

The life of the Spirit will always be at odds with our selfish self-rule

9-11 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.

"Have the Spirit of Christ... belong to Christ" – It is a decision to "belong" to Christ, as a result of which the Spirit of God comes to live in us and transform our human spirit.

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. 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.

"Spirit of God... Spirit of Christ... Christ in you" – the Trinity (God in three persons who are one) is not explicit in the Bible but strongly implicit, Matt 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14 etc

12-13 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

In practice Paul's point is that when we make a definite choice to enter into a relationship with Christ and become Christians, the Holy Spirit comes in and we take on a new persona. Taking our lead from Jesus requires faith and practice to overcome the familiar "me-centred", and independent "I'll do it...I'll fix it... I'll make it happen". There will always be a tension, but the Holy Spirit empowers our good choices.

Question How much are you led by the Spirit of God? What gets in the way?

"To the flesh...by the Spirit" – the selfish human nature is contrasted with the Spirit-led nature which grows out of the new birth. Paul is referencing Romans 8:1-8, especially vv. 5-8. When we give ownership of our lives to Jesus, we become a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

"Abba, Father" – Jesus used this word, Mark 14:36, considered inappropriate in its intimacy.

"Fear...adoption to sonship" – slaves lived in fear of arbitrary punishment as those without rights. The Greek-Roman pattern of adoption conferred the full rights, inheritance and authority of the son of the family. Christians are not to live in fear of possible punishment, but in the security of being held by God's love.

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

"Children of God" – a profound privilege which transforms how we pray – and know God as Father, John 1:12, Gal. 3:26, 1 John 3:1.

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.

The Living Word

Church calendar readings for Sunday, May 27 in Bible order.

Prepare for Sunday by reading and reflecting on the word for the week; or reflect on Sunday's teaching by looking at the Scriptures again

Theme: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are plural and also one

Isaiah 6:1-8 – *The Lord's call to Isaiah is: "Who will go for us?"*

John 3:1-17 – *Jesus says of the new birth: "We speak of what we know"*

Romans 8:12-17 – *The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are one*

Isaiah 6:1-8

The Lord calls Isaiah saying "Who will go for us?"

God reveals Himself in his call to Isaiah

Isaiah's vision at a time of national crisis, King Uzziah's death in 740 BC, follows teaching about Israel's call to be righteous and show God's ways to other nations. Isaiah, keenly aware of the pride of his nation, questions his call as their prophet.

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple.

"I saw the Lord" – no one has ever seen God, because God is Spirit, John 1:18, 4:24. However, at times He clothes Himself with visibility, as here in Isaiah's vision, or Joshua's challenge, Josh. 5:13–15.

2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

"Seraphim" – the word suggests that they looked like flames. "Covered their faces" – even heavenly creatures could not look upon holy God.

3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."

4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

"Unclean lips" – or unholy attitudes. Isaiah is comparing himself to holy God, and reflecting on his guilt by association. "The King" – Isaiah has glimpsed the real Almighty King.

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

"Live coal... from the altar" – Isaiah's human depravity put right, for him to speak for God.

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

"Go for us" – plural as Gen. 1:26, 11:7 implying the Trinity and God speaking within the heavenly council, 1 Kings 22:19-22, Jeremiah 23:18, 22.

In practice We may find it difficult to believe that Almighty, majestic, holy God would deign to speak and offer guidance to us. If Isaiah, a humble and holy man and renowned prophet, felt unworthy in himself and around the proud people of his time, what kind of audience can we expect? The answer is that we have a new identity in Christ, clothed in His righteousness and with the rank of sonship conferred upon us. We can enter into the courts of heaven and can go up to the throne of God the Father. In this picture we meet God via the throng of heaven and its complete unity.

Question How is heaven calling you? Why might you be chosen for that call?

John 3:1-17 "We speak of what we know": Jesus explains the new birth

Jesus give Nicodemus the fundamental statement of the gospel

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

"A Pharisee" – the Pharisees were the most influential Jewish sect in Jesus' time and unlike the more political Sadducees held a conservative, fundamental theology – which could be too inflexible to accommodate the challenge of Jesus' teaching. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin controlling body which was generally antagonistic to Jesus.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs You are doing if God were not with Him."

His cautious visit after dark – and his sense of spiritual darkness – showed a desire to find out for himself who Jesus was, while avoiding censure.

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Birth is how we enter this world; spiritual birth is how we enter the spiritual dimension of this world. Nicodemus would have believed being born a Jew was to inherit the kingdom of God.

4 "How can someone be born when

they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

"Born of water" – water cleanses from impurity and the Spirit transforms hearts. This cannot refer to things Nicodemus would not have understood, like Christian baptism, but must come from the Scriptures, which he knew well. Water in the OT often refers to renewal or cleansing, e.g. Ezekiel 36:25-27.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Everyone has had a natural birth; everyone needs a spiritual birth to come alive spiritually.

For further study: The Bible uses "born again", "born of God" and becoming a "child of God" to talk about the same thing, Jn 1:12-13, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3 and 23, 1 Jn 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4, 18.

7 You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again.'

"You" – not just Nicodemus, everyone.

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or

where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus would have recognised the allusion to 'wind' or 'spirit' and 'breath' – the same word group in Hebrew. Jesus is saying that He is the reality of the 'life to dry bones' prophecy of Ezek. 37:1-14 (OT reading last week).

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

For Nicodemus to be told that he, a prestigious teacher, could not enter the kingdom of God based on his own merit and good works, was shocking.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

Jesus ironically refers to Nicodemus' "we know" in v. 2, as if to say "We are God and we do know..."

12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.

In practice Jesus' reply to Nicodemus' question contains the most profound and direct explanation of what the Good News is all about – believe, and see the kingdom of God. The way God's order works with its salvation, only comes by a new spiritual start. This shocked Nicodemus, whose Jewish worldview was about attainment and 'good works'. If such a good Jew could not enter the kingdom of God, who could?

Our lesson is that we cannot do anything of ourselves to secure salvation. It is a gift which we can receive, but not if we're too self-sufficient to believe we need to receive it.

Question How would you explain to someone else their utter need of Jesus?

14-15 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.

"Lifted up" – Nicodemus would not have made the connection with crucifixion until some years later. Lifted up, as in the bronze 'snake in the wilderness', Numbers 21:4-9, is also raising a symbol of God's judgment and deliverance from judgment, for people to recognise. Jesus on the Cross was "raised up" as a terrible judgment for our sin but also the deliverance for that sin.

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

"To condemn... to save" – The holiness and righteousness of Jesus shows up the selfishness and independence of the world, which is condemned already. But God's purpose is to provide a way out: a way to believe, and live. "Whoever believes in Him" – faith is not about doing, but believing. Either to believe in the Son and know salvation and eternal life; or not, with the consequences of perishing – utter failure, loss and eternal separation. This requires faith – there is no middle ground.