

Walking in Truth

Romans 8:1-15 – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 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.

Let me quickly review a couple of key points from last week when I shared on "The Believer's Identity in Christ".

Crucified with Christ – dead to sin, but alive to God. Our old man, the sin nature was crucified on the cross with Christ. What we were, Sin, we are no longer!

We are a new creation – Christ dwells in us and He is our Life. *In our spirit, we are partakers of Christ's divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)*. This is our true identity – *no longer sinners, but the righteousness of Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:21)*.

So the question is: How do we experience Christ's life in us and walk in this truth?

A New Creation

As a new creation in Christ, my entire point of reference is Christ who lives in me. He and I are one. He lives His life through me. "I am a vessel, a container of His life, holy and righteous and blameless in His sight."

However, if all I know is forgiveness, the blood side of the Cross, then experientially I will continue to live in captivity. My point of reference is still on me. But Christ is my point of reference, because I died, and now He lives His life in me.

Now don't get me wrong, being forgiven is good, but so often we fail to understand that there is so much more to our new life than just forgiveness of our sins.

Last week I talked briefly about my own spiritual odyssey. How at one point I was convinced that living a victorious Christian life wasn't possible while I walked this earth.

I did have some inner reality – I remember the night God revealed to me that Jesus was God from John 1. The words from the Bible came alive and I was so elated it felt like I was walking on air. It was a defining moment for me and I really felt alive!

But I was still looking to externals for meaning. Now it was my **Christian** activity and my performance. And really, on the outside, it wasn't all that different from the way I lived life before I came to Christ. For the next 25 years I tried to live the Christian life (which meant different things according to whom I was performing for!!). I knew Christ for me and Christ with me. I vaguely understood Christ in me, but not Christ AS me, expressing His life as me.

And then God brought me to a point of death, of surrender. By the "light of God", I experienced the wonderful reality of Galatians 2:20. The words came alive, and there I was, walking on air again! I understood, and knew, that my true identity was based on my union with Christ. "Christ in me, the Hope of Glory." My identity had nothing to do with externals; it was Christ in me, Christ as me, expressing His life as me!

"The Lord taught me that when I was crucified on the cross with Christ, as Galatians 2:20 had told me for so long, I died to myself as my point of reference. Jesus living in me was now my point of reference.

This is the really GOOD news!! But there is also another reality that we have to take into consideration. And that is the Flesh or the False Self. This is one of the concepts I touched on briefly last week and I want to spend some more time on now.

The False Self

The flesh, in the words of Gregory Boyd, "is a deceptive state of being". It is not a nature that is essential to our identity, but it is a belief system, a way of pursuing life, an attempt to make our lives work through our own effort and apart from dependence on God.

Dan Stone writes, “. . . flesh carries a negative connotation that can mislead us as to its real meaning. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife...” and a whole bunch of other bad things (5:19-21). But the flesh can produce plenty of things that look perfectly acceptable on the OUTSIDE, like self-reliance, dependability, self-discipline, etc. The flesh, or the false self, is simply the body and the soul operating apart from the Holy Spirit.”

Trying to make life work through our own effort rather than through dependence upon the life of Christ in us.

Let's look again at *Romans 8:5,6*: “*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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*”

So what does it look like when we are walking after the flesh, or as Paul says, “setting our mind on the flesh”?

Paul says the “deeds of the flesh are evident” and in several places in the New Testament he gives us plenty of examples. When there is jealousy and strife between us, that's flesh. When I'm proud and I look down on others, that's flesh. When I worry and I'm anxious about events in my life, I'm walking after the flesh! When I grumble and complain because my spouse isn't doing things the way I want, that's flesh. And I could go on and on.

For me, it was also an issue of performance. You see, I lived by the false belief that said, “I must please others in order to be valued”. So I performed. Because I did not understand or truly believe that I was valued by God, I sought to get my need for value met by those around me. Almost everything I did was motivated by my need to be of value.

As Christians we do this all the time. “When we engage in religious activities as a means of acquiring something that we think is lacking in ourselves, in truth we are simply engaging in a religious variety of the flesh.” (Boyd)

Even our solutions to fixing our flesh problems, even though they may have an appearance of godliness, are still from the flesh! Paul writes in *2 Timothy 3:2-5* “*For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.** Avoid such people.*”

When I rely on my abilities to work for God, I'm living out of my own self-sufficiency. This results in a legalistic lifestyle and one in which law rules. I can only experience God's life when I renounce my own ability to manage life. My ability becomes a liability, but a victorious life comes from trusting Christ to express His life through me.

Our tendency to rely on our own self effort to make life work has to be dealt with. And sometimes severely! And so our loving Father introduces us to the process of breaking.

Brokenness

Brokenness, says Dr. Charles Stanley, is the way to blessing. My availability and usability to God is always directly related to my brokenness before Him. I can't separate effective, fruitful service from brokenness.

We tend to look at external circumstances as the source of our problems, but in reality the real problem is within. Satan has deceived us and has us focused on externals and not the inner person.

The principal of brokenness can be found in nature. In John 12 Jesus teaches that in order to bear fruit, a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die. God must break, must shatter the outer shell of our carnal flesh so that His Life might burst forth. Until my will is broken, I will never be what God wants me to be.

In my life, God brought to a place in my life where my “fleshly” strategies were no longer working. My attempts to fix me, change me, and improve me weren't getting the job done. And so God, as part of His divine plan for me, brought on a period of breaking -- Of breaking me of my dependence on myself. But you know the funny thing about brokenness? It's not just a onetime event in our lives! It is generally a perpetual thing!

John Eldredge, in his book *Walking with God*, talks about the propensity that we all have – a stubborn inclination to view the world in one and only one way: as the chance to live a happy little life. He writes “We are created to enjoy life. But we end of worshipping the gift instead of

the Giver. We seek for life and look to God as our assistant in the endeavour. We are far more upset when things go wrong than we ever are when we aren't close to God."

Eldredge states "And so God must, from time to time, and sometimes very insistently, disrupt our lives so that we release our grasping of life here and now. Usually through pain. God is asking us to let go of the things we love and have given our hearts to, so that we can give our hearts even more fully to him. He thwarts us in our attempts to make life work so that our efforts fail, and we must face the fact that we don't really look to God for life".

God's design in allowing brokenness is that my outward man (my reliance on my Fleshly strategies to make life work for me) be broken so that the inward man (Christ in my spirit) may be manifest through me, that I might receive from Him and display His Life through me. It's a painful process; it's an ongoing process. But there are several things that are true about brokenness:

- 1) God will only break us in love
- 2) God always sets limitations on His breaking
- 3) In the breaking process, God always breaks to teach something
- 4) God won't desert me in the process
- 5) God will lead me to victory if I will submit
- 6) God is always long-suffering

And Surrender goes hand-in-hand with brokenness.

Surrender

The kind of surrender I'm speaking about is not what we are typically used to. It's not that tepid little prayer we pray at the annual church revival when in a moment of emotion we express our devotion to God. Oh no, it's much more than that.

Surrender (and abiding) is not passivity as some would suppose. It is an active and daily choosing to change beliefs, trust God, and "sink ourselves" into dependency on His Life within us in the face of life's circumstances. Focusing on truth, while relinquishing our inner striving to rely on old ways, is a discipline of living in Grace.

The concept of "surrender" is our voluntarily choosing to give up on our "survival techniques", our false beliefs about self, God and about how needs should be met, and on our cycle of trying hard to make life work the best way we know how. It can be said that our "surrender" to God in the context of our relationships is SACRIFICE of "our own way". Yet our focus cannot be on the sacrifice or surrender. It must be on God and His faithfulness.

The greatest example of surrender is found in Christ's life. In *Philippians 2:5-8*:

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, **did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane He prays to the Father, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36).

Look at this closely! "Yet not what I will, but what you will". Until we come to the place in our lives where we can say truly pray this, we will not experience the blessing of total surrender.

Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. . . And yet I "grasp" all the time. I grasp at what I presume (wrongly) are my rights.

The key, I believe, of a true inner spiritual life involves the surrender and release of that which I believe to be rightfully mine. Because when I'm insisting on my rights, I'm demanding that God meet my needs on my terms. And I relegate God to second place.

When I surrender my goals and plans, I'm beginning the process of letting go of my presumed right to success, accomplishment, even Life! When I surrender my spouse, I'm beginning the process of letting go of my presumed right to have another person fulfil or complete me.

The same applies to my possessions, my circumstances, my family, my reputation, my status in the church, etc.

Surrender is not a "one-time" event. Jesus said in *Luke 9:23* "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me".

And then finally, Abiding in Christ follows surrender.

Abiding In Christ

Jesus says in *John 15:4* "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me"

I think it's probably fair to say that a majority of us really have no idea what it means to abide in Christ. As a consequence we attempt to live out our lives by means of our own making. Most of us have our identity in what we do. Therefore we attempt to become Christ-like by things that we do for Him. If I work hard enough, pray hard enough or serve enough, then I will learn to abide. Of course keeping rules and self-effort will not make us Christ-like.

To abide means to rest on, dwell in, depend on. Jesus said, "Without me [without dependency on the power of My Life that works in you] you can do nothing" [whatever you do has no value at all] (vs 5).

In *Matthew 11* Jesus says "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

But so often, instead of resting in Christ's completed work at the Cross, we strive. Instead of depending on, trusting in the power of Christ's life in us, we strive. In our own strength and through our own effort, we strive to be a better person, to be kinder to our spouse, to overcome a particular sin.

In my own experience, I know that I am abiding in Christ when I respond well to circumstances around me. Take temptation of whatever flavour. For you it's probably different than it is for me. The temptation comes into my thoughts. What do I do with it? Well, I have a couple of choices. I can choose to give into the temptation and I sin.

Or, I can choose to turn to the power of Christ to overcome. I have to engage my will, but it's important to understand that it's not me overcoming, but Christ in me.

This simple illustration sums it up:

Recognize a thought - that it is not Truth.

Refuse to accept it or act on it.

Reckon (count it as fact) that I am dead to sin and alive to God and all His promises are sure for me.

Risk acting on what I know to be Truth.

Rest. When I experience the Lord's rest, I am assured that I am in Christ, and He is in me by God's doing....I am safe, valued, and He is taking care of the situation.

My goal now is to refuse to be controlled by what I see, think, or feel, but by what I know.....Truth.

We abide when we cease from our "own works" and choose to depend on and trust Christ. By totally becoming dependent on Jesus through the surrender of our will, He leads us to live a life of absolute faith and trust in Him.

These are some hard concepts: Brokenness, Surrender and Abiding in Christ. Whole books have been written on these topics. So I know that we've only brushed the surface here tonight.

But if you take nothing away from tonight, at least leave with this:

God gave His Life FOR us

In order to give His Life TO us

In order that He might LIVE His Life IN us!

And walk in newness of life!

Curt Tyler, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland