pleases God, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him . . .” (Colossians 1:19) Who was God so pleased with? Jesus.

So, by extension, a relationship with Jesus may gain us access to God’s pleasure. And a relationship with Jesus requires faith - trusting God in all things. The author of Hebrews asserts, “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he those who earnestly seek him.”

Remember what Scripture witnesses about God’s pleasure, “He (Jesus) received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” (II Peter 1:17)

Our third and final question tonight is, “How does the Spirit give life through righteousness?” Proverbs 12 asserts, “in the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.” And in Proverbs 21, “whoever pursues righteousness AND love finds life . . .” This is in concert with what Jesus said and did - love trumps everything.

In Romans 5, Paul declares, “. . . those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ,” and, “just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

How does this life in the Spirit make a difference in our daily living a very real life in the flesh, with all the reversals and failures and temptations that means?

In a New York Times article from the Neediest Case file (Jon Otis, 24 December 2015), we read, “Wesley Booker exudes an air of tranquil confidence. But his laid-back manner reflects a staunch assuredness, not nonchalance. As a father to two young sons, Mr. Booker, 22, cannot afford to be mired in stress or roiled by inner disquiet. His own father, Henry, carried himself in the same resolute way, and Mr. Booker said he was proud to emulate him . . . My dad taught me how to hold myself,” Mr. Booker said - to hold himself with dignity and confidence, not in his own abilities, or knowledge.

Wesley Booker graduated from high school and got a job with an elder care company. His father took him to work most days. One workday, Wesley didn't hear from his father, so went to his father's home, and found his 79 year old father dead. Wesley called his client, a gentleman dying in hospice care, to let the family know he wouldn't be at work. His employer accused him of breaking protocol, not calling the company, and Wesley was fired.

As a twenty two year old, with two sons, Wesley was grateful his father had willed Wesley the brownstone rooming house where he lived. Wesley took over management of the house, with private bedrooms and common areas for cooking and socializing. Wesley allowed his half-brother, who had just been released from prison, for murder, to come live in the house. Their father had told Wesley he wanted this for his older son, saying, "It will be hard enough for him after prison. He needs a place to stay."

And then came the day the police arrived, searching for drugs. They didn't find any drugs, but they found an unregistered weapon. Wesley was pretty sure it belonged to one of his brother's friends. Rather than get his brother, who was on parole, in trouble, Wesley told the police the gun belonged to him. He was arrested, but since he had no criminal history, Wesley was charged with a misdemeanor. He was grateful for that, so he could still take care of his sons. However, Wesley was forbidden to live in a house with his ex-convict brother. So, Wesley moved in with his mother, and was now unemployed.

That proved to be a blessing when his mother suffered a stroke, and needed full time in-home health care, in which Wesley was trained from his previous job.

When asked how he was handling all these reversals and injustices, Wesley answered that he was grateful. He still owned his grandfather's house, he still had his two boys, and he had a lot to keep him busy with his mother's care. He was very grateful for what his father had taught him.

In Jesus, we have the promise He will be with us no matter what life in the flesh brings. As we are living with him in the Spirit, the Spirit is teaching us, reminding us, comforting us, and convincing us of the things of God. With Jesus, in the company of His Spirit, I can only be grateful.