

June 21, 2009  
Therefore ...  
Romans 8

*Getting Personal*

What would you say to someone who said that there was no point in trying to live a holy life? "After all," he would argue, "I can never be totally holy in this life. I will only be made holy in the resurrection when, by the power of God, my body is made pure and holy and all of me is cleansed, restored, and renewed." This fellow is quite right, of course - none of us will ever be perfect or holy in this life. It is only when, in the resurrection our bodies are made new and perfect, as Jesus' was, that we will be holy.

But at the same time, we would expect that there would be evidence in this life of new life in the Spirit, of obedience to Jesus as Lord, of a transformation in how he would live in this life. We would expect that his faith in Jesus, that the power and presence of the Spirit would lead him to become more and more like Jesus. Wouldn't we?

*"But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*

*"Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." (Romans 8:9-14)*

Even though he will never be perfect in this life, we can expect that he will be changed by his faith in Jesus.

How does your faith in Jesus change the way you live?

*Getting into the World*

What would you say to someone who said that there was no point in trying to bring justice to the world, care for God's creation, or bring hope and healing to hurting people here or overseas? "After all," she might argue, "the world will not be completely just and right until the new creation. Only when Jesus returns will all evil and injustice be finally destroyed and all righteousness and goodness restored, and renewed." This person is quite right, of course - the

world will not be perfect or holy until the King of Kings returns and sets things straight. It is only when Jesus comes again that all the evil systems and structures will be destroyed.

But at the same time, we would expect that, through the Holy Spirit, she would be about the business of trying to live a new life in the Spirit, being obedient to Jesus as Lord, transformed and transformational in how she lives in the world? Would it not make sense that - just as we would expect the Holy Spirit to change how we live personally, to live more holy lives, more like Jesus - that the Holy Spirit would also lead us to seek to help the world become a more holy place, a more just place, a more compassionate place, a freer place, a more loving place.

Our personal lives will never be perfectly like Jesus', this side of eternity - but we are called to that lofty ambition.

Our world will never be heaven, this side of eternity - but are we not still called to that lofty ambition? That is part of the mystery of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. It is part of the mystery of Jesus' resurrection, that we are called to live differently this side of eternity, too! We are called to create little foretastes of heaven, through how we act, live, and love.

Paul, in the conclusion of his longest teaching on resurrection and heaven, writes, "*Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*" (1 Corinthians 15:58). What we do this side of death and resurrection matters! It is not in vain! Eugene Peterson translates that verse, "*Dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.*"

### *Finding the true middle ground*

Hopefully this makes sense! But historically there have been two extremes to which Christians have gravitated. At one extreme are those who will say that the world is such a mess, it's going to hell in a hand basket anyway, nothing can be done about until the Lord returns, so let it go. Maybe if it gets really bad, that will force Jesus to return even sooner! The gospel is just about personal sin, personal salvation and going to heaven when I die. The best we can do is keep ourselves "safe" by not getting involved in the whole messy business. We don't want to get involved in the things like medical care, clean water, feeding and clothing the poor - that's risky to our souls and it misses the main point - getting people to heaven.

The other extreme is to say that it's all about getting involved in social causes and changing social structures - if we can just change society then everyone will love one another. The gospel is all about social change. Sin, the cross, resurrection, Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit - these are all unnecessary complications that distract us from the main thing - changing structural evil. If we just do enough good the world will be a fine place. We may not want to bring Jesus into the discussion because His talk of personal sin and transformation may make people uncomfortable.

What God calls us to is a dynamic tension between the two extremes: Because Jesus is God come among us; because He showed us how to live in close relationship with the Father and in loving compassion with other people; because He died on the cross and rose from the dead ... we are called to pray, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And we are called to "throw ourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing we do for him is a waste of time or effort."

We are called to seek to His Kingdom come in justice, love, and hope - in the name and in the power of Jesus. That's the kind of thing Jesus and the early church did. They cared for those who were poor, hurting, lonely, and struggling - in tangible, physical ways. But they also did it, clearly and unapologetically, in the name of the Kingdom of God and (in the case of the early church) in the name of Jesus. Both Jesus and the early church called people to see these things as signs of the kingdom - foretastes of heaven - that should change the way they live!

We are called to believe that we can be and bring signs of the kingdom - these foretastes of heaven - into our community. Here are some of ways we do that:

**What we as church are involved in:**

Soup Kitchen  
Adult Drop In  
Food Bank  
New Canadians/Refugees  
Moms Group  
Mill Creek Baptist Camp  
LCI Outreach  
Neighbourhood Harvest Festival  
Crossroads Counselling Centre  
Seniors' Homes Ministry (4)  
Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship  
Meals to New Moms  
Stretch class  
Vacation Bible School

**What individuals are involved in:**

Personal sharing/caring  
Woods Homes  
Coaching sports  
A.A./G.A. Groups  
LSCO/Norbridge Seniors Centres  
Reading in Schools  
Alzheimers Society  
Reading for the Blind  
Crisis Line Volunteers  
Victim Services  
Larsch Homes  
Bibles for Missions  
Homeless/Affordable Housing  
Streets Alive  
Blankets for Canada

I've asked a couple of people to share their experiences with some of these ministries.

- Soup Kitchen
- Vacation Bible School (summer children's programme)

We do these because these are the kinds of things Jesus would do!

But we also do them to help people see that the kingdom of God is real - the gospel is true - God is God, Jesus is the risen King, His spirit moves in people today. And we do them to challenge and invite people to meet Jesus for themselves. To discover how He can transform their lives.

## *Looking ahead*

Could we do these better? Absolutely.

Are there more things we could do? Absolutely?

One of the exercises our church council has been going through is wrestling with which of these are priorities to strengthen. What new things might we want to begin?

Some of the suggestions: improve our Adult Drop In Centre outreach into community better; offer as outreach focused class like "Exploring Christianity" (similar to Alpha but different); closer involvement IVCF outreach on U of L campus; thinking about new opportunities with our LCI outreach.

Other ideas we brainstormed: Christmas Party for the Neighbourhood, noon organ recitals, evening potlucks and hymn sings, after school tutoring, ESL drop-in, home and mechanical repairs ('Men With Tool Belts'), special workshops or speaker series ...

I've begun asking the Homeless Shelter, the YWCA and Woods Homes, "What is your "dream list" of your needs? Perhaps we can find some projects we can take on.

What are your thoughts? How can we make a difference? How can you make a difference?

In the bulletin is a page entitled "Taking it to the Street ..." Take a moment to fill it out.

God is God. Jesus is Risen. The power of Spirit is real in our lives. *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"*

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