

“You Have Heard That It Was Said”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Matthew 5:21-37

Live out your identity in Jesus Christ and God will fulfill God’s promises. Living out your identity in Christ requires maturation in your development as a follower of Jesus. To mature in one’s development as a follower of Jesus requires a caring sensitivity to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Listening to the Holy Spirit provides incredible motivation to put one’s faith into action. Faith practices, and not just faith beliefs, contributes to one’s fulfillment and contentment in living out of their identity in Christ.<sup>1</sup> And Paul confirms the devastating consequences of not putting faith beliefs into action when he writes in 1 Corinthians 3:1, “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” Maturing in Jesus, a work of the Holy Spirit, leads a follower of Jesus to put one’s faith into action. When we trust the Holy Spirit to lead us in the way of the crucified Jesus, we exude hope through our words and deeds of an active faith. When we act, think, and love like Jesus the Holy Spirit is active and we demonstrate a proper understanding of the gospel.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Psalm 119:1-8, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, and Matthew 5:21-37 makes one point, and one point alone. To mature in one’s development as a follower of Jesus requires a caring sensitivity to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 raises this point as beneficial to mature in one’s

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<sup>1</sup>Some ideas in this sentence were gleaned in my reading of Martin Thielen, *Searching For Happiness* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 128.

development as a follower of Jesus who has a caring sensitivity to listen to the Holy Spirit. Choose life by loving, obeying, and holding fast to God. The Deuteronomist in Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20 writes, "...See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days...." In Deuteronomy the word "choose" is frequently used to describe God's choices. In the context of these verses, the invitation to choose is given to the hearers. Think about it this way. God's choice means nothing unless those chosen return the favor. And the Holy Spirit leads one to choose life.

The text in Psalm 119:1-8 offers this point as beneficial to mature in one's development as a follower of Jesus who has a caring sensitivity to listen to the Holy Spirit. The Torah, the law of God as revealed to Moses, serves as instruction on how to live out God's desire for God's people. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 119:1-8, "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways." Because we are in relationship with God, we seek to follow the commandments, strive to keep the law, and follow God's way. Doing these things informs how we parent, vote, conduct business, and how the church is the church. And the Holy Spirit leads one to seek to follow the commandments, strive to keep the law, and choose God's way.

The text in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 lifts up one point as beneficial to mature in one's development as a follower of Jesus who has a caring sensitivity to listen to the Holy Spirit. Live one's identity in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in 1

Corinthians 3:7-9, “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” To mature in one’s development as a follower of Jesus requires to live one’s identity in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. What this means is that our behavior must indicate that we belong to God and that “belonging” demonstrates the lifestyle of Jesus. What is such a lifestyle? One that is marked by not being motivated by anger, a commitment to reconciliation, and faithfulness even in the hard stuff. And the Holy Spirit leads us to experience “belonging” which demonstrates remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble.

The text in Matthew 5:21-37 demonstrates this point as beneficial to mature in one’s development as a follower of Jesus. The beliefs and actions demanded by Jesus bear fruit in the contexts of communities of justice, peacemaking, and reconciliation. Jesus says in Matthew 5:33-37,

Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times,  
‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’  
But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,  
or by earth, for it is the footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great  
King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or  
black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or No, No’; anything more than this comes  
from the evil one.

To mature in one’s development as a follower of Jesus requires to live one’s identity in Christ with a firm commitment to give God nothing less than one’s innermost desire for God that seeks to express itself by doing God’s will. What does this mean? As one lives out their identity in Christ, God honors God’s promises in that relationship. And the Holy

Spirit comforts and advocates for the follower of Jesus as one navigates the ups and downs of life as a disciple.<sup>2</sup>

You have heard that it was said, believing orthodox and apostolic Christian doctrines is essential. However, maturing in how you live those truths actively, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is more important.” If you believe the Holy Spirit is the real agent of change, not eloquent words or acts of persuasion, then you, in the power of the Holy Spirit, are used by God to draw others in with the winsome love, compassion, and mercy of Christ-like words and actions. Timothy Keller writes,

And how can we be sure that faith in Christ will usher us into this future? One ground of our assurance is the Resurrection of Christ himself, the historical evidence is formidable...Another ground of our hope is the foretaste of the future we get now, as we receive intoxicating if fleeting experiences of God’s love through prayer. ‘And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us’ (Romans 5:5).<sup>3</sup>

Jesus lived his life in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was faithful to the plan and purposes of the Father. Living in the Spirit, that is seeking to apply the beliefs of Christianity in one’s daily living through words and actions, translates hope to others who are seeking a better way to live. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)  
on Sunday, 12 February 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh  
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>2</sup>In the five paragraphs above of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Patricia K. Tull, Ken Evers-Hood, Eric Todd Myers, Charles L. Aaron Jr., Scott McKnight, Christopher T. Holmes, and Zaida Maldonado Perez in *Connections, Year A, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 225-227, 228-229, 230-232, 233-235, 235-237, 238-240 and 240-241.

<sup>3</sup>Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York, New York: Viking, 2016), 175.