

The Holy Spirit and Holiness

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[0 : 00] Father, we just confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit, and that little phrase is packed with so much power.

That little phrase is packed with so much good news. So many of us aren't aware of all the things that the Holy Spirit does in our lives.

But Lord, we thank you for even the things we're not aware of, even the grace that we're not aware of. We thank you for it. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit, though we know he's present with us now, we ask that he would be more active in our hearts, opening our ears, letting us see Jesus clearly, and igniting our hearts with love for him as we hear him in his word.

We ask these things for Jesus's glory and in his name. Amen. Well, friends, we are continuing our series in the Holy Spirit.

And for these five weeks in between Easter and Pentecost, we are looking at the Holy Spirit and the Christian life. And tonight we're looking at the Holy Spirit and holiness.

[1 : 21] Now, I would be very interested to know what comes to your mind when you think about the word holiness. holiness. My guess is that there's each of us have a little different connotations with the word holiness.

If you don't really come from a religious background, my guess is that you have very few connotations with the word holiness because it's a pretty religious word. But if you do think about the word, if you do have connotations, they're probably fairly negative.

My guess is that if you don't come from a religious background, you think of, you know, somebody who's really self-righteous or sanctimonious or something like that. And for those of us that do come from a religious background, the connotations, I'll bet, that we have around the word holiness, when we think of the, you know, when we think of Christian holiness, my guess is that a lot of us think about that aspect of the Christian life that is really, really hard, fairly guilt-ridden, not a lot of joy associated with it and all kinds of things like that.

But the funny thing is that when the, when, when the apostle Paul thinks about Christian holiness, when we read what he says about Christian holiness, when we read what the apostle Paul taught about the Christian's transformation of character, what we find is that the apostle Paul doesn't have in mind anything like self-righteousness.

It's closer to the opposite. The apostle Paul doesn't have in his mind anything associated with a kind of joyless, guilt-ridden, duty-bound kind of servitude.

[3 : 07] What comes to the mind of the apostle when he thinks about the spirit's work of transforming us is the word freedom. You can see it in the very beginning of our second reading and it's not the first time that it happens in that chapter.

See, in the mind of the apostle Paul, and I hope increasingly in our minds, when we think about the Holy Spirit's work of transforming the Christian character, we think of it, just like the apostle Paul does, as the way the Holy Spirit brings us to a place of freedom.

The way the Holy Spirit brings us to a place where we are able to freely love Jesus more than anything else and freely love other people through works of, through good works, works of kindness, things like that.

And so one of the things that I want to do tonight is I want us to see that the Holy Spirit is absolutely, utterly committed to holiness. It's one of the highest priorities that the Holy Spirit has for your life.

But the reason the Holy Spirit is so utterly and completely committed to holiness is that the Holy Spirit is utterly, completely committed to your freedom. So I'm going to look at two kind of categories here, two points.

[4 : 29] First of all, we're going to look at the captivity to our flesh. And then we're going to look at how the Holy Spirit brings us to freedom. First, captivity to the flesh and then the freedom of holiness.

Take a look at the second reading, Galatians chapter five. We're not going to look at all aspects of this chapter or this passage, but we'll look at certain bits of it.

If you read through it, and hopefully you caught this as Aaron was just reading it now, there's two key words that Paul repeats again and again. He talks about the flesh and he talks about the spirit. Now, when he talks about the spirit, he means, he doesn't mean your spirit. He doesn't mean my spirit. He doesn't mean spirituality in a kind of general sort of way. He means the Holy Spirit. He means the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit who we just said we believe in. When he talks about the flesh, though, he's not talking about our physical bodies.

[5 : 31] When the Apostle Paul talks about the flesh, it's a key word he uses. He's talking about that inner captivity to our selfishness.

We talked about this a few weeks ago when we walked through the Titus passage, which was the first reading. Human beings have a kind of default settings, you know, like your computer has default settings.

Human beings have default settings and our default settings are to prefer ourselves over and against just about everything else. At least as a general tendency.

There might be notable exceptions to this, but as a general tendency, we tend to prefer ourselves over and against everything else. And according to the Apostle Paul, he calls that the flesh and it leads to terrible, terrible captivity.

And the first place you see the captivity is in destructive behavior. Look at verse 19. Paul writes, now the works of the flesh are evident.

[6 : 33] Sexual immorality and impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the list goes on and on.

We don't have time to go into each of those individually. I think there's like 15 of them. Obviously, it's not an exhaustive list. But if we were to go into each of them, it'd be pretty easy to demonstrate that at the root of all these destructive behaviors is a disorder within the human heart, within the human soul.

There's a disorder within us that makes us deeply, deeply committed to prefer ourselves and to seek after our own pleasure and gratification and pursue.

We're kind of driven by our selfish desires. And the first thing you see is you see it kind of evidenced in these destructive behaviors that are oftentimes very, very addictive.

But it gets worse. The flesh, according to Paul, leads us into an even deeper kind of captivity. Think about this for a moment.

[7 : 54] I want you to imagine. I want you to imagine what would happen if God allowed us human beings to pursue the flesh for eternity.

Imagine what would happen if God allowed us to pursue our kind of selfish pursuit of self-gratification and he allowed us to do that without limits for forever.

Just we can do whatever we want for as long as we want. Now, for some of us, it might sound like that would be a kind of fun world to live in.

But it wouldn't take long. And you don't have to have too vivid an imagination to realize that it would end up in a terrible, terrible type of captivity. Let me explain what I mean.

Most of us are aware selfish people don't know how to love. Right? Like, selfish people have terrible relationships. Because what happens when somebody is really, really, deeply, deeply self-centered, you know, just a rank narcissist, what happens is they're very eager to enter into relationships with somebody.

[9 : 15] But they're always using those relationships as a kind of means towards self-gratification. So they're into them as long as they're helpful and pleasurable. But as soon as they stop being one of those two things, then they end up, the selfish person rejects that other person.

And what Paul's saying is that even if we're not obviously terribly narcissistic, even if it's not overt, there's something deep within us that if we let drive us into eternity, it would turn us into a type of person who is utterly and completely alone.

And the reason we would be a person who is utterly and completely isolated is that we would continually prefer ourselves over everything else, which would lead us to reject other people.

And that would happen again and again and again until before long we would be utterly and completely isolated from other people. And we would also be utterly and completely isolated from God.

And the Bible calls that hell. And that's why in verse 20, Paul issues such a sober warning.

[10:30] He says, I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things, remember those who are controlled by their flesh, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Okay, now why am I saying this? Why is Paul giving us this warning? This is why. Paul wants to press home to us why it is that the Holy Spirit is absolutely, fundamentally, completely, passionately committed to waging war against our flesh.

God loves you and therefore, God wants to kill your flesh. He wants it absolutely dead. And the reason he wants it dead is he does not want it to drive you into that utter eternal captivity.

He wants to rescue you from that. He wants to transform you. He wants to liberate you and give you freedom. Let me read you a story.

Some of you are aware of C.S. Lewis' book, *The Great Divorce*. A lot of you have read it. If you haven't read it, if you haven't read it, you should. And it tells the story about a fictitious bus ride from hell to heaven.

[11:54] A bunch of ghosts down in hell get to take a bus ride, kind of field trip up to heaven. And they get to kind of hang out on the outskirts of heaven. And if they want to stay, and if they want to go on to kind of downtown heaven, they're allowed to.

But in the course of the story, there's this one particular scene where there's a ghost from hell who's on the outskirts of heaven and he's got a lizard wrapped around his shoulders.

And the lizard stands for the kind of fleshly desire, his self-focused commitment to his own pleasure. And as he's standing on the outskirts of heaven, the lizard's just chattering in his ear, trying to convince him to turn around, get back on the bus, get back to hell, get back into captivity.

And right at the critical moment, right when he's about ready to give in to the lizard, turn around, get back on the bus, go back to hell, an angel steps up. And that's where we pick up the story.

Listen up. Would you like me to make the lizard quiet? Asked the angel. Of course I would, said the ghost.

[13:10] Then I will kill him, said the angel, taking a step forward. Wait, wait, wait, wait. Look out. You're burning me. Keep away, said the ghost, retreating. Don't you want me to kill him?

Said the angel. Well, you didn't say anything about killing him. It's the only way, said the angel, whose burning hands were now very close to the lizard.

Shall I kill it? Well, for the moment, said the ghost, I was only thinking of silencing it. It's just a little embarrassing. May I kill it?

Said the angel. Well, isn't there time to discuss that later? There is no time. May I kill it? Honestly, I don't think that there's any need to kill it.

I'm sure that I'll be able to keep it in order now. I think that the kind of gradual process will be better than killing it. The gradual process, said the angel, is of no use at all. There is no other day.

[14:13] All days are present now. This moment contains all moments. The ghost begins to cower. Why are you torturing me? How can I let you tear me to pieces?

Why didn't you just kill it without asking me? The angel replied, I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Do I have your permission?

The angel's hands were now almost closed on the lizard, but not quite. Do I have your permission?

Said the angel to the ghost. If you kill it, I know you'll kill me.

It won't kill you, said the angel, but it will hurt you. But what if it did kill you? Said the angel. You're right.

You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature. Then may I kill it, said the angel. Damn and blast you, said the ghost. Go on, can't you?

[15:12] Get it over. Do what you like, bellowed the ghost. But then he ended cowering, whimpering. God help me. God help me. The next moment, the ghost gave a scream of agony like I've never heard on earth.

The burning one closed his crimson grip upon the reptile and twisted it. And while it bit and writhed, he broke it. And he flung it, broken back, on the turf.

And it was dead. Amen. Amen. That's what the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life. And when you think about your life and you think about the captivity that so many of us live in to these areas of our

lives where our flesh has just gripped us.

When you think about that and when you think about the destructive, not just the destructive behavior, but where it leads, when you think about the Holy Spirit's offer to kill it, I mean, isn't that what you want?

Don't you want to be freed from that? From yourself, from your commitment to yourself, from that unloving, people rejecting, self-centered, addictive, craving, angry, part of your soul that is always bent inside and on itself.

[16:52] See, that's our captivity to the flesh. Okay. How does the Holy Spirit kill it? In the words of Paul, what does it mean now to walk in the Holy Spirit in verse 25?

What does it mean, verse 24, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh, killed the flesh with its passions and desires? If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit.

Now, how does that happen? How does the Holy Spirit lead us from captivity into freedom and into holiness? Let me try to explain this. The Holy Spirit kills our flesh and then leads us on to freedom and holiness in two strokes.

Two strokes. First, the Holy Spirit leads us from conviction to surrender and then from surrender to freedom. First of all, from conviction to surrender.

Now, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is a critically important part of His ministry to us. And the conviction of the Holy Spirit is when the Holy Spirit comes and convinces us that our flesh is not as good as it feels in the moment.

[18:10] That our flesh is actually poison. That the lizard is not something you want to keep. You know, the angel had to convince the ghost that the lizard had to go.

And the Holy Spirit does the same thing in us. But it's not a small feat. It's a fairly big issue. It's a really big issue because naturally, we love our flesh.

Don't we? Don't we? Don't we? I mean, I know Jim and I know that Jim really loves living in a Jim-o-centric universe. You know?

I like everything revolving around me and there's something, there's some kind of twisted part of me. It's not rational, but there's some part of me that thinks that my deepest happiness will come when I live for myself.

And so the first thing that the Holy Spirit does when He's going to come and kill my flesh is He's got to break that. He's got to break that idea. He's got to break that love that attachment that I have to my own self-seeking, others-rejecting pleasure.

[19:13] The thing is, the only way for us to stop loving our flesh is for us to start loving something else more. And so that's what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit comes to us and shows us the ugliness of our sin and of our flesh by showing us the beauty of Jesus.

If you've been a Christian for a while, you know how this works. When you see the love of Jesus clearly, when you see Him in the Gospels and above all, when you see His self-sacrificial love on the cross, when you see Jesus upon the cross dying the death that you deserve, when you see Him enduring the captivity that your flesh purchased, when you see that clearly, it does something to you.

You can't see the love of Jesus clearly and not in some regard be compelled by it. And as you see the beauty of Jesus, at the same time, almost in contrast, you begin to see the ugliness of your own sin and flesh more clearly.

The more you get, the more you're thrilled with Jesus, the more appalled you are at yourself. The more you praise Jesus, the more ashamed you are at how unlike Him you are.

And as those two things grow, the beauty of Jesus becomes clearer, the ugliness of sin becomes more evident to you. That's the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit begins to convict us of the absolute ugliness of sin and begins to drive us inevitably without, irresistibly towards surrender.

[21:03] And when He drives us to a place of surrender, what happens is we stand before the cross of Christ. We stand before the cross and we utterly reject our sin because we prefer Jesus.

We say, Jesus, I hate my sin. I confess my fleshly self-centeredness. I renounce all the outward expressions of it that have been in my life, all the addictive behavior, all the secret sin, all the thoughts and the words and the deeds that have grown out of my own selfish ugliness.

And before the cross, you say, Jesus, I am utterly, utterly unable to change. I mean, there's nothing I can do to fix it. Will you forgive me?

Will you change me? Will you take away this self-centered, self-loving heart and give me instead a self-sacrificing, truly loving heart like yours?

And the beautiful thing, friends, the beautiful thing is that when the Spirit leaves us from conviction to surrender, at that moment when we finally renounce our self and cling and hope only in Christ alone, that's when the Holy Spirit comes in and answers that prayer.

[22 : 28] And He answers that prayer with a gift of freedom. He comes in and He applies the absolute forgiveness of God to our hearts so that all of a sudden, though we were, you know, we deserve just absolute rejection from God, we can stand before Him utterly innocent, utterly pure, like Jesus, just before the throne of God in His presence.

But then, at the same moment, He changes our hearts, takes away our self-oriented, flesh-committed hearts and gives us hearts that are free, hearts like Jesus, free to love God, free to love other people, free to obey.

That's why verse 22, Paul says, the fruit of the Spirit is first of all love. And in the Greek, it seems that love is the heart of it.

And then joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness all kind of flow out of that love that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts. from conviction to surrender, from surrender to freedom.

Let me read the story of the, let me read the end of the story about the ghost and the lizard. At this point, the angel's just thrown the lizard down, and it's dead.

[23 : 50] But then the lizard starts to move. Listen up. As I looked at the lizard, I saw that it was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled.

As it grew, it changed. Suddenly, I started back, rubbing my eyes. The lizard transformed into the greatest stallion that I have ever seen.

Silvery white with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, winning and stamping with its hooves. And the ghost also transformed into a new-made man in front of my eyes.

And in a joyous haste, the young man leaped on the horse's back and rode off like a shooting star on the green plain. And soon, they were among the foothills of the mountains. And then, like a star, I saw them winding up into the rose brightness of that everlasting morning.

Isn't that great? I love that. It's a great image of Christian holiness. This lizard, this captivating in all the worst ways, this ugly, sin-infested, flesh-driven lizard gets killed, but then gets transformed into a stallion that the guy rides straight into heaven.

[25 : 15] Straight into the presence of God. And friends, that's exactly how holiness works in our lives. It's exactly how the Holy Spirit works. We bring our sin and Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, kills it.

And then brings it back to life in the form of love and joy and peace and all the rest. And then he inserts it into our hearts. And at the end of the process, we look more like Jesus.

And the Christian life is a matter of that repeating again and again and again. until we ride up into that everlasting morning. That's called freedom.

That's called holiness. It's not guilt-ridden. It's not duty-bound. It's not self-righteous. It's the opposite of all of that. It is joyful. It's grace-saturated.

It's gospel through and through. It's not guilt-ridden. My guess is that there's three groups tonight. There's some of us here who you've got a lizard on the shoulder.

[26 : 24] But for some of us for some of us I fear that you've kind of made peace with it. You know? It's kind of like it's still domestic. You know what I mean?

It's like it's your pet. And you're kind of happy with it. You can kind of keep it secret. It feels manageable, that kind of thing. The Holy Spirit wants you to know that it's just full of venom, full of poison.

It wants to kill you. It wants to keep you captive for forever. There's others of us who have, you know that there's a lizard on your shoulders.

And it's heavy. And it's ugly. And you hate it. You hate it. You hate it. You've been spending a lot of time trying to keep it quiet. Trying to keep it under control.

Trying to keep it secret. You want to get rid of it. But the more you try to manage it, the louder it chatters. And you're ashamed. You can't do it, man.

[27 : 30] You can't do it. The Holy Spirit wants to kill it. He wants to kill it. Let him kill it. You know, bring it to the Lord tonight in communion.

Receive prayer tonight. Talk to Aaron. Talk to me. Talk to one of the home group leaders or the Bible study leaders. The Holy Spirit wants to kill it. He wants to set you free. And then there's a third group, I think.

Those of us who have walked with Jesus for a while and the Lord's killed lots of lizards. And you know that this is true. And you're walking in a degree of joy and freedom and holiness.

And you know, let your heart just be filled with gratitude tonight. And allow the Holy Spirit to show you people that you can begin to minister to.

The Holy Spirit wants to use your prayer and your counsel and your encouragement in other people's lives. And as we as a congregation become a people who are more saturated with the gospel holiness.

[28 : 38] More free. We're going to become more and more free. More and more joyful. And more and more like Jesus. And there's just nothing better. So let's pray for that.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. But I say walk in the Spirit.

And you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Father, what a precious promise. Walk in the Spirit. And you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Jesus, will you kill it in us? Father, will you minister your freedom to people?

Father, will you send your Holy Spirit? Will you break the yoke? Break it. Kill it. Throw it down. And fill us with that love and that freedom and that joy and that precious, glorious holiness.

[29 : 59] Upon which we shall ride into you that everlasting morning. Amen. All true prayer.

Lord, somehow confesses our absolute dependence on God. It is therefore a deep and vital contact with him.

It is when we pray that we really are. With that in mind, can we adopt a prayerful position as we come before the Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, you've stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within reach of your saving embrace.

So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you.

[31 : 28] Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Heavenly Father, you have promised through your Son, Jesus Christ, that when we meet in his name and pray according to his mind, Jesus will be among us and hear our prayer.

In your love and mercy, fulfill our desires and give to us your greatest gift, which is to know you the only true God and your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Lord, in your mercy. Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray you so guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life, we may never forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your sight for your name's sake.

Lord, in your mercy. Finally, Lord, we lift up to you our Regent and our Tidza students. We ask that you provide work for them during the summer months that they may be able to raise sufficient funds to continue with their education in the fall.

Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Yeah, let's stand together for the offering.