

## Living In The Spirit

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series on “the Genius of the Early Christians” by exploring why the earliest Christians believed they were inaugurating a whole new era in human history.

1. Warm up question: Name two foods that should never be put together. Or name two foods that you personally like together, but others consider gross.
2. Like catsup and scrambled eggs, the “new way” Jesus taught did not mix well with the “old way” embraced by many in his culture. Read Luke 5:27-39.
  - a. Wine flasks were often made out of animal skin. Over time, the flasks became dry and brittle, and would burst if put under pressure from the fermentation of new wine. What do you think the old wine skins represent in Jesus’ parable?
  - b. What do you think the new wine represents in this parable?
3. Jesus recognized that his message had the potential to explode the predominant religious norms of his culture. On Sunday, we looked to the first Christian sermon in the book of Acts for clues as to what was so explosive about this new message.
  - a. Read Acts 2:1-21. Try to imagine the scene as described. What may have caused some observers to assume these people were “filled with new wine” (vs. 13)?
  - b. Peter responds to the accusation of drunkenness beginning in verse 16. What do you understand him to be saying? If you were to put his response into your own words, how would you say it?
4. In the old way of thinking, God communicated primarily through the religious elite (i.e., priests and prophets), who told the rest of us what God wanted and laid down rules we must obey. Two hallmarks of the old way were: (a) religion as rule keeping, and (b) a priestly (or preacherly) monopoly on communications with God. Even to this day, institutional religion often slips back into this “old way.”
  - a. How much of the “old way” have you seen in the churches of your past? Describe what you experienced.
  - b. Why do you think it’s so easy for churches to lapse back into the “old way”?
5. Peter ends his sermon in Acts 2 by inviting hearers to turn to Jesus and “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 28). Repeatedly, the New Testament refers to this new way Jesus showed us as “living in the Spirit.” In Romans 7:6, Paul says, “We are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit.”

- a. Paul associates rules-focused religion with captivity and slavery. Why?
  - b. What does it mean to say that we who follow Jesus are “discharged from the Law [of Moses]”? For example, are we subject to the Ten Commandments? What about the behavioral instructions Paul gives us – are we subject to them?
6. The Jerusalem temple had a veil that shielded the inner sanctum of the temple from access by anyone except authorized priests. When Jesus died, that veil “was torn from top to bottom” (Mt. 7:51), symbolizing open access to God. The earliest Christians believed they lived constantly in the intimate presence of God’s Spirit, able to speak directly to, and receive messages directly from, the Spirit – just as Joel had prophesied. Jeff illustrated this with the story of a man, William Willimon, who had a premonition that he would be instrumental in the life of a young man he met. Later, on a prayer walk, William asked God to help the young man pay for college. A week later, jogging past that same spot, he got a sudden flash of insight about a book he should write, complete with title and chapter subjects. After writing the book and getting a big contract, William heard God saying, “It’s not your money; it’s his” – meaning the young man. So William donated the royalties to that young man.
- a. Some people feel empowered to have direct, informal, ongoing conversations with God. Others have been raised in a way that they would rather have someone else pray for them or feel they should only use prayers scripted by someone else? How do you feel? What does your conversational life with God look like?
  - b. Do you have experiences where it feels that God is speaking directly to you? What form do these communications take? Give us an example.
7. Because we’re able to be in constant intimate communication with God’s Spirit, the voice of the Spirit in our lives becomes our ultimate authority, able even to trump religious rules, as both Jesus and the early Christians often demonstrated. Suppose you were to face a situation where your strong inner sense of what was right conflicted with a religious rule you’d been taught. Would you obey the rule or that inner voice? Can you think of a time when you’ve done that? Tell us about it.
8. Jeff closed the sermon by talking about how years ago his and David’s very sick dog Turkey leapt to her feet at the sound of his voice. Christians who have lived in mystical closeness with God would say the same about how God’s voice affects them.
- a. How close to God do you feel? What words would you use to describe how close (or not) you feel to God?
  - b. What are some practical ways we can grow the power of our intimate, personal connection to God, so as to more fully “living in the Spirit”?