

Romans 8:5-11

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. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For 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. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you.

Have you ever noticed when people are preparing to move, or leave for an extended period of time, or even when they realize they are dying, there are certain words which these people want to hear and/or say.

- “I’ll miss you”
- “Thank you”
- “I forgive you”
- “I love you”

But we believe if these people could hear just one of these statements, they would choose “I love you.” My question for you this morning is, ‘what makes the words everyone most wants to hear so hard to get right?’ We, as human beings struggle, with what seems our entire life, with these three simple words, “I love you.” Why?

First, many see these words as they did when they were teenagers as something which is messy and leads to trouble. Young girls long to hear the boy of their dreams say those three special words, and actually mean it. Teenage girls dream of hearing those words without having to exchange them for something. Teenage boys and older fear saying those three simple words simply because of the consequences which come from saying them. So called men, fear saying them because society has made them believe saying those words is a sign of weakness.

Secondly, our language collapses and falls far short when we try to say them without really saying them. How many times have we attempted to say these three simple words, and actually not say them? The couple is together, they are close, the scene is heating up the woman looks longingly into his eyes and says those words for the first time 'I Love You,' to which the man replies, "Ditto."

Thirdly, each of these words are essential to living a biblical lifestyle, but as their meaning has been corrupted by our culture, and as a result the so called lifestyle we live, is in reality a deathstyle. The whole divine-human relationship hinges on these three simple words.¹ Thank God Jesus gave us a new way of living.

Jesus gave us a new way of living, by living in the presence of the Spirit. When Jesus sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit our lives became about life not death. Life in the presence of the Spirit gives us 3 vital components for living; identity, integrity, and intimacy. Without identity, intimacy, and integrity, life is not really life. We may try to convince ourselves and those around us we are really living, but actually without these three components as part of our everyday lives, we are dying.

- a) New Identity ... "I"
- b) New Intimacy ... "Love"
- c) New Integrity ... "You"

Without identity, intimacy, and integrity living becomes existing, and life becomes death. The magic of "I Love You," is found not only in each individual word, but also in the combination of the three words. Life seems to move for us in threes. You've all heard, things come in threes, or things happen in threes. In the academic world when things are in threes it is said it is cubed. Remember math class, 2 cubed, which is $2 \times 2 \times 2$ is 8; 4 cubed, which is $4 \times 4 \times 4$ is 64.

Think about this, life moves in threes. Three is the symbol of union, completion, and perfection. Life revolves around three, it's a survival number. You can only live three seconds without blood. You can only live three minutes without air. You can only live three days without water. You can only live three weeks without food.

In our everyday life we see three in abundance, Snap, Crackle, Pop; Tom, Dick, and Harry; Moe, Larry, Curley; the three little pigs; three blind mice. Traffic lights are red, yellow, and green. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Caesar's announcement, "I came, I saw, and I conquered." We were all created how, in body, mind, and spirit.

Three is the most sacred number in Christian history. For the Christian everything, every part of life is cubed. Not squared, but cubed. The kingdom of God is a community, a cubed community. Times of daily prayer use to be three, morning, noon, and night.

The sanctuary had three divisions, the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. Both the Tabernacle and the Temple consisted of three parts. The holiest place, the holy of holies was shaped like a cube itself.

When we read Scripture we see the pattern of three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jonah in the belly of the whale three days, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The man on road to Jericho had three walk by, Priest, Levite, Good Samaritan.

Before Jesus began His earthly ministry He was tempted by Satan three times. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me," and He made Peter answer Him three times. Jesus always took three with Him when He went off, Peter, James, and John. Jesus raised three persons from death, Jairus's daughter, the widow son, and Lazarus. Notice the ages of the three raised from death, a small child, a young adult, and a full grown older man. Each representing a phase of life. There are three offices of Christ, which describe His heavenly position: Prophet, Priest, and King. He was crucified at the third hour. The inscription on top of the cross was written in three languages. Jesus rose on the third day.

The meaning and impact of three is without question woven throughout our lives, from beginning to end. If we are to get these three words, "I Love You," right we must draw upon the power of heaven. But until we get our identity, intimacy, and integrity right, we'll never get "I Love You" right.

Our passage talks about the setting of your mind. Your mind is either set on the Spirit or the flesh, contrary to what most believe it cannot, never has and never will, be set on both. It's either one or the other. We seem to get caught up, in what we call living, and never really get started. We are like the birds that became trapped in an airport terminal, living their lives full and free, to what seems bountiful. The problem is the real world waits outside for them. The birds live as if they are free, but in reality they are trapped inside, closed off from the real world.

We too are the same, we live as though we are free; we even believe we are living bountiful and very productive lives, when in reality most have settled for closed off sheltered lives. Our lives never fully become lived, why? Because we have settled for less, we have settled for second best and have become satisfied with that. The question is why?

Most of us know of God, we know He created us and the world, and many actually believe He sits on a throne some place way up in the clouds. Most believe Jesus is the Son of God, and they may even believe that He rose from the dead. But the Holy Spirit, well that's another story. Most believe there is a Holy Spirit, but far too many believe they can live without Him.

Romans 8:9 *“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”* Do I need to repeat that verse? To me this is the heart of Paul’s message, *“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”*

I mentioned earlier how we need to understand our identity, intimacy, and integrity. Each one of us has to understand his or her own identity, intimacy, and integrity, not someone else’s. Each day we choose life or death and far too many choose death. Everyday we live is full, rich, and rewarding, but far too many attempt to live their lives minus the Holy Spirit. We believe there is a Holy Spirit, but at the same time we believe we can live without Him. We believe we can live our lives, as long as we come to church, don’t kill or hurt someone else, believe we’re good Christians and everything will be alright. I’m here to tell you your dead wrong!

Life without the Holy Spirit is not life at all it’s a slow death. If you are attempting to live your life without the Holy Spirit you’re already dead, and you just don’t know it. **John 6:63** says, *“It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail.”* We can’t do it apart from the Spirit, regardless how good we think we are. On numerous occasions I have felt a nudge to read a particular book, or attend a certain lecture, or to have lunch with a particular person.

Then perhaps a month later, I find that I need some information I picked up from those earlier contacts. I don't think that was coincidental. That was the Holy Spirit guiding me into certain avenues of truth.

Sometimes we come to worship services not expecting much. Maybe we are distracted by some problem or aggravation or maybe the children argued all the way to church. So, we're not exactly in a worshipful mood, but then, BAM!, right out of the blue, some spiritual power delivers a message directly to our heart like an arrow to a bull's-eye! How did that happen? It was the Holy Spirit.

God never placed within any one person all the resources needed to carry out the mission of the church, but there is an unlimited source available to you, if you will ask in faith. He is the Holy Spirit. Look at **Ephesians 5:18** where we read, "*Be filled with the Holy Spirit.*" The Greek here implies a continuous filling rather than a one-time thing. Then look to **Luke 11:13** where Jesus said, "*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!*" That really grabs your attention. Jesus obviously considered the Holy Spirit the finest gift He could give to us, and, our asking was and is critical to our receiving it.

I've been asking God of late not as I should but occasionally to fill me with His Spirit. I'm going to make a vow before everyone here this morning to ask God each and every morning and ask for a full indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

May I challenge you to do something with me? I challenge each and every one of you this morning to include this request in your morning prayers: “Lord, I ask for a full indwelling of your Holy Spirit, so that I might have all the resources you want to give me for the living of this day.” If you are willing to do that, then when you shake my hand as you leave today, just look me in the eyes and say, “Preacher, I will.” I’ll know what you mean.

Let me conclude with a sailing story. For 132 consecutive years, Americans won the coveted “America’s Cup” given to the best sailing yacht in the world, but in 1983 the Australians threatened to take the cup. After six races that year, the two yachts were deadlocked with three wins each. Thousands were watching the seventh and deciding race. Additional millions were watching on television. Both yachts were at the starting line. All was ready, but there was no race. Why? Not enough wind. In yachting, no wind means no race.

The word for wind in Hebrew is “*Ruach*,” it is also the same word for Spirit. In the life of the Christian, and of the church, if there is no wind of the Spirit, nothing of significance can, or ever will happen. Please commit with me that you will be wide open to the leading of the Father and the Son and as much of that mighty wind of the Spirit as God is willing to give, and let’s not be squared in a round world, instead let’s ask for an out pouring of God’s spirit to fully live.

ⁱ Leonard Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right*, (Waterbook Press: Colorado Springs, 2006), pp 2.