

Assurance (Part One): Self Examination

The Holy Spirit

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In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus described the basis of real Christianity. He pointed out certain characteristics that would clearly identify His true followers, for example: humility, meekness, merciful, and peacemaker, just to name a few.

But why do the Christian qualities Jesus described seem to be so difficult to find even in the Christian-professing churches? Mainstream Christianity does not understand that it is not merely a set of beliefs. It is not joining a church, or something to be practiced one day a week or at odd intervals. It is a way of life!

Early Christians referred to original Christianity as “the Way of the Lord” and “the Way of God.” No one can follow what Jesus taught without experiencing an obvious change in life and lifestyle.

Nevertheless, even for true Christians it is not easy to live “the Way.” Notice what Jesus had to say about God’s way of life here in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:14 “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

So Jesus tells us right off the bat that it is not going to be easy, but He also promises the help to get us through. We also see that it is pictured as difficult in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, in Matthew 25. Although each of the ten virgins seemed to be what we would today call believers or “the called,” only five were actually taken to be with the Bridegroom when He came. Which means that only half were accepted as truly part of the Bride of Christ.

Notice that all had been invited to the wedding banquet; all belonged to what we would call the visible church; all professed to have the Bridegroom as their Lord; all believed in the Lord’s second coming; all were waiting for

Jesus; and all even fell asleep while waiting. Nevertheless, five were not accepted.

Matthew 25:11-12 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you.’”

What a terrifying thought! This alone should be reason enough to make Christians want to examine themselves to see if they really are Christians, knowing that a mere profession of faith is not enough. Humanly it is impossible to accomplish.

According to the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans, there are *not* three categories of people in this life: those who are Christians; those who are not Christians; and those who are Christians but live as if they were not. Rather there are only two types, and they are: those who are dead in their sins and are therefore as unresponsive to God as dead people; and those who have been made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit and are therefore following Jesus Christ in true discipleship.

Granted, Christians do sin, and sometimes very badly, but a person who is on the path of discipleship gets up again and goes forward with Christ, while the unbeliever does not. In fact, the unconverted is not on the path of true discipleship at all.

This means that we should never take sin lightly. II Peter 1:10 says that we are to examine ourselves to make sure of our calling. We should not be at ease in this matter and not rest until we are sure that we really do rest in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of Romans 8 is not to instill doubt in believers but rather the exact opposite. It is to give us assurance. Romans 8:39 teaches that if we are truly in Christ, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from God’s love.

In verses 5-8 of Romans 8, Paul tells us to examine ourselves and he does this by sharply contrasting those who live according to the sinful nature and those who live according to the Spirit. A direct comparison here.

Romans 8:5-8 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, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

In verses 9-11, he continues by showing, in a very encouraging manner, who a Christian really is. Paul's outline is simple. He talks about the Christian's past, present, and their future. The past is discussed in verse 9; the present is discussed in verse 10; and the future is discussed in verse 11.

Romans 8:9-11 But you are not in the flesh but in [or you could say in union with] the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Verse 9 discusses the Christian's past. It is important, because it makes clearer than any other verse in this chapter that the description of those who are not controlled by the sinful nature but who live in accordance with the Holy Spirit applies to all Christians, not just to so-called spiritual ones. In other words, there is no such thing as a "secular Christian" here.

Notice Paul's direct logic. First, if you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to Christ. Second, if you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ. And third, if you have the Spirit of Christ, you will not be controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit.

In other words, if you belong to Christ, you will live like it. If you do not live like it, you do not belong to Him, regardless of your outward profession. But this is meant to be encouraging, which is why Paul begins the first sentence as he does.

He is writing to the believers in Rome, and to us, and says to these brethren, “You, however, are controlled, not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit.” That is, he is assuming that these professed Christians really are Christ’s, and he is trying to explain the difference their new identification with Jesus has made and will make in the future.

So, what difference has it made? Well, when we look to the past, which is what Paul does first, we see that as Christians we have been lifted out of our former sinful or fleshly state and into the realm of the Spirit, something we should not take lightly. We are now “in the Spirit,” and, as Paul also says here, the Spirit is “in” us.

This is an absolutely critical thing, because it means that being a Christian is not merely a matter of adopting a particular set of intellectual or theological beliefs, however true they may be. It involves a change of state, which is accomplished, not by us, but by God who saves us. It is not a matter of just changing your beliefs only.

You *were* in the realm of the flesh, dominated by the flesh, and you are *now* in the realm of the Spirit, which is governed and controlled and dominated by the Spirit. You and I cannot make this change ourselves. It is something God does.

However, we also have a responsibility to submit to God’s will and make an effort by the power of His Holy Spirit to do the will of God. Nevertheless, it is God who is miraculously doing it.

Paul said the same thing in Romans 5, where he wrote that the Christian is no longer under the reign of sin unto death but instead has come under the reign of God’s grace in Christ. The fact that it is “of grace” shows that God is continuing to complete us and never lets up.

This change also means that being a Christian is not a matter merely of living in a Christian manner either, important as that also is. If you are a Christian, you will not merely talk like one, you will live like one, and you

will think like one. Living like a Christian, at least in an external and observable sense, does not in itself mean you are one. Many unbelievers live outwardly moral lives.

A Christian is someone who has been delivered from one realm, the realm of sin and death, and has been transferred into the realm of God's Spirit, which is life. This, of course, is something God Himself has done, and it means that salvation is of the Lord and that it is all of grace.

It is because salvation is of God and not of ourselves that it is possible to speak of the Christian's assurance. The only reason we can be assured of our salvation is because salvation is a work of God, whose ways are always perfect, whose promises are never broken, and who does not change His mind.

The opposite of this assurance is expressed quite clearly as a warning in the section in Deuteronomy 28. The curses for disobedience, for rebelling against God's way of life, are listed here.

Deuteronomy 28:65-66 And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.

That is the exact opposite of people in God's church. We have that assurance of salvation because we have God's Holy Spirit and that is our guarantee, the world does not have that. Israel did not follow through and wound up not having that assurance of life either. You will feel like your life is hanging by a thread and that is exactly how the world feels. That is what a life without assurance from God feels like.

Now back to Romans 8 again. Verse 10 describes the Christian's present and the source of the strength to persevere.

Romans 8:10 And if Christ is in [in union with] you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

In Romans 8:5-11, Paul is drawing a contrast between two kinds of life. One, there is the life which is dominated by sinful human nature; whose focus and center is self; whose only law is its own desires which takes what it likes where it likes.

Now turn over to Galatians 5. We are talking here about the first way of life dominated by human nature. These traits may also be described as passion-controlled or lust-controlled, pride-controlled or ambition-controlled.

Galatians 5:16-21 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Its characteristic is its absorption in the things that human nature without Christ sets its heart upon. We see that very vividly in the world.

Now the second kind of life is a life that is dominated by the Spirit of God. As we breathe in the air and the air fills us, in a sense, so Christ fills us. Our mind is centered on God's way of life 24/7, and we do the will of God, not our own will. Our desires are determined by the motivation of the Spirit of God. We are Spirit-controlled, Christ-inspired, and God-focused.

These two lives are going in diametrically opposite directions. The life that is dominated by the desires and activities of sinful human nature is on the way to death. In the most literal sense, there is no future in it, because it is heading away from God and toward death.

To allow the things of the world to completely dominate life is self-extinction, it is spiritual suicide. By living it, a person is making himself totally unfit ever to stand in the presence of God. He is hostile to Him, resentful of His law, and His control. God is not his friend but his enemy.

The apostle Paul was addressing the fact that everyone dies because he is involved in the human condition. Sin came into this world and with sin came death which is the consequence of sin. Inevitably, therefore, all human beings die, but the person who is Spirit-controlled and whose heart is God-focused, dies only to rise again.

Paul's basic thought is that the Christian is inseparably one with Christ. Christ died and rose again, and the person who is one with Christ is one with death's conqueror and shares in that victory. The Spirit-controlled, Christ-owned person is on the way to eternal life and death is but an inevitable interlude that has to be passed through on the way. Now what evidence makes it apparent that the Holy Spirit is working in us now?

Matthew 7:16-20 “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

True faith in Christ changes one's life and produces fruit for God's glory. Everything in nature reproduces after its kind, and this is also true in the spiritual realm.

The person who believes false doctrine, who follows a false prophet, will never experience a spiritually changed life. Sadly, some people do not realize this until it is too late.

John 15:1-8 “I am the true vine [Christ speaking here], and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the

word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

The emphasis here is bearing fruit and bearing much of it. When something is repeated it means that it is of extreme importance. Fruit here is an image for good results coming from the life of a believer, at least in part generally, in terms of bringing benefit to the lives of others and advancing the work of God in the world. We must rekindle the embers, fan the flame, and keep the gift of God burning in us. We can never let down in that area.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

These aspects are the complete opposite of a life hanging by a thread. It is essential to remember that personal spiritual growth always comes from producing good results while serving others.

Once regenerated by the Holy Spirit from the Father, we must continually be led by it, bearing spiritual fruit throughout our lives. This is not something we are expected to do occasionally, we are expected to do this every day of our lives. Now we will read Galatians 5, which is a contrast to the works of the flesh, which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

So Paul is again saying there that we have the Spirit of God in us if we are a Christian and if we do then we will produce the fruit of the Spirit. If we are producing the fruit of the Spirit, which exhibit a sound mind, we know it is working in us. It should be a checklist of things that we are to review every day of our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the power, mind, and essence of the divine nature, and through it God carries out His will. It empowers the mind to comprehend spiritual matters, producing conversion, and it gives us the strength, will, and faith to overcome our flaws and sins. Through His Spirit He has given to us the means to overcome.

Romans 8:11 describes the Christian's future, pointing forward to his or her resurrection. It is true, as verse 10 has said, that the "body is dead because of sin." But although we die, we will all nevertheless rise again.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him [God the Father] who raised Jesus from the dead [out up from among the dead] dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His [God's] Spirit who dwells in you.

In the last phrase of this verse, the word "who" is not in the original Greek. It literally says, "dwells His Spirit in you." Now there are two common mistakes in the interpretation of this verse that we should not fall into.

The first misunderstanding is that the verse is speaking not of a future physical resurrection, but of some kind of moral resurrection. True, there is a kind of "resurrection" in which we, who have been dead in sin, have been brought into newness of life and are now increasingly putting to death the deeds of the body and living in Christ and righteousness.

In baptism we are raised up out of the watery grave to newness of life. But that is not what Paul is thinking of here. The comparison between the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection makes his real meaning clear. The point is that God will raise us just as He raised Jesus Christ.

The second mistake is to think of this in terms of faith healing, which some have done, supposing it to be a promise of perfect health for those who believe God will heal them. This idea is simply foreign to the context.

The verse is speaking about a future resurrection, and it is regarding it as certain for all who are in Christ. It is not just the divine Christ but also the divine Father who is in view here. Both combine to guarantee our resurrection. We have that assurance. And by having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we have that guarantee.

Now let us shift gears here and look at sanctification for a moment. But first, I want to read what one pastor wrote about a letter he received which shows a lack of understanding about being sanctified. He writes:

I once received a letter from an old friend whom I had not seen for four or five years, and it contained an old problem. Two years earlier she had begun to date a man who was not a Christian. At the beginning of the relationship, when she had raised the question of religion, he had brushed it off, claiming to be an agnostic. My friend reasoned that the relationship would not last anyway, so she dropped the subject. But the relationship did last.

And now it was two years later, and she was in love with a man who was not a Christian and had no interest in becoming one. Of course, she had prayed. But God had not answered her prayer by bringing the man to faith. And now she had a twofold problem. One was how to find strength to break off the relationship, which she knew she should do. And the second was with God. Why was God not intervening to bring her friend to faith?

The relationship mattered to her. She had prayed for his salvation. There seemed to be no other men around who were Christians. What was wrong? In fact, in looking back over her life, she had begun to wonder if God had ever intervened in any special way to do anything just for her. And if He had not, why? Was she to assume she had a special relationship with Him? Or, for that matter, why was she to believe that God was even there?

I think this letter expressed a very common dilemma, one you may have experienced yourself. Your specifics probably differ; the problem may be a job-related situation, a habit or sin needing to be overcome, some puzzling choice needing to be made. But the questions are the same. How can you do the right thing in your particularly difficult situation? And why does not God intervene in some way to work your problem out?

Some of the answers to those important questions are found in this section of Romans 8, because in these verses Paul is talking about our obligation to do the right thing as God's people, as true witnesses for His way of life. And he is implying that, as the faithful in Christ, we not only have an obligation to live a holy life and do the right things, but also to use our God-given ability to live rightly. In fact, the obligation and ability are both grounded in the fact that we are true Christians.

Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put [are putting] to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

We know that sanctification is a process and by that process we are overcoming sins and putting to death the deeds of the body. In Romans 8, Paul emphasizes that those who belong to Christ do have the Holy Spirit, and as a result, they live like it.

Now what is the proper approach to sanctification? How are Christians to achieve victory over sin and grow in holiness? Paul gives an adequate general answer in these verses. In some ways, the most important word in verses 12 and 13 is the first. It points to what Paul said earlier. The first important occurrence of “therefore” was at the start of Romans 5.

After Paul had explained the gospel in chapters 3 and 4, the word introduced the consequences of the salvation achieved for us by God through Jesus Christ, the most important being that our salvation is certain or assured. It is guaranteed.

“Therefore” appears again in Romans 5:12 and at the start of Romans 8. In each case it introduced a consequence following on what had previously been said. It is the same here in verse 12.

Paul is arguing that Christians have an obligation to live according to God’s will, rather than according to the sinful nature. Many people, especially in mainstream Christianity, think it is a choice as far as obeying God. But once we become baptized and have God’s Holy Spirit, it becomes an obligation, a debt we are obligated to pay and are indebted to Christ for.

The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit has joined us to Jesus Christ so that we have been delivered from the wrath of God against us for our sin and been brought into an entirely new realm, the sphere of God’s rule in Christ. Also we have been given a new nature, being made alive to spiritual things to which we were previously dead. And we have been assured of an entirely new destiny in which we will live in God’s Family forever.

These are things God has done, or will do, for us. We have not done them for ourselves. But Paul says, because God has done them for us, we have an obligation to live like God has lived. It is an imperative that we must “live for Him!” And by living for Him we have assurance of eternal life.

In other words, everything that we have seen in Romans 8 up to this point has been a general description of the Christian: our status, present experience, character, and future expectation. Now, for the first time, Paul draws a specific conclusion, saying that the work of God for us and in us presents us with a serious obligation. It is to live for God and not according to our sinful natures. That is something that we have to have in our minds every day.

In Romans 8:13, the specifics of this obligation are stated negatively, though positive expressions follow. We are not to live according to the sinful nature, and we are not to give control over to the disobedience and thoughtlessness of the body. Yet the positive side is implied.

Instead of living according to the sinful nature, we are obviously to live according to the Spirit. And instead of giving reign to the transgressions of

the flesh, we are to put the sins of the body to death and instead yield the members of our body to God for righteousness. This is exactly the teaching found in Romans 6.

Romans 6:11-13 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Here, Paul was teaching about our union with Christ. He was teaching that, if we are true Christians, we have been baptized and united to Christ in His death so that His death becomes our death and His resurrection becomes our resurrection. And because of this union with Christ we are no longer what we were. We have a new status before God, and we are changed people.

The key word in verse 11 is “count,” or “reckon.” It means to proceed on the basis of what is actually the case. In this case living precisely as a new creature in Christ because that is what one truly is as a Christian.

We cannot go back, our past is dead to us. The only direction we can go is forward. This is exactly what Paul is teaching again in Romans 8. The only difference is that now his primary subject is not our union with Christ, which he was discussing in Romans 5 and 6, but rather the role of the Holy Spirit as the Father’s mind and power in saving us.

The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ. But this is the identical point. In other words, all Paul is doing in these chapters is approaching the subject of sanctification from two different directions. Yet, no matter what direction he comes from, the bottom line is the same. If we are Christ’s, if the Holy Spirit has joined us to Him, the past is dead for us and we must live now as what we truly are. To use Paul’s meaning in verse 12, it is our obligation.

Since Romans 8:12-13 are parallel to Romans 6:11-13, the earlier verses give an interpretation of the words “put to death the [mis]deeds of the body.” They show that this means offering the parts of our body to God for

righteousness rather than to sin. Now notice for a moment the first question in Romans 8:13, which says:

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

In other words, if you live according to the dictates of, or according to the sinful nature, you will die. What kind of a death is this? Is it physical or spiritual death? Regardless of how we answer that first question, what would we actually have to do, how bad would we have to be, to experience it? We will read I John 5:16-17, which says:

I John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

As a background to this passage John Ritenbaugh in his sermon, “The Covenants, Grace, and Law, Part 16,” succinctly clarifies the meanings of righteousness, transgression, and sin. In it he states: “The concept in these two verses provides a foundation for showing that the Bible clearly categorizes sin in a number of different ways.”

First, we must define a few terms. Psalm 119:172 says, “All Your commandments are righteousness.” What does the word righteousness mean? It is an Old English word that we still use today, especially in religion. It is slowly being replaced by the word rectitude.

Righteousness is a combination of two words, right, meaning correct, and wise, although it is not spelled anything like our modern word wise. Wisdom is right application, that is, right doing. Righteousness then is right doing. “All Your commandments are right doing.” All unrighteousness, all wrongdoing, is sin.

I John 3:4 reads, “Sin is the transgression of the law.” We need to define transgression. Transgression means to go beyond the limit; to violate, giving us a broad foundation for understanding this.

Sin, then, can be defined as going beyond the limit of what the law allows. Righteousness is applying the law's letter and/or its intent.

Quite a number of words, Hebrew and Greek, are translated into this single English word sin. A general element that is present in all sin, regardless of which word is used, is failure. Sin equals failure. Sin is failure to apply or to live up to the standard of what is right. This is why the apostle John says that all wrongdoing is failure, but some failure is much more serious than others.

So then, in I John 5:16-17, a sin which does not lead to death with regard to a Christian; or in other words a failure to rightly live God’s way of life which does not require the death penalty, is one that is genuinely repented of and for which forgiveness is available because the attitude of the sinner is meek and truly sorrowful.

A person may have this attitude, yet still sin on occasion out of weakness, ignorance, bad judgment, or even inadvertently. Both greater and lesser sins can fall under this category. Earlier in John’s letter, he writes in I John 1.

I John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our genuine confession admits to God that we are guilty of breaking His law and we seek to be cleared of it by Christ's sacrifice. This true repentance leads to an aggressive desire to not sin, to overcome sin, and to build righteous character. God consequently lifts the penalty of the second death, and once again, we, by His grace, are back on the road to salvation.

The sin that John calls a sin leading to death is a *willfully* turning away from God’s way of life. It is an outright flagrant rejection of God. Another way of putting this is *willingly* sinning.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Those are terrifying warning words! Both greater and lesser sins can lead to the attitude that causes someone to commit an unforgivable sin. Such a sin is deeply reinforced by the attitude of the sinner, an attitude that denies Jesus Christ as Savior, that flagrantly hates his brother, and refuses to obey God's laws and statutes. Rebellion and defiance set this sin apart from others. It is an *unforgivable* sin, because at one time that person had God's Spirit, but rejected it outright.

Part of what Paul is teaching in Romans 8:13, is that an important aspect of the way of sanctification is the way of realizing the truth about ourselves and our obligation as Christians, and then putting it into practice. Put simply, it means that we are not taking any bit of it for granted.

Paul is saying that if a professing Christian lives like a non-Christian, dominated by sinful nature rather than living according to the Spirit of God, he will perish like a non-Christian because he *is* a non-Christian. As Paul succinctly put it to the church in Rome, "If you live according to the flesh, you will die."

On the other hand, if you really are a Christian, you will not live according to the sinful nature. Instead, you will acknowledge what you actually are in Jesus Christ and live accordingly. If we are ashamed of our association with the teachings of Christ and our membership in God's Family, will God our Father and our Savior Jesus Christ want us in Their Family? Would you want someone in your family that hated you? Thankfully He is very forgiving and forgives sins when we repent of them willingly.

Mark 8:38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus' ministry and life are the anvil on which our metal is be tested. How we react to Him will determine our ultimate fate. Basically Paul is not

teaching anything new here but is instead reinforcing what he already stated. It seems repetitive, and it is, but it takes repetition to get it instilled in our minds. The general theme is assurance of salvation, but that doctrine was laid out in chapter 5. Chapters 6 and 7 were a digression to answer several important questions growing out of chapter 5, after which the apostle Paul picked up where he left off earlier. But true as that is in general, we find something new when we come to verse 14.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Here the idea that we are sons of God appears in Romans for the first time. Sons of God are those who repent. This is not merely an incidental thought. Paul is talking about assurance of salvation throughout this section of Romans and is arguing that one basis for this is our new relationship to God, which is a family relationship.

In addition, having introduced the theme here in verse 14, Paul then elaborates on it in verses 15-17, speaking of such related concepts as “sons,” “sonship,” “children,” and “heirs.” Some of the words reappear later on in verses 19, 21, and 23.

In principle, verse 14 is introduced as proof of what has gone immediately before. The principle amounts to this: that all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God; all the sons of God are heirs of eternal life; and therefore all who are led by the Spirit of God should feel assured of eternal life.

Therefore, Romans 8:14 is meant to be both a test of spiritual life and a comfort. Verse 14 is one of those amazing verses, found often in the Bible, which is literally loaded with important teachings, so let us look at three of them here.

The first important teaching is a negative one: not everyone is a member of God’s Family.

The reason this is important is that we have an idea in Western thought, a product of older liberalism, which said that human beings are all sons or

daughters of God and that therefore we are all members of one family. The popular way of putting this has been to speak of “the universal fatherhood of God” and “the universal brotherhood of man.”

There is a sense, of course, in which all human beings are brothers and sisters, having been created by the one God. This is the way the apostle Paul spoke in Athens in Acts 17:28 when he quoted the Greek poets Cleanthes and Aratus.

Acts 17:28 “For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”

He was talking to a secularly intellectual audience, but in Romans he is speaking to each and every one of us. But that is not the way the words “sons of God” are used in Scripture, and it is certainly not the way Paul is speaking here.

When he writes of “those who are led by the Spirit of God,” he is distinguishing between those who are led by the Spirit and those who are not led by the Spirit, which means that only a small portion of humanity are God’s spiritual children. That alone should make us so grateful for what God has given to us in calling us into His church, because it is a small flock.

The clearest statement of this important truth is from the mouth of Jesus Christ. The relevant passage is John 8:31-47. Jesus had been teaching the people and had made a statement similar to what Paul has been saying in his letter to the church in Rome.

John 8:31-33 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?”

Now this offended his Jewish listeners, because they did not like to think of themselves as enslaved. “We have never been slaves of anyone,” they said. Their statement was absurd, of course, because they had been enslaved by

many nations during their long history, and even at that time were under the domination of the Roman Empire. But Jesus ignored that point and answered instead that He had been speaking spiritually.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”

John 8:38 “I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.”

They answered that Abraham was their father. Jesus denied it, saying that if they were Abraham’s children, they would be like Abraham and would not be determined to kill Him, which they were. He said again that, instead, they were acting like their true father. They then replied that God Himself was their only Father, at which point Jesus became most explicit.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.”

John 8:44 “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

John 8:47 “He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

If you talk to any mainstream Christian about what the Word of God actually says he may or may not agree with you, but he will always supersede the Holy Scriptures with his Catholic or Protestant tradition. For example: Sunday keeping, Mary as Mediator, Purgatory, the Trinity, Heaven and hell, Christmas and Easter, and so on. It is amazing how blind people can be.

It cannot be said any clearer than that. In these words Jesus made clear that there are two families and two fatherhoods, and that only those who love and

serve God are God's children. This leads to the second important teaching of Romans 8:14.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

In fact, it is the main one. All true Christians are members of God's Family. This involves a change that is radical, supernatural, and far-reaching.

First, it is a change that is radical. To become a child of God means that the individual has experienced the most radical or profound change possible. This is because, before a person becomes a son or daughter of God, he or she is not a member of God's Family but is a member of the Devil's family, to use Jesus' terminology in John 8. Or is merely "in Adam," to use Paul's earlier teaching in Romans.

To be "in Adam" means to be in sin, a slave to wickedness, under divine judgment, and destined for eternal death. To be "in Christ" is the reverse. It means to be delivered from sin and its judgment, to be growing in holiness, and to possess eternal life. The change is as radical as passing from a state of slavery to freedom; from death to life.

Second, it is a change that is supernatural. This change is not only radical, it is supernatural too which means that it is done for us from above by God. We are helped by the very words of Jesus Christ, as recorded in John 3.

He had been approached by Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, and had told Nicodemus that he would never be able to understand spiritual matters unless he was born again, or born from above. This puzzled the Jewish ruler, so he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?"

John 3:5-8 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

In these words Jesus made clear that becoming a child of God is a matter of spiritual birth and that this is something that can only be done through God's Spirit. The Greek word translated "again" implies that this birth is from above, rather than from below, which means that this new spiritual life is divinely imparted.

Third, is that it is a change that is far-reaching. The end of this spiritual rebirth is not only deliverance from sin's judgment. This is where chapter 5 began, and it is where chapter 8 will end. It is the point of this section of Romans.

Romans 8:17 And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Once we were in the absolute control of our own sinful human nature, but God, in His mercy, has made us His absolute possession. Our old life has no more rights over us, God has an absolute right, however.

The guilt of our past is canceled and the penalty is wiped out. We begin a new life with God and become heirs of all His riches. If that is so, we become joint heirs with Jesus Christ, God's own Son. That which Christ inherits, we also inherit. Christ had to suffer, we also inherit that suffering, and since Christ was raised to life and glory, we also inherit that life and glory.

Paul paints the picture that, when we became a Christian, we entered into the very Family of God and we did nothing to deserve it. God, the great Father, in His amazing love and mercy, has taken the weak of the world and adopted us into His own Family, so that the death penalty for sin is canceled and we have the assurance of inheriting eternal glory.

Now not every characteristic of our age is bad. One potentially good characteristic is modern-day practicality. We are a down-to-earth people and we want to see results. Although like everything else on earth we are unbalanced about it. So I ask, what is the practical result of this important change that has happened to us?

Here is where Romans 8:14 provides us with the third important teaching: To be a true Christian means to be led by God's Spirit.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Up to this point the teachings might seem to be referring to a change of status only. Before, we were "in Adam," now we are "in Christ." Before, we were under condemnation, now we are delivered from condemnation. Before, we were spiritually dead, now we are spiritually alive.

All that is true, of course, but it is not the only truth Paul is teaching. Because our change of status has been accomplished by means of the Holy Spirit, which has been imparted to and is active within each and every genuine Christian. Being a Christian also means that we will be led by that same Spirit and it means that we will be growing in holiness increasingly.

This is the way verse 14 is tied to the preceding one. Verse 13 said that we will live spiritually, now and forever, "if by the Spirit we put to death the [mis]deeds of the body." Now verse 14 adds that we will indeed do that if the Spirit is within us, because this is the direction God is leading with His Spirit.

So this begs the question: How does the Holy Spirit lead us? The place to start is by recognizing that the Holy Spirit works within us or, as we might say, internally. Everything in the passage indicates this.

Paul has been talking about our minds being set on what the will of God is and about our having an obligation to live according to the Spirit rather than according to human nature. In verse 15, Paul will speak of an internal witness of the Spirit by which we instinctively call God "Father."

God can order external events, of course, and He does. He orders everything. But that is not what is being discussed here in verse 14. Paul is talking about what God's Spirit does internally within the Christian.

So we reduce the earlier question to this one: What does the Holy Spirit do internally in us to lead us? Let me suggest three things here. First, God, by way of the Holy Spirit renews our minds. The first area in which the Holy Spirit works is the intellect, and it does this by what Paul will later call “the renewing of your mind.”

This comes out very clearly in Romans 12. There, having laid down the great doctrines of his letter, Paul begins to apply them to our conduct in being a living sacrifice to God.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The person who discovers, tests, and approves what God’s pleasing and perfect will is obviously is being led by God. But the key to this, according to verse 2, is the mind’s renewal.

How, then, are our minds to be renewed? Primarily, by our reading and studying the inspired written Word of God and by way of God’s Spirit we receive understanding and wisdom from it. We do receive instruction by God’s inspired speakers as well, but the majority of His teaching comes from reading and studying. That is what God has given the Bible to us for, to inform us, enlighten our minds, and redirect our thinking.

The Bible, the inspired written Word of God, and the Holy Spirit work together. A person who considers himself to be led by the Spirit apart from the Bible will soon fall into error, and become unbalanced and confused. He will begin to promote non-biblical and therefore false teachings. All one has to do is look at mainstream Christianity to see this negative principle at work.

Mainstream Christians appear to be moral and living God's way of life on the surface, but yet they reject or do not have the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot possibly apply the spiritual principles of it and are only following the letter of the law.

Or, a person who reads and studies the Bible apart from the illumination provided by the Holy Spirit, which is true in the case of all unbelievers, will find it to be a closed and meaningless book. The true Christian is led by the operation of the Holy Spirit and the Bible together.

So the question for you is: Are you living differently than the world? Unless you are crazy, you will begin to live differently, because a person who realizes that one way is true and another is false and yet takes the false path must be out of his or her mind—irrational, or insane. If your mind has been renewed, it will show; and the world will look utterly foolish.

What else does the Holy Spirit do internally for us? God, by way of the Holy Spirit, stirs the heart. Figuratively, the heart is the seat of the emotions, and the Holy Spirit works upon it by stirring or accelerating the heart to love God.

In verse 15, Paul speaks of an inner response to God by which we affectionately cry out, "Abba, Father." Verse 15 does not actually mention the heart, but in the parallel text in Galatians Paul does, showing that he is thinking of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts explicitly.

Galatians 4:6-7 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

In other words, the Spirit of God leads us by making us affectionate toward God and His ways. It is the Spirit that causes us, as Jesus said in Matthew 5: 6, to "hunger and thirst for righteousness."

The last thing I want to mention the Holy Spirit does internally is that God, by way of the Holy Spirit, directs our will. Just as God's Spirit leads us by renewing our minds and stirring our hearts and affections, so also does it

lead us by redirecting and strengthening our will and conforming our will to God's will. Paul speaks of this in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

It is interesting that Paul says this because it relates so well to our lives today where the church is spread out all over the place and yet they are obeying God, keeping the Sabbath, etc even though there is no minister right there or even a congregation.

God gives us a singleness of purpose to do His will. He changes our will by a new birth so that what we despised before, we now love, and what we were indifferent to before, we now find desirable.

Our right attitude and activity is the evidence of the Spirit's activity. And the activity of the Spirit is the cause of our activity. If we are trying to please God, it is because the Spirit is at work in us, leading us to want and actually do the right thing. It is a very strong reason for knowing we are in God's Family.

How we can thank God for imparting to us His Holy Spirit in order that we can understand and do these things and give us the guarantee of eternal life in the future. We should be so very thankful!