

A New Obsession

The War Within – Part VII

Romans 8:5-11

Introduction

The past weekend for millions of people, is best known for the consumption of large amounts of candy. I know believers who use Halloween as a time of evangelism and hand out gospel tracts along with candy for the kids who come by.

For a lesser number of people, October 31st is known for its special moment in history. October 31, 1517, was the day that Martin Luther, the converted monk, drew up the Ninety-five Theses. They were, he wrote, “for the purpose of eliciting truth,” and represented his efforts to reform the church. He fastened his ninety-five statements to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In many respects, this was the beginning of what we refer to as, the Protestant Reformation.

October 31st is a date that is special to many people for different reasons. For most of the world, it is Halloween; for believers, it is the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

For six of us, in the Davey household, October 31st has an additional special meaning. On that day, our daughter Charity was born. We just celebrated her tenth birthday yesterday. I told her, “Just think, you’re now in double digits for the rest of your life!”

Charity thought that was great! She had quite a party. And, except for grilling the hotdogs, I stayed out of the way. At one point though, I was invited to watch their fashion show as they walked by my study door in wild, outlandish outfits. It was a scream.

I was reading some old notes recently, and came across the beginning of a tradition that Charity and I

still carry on today. When she was around two and a half years old, she could not pronounce her R’s. She brought some books for me to read to her one evening and sat down on a pillow beside me, ready to listen. Before I began to read, she looked up at me, smiled, and said, “You’re my best ‘fwiend’.”

Isn’t that great? “You’re my best ‘fwiend’.”

Now, I have to admit, she said the same thing to her mother. But, I am sure she did not mean it as much as when she said it to me!

A few days after that incident, she went up to Marsha and announced, “I’m gonna go and see my fwiend named Daddy.”

She can have anything she wants in life.

To this day, she and I have this tradition of saying to each other, usually at the end of the day, “We’ll be best friends forever.”

Nothing, not a national party nor a historical reminder of the Reformation, compares to a reminder of being her friend.

The Holy Spirit – our best Friend

In our last discussion, we were introduced to a very special Person who is nothing less than our eternally faithful, very best friend. We refer to Him as the Holy Spirit.

When we placed our faith in the atoning work of Christ, we became the sanctuary of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God who creates, sustains, and preserves spiritual life in every one of us who call Christ our Savior.

The Holy Spirit will ultimately, bring every believer into the full enjoyment of salvation by granting him eternal glory in the presence of God. It is the Holy Spirit who:

- fills us,
- seals us,
- communes with us,
- fellowships with us,
- intercedes for us,
- teaches us,
- guides us,
- disciplines us,
- comforts us,
- empowers us,
- admonishes us,
- sanctifies us, and
- enables us to resist sin, love Christ, and serve God.¹

In truth, the Holy Spirit is and will be, every believer's best friend forever.

According to the Bible, the believer:

- rejoices in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21);
- resolves or decides in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:21);
- has a conscience that bears witness with the Holy Spirit (Romans 9:1);
- enjoys access to God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18);
- loves one another through the power of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:8).

The question is not, "Do we need the Holy Spirit?" but, "How can we survive without Him? How can we ever live for God without Him? How can we progress in our Christian walk without Him?!" The question is not, "Do we need Him?" but, "Why would we ever want to try to live a day or an hour or a moment without this divine, powerful, loving, correcting, enabling, protecting, best of all, faithful friend?"

The apostle Paul, in fact, informs us in Romans, chapter 8, that the entire world can be divided into two camps; two categories of people – those who are friends of the Holy Spirit, and those who are not. Jesus Himself referred to His disciples as His friends

(John 15:14), while James referred to unbelievers as "friends of the world" (James 4:4).

So, what does it look like to be a friend of God the Spirit? What does it look like to walk in friendship with the Holy Spirit? And while we are at it, what does it look like to not be a friend of the Holy Spirit; to not be in communion and friendship with God Himself?

Two Dispositions

In the opening paragraph of Romans, chapter 8, Paul begins a series of contrasts that reveal the difference between the believer and the unbeliever. Look at verse 5.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Notice Paul's focus on the "setting of the mind". The believer sets his mind on spiritual things; the world sets its mind on fleshly things.

When Paul contrasts the mind of the believer with the mind of the unbeliever, he is not talking about I.Q. Paul is talking about D.Q. We will coin a new phrase. It is not an intelligence quotient that reveals the difference between the heart of a believer and the heart of an unbeliever, it is a "desire quotient". It is not I.Q. that matters, but D.Q.

What do you desire?

David wrote of his desire in Psalm, chapter 73, verses 25 through 26 and 28a, saying,

Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. . . . But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; . . .

Paul wrote, in Romans, chapter 10, verse 1,

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

He also wrote, in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 9,

. . . we also have as our ambition [desire], . . . to be pleasing to Him [God].

In other words, Paul says, "It is my desire [which can mean, "it is my cause to which I am totally devoted"] to please God."

The truth is, your D.Q. says a lot more about you than your I.Q.

Look again at verse 5 of Acts, chapter 8. Paul writes,

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

The Greek word for “setting the mind,” or “phroneo,” which is translated, “to set their minds,” is a word which refers to a person’s disposition; to their “bent”; to the occupation of their heart’s desires. This is referring to what occupies a person’s mind – and it can refer to obsessions. In other words, your life will never become obsessed with whatever your mind has not first become set on.

What are you devoted to? Upon what things have you set your mind? In other words, what are your obsessions?

I read recently about John Audubon, who was born in the late 1700’s, and at an early age, revealed his love for art and birds. He would rise at midnight, night after night, and go into the swamps to study certain nighthawks. One summer, he repeatedly visited the bayous near New Orleans to observe a shy water bird. He would stand almost to his neck in the stagnant waters, scarcely breathing, while poisonous water moccasins swam past his face. It was life-threatening work, but he was reported to have said with great joy, “What of it, I now have pictures of the birds.”

There is nothing necessarily wrong with that – it is our joy to study the creative handiwork of God. And because of that desire, John Audubon was devoted to studying birds. He risked his life, suffering every discomfort without any regret, in order to study what he loved.

I know of people who are passionate about far less important things. I read about one of them – he was cited in the article “Strange World,” published by *Campus Life*. His name is Roy Wehling, who won the annual Tour de Donut in Staunton, Illinois . . . and I am not kidding. The article gave the guidelines to the race – contestants get to take five minutes off their total time for every donut they eat during the thirty mile road race. Roy Wehling did not cross the finish line first, but during the race, he consumed eighteen donuts. That was enough to take sufficient time off for him to be declared the winner. He was interviewed afterward and said he had eaten nine donuts in the previous year’s race, but that this year, “I [was committed] to double my donuts and have a good road time.”ⁱⁱ

I not only question that man’s D.Q, I have questions about his I.Q., as well as anyone’s who rides a bicycle and eats a dozen donuts. If you are going to eat a dozen donuts, you should be in a booth with hot coffee – everyone knows that!

It never ceases to amaze me what people are passionate about and what they are devoted to doing. The truth is,

What you love, you think about, and what you think about, you do because what you think about, you are!

Let me say that again,

What you love is something you think about, and

what you think about, you end up doing because

what you think about, you are!

In other words,

You are what you have been becoming.

I know it is too early in the morning for such deep truth!

Solomon put it this way, in Proverbs, chapter 23, verse 7 (NKJV),

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

When a person has his mind made up about something or holds to a certain idea or belief, we refer to him as having a mind-set, right? We might say, “He responded that way . . .” or “He said that . . . because of his mind-set.”

That is what Paul is referring to in verse 5. The verse could be paraphrased to read,

Those who walk in the flesh have a mind-set on the flesh; those who walk in the Spirit have a mind-set on spiritual things.

In other words, a mind-set is a way of revealing who you really are and what you have become – it is your disposition! Your mind-set:

- determines how you act;
- motivates you in what you do and say and feel;
- determines who you will allow to influence your life;
- decides what you will choose as a source of knowledge;
- affects your view of every experience you have;

- shapes your value system;
- dominates your private and public life.ⁱⁱⁱ

What captivates your mind is what you have become.

One youth pastor made an interesting application of this truth when he wrote,

The more you love something, the more you become like it. For example, I have a friend that loves tennis. There's nothing wrong with that, but he doesn't realize what he's become. He wears tennis stuff. He reads tennis magazines. He talks about tennis all the time – even his hair looks like a tennis ball. I have another friend that loves surfing. He dresses with surf stuff, and he reads surf magazines. He uses surfer talk, and he smells like seaweed. Could this be why the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind because the power to change us is given in relationship, and what you love you become like?^{iv}

Paul basically says the same thing in a different way in verse 5, paraphrased,

. . . those who are of the flesh love the things of the flesh and those who are spiritual love the things of the Spirit.

The fleshly become more dominated by the flesh and the spiritual become more dominated by the Holy Spirit.

Paul is contrasting two different mind-sets; he is contrasting the disposition of the unbeliever who loves the flesh and the things of the flesh with the believer who loves the Spirit of God and the things of the Spirit!

Two Destinations

Paul now goes one step further and contrasts not only two different dispositions, but two different destinations. Notice verse 6 of Romans, chapter 8.

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

The unbeliever is obsessed with the flesh and the believer is obsessed with the Spirit. And now, Paul gives us the fruits of these obsessions:

- The fruit of the flesh is death – literally a death-like state – unable to experience the life of the Spirit nor the things of the Spirit of God.

- The fruit of the spirit is life and peace – not future life and future peace, but a life-like state – able to experience the life of the Spirit and the things of the Spirit of God.

In the next several verses, the apostle Paul summarizes the results of these two dispositions and destinations which he has already explained in this letter. Look at verses 7 through 11.

because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; . . .

(that is in Romans, chapter 1),

. . . for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

(that is in Romans, chapter 2),

and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

(that is in Romans, chapters 3 and 4),

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

(that is in Romans, chapters 6 and 7),

But 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.

(that is in Romans, chapter 8, verses 1 and 2).

Paul delivers the truth that deeds of the flesh equal death. Go back to Romans, chapter 1, and read the record in verses 24 through 32. Paul can never be accused of beating around the bush – no matter how embarrassing; no matter how revealing!

I recently read a new book, based on the book of Proverbs. I could not help but think of one of the stories about a mother who was preparing dinner one evening, when her little boy came running into the kitchen.

She asked, “Well, what’s Mama’s little darling been doing all day?”

He replied, “I’ve been playing mailman.”

“Mailman,” the mother wondered out loud, “how could you do that when you don’t have any letters?”

“Oh, I had a whole bunch of letters,” he said.

“What letters?”

The little boy answered, “All those letters I found in the bottom drawer of your dresser all tied up with ribbons . . . I put one in every mailbox on our street.”^v

The news is out! Here is the letter – and it can be embarrassing; revealing; something you might want to keep private and confidential. The news is out:

- People who are governed by the flesh and love the things of the flesh are living dead! And, they are headed for eternal death.
- People who are governed by the Spirit and love the things of the Spirit are living redeemed! And, they are headed for eternal life.

Right now, you, the believer, have this incredible Friend. You are helpless victims of sin no longer. The life-giving Holy Spirit can overwhelm the power of sin and empower every one of us to lead holy and godly lives.

That does not mean true believers are perfectly, consistently governed by the Spirit, but that this is their disposition; their bent; their desire. The mindset of the true believer is devotion to the things of the Spirit of God.

And, guess what? The Holy Spirit who brought your spirit to life at conversion will be, according to verse 11, the One who brings your old decayed dust back to life as the spirit is reunited with the glorified resurrected body at the rapture of the church. The crowning act of redemption will be the resurrection of the body. Paul says so in this verse.

But 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.

There will be no more flesh; no more sin; no more residue of earth.

The effects of sin will no longer be seen on the bride of Christ, the church. Jesus Christ will be the only one in heaven with scars.^{vi}

However, for the unbeliever, who is hostile toward Creator God, unable to please God, self-centered in his life and arrogant in his death, there is only future death and eternal depravity. Everything they lived for will be seen for what it was! Everything they hoped in will be seen for what it cannot do! Everything they believed in will be seen for how it cannot save!

In his book, *Bones of Contention*, professor Marvin Lubenow tells the sad story of Sir Arthur

Keith, one of the greatest anatomists of the twentieth century. Sir Arthur Keith was born in 1866 and died in 1955. According to his autobiography, as a young man he attended evangelistic meetings in Edinburgh and Aberdeen and watched students make their commitments to Jesus Christ. He himself often felt “on the verge of conversion,” yet he resisted, rejecting the gospel because he felt that the Genesis account of Creation was just a myth and the Bible was merely a human book.

In 1908, a discovery was made of some bones, buried deep in a gravel pit, just forty miles from downtown London. Keith became intrigued by the discovery and soon, it was announced by the Geological Society of London that these were the remains of the earliest known Englishman, *Eoanthropus dawsoni* – otherwise known as Piltdown Man. The vast majority of paleoanthropologists worldwide hailed this as a great discovery of our human ancestors.

Piltdown Man became the obsession of Sir Arthur Keith. To him it was the validation of his evolutionary beliefs – the missing link – and he wrote more on Piltdown Man than anyone else – even though some five hundred doctoral dissertations were written about this discovery. Sir Arthur Keith’s famous work, *The Antiquity of Man*, centered on the Piltdown fossils.

In 1953, science caught up with speculation, and the British Museum proclaimed the entire thing a fraud. The jawbone was not much older than the year it was found. The bones had been treated with iron salts to make them appear old; scratch marks, invisible to the naked eye, revealed that the sharp teeth had been recently filed down.

Sir Arthur Keith was eighty-six years old when some of his colleagues visited him at his home to break the news that the fossil he had trusted in for forty years was a hoax. The bones he had been obsessed with, convinced they proved Creation a myth, had themselves been a fraud . . . and his writings were nothing more than myth and speculation.^{vii}

Can you imagine spending a lifetime of great faith; a lifetime of obsession . . . in the wrong thing? Just a matter of months before this venerated scholar died, he realized the truth.

What are you hoping in?

What are you living for?

Who are you trusting in?

Paul delivers the truth about two dispositions . . . and two destinations. Which one represents you?!

How different from the death of Sir Arthur Keith are the deaths of God's children. I cannot imagine Sir Arthur Keith's disillusionment and anxiety. I cannot help but think of the contrasting confidence of the believer in their eternal future.

I have stood in hospital rooms with Christian sons and daughters as their aged parents lay dying – and watched those saints slowly stop breathing and the monitor go flat. I have stepped in hospital rooms where mothers have handed me their lifeless babies – with tears of sadness, but hearts filled with confidence that a reunion was on the way.

I can think of the confidence of one man in particular, who was on his deathbed. I stood in the hospital room where he lay, as he was a matter of a few hours from glory. I could hardly speak and was fighting back the tears. His wife was there – singing to him; reading the word to him. He would come in and out of consciousness, was laboring to breathe,

and his heart just about ready to give up the fight. He was a young man, my age at the time, who loved God. As I got ready to go, knowing I would probably never see him again this side of heaven, I leaned over the bed, assuming he could not even hear me, and said, "I'll see you later."

He stirred, smiled, and whispered with great passion, "Yes, you will."

Verse 11b says,

. . . He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

Thank God for His Spirit – His life giving, life leading, eternally empowering, resurrecting Spirit.

My friend, hear the word of the Lord – the flesh will lead you to eternal death; the Spirit will lead you to eternal life. If the Holy Spirit is your friend, you will be friends, forever!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/2/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, Romans Volume I (Moody Press, 1991), p. 414.

ⁱⁱ "Strange World," Campus Life, vol. 56, no. 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Life Application Bible Commentary: Romans (Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), p. 151.

^{iv} Wayne Cordeiro, A Personal Relationship, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.

^v James Merritt, Friends, Foes, and Fools: The Wisdom of Proverbs for Fathers (Nashville, TN, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), p. 40.

^{vi} Gib Martin, Romans: God's Word for the Biblically-Inept (Starburst Publishers, 2000), p. 111.

^{vii} Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 156.