

Setting Your Mind

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[0 : 00] Let's pray, friends. Lord God, we humbly ask that tonight your spirit and word would work together, as they always do, with power in our lives to make Jesus great, to make us trust him and to follow him with more intensity and with more victory.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I thought I'd revisit a friend of mine tonight that I've mentioned in a previous sermon that I gave on Romans.

His name is Martin Luther. And I've got a picture this time just so you can get to know my friend. So he's Martin Luther, 16th century reformer. He liked these things.

The Bible, so he's good, good Christian theologian. He liked beer and he liked a good brawl for the gospel. He liked a really good gospel stoush.

In fact, he stood up to basically the whole world at his time, which was pretty much controlled by a corrupt Roman Catholic church. And he stood up for the biblical gospel and pretty much changed the world.

[1 : 16] God used him to change the world. So he is a dead set legend. You do well to read Luther. It's all on the net, but you've got to print it off because it's hard to read on computer. Now, my next slide is just to sort of get you enticed into Romans 8.

Luther said that there were three marks of a godly, mature Christian, three marks of a theologian or of a good pastor or of a good Christian. I wonder what you would reduce the Christian life to.

What three things would you say make a good Christian? Well, the first one he said was prayer.

Prayer is a mark of a mature Christian. The second one you should say was, how have I put it here?

Meditation on the word. So prayer, the word. What's your number three? What's the mark of a mature Christian? What would you add to prayer, meditation on the word?

Luther was strong on this. He said the third mark of a mature Christian was temptation. Temptation was the third mark. By temptation he means not giving in to temptation, but fighting temptation, wrestling sin, being attacked for what you believe, suffering for godly truth and living.

[2 : 35] For Luther, that was the third mark of a mature Christian, was that sort of, that fight that the Christian has and that the marks of fighting temptation that they bear.

And I couldn't not give you this quote. This is a really beautiful quote, so chuck it up and let's read it. I'll read it to you. I did not learn my theology all at once, says Luther, but had to search constantly deeper and deeper for it.

My temptations did that for me, for no one can understand Holy Scripture without practice and temptations. You getting this? Have I got more yet?

This is what the enthusiasts and sects lack. They don't have the right critic, the devil, who is the best teacher of theology. He's a shock jock.

He's sort of like a talkback radio guy. What he's saying is you learn your theology by praying it, by studying the Bible, and then when the devil goes after you, you take him on and you fight him and you learn that theology in the heat of battle, in the fight for godly living.

[3 : 41] That's where you learn good theology. That's when you become a mature Christian. So the three marks are prayer, meditation on the word, and fighting, wrestling, temptation.

That's what a mature Christian is. And when we come to Romans, that's what Romans is all about. It's all about the Christian life in Romans is all about fighting sin, fighting temptation, with the promises of scripture, with prayer.

I'm so glad that Romans doesn't gloss over the Christian life. What we heard Megan preach last week about how hard it is being a Christian, not doing what you want to do.

That's so true about the Christian life. The heart of it in Romans, you see it in Romans 6, 7, and now 8, is our fight against the sinful nature that we've been released from but still lingers, and we must keep focusing on Christ and fight it.

Many Christians, I think, want to make the heart of the Christian life fighting something out there. So it might be fighting the world. We've got to get away from the big bad world, or it's some kind of demon thing where it's all about demons, getting the demons that are out there, stopping them getting into this building or getting into my family.

[5 : 01] But actually, according to Romans, the heart of the Christian life is this fight against what is in us, our own sinful nature. Now, I like that because that's my life.

That's where I'm at. Now, it's good to go from Romans 7 to Romans 8 because even though it's talking about the same Christian life, we're talking about the same Christian struggle, the focus is different.

The focus moves from introspection to the Holy Spirit in us. The focus moves from past mistakes and battles to future hope.

If we stayed in Romans 7, we probably would get depressed. But we need Romans 8 as well to give us this picture of spirit-filled Christian living. Now, we're not going to look closely at verses 1 to 4. We saw it last week. But just in summary, Paul said, There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There's no condemnation. We are justified.

[6 : 02] Where atonement has been made, our sin is propitiated, the blood of Christ, there's no condemnation. And in fact, what God has done, instead of condemning us, he sent his incarnate son in the likeness of a sinful man.

And instead of condemning us, he condemned sin. And sin was condemned in the cross, so that now we who are followers of Jesus, who trust in the cross, led by the Spirit, fulfill the requirements of the law.

That's Romans 8, 1 to 4. And it's really great to be talking about the Holy Spirit. We need to know about the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 is full of wonderful truths about the Holy Spirit.

It's so good. In tonight's reading, the Holy Spirit is mentioned on average once per verse. If you want to know about the Holy Spirit, Am I a Spirit-filled Christian?

Am I a Spirit-led Christian? Where do you go? You start in Romans 8. Start in Romans 8. Now the question, Paul's question to us in verse 5.

[7 : 14] What is your mind set on? What is your mind set on? 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

So our really critical question that you've got to go home asking yourself, or asking the people you came with, is, what is your mind set on? What's your focus? Or another way to ask it is, how do you walk?

What are you walking towards or according to? The two go together. What your mind is set on and how you live. The two go together for Paul. And he says, Now here's a real big mistake.

Paul does not say, Those who walk according to the Spirit have their minds set on the Spirit. That's what a lot of Christians think it says. But Paul said, Those who live according to the Spirit have set their mind on the things of the Spirit.

What are the things of the Spirit? They're the things of Romans 8. They are Christ. The Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ.

[8 : 36] Pre-eminently, the Spirit-led Christian is Christ-focused, not actually Spirit-focused. The Spirit-led person is focused on the things of the Spirit, namely Christ, our redemption in Him, Christ's resurrection, our adoption into God's family, our relationship with God the Father.

These are all the things of the Spirit in Romans 8. Our future glory with Him. Many grumbling Christians kind of get mathematical, and I just think stupid, really.

And they kind of go, Oh, this church never talks about the Holy Spirit, and He was hardly mentioned in that service. And you say, Well, was it Christ-focused? Was it focused on the things of the Spirit? You know, that's what matters. Don't grumble and say, We've got to give the Spirit kind of equal mention to Jesus. The things of the Spirit are Jesus and the Gospel.

So the Spirit is leading us when we're focused on those things. If someone asks you, Was the Holy Spirit at work in your church tonight? You would say, Yes, if you think tonight was focused on Jesus and all His benefits.

[9 : 54] If someone said to you, Did you feel the Holy Spirit at Holy Trinity tonight? You could say, Yes, if I felt love for Christ or conviction for Christ.

Don't just assume that if you get pumped on talking about the Holy Spirit, that that's the things of the Spirit. Because it's not. The things of the Spirit are Christ. The things of the Spirit are the things of Romans 8 that we are to set our minds on.

So friends, what is your mind set on? Is it set on the things of the Spirit? Or are you addicted to the things of this world? Do you constantly set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

Do you find yourself thinking about Christ wherever you are? How does He fit in here? How can I serve Him here? How can I glorify Him here? Where is Christ in this for me?

Are you dominated by thoughts of Christ? If you are, then you're being led by the Spirit. If you're not, then you're described in verses 6 and 7.

[10 : 59] To set the mind on the flesh is death. The flesh, remember, is our sinful nature. It's not our physicalness. It's our sinful nature.

I'll come back to that in a minute. To set the mind on the flesh is death. But to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. It's a pretty stark description of someone who doesn't have the Spirit.

They're hostile to God. They cannot please God. They don't want to please God. Their mind is actually set on things that lead to death. And all rebelling against God, all sin does lead to death.

If it is allowed to come to fruition, if you keep following it to its full conclusion. It's amazing that Paul says you need God's Spirit to regenerate you or to make you born again.

[12 : 04] You couldn't have even turned to Christ because you were hostile to God unless the Spirit was at work in you. The more Paul preaches his gospel, the more he edges closer to this idea that free grace inevitably means that God chose you before you chose him.

And he'll get there in Romans 9 to 11 that we'll do later in the year. But that's a beautiful and great truth that we need God's Spirit to even come to Christ.

But here's where we are, Christian brothers and sisters. We are verse 9. You are not in the flesh. You are in the Spirit. Since the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

There is life in you. If you have the Holy Spirit, we've seen it in Romans so much, you're no longer a slave to the sinful nature. You're no longer trapped in recurring patterns of rebellion against God, of hostility to God.

[13 : 18] You are in the Spirit continually. The gift of the Holy Spirit impacts our world. We may not realize it, but Paul says you've got to realize it and live it out.

Some people may ask with some doubt. They may say, I love Jesus. I trust him. But do I really have the Holy Spirit in me?

I'm a Christian, but am I a Spirit-filled Christian? How do I know? And the answer is there in the second half of verse 9.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to him. That is, if you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ. It's actually guaranteed. You cannot separate what Paul calls the Spirit of Christ and Christ.

The two go together. Anyone who is in Christ has the Spirit. And in fact, Paul can use the words interchangeably. He says, the Spirit is in you. Christ is in you.

[14 : 18] It's the same thing. If you are a Christian, if you've come under, if you've received the Lordship of Jesus, if you trust in him, then his Spirit has been given to you.

I can see it by the very fact that you believe. It's amazing actually to think, how does all this work? Who's in me? Is it the Spirit sometimes and Jesus sometimes?

It gets quite confusing. I think what happens is, and I don't like the way we talk about, you know, invite Jesus into my heart. It's hard to find that in the Bible. What I think the Bible says is, I've got to get this right.

Now, when we receive Christ Jesus as Lord, Jesus comes into us via the Spirit. So you could say Jesus doesn't actually come into us, but he does by the Spirit.

And the Spirit and Jesus are so close that it's as good as we'll get this side of heaven. Jesus is not here physically.

[15 : 22] He's in heaven at God's right hand. He's seated at the right hand of the Father, but we are connected to him by the Spirit that lives in us. We owe the Spirit to Jesus.

The Spirit is our connection to Jesus. And the things of the Spirit are all about Jesus. If you think that's confusing, wait till you get to verse 11. Because there you've got all three members of the Trinity at work in your life.

Read it with me if you've got your Bible open. Look for the three persons of the Trinity. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

So the Spirit is mentioned. Christ raised is mentioned. And the Father is mentioned almost quietly. He's the one, the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead.

So it's not the Spirit. It's not Jesus. It's him. It's God the Father. The name for God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. That's how we identify our God.

[16 : 34] The God who raised Jesus. And so all of who God is, Father, Son and Spirit, is at work in your life to bring you salvation. And as Paul promises, to give life to your mortal bodies, to resurrect you one day and to transform your physical body.

It's an amazing gospel that all of God is at work in all of us. The gospel is not your soul going to heaven when you die.

It's actually about your whole body being transformed to live with God forever. However, there's a very real and scary kind of thing going on in our society of youth suicide at the moment, you know, in our generation.

Especially young men. There's a whole kind of thing going on. I don't really get it. I mean, maybe people younger than me can explain it. The whole, this whole emo culture thing and this whole self-harm culture.

I just read about this. I don't really know this, right? But there's a sort of thing about a generation of kind of depressed, angry, middle-class kids who self-harm their bodies for attention.

[17 : 45] And it's a scary thing and a serious thing. And the beauty of the gospel is that God cares about our bodies. Our bodies are not things to be taken our anger out on.

But God actually cares about resurrecting our bodies. Because the gospel is for our bodies. The spirit is going to give life to our mortal bodies. It's really ironic because Paul talks a lot about the flesh, the sinful flesh.

But actually the gospel will transform our physical bodies. So let's just summarize where we are. We were dead in sin. We had our minds set on our sinful desires.

We couldn't please God. We couldn't submit to God. But now, here are the truths that apply to every Christian believer. Christ dwells in us via the Holy Spirit.

We are not in flesh, but we're in the Spirit. We're alive to God. And we're looking at our mortal bodies being resurrected and transformed on the last day.

[18 : 50] So then, how shall we live now? How shall we live now? Well, Paul is really stunning here. So then, brothers and sisters, 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 to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

We have a debt, friends. How are we to live? Remember this debt. It's an obligation we have, I think, to the Holy Spirit that dwells in us.

The debt is to stop living to the old nature and to start living to the Spirit and to live according to the things of the Spirit.

Paul doesn't often, you've got to know this, Paul doesn't often use language of debt because his gospel is so much about free grace.

[19 : 53] He doesn't want to get debted up into legalism, but he uses language of debt. It's very serious. We've got a debt in verse 13. By the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body.

Then we live. We've got to put sin to death in our life. Now, previous generations of Christians had a word for this.

They would call it mortification. Mortification of sin. Putting to death sin by the power of the Spirit. We don't talk about this much today. And in fact, today, if I say something happened and I was mortified, it just means I was embarrassed. But the term among great Christians means to do Romans 8.13, put sin to death.

What does that mean? John Stott says it's a decisive and radical repudiation of evil in our life as evil.

[21 : 03] It's an attitude and an action about sin in your life. That you're not apathetic about it, but you're radical and decisive about stomping it out, about killing it.

It's something that you do by the Holy Spirit, Paul says, by the Spirit put to death. I think it's something about we meditate on Scripture and also our own sin until we see how bad it is. Until we see how wrong it is. So it's not just a head thing, but it's a heart thing. We feel the dodginess of the sin in our life.

We clarify not just the personality things we don't like about ourself. You know, I wish I was taller or shorter or whatever. But we actually clarify the real sin in our life that we need to actually focus on. Not just things that we dislike as preferences, but the real sin. Putting to death means really cutting sin off in a tough way.

[22 : 09] If you have temptations on your computer, it means tossing the computer or cancelling the broadband. If you're tempted to be angry at someone or bitter at someone, it means planning out a calculated campaign of love toward that person.

If you're tempted, if you're just apathetic, if your sin is just apathetic about your Christian life, it means some really concentrated exercises in the death of Jesus, thinking about what it took for him.

Or working on, reflecting on, meditating on the passages about hell. Thinking about the eternity of hell. Of what you've been rescued from.

What you deserved. Killing sin has to be something that we, in the power of the Spirit, we actually long for Jesus to win some victories in our life.

We long, we thirst for supplies of grace from God to really take on sin, like Luther, to fight temptation and seize some victories.

[23 : 25] It's a tough image because we don't kill anything anymore. It's all done for us comfortable Westerners. We don't even kill flies. We don't kill cockroaches.

We free them in the backyard. In Paul's world, you know, just going down to the market to get some meat, you come back covered in blood. Do you know what I mean? They'll kill an animal in front of you.

You know, that happens in countries today. In Paul's world, you just walk past temples and hear animals being screaming and being killed in pagan temples. You're familiar with killing and death and killing your own food.

We don't have that. We're so sterile and it's all done for us in abattoirs. Do we really understand what it means to kill something? Paul says, put sin to death.

Take a specific sin and put it to death by the power of the spirit. It will put up a fight. All living things put up a fight. Kill it.

[24 : 25] And if I can plug a book, I've been reading this great old book by a guy called John Owen called *The Mortification of Sin*. I've got a couple of copies here down the front.

If you want to have a look at it, it's a hard book, but it's a real meaty book. So only read it if you're like a meaty sinner. Now, we've got some real educated people at Holy Trinity.

We've got PhDs and postgraduate degrees. Some of us probably have postgraduate degrees in sinning.

So we probably need to read some hard books like that to think about what it means to fight sin.

Here's a summary of John Owen. He says, Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Be killing sin or it will be killing you. And that's straight out of Romans 8. The things of the flesh lead to death, but by the spirit you will live.

[25 : 29] If you put to death the misdeeds of the body. If you kill sin. And lastly, friends, Paul shares this great intimacy we have with the father. Because he's talking to Christians.

He's not talking to people under law. He's talking to people who have the spirit and know God's grace. All who are led by the spirit of God are children of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. But you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, Abba, Father. It is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. If in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

If you have the spirit, if you trust in Christ, you are a child of God. You call him Abba, Father. This term of intimacy that Jesus used that shocked so many.

[26 : 30] That he was so close to his father. We have that intimacy with God. And in prayer, Luther's first mark, we can lean on God in dependence.

Call out to God. You know, kids just cry to their parents all the time. And we'd be like that with our heavenly father. To depend on him in this fight against sin.

In our putting sin to death. The Greek actually says we're not just children, but we're sons of God. That is, even if you're a female here tonight, you're a son of God.

Because in the ancient world, the son got the inheritance. And so we all, male and female, get the inheritance. And our inheritance is not chocolate and golf courses and beaches.

Our inheritance is God. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The Holy Spirit himself testifies in our hearts of this.

[27 : 32] Have you prayed and prayed and leaned on God? And just, it is a feeling in a sense. It's more objective than that, but there is a subjective witness of the Spirit that comforts us in our battle against sin.

We are not slaves again to fear, but we boldly fight sin. Just think of the way Christ went. Christ lived in the power of the Spirit, suffered, lived out the Scriptures and died and went to glory.

And that's our path too. We know to, by the power of the Spirit, fight sin and suffer for the Gospel truth and then one day share in his glory.

That was also Luther's road. They hated Luther. They really tried to get Luther. Well, friends, which of Luther's three marks are you weak on?

There were prayer, meditation on the Word and fighting temptation. Which of those three are you weak on? There's probably three different groups of Christians here tonight.

[28 : 42] Some of you are diligently beaver away at your Bible reading and your study and your kind of disciplined prayers maybe. But you're not actually fighting sin.

You're not fighting sin. You're not wrestling. You become so desensitized to your own sinfulness that you're just taking it for granted. You're an academic Christian.

And it's a sterile Christian life. You know, you look mature to the rest of Holy Trinity, but actually you're a coward. You're not willing to stick your neck out and fight sin and take some hits, take some scars for the Gospel.

Some of you are deeply caught, on the other hand, in a fight against sin. You're deeply caught in an addiction or a temptation and you're praying like nothing else and you're getting nowhere.

And I think maybe you don't know your Bibles. Maybe you're getting nowhere because you're not saturated with the Gospel truths of Romans 6, 7, 8.

[29 : 52] And what you need to do is, you know, you've got no weapons to fight with. That's the problem. You've got no weapons. You've got no Gospel truths to fight with. So you need to get back to those chapters in Romans and get some weapons for the fight.

And lastly, some of us here, we know our Bibles. We might know our sin, but we just don't pray. You know, we're just, we're kind of practical atheists.

We just never pray. We never call on Father in heaven. We never call on Abba. We never lean on him. We never depend on him like the adopted child we are.

If you're that kind of theoretical Christian, you need to get real with God before sin takes real root and takes over.

So friends, remember the three marks, prayer, Bible saturation, and wrestling with temptation. Set your mind on things of the Spirit.

[30 : 54] Set your mind on your adoption to your Heavenly Father. Set your mind on Jesus Christ, who died and was raised to free us from sin and to give us hope and a new life.

Set your mind on the warning that if you live according to the flesh, you will die. Set your mind on the danger of sin. Set your mind on Jesus Christ at God's right hand, ruling, reigning, at work today in your life by the Spirit.

Set your mind on your inheritance, God himself. Set your mind on the Holy Spirit's sin-killing power available in your life.

And pray to the Lord Jesus with me now for new supplies of grace for this battle. Let's pray for that now. Our Lord Jesus, we are in a war against our old self.

And the devil's in there somewhere trying to stir it up as well. And the world doesn't help, but we know this battle is really at heart. We just pray, Father, that by the power of your Spirit, you'll give us conviction about any particular sin in our life that you want us to strangle or kill or put to death.

[32 : 22] Dear Father, we pray that you would help us to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, on Christ at your right hand, on our future hope, on our physical resurrection, on life to our mortal bodies.

Dear Father, may our minds be set on these things. And this week we experience your Spirit as we live and love and trust and serve your Son, the Lord Jesus, in this great fight.

Amen.