

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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**Broadcast Date:** 16 June 2013

No. T0785

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## Spiritual things: Spiritual men

The verses of Scripture that I want to base our talk today on are found in the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. I do not intend to go through them verse by verse but let's read together Romans 8:1-17.

*"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 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. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together",* Romans 8:1-17.

This is the second talk of four that we have called Spiritual Things and is entitled "Spiritual men". In the New Testament we have presented to us God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - what is called a "Triune God". One God revealed as three persons, yet still one. In the Bible, we also have the story of Satan, the Devil, the inveterate enemy of God. We are warned that there are forces vehemently opposed to the Godhead. We see in the Gospels that Satan resisted Jesus Christ at every turn (see Matthew 4:1-11), and continues to oppose Him, His people and His interests with anti-Christian teaching. We are also warned that the world stands opposed to the Father. So we are told in 1 John 2, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world"*, 1 John 2:15-16. Yet we are told later in this same epistle that *"... the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world"* (1 John 4:14) so it is clear that whilst God the Father loves those people in the world and has made every provision for their salvation at infinite cost to Himself, the world system, the principles that govern this world's affairs are entirely opposed to Him. In the same way we read, *"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these things are opposed one to the other"*, Galatians 5:17.

If we are to understand what it means to be spiritual men or women we must see it in part by contrasting it by what we are by nature. We are familiar with the expression "flesh and blood" meaning these bodies we inhabit. But the Bible also frequently uses the term "flesh" or "fleshly" to refer to the base forces that drive us to satisfy our own desires and lusts. For instance, Peter pleads with us, *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"*, 1 Peter 2:11. Or, Paul encourages us to, *"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts"*, Romans 13:14.

An unsaved person has just one nature; it is a sinful nature, and it is incapable of pleasing God. We read at the beginning of this talk, *"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God"*, Romans 8:8. We could also have read in the previous chapter Paul's sad conclusion about himself, *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells"*, Romans 7:18. As a Christian, a true believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I have been given a new nature, a divine nature. *"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"*, 1 Peter 1:23. Peter also writes, *"To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and*

*precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*", 2 Peter 1:1-4. We have a new spiritual life, a new spiritual nature and we have dwelling within us God the Holy Spirit and He will never leave us.

I hope this lays a foundation for understanding this subject. An unbeliever has only one nature. It is a sinful nature and it is incapable of pleasing God no matter how hard one tries, or how it is disciplined or educated. On the other hand the Christian, whilst still having his own sinful nature, also has a new nature. He has been "*born again*" (see John 3:3). There is therefore the possibility of a Christian leading a life entirely governed and directed by the Holy Spirit of God and so be entirely pleasing to God. Sadly, there is also the possibility of a Christian ignoring the promptings and guidance of the Holy Spirit and thereby leading a life in no way dissimilar to that of an unbeliever.

This I believe then is how the Bible defines a spiritual individual. Not as an "airy fairy-head in the clouds" individual with no interest in the material world around him, but rather an individual indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and governed by the Holy Spirit. Or as we read at the beginning, "*...who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit*", Romans 8:1-5.

The life lived according to my fleshly desires and lusts inevitably leads to death, but the life lived according to God's Holy Spirit leads to life and peace. James also comments on this principle in his letter. "*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*", James 1:14-15.

We have the choice then, not just every day, but every minute of every day as to which nature we will cherish and nurture and consequently which features we will display. Many of us do not have too much choice as to how we fill a large part of our day. Most have to work, mums often are kept very busy caring for children, others are busy in factories, shops or offices. But even as we work for others we can choose to do so, as those who serve Christ. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him", Colossians 3:17. Paul writes a few verses further on, "for you serve the Lord Christ", Colossians 3:24. So a spiritual person is not one aloof and remote from the issues that affect us day to day, but one who has chosen in every detail of his or her lives to be guided by God the Holy Spirit. They are in fact the most practical and useful of individuals. Christians should be the best employees and the best employers!

This guidance of the Holy Spirit can be both direct and indirect, both positive or, as it were, negative. By this I mean that, as we read the Bible, we learn that there are things we are told to do, and things we are told not to do. In these things we do not need to seek further guidance on the matter! God is not going to change His mind! Clearly if the Bible says that that we are not to commit adultery (Exodus 20:14), we should not commit adultery. And this principle applies to many other areas of our lives, like stealing (Exodus 20:15), lying (Exodus 20:16), swearing (Exodus 20:7) or behaving unkindly (Exodus 20:17).

There are some matters however, where the Bible does not give specific instruction. For instance, the Bible gives general instruction on the sort of character I should seek in a spouse (e.g. 2 Corinthians 6:14). It doesn't tell me whether I personally should marry or whom I should marry! Yet we can still enjoy the Spirit's guidance in matters like these. As we submissively pray about them, do we have God's peace in our hearts? We can ask ourselves what are our motives; are we set on pleasing ourselves or pleasing God? (see Galatians 1:10). We can seek the advice of other godly Christians. If the issues are financial in character, can I enter into them with a clear conscience? Will I still be able to contribute financially to the Lord's work in my local church? Will I be able to fully discharge my personal responsibilities to my family?

The issue then is whether or not I actively seek to walk as guided by the Holy Spirit, waiting on God, reading His Word and applying the principles laid down in the Bible to my everyday life. Or whether, on the other hand, I go with the flow, drifting day by day without ever asking myself the question as to whether or not I am doing what God wants me to do (see Acts 9:6).

The difference this sort of living makes in our lives should be dramatic. It is to live by an entirely different set of motives and principles altogether. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*", Philippians 2:5-8. The Lord Jesus not only more than anyone else but indeed perfectly, lived here displaying those features that are so pleasing to God and so contrary

to human nature. Naturally we have a tendency to make ourselves appear more than we are. The Lord, on the other hand, actually became so much less than He truly was to achieve God's purposes and desires.

Remarkably we read, *"We have the mind of Christ"*, 1 Corinthians 2:16. If born again, if we are "partakers of the divine nature" through new birth, we also have "the mind of Christ". As such, we are able to value things in the same way as the Lord does. Obviously we so often fall very far short of this, but the potential exists nevertheless. A life lived subject to God's Word and guided by God's Holy Spirit will be vibrant with life and consistently glorifying to God. *"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day"* Proverbs 4:18. In contrast, as we read in Romans 8, *"If you live according to the flesh you will die."* The sad fact is that the Bible teaches us that a life lived in a fleshly way inevitably leads to death.

A life lived under the daily direction of the Spirit of God will be a productive and fruitful life that will not only lead to personal growth and blessing but also be a blessing to those we come into contact with. We have a picture of this in Psalm 1: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper"*, Psalm 1:1-3. This is a beautiful picture of a spiritual person - one who has chosen to stay away from the ungodly and scornful, and has chosen to immerse himself in God's law day by day.

In the Galatian Epistle, the Apostle Paul is worried that the Christians in that city were being deceived and led astray. There were those who had come among them, plausible and charismatic teachers, who were telling them that they needed to add an outward form of religion to their Christianity if they were to know God's full blessing and salvation. His language is very strong! *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ"*, Galatians 1:6-7. Paul is resisting with all his ability the error of those who would add religious duty, law-keeping and various ordinances to simple faith in the finished work of Christ. There is no possible meeting point! We received salvation only and simply through faith in the Lord Jesus and, being saved in this way, Paul argues that it is foolish then to try and live the Christian life in the power of our fleshly nature. *"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"* Galatians 3:3.

A spiritual, God-pleasing life can only be lived in the power of God's Spirit who lives within us, in daily dependence upon God and His word. And we do have the ability to understand God's Word, principles and plans, mysteries that are hidden from even the wisest unbeliever. *"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God"*, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12. I should value God's word more than I do! God has taken the trouble to write to me, He has providentially preserved those writings through the centuries. Men and women have paid with their lives to deliver these writings to me in my own language and, additionally, God has given me His Holy Spirit to teach and guide me in an understanding of His Word.

Sadly we learn from Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 3:1, that it is very possible for us to have so allowed our first nature, our fallen, fleshly nature to dominate our lives that we are unable to understand properly the Holy Scriptures. Instead of treating the Corinthian Christians as mature or spiritual people, Paul has to treat them as babes and feed them with milk not solid food. They were not growing as Christians; they were still on the very simplest of food. God wants us to grow stronger as Christians *"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting"*, Ephesians 4:14. Paul was completely in tune with God's thoughts for His people and wrestled in prayer to this end. *"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"*, Colossians 1:9-10.

It is also the mature Christian, the spiritual Christian, who is needed to help out when things go wrong. *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"*, Galatians 6:1-2. Inevitably, situations will arise where a Christian falls into sin, a fellow believer embarks on a course of action that is contrary to Scripture. Paul warns the Christians in Galatia, and so also warns us in turn, that it will require gentleness and a spiritual, mature faith to approach and recover such a one. Also a very real sense of our own vulnerability similarly to fall! A "holier than you" attitude will be more harmful than helpful!

Paul also appeals to those who are truly spiritual to acknowledge the distinction that exists in the Christian company between the role of men and women. *"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to*

*speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord", 1 Corinthians 14:34-37. We are not at liberty to pick and choose what sections of Scripture we obey! We cannot dismiss New Testament instructions as being purely cultural as many would like to do today.*

One final aspect of this subject of "Spiritual men" which we must consider is found in 1 Corinthians. We will be plagued by our fleshly nature all our lives, but we have the glorious prospect of one day being forever free of it and then living eternally in God's presence. *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man", 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.*

This is the wonderful certainty for all believers of one day being truly spiritual men or women! It should spur us on while we live here to seek increasingly to cultivate and nurture our spiritual nature, and so to live for God's glory.

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