

The Obligation of Life in the Spirit

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[0:00] Some of you saw me carrying this in this morning and you were thinking, what in the world is he doing?

! What you're gonna see? I hope what you noticed, this was not a sobriety test, okay?

I hope what you noticed is that as I walked along that board, I didn't pick a very high one either, you notice. As I walked along that board, I had to keep a balance.

If I lost that balance, I fell off on one side or the other. The Christian life is like that.

I have to walk the balance. Not only the Christian life, but theology itself is a balance.

[1:27] Let me give you a couple examples of that. First one, is God loving or is God just? And you answer, yes.

Because God is both loving and just. He loved us so much that he gave his only begotten son. And yet, those who reject the son will suffer eternal consequences.

Another one. Is God one or is God three? Ah, yes. Because if you don't hold to God being one, you have no place in your theology for the deity of Jesus Christ.

And yet, if you go to the other side and say, well, God is three, then you are in pantheism. How does this connect to the passage today?

The question, are works important in the life of the believer or are works inconsequential? They don't matter.

[2:40] And that's what our passage is about today. Before I start, however, I need to make something absolutely clear. And that is, we are saved by grace alone.

Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. Romans 5.8, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Titus 3.5, he saved us not because of works done in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

So we should never walk out of here and think or say, oh, I guess we have to work for our salvation. May it never be.

But having said that, Pastor Andrew titled this series of messages, Life in the Spirit. And today fits well in that title.

But it's the balance of the obligation that we have to live in the Spirit. Martin Luther said it this way, we are saved by grace alone, but we are not saved by a faith that is alone.

[3:56] So let's look at our passage today. It's Romans chapter 8, verses 12 to 14. In your pew Bible, in the rack in front of you, it's on page 944.

If you'll follow along as I read. So then, brothers, 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.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. First point today. Our response to the Spirit is not optional, but it is necessary.

The verse begins with, so then. In other words, it's referring back to last week's message. And Paul says, we're debtors, not to the flesh. But what does that mean?

Well, it means, I think, at least two things. First one is, this says that we are not obligated, we have no obligation to the sin. And so we don't have to sin.

[5 : 06] Look back at verse 9. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

If the Spirit dwells in you, and you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Why? Because anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

What's the point of that? Well, it goes all the way back to this point that there's not two separate things of being in Christ and having the Spirit.

They are one and the same. If you have Christ, you have the Spirit. If you do not have Christ, you do not have the Spirit. And Paul started the argument back in verse 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. From there, he goes to verse 9 that says, If Christ is in you, you have the Spirit of Christ in you.

[6 : 13] And that leads us to verse 12 that says, You're not a debtor to the flesh. John Piper put it this way.

To put it another way, when you put your trust in Christ, your bondage to the world and its overpowering lure is broken. You are a corpse to the world, and the world is a corpse to you.

Now, we know the flesh is not totally gone. The battle is real, and the battle is persistent. On the other side, against us, we have Satan, our enemy, who tells me just one more time, After all, you deserve it.

And it's just a little thing. I also have the world that's telling me, Well, everybody else does this. And if you don't do this, you're just weird.

And I also have my own flesh that keeps telling me, Well, at least you're not as bad as those other people. It's a dramatic change, dramatic battle.

[7 : 25] But that battle is the same one that brought Paul to this place. Look right in front, just up a little bit from the passage that we're looking at. Chapter 7, verse 21 to 25.

So I find it to be the law that when I want to do right, Evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, But I see in my members another law, Waging war against the law of my mind, And making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, But with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Yes, I'm a wretched man. Yes, with my flesh I've served the law. But then it comes to chapter 8, verse 1. But there is therefore now no condemnation To those who are in Christ Jesus.

I've received the full redemption for my sin. Christ has fully atoned for my iniquity. And I have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

[8 : 43] Then verse 8 follows that. You, however, are not... I'm sorry, verse 9. You, however, are not in the flesh, But in the Spirit. That means I have all the resources of heaven to avoid sin.

Do you ever get discouraged by sin? When you commit the same exact sin for the 1,000th time? When the same exact problem that you had before Raises its ugly head again?

Do you ever say, Well, it's just the way I am. It's the same way my parents were. And it's the way I am. And I guess I'll never change. Change. What God...

What Paul was saying in Romans 8 Is because you have been forgiven, You can change. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Which we have, if we have Christ, With the help of the Holy Spirit, I can...

I trust that there will not be A 1,001th time. A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Andrew quoted John Piper, And I think that quote fits here, too.

[10 : 04] The only sin you can have victory over Is the sin that is forgiven. Paul says here, I don't know sin anything.

I don't know the flesh anything. So I don't have to sin. I can live different. I can be different. Because of the Spirit.

When I sin, It's not because I have no choice. The second thing Paul was saying here Is we have an obligation to the Spirit, So I can and must grow in sanctification.

Now Paul leaves the obvious unsaid here. The obvious is, We're not debtors of... We are debtors, Not of the flesh, So we must be debtors of the Spirit.

He doesn't say, You have to walk according to the Spirit, But you can live any way you want. He doesn't say that, If it's convenient, And you don't stand out too much, Then you ought to walk by the Spirit.

[11 : 21] If it doesn't get hard, Life doesn't get difficult, Then you have to walk by the Spirit. No. Paul says, We're debtors to the Spirit, To live according to the Spirit.

Paul's going to emphasize that more in the next verse. But before we get there, I want us to notice, That it's something Paul's already been saying. If we look back at chapter 6, I'm going to start with 12 to 14, But then I'll put verse 22 up on the screen.

Then verse 22, But now that you have been set free from sin, And have become slaves of God, The fruit you get leads to sanctification, And its end, Eternal life.

Paul says, You've become slaves of God. There is still an obligation, But the obligation is no longer to sin, The obligation is to the Spirit.

There's really no option. Sanctification is not a luxury, But a necessity. It's not just for the leaders, The pastors and deacons, It's for every one of us.

[13 : 09] It's not for someday when I get older, Then I'll worry about sanctification. Sanctification, It's for young people today. Sanctification is something that is supposed to be going on in our life, From the very moment of salvation, Until the day that we meet Christ.

There's no excuse for us not growing, In our walk with Christ. Sanctification is something that is not fitting.

In growing, In sanctification, Then as someone, A friend of mine used to say, You need to check your birth certificate. Because there's something that's not fitting.

There's no option. There's no, And if there's a disconnect, It needs to be corrected. Now, Having said that, One of the reasons that you and I consistently fail, In our walk, In our avoidance of sin, Is that we depend upon the same old resources, That didn't work the last time.

And that brings us to the second point, From verse 13. Our response to the spirit must be empowered, By the spirit. If you live according to the flesh, You will die.

[14 : 39] But if by the spirit you put the deeds, To death the deeds of the body, You will live. Last week, Pastor David laid out for us, That what it looks like to be in the flesh, And what it looks like to be in the spirit.

And then he continued from there, To talk about the concept of our responsibility, To live by the spirit. Today, We're continuing that theme.

We're continuing that idea, Recognizing that by living by the spirit, Is always and only by the spirit. The practical question, Of course, Is, So how do I do that?

How is it any different, Than the way that you've already been living? How would you, How would you respond differently? How would you change things, So that you get a different result?

Well, If it's to be by the spirit, Then we need to recognize, What the spirit does. Because if we understand, The spirit's job description, If you will, Then we have a better idea, Of how do we live, According to the spirit.

[15:59] And we don't have time, To look at all of the responsibilities, And roles of the Holy Spirit. But I think there are three of them, That are pointed to by this passage, So as we think about these three roles, Of the Holy Spirit, I think it gives us a plan, For how to change, And how to actually walk by the spirit.

The first one is, To recognize, The difference between flesh, And spirit, In my life. That is conviction.

And one of the roles, Of the Holy Spirit, Given in John chapter 16, Verse 7, Is to convict, The world of sin. In other words, To show me, The sin of my life.

Two passages, That Pastor Andrew referred to, A few weeks ago, And they fit here as well. The first one is, In Ephesians chapter 20, Or chapter 4, 22 to 24, To put off your old self, Which belongs, To your former manner, Of life, And is corrupt, Through deceitful desires, That is living according, To the flesh.

Verse 24, To put on the new self, Created after the likeness of God, And true righteousness, And holiness, That is, Walking in the spirit.

[17:25] Well, What is the hinge, That ties these two things together? It is verse 23, To be renewed, In the spirit of your minds.

In other words, Until my thinking changes, My actions won't change. So how do I change my thinking? I have to rely upon the Holy Spirit, To do that.

Another passage he uses, Romans chapter 12, Verses 1 and 2, I appeal to you therefore, Brothers, By the mercies of God, To present your bodies, A living sacrifice, Holy and acceptable to God, Which is your spiritual worship.

And that is talking about, Walking, Living, In the spirit. Do not be conformed, To this world. That's talking about, Walking, Living, In the flesh.

Do not be conformed, To this world, But be transformed, By the renewal, Of your mind. In other words, I have to have my thinking changed. That by testing, You may discern, What is the will of God, What is good, And acceptable, And perfect.

[18:35] Remember that last phrase, Because that comes up again, In the next point. But the first one is, That I have to rely, On God, To teach me. I have to rely, On the Holy Spirit, To talk to me, And to tell me what's wrong.

The battle is in, The mind. Why is that? Because sometimes, I cannot tell, Whether I'm walking in the flesh, Or walking in the spirit.

Oh, Sometimes it's obvious. Okay, Those are easy. I'm assuming, Everybody in here, Has already worked on those. Okay? I'm talking about, The subtle things.

The little things. The things that really, Need to be changed, In my life, To make me look, More like Christ. You see, Those, Those kind of things, I need the Holy Spirit, To speak to me.

I need him to tell me, That was the wrong way, To respond to that person. That was the wrong way, To think about that situation. That was the wrong, Activity to be involved in.

[19:44] Those things, Do not look like Christ. But my sin, Seems so right. My view of my own righteousness, Can be the boom box, That blocks out, The quiet voice, Of the spirit.

As I was thinking about that, I was thinking about, The cars that drive past my house. But, If one of them were stopped there, The car is shaking. Da boom, Da boom, Da boom.

And I thought, What if I walked up to the person, And said, Hey, Could you turn that down, Just a little bit? It's shaking my whole house. The person would go, What?

Can't hear ya. That's the way I am, With my sin. The Holy Spirit, Taps me on the shoulder, And he says, Hey, That wasn't very good.

Where did those words, Come from? And I'm so busy thinking, Oh yeah, I'm doing really good, God. You're so proud of me, I can't hear him.

[20 : 50] I can't hear him, Because I've blocked him out, With my own sinfulness. So what happens? What does that look like, In our lives? Husbands justify, The way we talk to our wives, By telling ourselves, She just needs a little bit more respect.

Wives, Grow bitter with their husbands, Because they're not loving enough. Parents are angry with their children, Because they interrupted the program.

Children are dismissive, And disrespectful, Because their parents, Just don't understand. What can I do? How can I fight those things?

Let me give it to you in a nutshell, And then explain. The road to righteousness, Is paved with repentance. The road to righteousness, Is paved with repentance.

What does that mean? First, I have to turn off the noise, Of the self-justification, And listen for the sound of God.

[22 : 00] For the words of God. Aaron's song was so, Aaron, You know, Do you know the last time I spoke, You sang? I just thought of that.

Thank you. But, And then, She picks the songs, That I think, Oh yeah, That looks great. What was the line?

I'm listening. I'm listening. I'm listening. We need to turn off the noise, Of our own attitudes, Our own ideas, And simply listen.

Secondly, We have to be regularly in the word, So that the voice, When it comes, I can understand, That that is, God, Speaking. I have to, To have in my, In my, In my repertoire, What is, What does God think?

Because then, When I do something, And I feel that nudge of the spirit, Then I can say, Yeah, That's right, That wasn't right, That wasn't good. Third, And this one's probably the most important, Confess to God, And to others, And ask, For forgiveness, Nothing helps me change, My way, Of speaking, Thinking, And acting, More, Than the humiliation, Of confessing it.

[23 : 43] When I find myself, Getting a little bit, Too authoritative, With my wife, When I find myself, Stretching the facts, To make myself, Look better than I am, I find, That going to my wife, And saying, That was wrong, And I should not have spoken to you that way, Would you forgive me?

Going to other people, The people who are involved, In the conversation, Say, I think I exaggerated the truth there, That was a lie, Would you forgive me?

The simple act, Of doing that, Helps me avoid it the next time, Because it hurts, How do you walk by the spirit?

First, In simple humility, Tell God, I'm a sinner, And I know, That does not please you, Notice I did not say, I was a sinner, I said, I am a sinner, I would have liked to have spent some time, Looking at Psalm 51, But we wouldn't be done today, So, So, Psalm 51, Read it on your own, It is how, David, Was changed, And used the spirit of God, To walk by the spirit of God, But I will give you one verse, Psalm 139, Verse 23, Search me, Oh God, And know my heart, Try me, And know my thoughts, The Holy Spirit, Whose role, Is conviction, Will point it out to you, Second, Another role of the Holy Spirit, Is to remind us of Christ's words, According to John 14, 26, So it's by instruction,

And here's the issue, Practice a day by day action, Those of you who are in Sunday school, This morning, I love it when the Sunday school, And the morning message, Come together, And they say essentially the same thing, It kind of makes me think, We're all using the same book or something, I don't know, The verb here, Killing, Killing, The deeds of the body, Is present, Present tense, And what that means, Is that it's talking about, A continual activity, It's not something that we can do, Once and for all, And be done with, It's a daily duty, Paul says that the spirit, Provides us with the energy, And the power to continually, And gradually, Be killing our sin, A process that's never completed, In this life, Means the spirit, The means the spirit uses,

[26 : 39] To accomplish, This process, Is our faithful obedience, In the simple commands, Of scripture, I've often said, The Christian life, Is incredibly simple, And incredibly hard, I know the simple commands, Of scripture, And yet, Often times, I don't live them, The energy, Of the spirit, Not the energy, Of the flesh, Is what enables, The believer, To put the body's, Deeds to death, It's an energy, That's given, One day at a time, Holiness, Holiness is not an event, It's a process, So whether you are a child, Whether you are a teen, Whether you're an adult, Or whether you're an elder, You should be able to see, Some change,

That's taking place, Can you look back, Over the last month, Or even the last year, And see anything, At all, That is different, In your life, Can you look back, And see any sin, That you have, Gotten a victory over, Any problem, Difficulty, That you've recognized, The help of God, In, So often, We, When we talk about, What the work of God is, We talk about, Like he stopped working, 20 years ago, For some of you, Five years ago, Why is that?

Because we're all, Way too satisfied, With the way we are, We can be so discontent, With our life, With our finances, With our stuff, With our friendships, With our family, But when was the last time, That you found yourself, Discontent, With your level of holiness?

How do I change that? Be specific, With God, Don't ask God, To make you more holy, Ask God, To help you, To stop, Doing this one thing, That you find yourself, Doing, Over, And over, And over again, Do not become discouraged, But also, Do not become complacent, Take little steps, Of holiness, And take them consistently, Third, The Holy Spirit, Is called the helper, Over, And over, And over again, In John 14, Through 16, In this passage, It says, You, By the Spirit, I like the careful balance, That Paul achieves, In this verse 13, By the Spirit,

You put to death, The deeds of the body, Paul puts a responsibility, On our shoulders, You need to be putting sin, To death, But you need to rely, Upon the Spirit, To do that, It says the same thing, That Peter said, In chapter 2, Verses 11 and 12, Beloved, I urge you, As sojourners, And exiles, To abstain, From the passions, Of the flesh, Which wage war, Against your soul, Keep your conduct, Among the Gentiles, Honorable, So that when they speak, Against you as evildoers, They may see your good deeds, And glorify God, On the day of visitation, In other words, Live your life, As if someone were watching, Because people are watching, Live your life, As if someone were watching, Because God is watching, Paul makes it clear,

[31:00] That we can do it, Only through the Spirit, It goes back to that balance, My walking on that, If I say, Oh, It's all about me, Then I'm going to fall off, On that side, If I say, Well, I'm not going to work, At this at all, When God's ready to change me, He'll change me, Ever heard anybody say that?

Ever heard anybody think it? I've thought it, When God wants me, To get rid of this sin, In my life, He'll take it away, And I, Guess what?

I continued to do, The same stupid sin, Over and over again, Till finally, I said, Huh, Maybe I should stop, Most of you know, Because I have not been secretive about it, For years, I smoked, After I accepted Christ, And I continued to do it, Thinking, Yeah, God will stop me when he's ready, Guess what?

God was ready, Way before I was, And when I finally, Simply obeyed, And did it, Then I started growing, In ways that I had never imagined before, In ways that, Not only was God, Okay with, But so was my wife, By the way, It has to be, By me depending upon God, But I also, Have to be involved, In doing it, I've used this illustration before, I'll have someone, That I'm counseling, And they'll be telling me, About this sin, They were involved with, And I'm thinking, That's terrible, And I'll ask them, Would you do that sin, If I were there, And they'll say, Well of course not, That was weird, And I say,

But you did that sin, While the Holy Spirit was there, Doesn't that trouble you more? Doing it by the Spirit, So how do you do it?

[33:29] One of the fruits of the Spirit, Is self-control, Galatians chapter 5, Verses 22, And 23, But the fruit of the Spirit, Is love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control, I could have focused, On any of them, But let me just take, The final one, Self-control, How do I develop, Self-control?

Ask, Act, Rely, I wish it would have been an A, But I couldn't think of an A, Ask, Act, And rely, So let me give you an example, When I find myself so caught up, With, With my emails, And my texts, And my, The weather report, And the news headlines, And which new product, Whatever, Whatever my preference is, In terms of Apple, Or, You notice, I have a watch on, I have a phone in my pocket, I have used my iPad, My Mac is at home, Whatever it is, Okay, When I find myself, So caught up with those things, That they take precedence, I need to ask God, Help me Lord, To stop that, So the first thing I do, Is the night before, I pray,

Lord, Tomorrow morning, When I wake up, Please help me to focus first, On your word, Then I can look at all that other stuff, That's my ask, My act, I go to my devices, And I turn off notifications, On the home screen, Some of you have no idea, What I'm talking about, It's okay, Okay, I do something, I turn off those notifications, So the first thing I look at, When my phone comes on, For the alarm, Is not, What is the news headline, What's the weather, What's, What are my three emails, That I got overnight, From somebody, Trying to sell me something, Right, I turn off those notifications, Because I don't want to see those first, Because if I do, I will fall, So I take some action, To keep me from falling, And third, I rely, I rely on the Holy Spirit,

To when I start my phone, Which is what I do my devotions on, The first thing I go to, Is God's word app, I read that first, Maybe it's not news for you, Maybe it's not emails, Maybe it's social media, If we focused a little more, On God's media, Our social media, Would be a lot more pleasing to him, That's a different subject, This brings us to the last point, And if you looked at your clock, You're worried, Okay, Because the third point is, Our response to the Spirit, Is an evidence of salvation, Don't worry, We're okay, Alright, We're okay, Because this one is the message, Of next week, And I don't want to take it, From Pastor Andrew anyway, For all who are led, By the Spirit of God, Are sons of God, Put simple terms, The presence of the Spirit,

Is the proof, I do not depend, Upon how I feel, Well I just feel like I'm saved, You know what, Some days, I don't feel much like I'm saved, Worse than that, Some days I don't look like it, But I know I'm saved, Because I know, That the Spirit of God, Has worked in me, He's changed things, That I never imagined, He would change, He's changed things, That at first, I wasn't all that crazy, About changing, But he's changed them, And because of the work, Of the Spirit of my life, Because I recognize, That I'm being led by the Spirit, I know, That I am the Son of God, 1 John chapter 3, Verses 2 and 3, Beloved, We are children of God now, And what we will be,

[38 : 02] Has not yet appeared, But we know, That when he appears, We shall be like him, Because we shall see him, As he is, And everyone, Who thus hopes in him, Purifies himself, As he, Is pure, How do I do that?

I make sure, That my response, To the Spirit, Is not an option, In my life, I am, I make sure, That my response, To the Spirit, Is empowered, By the Spirit, And those bring me, The evidence, Of my salvation, Maybe here, You're here today, And you, Say, Well, Nothing's really changed, I'm pretty much, The same person, I was before, I accepted Christ, Maybe you've been, Trying to live righteously, But you find, That you fail, Over, And over, And over, And over again, And maybe this morning, You realize, That the reason, You keep failing, Is because, You don't belong to Christ, No matter how many times, You've gone forward, No matter how many times, You've raised your hand,

No matter how many times, You've said a prayer, If the indwelling spirit, Is not bringing about change, I said it before, You need to check, Your birth certificate, Maybe you're here this morning, And you haven't made, The progress you want, You can see some change, You can see some evidence, But it's not, What it needs to be, Maybe things of, Sin is just, Keeps overcoming, And you need, Counsel and prayer, This morning, Would be the morning, To ask for that, Let's pray, Let's pray, Let's pray, Thank you.