

How Then Shall We Live? Part I

(11/19/03)

Greetings to the Church of Betsy's House,

A few days ago I was reading a book about how we live and grow as Christians.

I woke up the next morning, as is often the case, thinking about some things that the writer of that book had said.

The issue under consideration was how do God's sovereign rule and our actions fit together. It's the old question of who does what. It is commonly noted as the "Spirit filled" life.

He had noted some misconceptions about what the Spirit filled was not. It was not always being happy or sinless perfection or instantly producing the fruits of the Spirit. He concluded with a warning that being Spirit filled is not just "let go and let God" either.

To give an example of what he was writing about he cited a conversation he had had with someone after he had given a workshop on the Spirit filled life.

He said, "As I talked about the things we need to do to grow, such as face fears, take risks, and join a support group, one man asked, 'Isn't this just another way of saying you set your goals and just do them? That sounds like any other system of psychology and self-help'".

He took issue with that and pointed out we cannot do the things we need to do on our own.

That, in turn, led to the response, "Oh, I see. We can't do it so we just depend on the Holy Spirit to do it. We give it all to Him."

"No," he said, "We don't just give it all to him. We can't do it, and don't just give it all to him. We must 'work out our salvation', but we also have to be asking him to help us to do all of it. It is both, not one or the other".

"Humans" he writes, "tend to be unable to hold opposite ideas in dynamic tension."

It is to his last statement, his conclusion that I want to address a few remarks.

When Paul writes, "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18) he is using it in contrast with being under the influence of wine, being drunk. "Be filled" in the original Greek is in what is called the imperative mood, that means it is a command and an urgent command at that. So the sense of it here is not to have more of the Spirit but that the Spirit has more of the believer. Since God is commanding it is obvious that when we obey He will bring it about. Obedience opens the way.

The spiritual life is one of submission, obedience. Christ, we learn in Hebrews 5:8, "learned obedience by the things He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation."

Note that He was "made perfect", that is He was made complete through obedience.

I submit to you, then, that there really exists no "dynamic tension" between two "opposite ideas". The Father very simply gives us commands and we are to respond. Inherent in His commands are both the direction and the authority to do them. When we respond to them we are acting under His direction and power. We are cooperating with Him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I'm once again reminded of that famous Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5 who came asking the Lord to heal his sick servant. The Lord offered to go to the servant and heal him but the centurion replied in verse 9, "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

"When the Lord heard this He was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith'" And in verse 13 ends with, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed in that very hour."

Ours is always the response of faith and that will automatically bring about all that we need to live the Spirit filled life. It is not a question of who does what and some sort of tension. It is yielding to the Spirit as God's will is made manifest in His Word.

The major problem we have as humans is resident in the fact that we do not begin to reason from God's revealed will. We try to figure it out from the wrong end. We do it backwards. Let me give you an example of backward reasoning: God is love but love is not God. We try to determine what to do by placing what we do at the beginning of the consideration. It would look like this: Father, I am being offered this new job should I take it?

Whatever leads in the thought is the primary consideration. The better way is: Father, it is my desire to serve You and glorify You and be used in the propagation of the Gospel as revealed through Paul. Would this change in my job advance your purposes here on planet earth?

There is a prayer that can't go wrong. The Holy Spirit will assuredly give Biblical direction and authority to that prayer. One would then only have to "walk" in that way in obedience.

Who, you might say, is then doing "it". We are!!! There is no tension in that situation. We are acting as one, in union with our Heavenly Father. It is not a either/or situation. We are united in a single effort.

I want to extend a special invitation to any and all to be with us this Friday night at Ukrops. I have some super great things to share with you. The Lord has been working in me and showing me things in His Word to share with you. He wants to teach you. This Friday will be a special time. If you want to eat try to get there by 7PM if not we start at 7:30PM.

In His Love,

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