

“You have the Spirit” Rom 8:6-11

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Last Sunday I asked you the question about Paul the apostle, – was he a good pastor. You said ‘yes’. Now I’ll ask you another question, – can we trust what he is teaching us? Does he know what he is talking about?

Of course, we can, and of course he does. Resurrected Jesus Himself said about Paul: “He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” (Act 9:15)

Besides we can read that Paul had had quite a few visions and revelations which helped him to experience and understand the Gospel of Jesus and prepared him for his mission.

Now, today as we reflect on what Paul wrote to Christians in Rome I would like to focus on three very simple, but very important questions. First, how can I please God? Second, what is wrong with me? And finally, where am I going?

First, how can I please God? Have you thought about this? All people have a conscience, that accuses us, even if sometimes it seems that some don’t. And all people know that there is something higher.

You put these things, or experiences together and you inevitably arrive to the conclusion that one day we will be demanded to give an account about what we have done with our life.

Have you noticed something interesting; when you ask people about their relationships with God, there is something they say quite often. It is something along the lines of ‘I haven’t done anything that wrong’, or ‘I have tried to live a decent life’, or ‘I am not worse than those others’.

All these answers point to the same reality, that majority of people in their hearts, consciously, or unconsciously, have asked and keep asking this question, – how can I please God?

Paul gives a very simple answer. And it is not what we people usually expect. When we ask about what should we do, we expect to receive instructions, a set of rules, or something like that. And this is what all religions and secular philosophies do. They tell you what you need to do, how you need to behave,

and if you succeed in doing what you are supposed to, you may be fine. That's a deal. And it makes sense.

What Paul says doesn't make sense. For there is no deal. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Did you hear what he says? If you don't have the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, then you are the flesh, and those who are the flesh cannot please God. Paul is very clear. If you don't have the Spirit of Christ, you don't belong to Him.

Then you can do whatever you want, but you will not be pleasing to God. It means that – who are the only people who can please God? That's right, only those who have the Spirit of God in them.

The answer about how can I please God is not found in what we do, but in what we have received from God; whether you have the Spirit of God or not. If you have the Spirit of God, you are pleasing to God. If you don't, you are not.

For if you have received God's Spirit and keep receiving Him, then you belong to Jesus, and you are united with Jesus by means of His Spirit. And Jesus is God's beloved Son with whom He is well pleased.

When you are united with Jesus, you are made God's beloved child too. Now God the Father looks at you and says: "You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased."

This is so liberating. You can be assured that you are God pleasing. He made you this way through Jesus, and by giving you His Spirit. God's favor doesn't depend of your performance, or your goodness.

The presence of God's own Spirit in you makes you pleasing to God. And you, each of you have received this Spirit, and you keep receiving it whenever you come in His presence.

So, is there something that we can or should still do? Sure, there is – abide in words of Jesus, come in the presence of God, desire and receive His Spirit, when it is given to us through the Word and through the Sacrament.

This setting, right here is the very well from which Jesus gives us to drink His Spirit. This setting is the workshop of the Holy Spirit. This is where He has promised to come to you and to dwell with you.

Brothers and sisters, rejoice for you have received and you keep receiving the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus. And He makes you pleasing to God the Father. This is most certainly true.

Now our second question, – what is wrong with me? Is there anything wrong with you? There is so much wrong with me. This is how Christians are different

from everyone else. For everyone else, the better you do what you think you need to do, the better you get, the more wonderful a person you become.

But for us it is the very opposite. The closer we come to Jesus, the more we abide in His Word, the clearer we see how much is wrong with us. It is like coming out of darkness closer to light and with every step beginning to see the ugliness of our sin more and more; it is everywhere, in our desires, thoughts, emotions, motivations, works, actions. Everything is soiled by sin.

And we may get worried, – what is wrong with me? Wasn't I supposed to become better and better, with less and less sin, more perfect and pure? Why isn't this happening to me?

I know what God expects from me, but so often I don't want to do it. I know what God abhors, and so often I desire it. I know where Jesus is present, where He gathers His people together, and where His people gather around His Word, I know this and still, I am not interested in being there. What's wrong with me?

Paul gives us the answer. "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Luther called this teaching 'simultaneously saint and sinner'.

When Jesus gives you His Spirit, He doesn't destroy the old you. His Spirit, like at the creation, hovers over the void, and chaos and darkness in you, and then He creates something new, He begins to create you in His image and likeness.

But our old self remains. And the closer we come to Jesus, the clearer His Spirit allows us to see this old self, with all its darkness and chaos. This is a paradox of Christian life. The closer to Jesus we are, the darker we seem to ourselves.

On one hand, when you come closer to Jesus, sure, His Word and Spirit restores and transforms you and you grow in holy life, living more and more for your neighbours.

But on the other hand, the closer you come to Jesus, the more His Word and Spirit helps you to see your own sinfulness, and the more our sinfulness fights against God's light. Thus, we live in this tension between the old and the new.

We may hate to be reminded to live according God's commandments, but how happy and blessed we are when we do. We really don't like to be told that we are to respond to God's invitation and come where He invites us.

And that we need to read and learn and study His Word; our old self resists, but when we respond and do what our Lord commands us, we flourish and rejoice in the Spirit. Then we truly experience God's presence with us.

This is how Paul explains what is wrong with us. So, if you realize more and more how sinful you are, that is great, then rejoice for that is the Spirit of God showing you this truth and at the same time bringing you closer to Jesus to rejoice in His forgiveness.

Finally, where am I going? Do you ever wonder about it? Here is the answer of the Holy Spirit. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, [and He does] he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

That’s it. Remember, Paul was taken to the Paradise, and what He saw and experienced was not something you could put in human words. But knowing this he writes in this same letter, just a few verses later.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18) I want you to have a proper perspective. When Paul is talking about sufferings he is not talking about our good lives here in Barossa. Instead, this is what he has in mind. His life.

Multiple ‘imprisonments, countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2Co 11:23-28)

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” This is where you are going. If there is a hope that transcends all others, this is it and it is yours.

If you have a bad day, feel sick, weak, lonely, helpless, unworthy, or down in any other way, then remember, you have received and continue to receive the Spirit of Jesus. He is in you and that means that you are pleasing to God.

And don’t feel down if you see your sinfulness and idolatry more and more, that means you are closer and closer to Jesus. His Spirit dwells with you and prepares you for what is to come.

And above all of this, rejoice, for you will experience fully, what Paul saw only as a glimpse, – God’s glory in Paradise, which can’t be even put in human words. This is what your Father and your Savior Jesus has prepared for you.

Paul knows what he is talking about. He’s been there and seen it. And you will too. And the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.