

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

June 23, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

June 23, the sermon will reference several diverse texts. For the Bible class, we will study an extended passage (Romans 8:5-17) that contrasts flesh and Spirit. Lesson outline follows:

Warm-Up/Icebreaker

Read the names of the following phobias and see if anyone can identify what each is the fear of (have fun with this).

- Sinistrophobia- Fear of left-handed people.
- Dromophobia- Fear of crossing streets.
- Hagiophobia- Fear of saints or holy things.
- Euphobia- Fear of hearing good news.
- Coulrophobia- Fear of clowns.
- Sesquipedalophobia- Fear of long words.
- Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia- Fear of the number 666.
- Homilophobia- Fear of sermons.
- Spermophobia- Fear of germs.
- Cacophobia- Fear of ugliness.

Scripture Reflection

Review our memory verse with the class: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

1. If we are living our lives out of fear, what positive qualities are we likely missing?

Read Romans 8:5-17

The basic contrast in this passage is between the Spirit and the flesh. (The original NIV translates the Greek word for “flesh” as “sinful nature” (a poor translation that was corrected in later editions of the NIV). Explain to the class that “flesh,” as used in this context, refers to all of our human abilities (not just our weaknesses and failings, but also our gifts, talents, and skills) when used apart from God’s presence and influence.

2. Describe the differences between those who live by the flesh and those who live by the Spirit.
3. Review verses 15-17. How is the presence Holy Spirit intended to free us from a life of fear?

Application

1. Romans 8:5 says that, “Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” What practical steps could you take to center your mind more completely on the desires of the Spirit?
2. Everyone deals with fear to some extent. Examine yourself and identify your most significant fear. There is no need to name that fear out loud (unless you choose to). In what ways has it held you back and curtailed your ability to live fully and joyfully?

Sermon: *Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit*

Memory verse: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

A couple of simple observations: (1) if we are operating out of fear, our behavior is not being prompted by the spirit we have received from God, and (2) if the spirit God gave us—the Holy Spirit—is in charge, our lives will be a demonstration of power, love, and good judgment.

So this turns out to be a handy little diagnostic tool for individual Christian lives and for churches. To the extent that we are motivated by fear, we are driven by the wrong spirit. To the extent that power, love and sound judgment can be seen in us, we are led by the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, too many Christians are driven by fear. My life has been far more fear-based than it should have been. And there are too many churches that are driven by fear. Why?

1. After all, we are Bible-believing people. We take the Bible seriously and factually. When the Bible says something happened, we believe it really happened. Jesus literally walked on water. Noah literally took two of every kind of animal on the ark. Jonah was literally swallowed by a fish. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked unharmed out of a literal fiery furnace.
 - a. When we come to the book of Acts, we take it as real history of real events, not just a story concocted years later by the church to explain who they were.
 - b. When we come to Acts 2, we believe it. We misidentify it a bit. We say it's the birth of the church, which it is, but the main point of Acts 2 is hard to miss. Amazing things happen: sound of a hurricane force wind, something that looked like fire rests on heads of the twelve apostles, and when they spoke, people who had come from all over the world understood them in their native languages. What follows is a question, an answer, and a promise:
 - (1) Question: what is this?
 - (2) Answer: it's the Holy Spirit, which Jesus said he would send to take his place on earth.
 - (3) Promise: this spirit is now available to everyone from now on who puts their trust in Jesus and is baptized into him.
 - c. So Acts 2 is about the coming of the Holy Spirit. In rest of Acts, it is the Holy Spirit who builds the church. He gives visions to direct the work. He heals the sick and enables miracles. He sets Paul apart for a special ministry (13). He prevents Paul from going to Asia, sending him to Europe instead (16). Paul was compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (20). The churches established in Acts were empowered by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, led by the Spirit and they worshiped by the Spirit.
 - d. And we believe that every single event described happened just as the Bible says it did. After all, we're Bible-believing folk.
2. What's more, we are restorationists. You might find a sign or a brochure that claims that this is a first-century church, just like the church you read about in the book of Acts. But you won't find any open evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity and you'll scarcely hear him talked about.
3. How can you say you take the Bible seriously and that you're trying to be first-century Christians, and then do church in a way that barely acknowledges the driving force behind the first-century church, have no expectation that the Holy Spirit will show up in any tangible way, and not notice the obvious contradiction? Here's how. We read the Bible with a clear dividing line around the end of the first century, around the time the book of Revelation was written and the last apostle died.
 - a. Before that line, HS very active in just the ways described in Acts. Healing sick, empowering the church, guiding believers, warning them, uniting them, instructing them. Purpose: keep things on track until the Bible could be finished in written form and leadership structure established in church.
 - b. After that time, the Bible took over the functions of the HS. And so, we read of the Holy Spirit working in easily identifiable ways in the early church and it never once occurs to us to expect that something like that might happen in our lives or in our church.
4. In fact, were sort of frightened of what might happen if those kinds of things did happen to us. What scares us?

- a. Fear of being wrong. Our security has been tied up in being right. Admitting that past understandings were inadequate (or wrong) is unsettling to our faith. What if that hard and fast line at the end of the apostolic age cannot be supported by Scripture? Scary!
 - b. Fear of Loss of control. We are rational beings and we want our faith to make sense. We like things to be predictable. Just as they are natural laws and laws of physics that make the world understandable, we like spiritual laws that keep our spiritual lives orderly and tidy. Holy Spirit is too mystical, too hard to nail down, too loosey goosey. That scares us.
 - c. Fear of disunity. Periodically, we have had people in the church who have had an experience of the Holy Spirit that is outside our norm. I personally have seen some of them exhibit immature, arrogant, and judgmental attitudes toward any who would disagree or call them into question. “We have the Spirit and you don’t; why should we listen to you?” But then others, like Elton and Laquita...
 - d. Fear of unknown.
5. There are some things we should be afraid of instead
- a. Grieving the Spirit Ephesians 4:30, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” In context, how we treat each other can grieve the Spirit. Tearing others down verbally, resentment, and unforgiveness are things that can grieve the Spirit of God.
 - b. Resisting the Spirit Acts 7:51, “You stiff-necked people. You always resist the Holy Spirit!” In context, people so mired in their religious traditions that they not only miss what God is doing among them, but they vehemently oppose it.
 - c. Insulting the Spirit Hebrews 10:29 “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” In context, acting like grace gives you a free pass to sin all you want with no need to strive to live a holy life.
 - d. Putting out the Spirit’s fire 1 Thessalonians 5:19, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” In context, not being open to the activity of the spiritual realm. Refusing to accept anything that you can’t perceive with your five senses or logically reason with your mind.
6. What happens when we confine the Holy Spirit’s work to the first century?
- (1) Instead of relationship with God, devoted to religious system.
 - (2) Instead of being transformed, a self-improvement regimen.
 - (3) Instead of worship as overflow, a checklist of proper acts.
 - (4) Instead of prayer, wishful thinking.

So, what am I suggesting? A modest plea: start fresh in your knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit. John 3:1-8

Hang loose and be open to different thoughts and interpretations. Be open to an understanding of the HS different than what you’ve been taught. Don’t blindly accept what your religious tradition has handed you (even though the claim is that it’s “just what the Bible teaches). Don’t accept someone else’s tradition either (even though they claim it’s just what the Bible teaches). Pray to receive the Holy Spirit. Luke 11:13. “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

And look for His work in all things great and small.