

Walking According to the Spirit

Scripture: Romans 8:1 – 11

9/4/22 – Labor Day Sunday

Before we can truly hear the Apostle Paul's words this morning from Romans 8:1 - 11, we have to have a proper understanding of our guilt. Before we can truly understand the words of Paul this morning, we need to have a heart to heart talk about our guilt.

We do not like to talk about this, but we cannot grow in our faith unless we reflect on our guilt. We often approach our guilt in several ways:

- *We sometimes deny our guilt - O Lord, I am not a sinner!
- *We sometimes rationalize our guilt - Dear Lord, I had to do that!
- *We sometimes defend ourselves and our guilt - Lord, that is the way I am so that is what I do!
- *We sometimes blame others for our guilt - O God, it is all their fault!
- *We sometimes make excuses for our guilt - God, I did not do it!

When we recognize our guilt, we will often become stubborn and lash out at people who point out our sins. Paul talks to this in Romans. Paul tells us that we are self-righteous sinners who find false idols everywhere. Paul leaves us no place to hide from our guilt. Paul speaks the cold, hard truth about our guilt.

Guilt is like Velcro, it sticks to us so that we cannot shake it off. This feeling of our own guilt can be a miserable feeling. It is no wonder we do so many things to deny our guilt. We will deny it, rationalize it, defend it, blame it on someone else, and make excuses for our guilt.

You may now be looking back on something you did that gave you a feeling of guilt. I did this and my mind journeyed back a time when I was a boy. I lived on a playground each summer. The playground was behind my Elementary School – Lose Elementary. I always went to the playground each day if it was not raining to play.

After playing and getting all sweetie, my friends and I would walk to the corner store at West 4th St. and Isabella St, It was appropriately named 'The Corner Store'. And on their sign was the owners' names Jim & Barb Baker. They were a beautiful couple in their 40's who knew us by name. They would greet us with a BIG 'Hello' and say our names! We would go there to get a soda.

Let me describe the soda machine – first it only cost a dime for an 8 oz. soda and the machine was one of those that a glass door on the right that you would open and then you would reach in and pull out your glass bottle of soda. We had found out (I do not remember how) that if you put your dime in the soda machine and opened the door and pull on two sodas at the same time, you could get two sodas for the price of one!

Well we would do this often! The soda machine was located in the back corner of the store with a rack to put your empties in next the soda machine so that the owner of the store could get the \$.02 refund. We were out of sight of the owners' view.

So on this day I remembered, I put my dime in and I opened the door. Marc Cunningham and I reached for our sodas. I grabbed a hold of an Orange Crush soda and Marc grabbed a Hires Root Beer and on the count of three, we both pulled and both sodas came out! We drank them in the back corner of the store and put our empty bottles in the rack.

I talked to you about 'guilt' and notice that I did not mention the feeling guilt yet in my story. My guilt did not come until we walked out of the store and the owners would say good bye to us. I can remember vividly the guilty feeling when Barb Baker said – 'Bye Bones (which was my nickname) See you soon!'

I am now going to put a \$5 bill in our offering plate to make up for all the sodas I stole!

It is hard to let go of the guilt. You may even have developed a feeling of excessive guilt. This agony of excessive guilt is expressed well by Paul when he writes - 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do!'

Your own guilt can be like a weight around your neck and you may speak words similar to Paul's words when this happens - 'Wretched man or woman that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?'

This passage reflects Paul's own anguish and as well, the anguish he knows that we feel. Paul knows the struggle we have with guilt.

When people try to say that Paul gives us a guilt trip - maybe so but they have not read enough of him. It is true that Paul does not want us to be self-righteous sinners who ignore our own guilt. Paul does not want us to be self-satisfied and smug about our relationship with God and other people. Paul does not want us to wallow in guilt either! Paul wants us to realize what our guilt is and he wants us to be rescued and to live in peace.

Paul has the answer to our own guilt. Paul proclaims that Christ offers us that which we need. Christ offers us the peace we seek to free us from our guilt. By working in Christ, God has broken the power of sin in our lives.

Paul talks about how sin corrupts everything it touches. God gave the law as a gift but sin corrupted the law. The law became a burden rather than a gift. Trying to fulfill the law on our own leaves us with both frustration and guilt.

Christ has broken the power of guilt. Christ has disarmed guilt so that it does not have to weigh us down. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is only peace. Jesus frees us from the trap of guilt added to frustration.

Oh, we will still face our weaknesses. But Christ frees us from condemnation. Oh, we may still struggle to follow the law given by God, but Christ will allow us to rise above our weaknesses with his strength.

The Holy Spirit is there to strengthen us from within. Paul says that our choices are to set our minds on the flesh or the Spirit, what do you choose?

To set your mind on the flesh is death. The flesh includes the many manifestations of our sinful side. The flesh includes sensual sins, greed, and the desire for revenge. Do you choose the flesh?

To set your mind on the Spirit is the alternative way. To set your mind on the Spirit is to let the Spirit work within you, letting God's strength take over when we are too weak. Setting your mind on the Spirit does not mean that we will never sin or face frustration again. Setting our minds on the Spirit means that God is nurturing within us the grace to become loving, strong, and joyful. Setting our minds on the Spirit leads to life and peace!

Paul knows that we are still weak. Paul knows that we live in a fallen world. Paul understands our sinful nature and life is complicated. Paul believes on the one hand that we are responsible for our sins. We often choose idolatry, rebellion, and submission to temptation.

On the other hand, Paul says that we are not responsible for our sins because the whole creation is not what God wants it to be. Paul knows that we often are held captive to the powers and authorities that exist in this world. The sin of the whole creation often spill over onto us.

We have three choices to make about our guilt.

*Choice one - we can deny our guilt.

*Choice two - we can wallow in our guilt.

*And choice three - we can recognize our guilt and deal with it.

I choose number three - How about you?

If you choose number three - recognize our guilt and deal with it. We acknowledge that we are sinners who live in a sinful world and we open ourselves to forgiveness. We face no condemnation because the Spirit enables us to resist temptation and to grow in grace. The Holy Spirit enables us to learn to live abundantly with that we have. And we are content.

With the economy as unstable as it is, we cannot say to those who really are in desperate straits - be content with what you have. We have an obligation to help others.

The Holy Spirit enables us to look at what we have and to be at peace so that we have the strength and the will to reach out to those in need. How have we demonstrated the Holy Spirit working in us?

Let us always choose number three - recognize our guilt and deal with it. The Spirit will walk with us. Let us walk according to the Holy Spirit!

Let us pray:

O God, make us to live a guiltless life, forgive us when we sin, and give us the joy that comes from serving you. AMEN.