

Selective Listening
January 19, 2014

Well it is a new year, and you may be wishing for a new you. Most people spend some time around the start of a new year thinking back on the previous year and wishing to be a better person. Maybe you set some goals for the new year, whether you call them resolutions or not. This morning, I have some help for you.

As your pastor I have some goals for you that I hope you want as well. One goal you may want for yourself this next year is to sin less. As you look back on your life of last year, maybe there are sins that continue to haunt you. There are sins that continue to have power over you. You are tired of it and want some victory. This morning, I have an answer to see that happen.

Another goal I hope for you that you may also want is to be closer to Jesus. You hear other people talk about being close to Jesus and you want that too. You want to know, for sure, that you are doing the work that pleases Him. You try to be a good person and have some success, but you still feel somewhat distant from Jesus. And you aren't sure how to get closer to Him. This morning, I have an answer to help you.

If you want victory over sin and wanting to live closer to Jesus, Paul gives the answer to these in his letter to the church in the city of Galatia.

Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

"... live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

He says to live by the Spirit. We need to ask ourselves some questions of this text this morning. We will look in other parts of the Bible for the answers.

Who is this Spirit? (John 14:16-17; Acts 2:1-47 [note vv 1-4, 18, 38-39])

It is the Spirit Jesus predicted. On the last night before His crucifixion, Jesus was teaching His followers some important truths about what would happen when He left the earth. He tells them that after He is gone, He will ask God to send this Spirit to earth. This Spirit would be with Jesus' followers and in them.

This prediction came true about seven weeks later, on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in the Bible in Acts 2. In that chapter we learn that this spirit is the Holy Spirit. So who is this Spirit? **This is the Holy Spirit.**

We also learn in Acts 2 that the Holy Spirit was not just for a few followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is for all who will put their faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is for all who become Jesus followers. Every Christian has Jesus present with him or her by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian Jesus is never separated from you and you are never separated from Jesus. Wherever you are, Jesus is too, because the Holy Spirit is in you. Whereas Jesus was limited to one physical location, the Holy Spirit is present wherever Christians are located.

What is the Holy Spirit doing? Let me tell you four things the Holy Spirit does. There are more than four things the Spirit does, but these four will help you achieve a new you this year.

1. The Holy Spirit confronts sin in us. (John 16:7-11)

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin against God. This is different than your conscience. We are all born with a conscience. Even non-Christians have a conscience. God created a conscience in each of us so that we feel guilty when we do something that we already know is wrong.

What the Holy Spirit does is convict us of our sin against God. God wants us to know that we are guilty of sin against Him. He wants us to know that we will be judged for our sinfulness. He wants us to know this so we will gladly accept the Savior, Jesus, that God sent.

You may not know that something you are doing is a sin, until the Holy Spirit tells you. The Holy Spirit also calls us to repent when we sin. Conscience doesn't do that.

One day, when I was in college, I cut my neighbor's rose bush back, not all of it, just the part that hung over into our yard. I got aggravated because it was hard to mow around it on our side of the fence. Later, God convicted me that I had sinned against my neighbor. That was bad enough. But then God told me to go apologize to my neighbor. I really did not want to do that. But as I prayed about it, I became convinced that it was necessary. It was necessary for my relationship with God to be right.

So I prayed for courage and went and knocked on my neighbor's door. I explained about the bush and asked his forgiveness. He was very understanding and accepted my apology. Once I obeyed God I had peace in my spirit.

Some of you are in such a situation today. God has been telling you how He wants you to fix a problem relationship in your life and you keep putting Him off. The reason you are not at peace with God right now is because you won't listen. You won't obey. You won't repent of your sin.

Well God isn't going to quit. He loves you too much to let this stand. You aren't going to be happy until you listen to God and make it right. I know from experience. The Holy Spirit will keep telling you to do this thing you are avoiding. The Spirit will outlast you.

So one job of the Holy Spirit is to convict us, in our spirits, of our sinfulness. But the Spirit also does something that conscience does not do. The Holy Spirit often warns me before I sin, that I should not do what I am thinking of doing. This is sort of a pre-conviction. Sometimes the Spirit tells me not to open the refrigerator. Sometimes the Spirit tells me not to make a joke about something. This is part of your victory over sin. The Spirit warns you to avoid sin.

2. The Holy Spirit reveals truth. (James 1:5; Colossians 1:9)

John 16:12-13 (NIV) "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

The Holy Spirit guides our understanding of spiritual truth in the Bible. When you are reading the Bible and suddenly understand something in it and you just know in your spirit that it is true, that is the Holy Spirit's work. We count on this in our teachers and preachers, but it is not reserved for them. It is something the Holy Spirit does in each Christian, IF... you are listening.

The Holy Spirit can give us wisdom and understanding and insight into spiritual things. James writes of this in his letter. Paul prays for God to give Christians wisdom and understanding so they will know how to live out God's will. This is part of what the Holy Spirit does.

3. The Holy Spirit gives special assignments.

Some years ago my friend, Michael, was in his room one evening and the Holy Spirit told him to go down to the local Laundromat. My friend shrugged the suggestion off at first, not believing that it was the Holy Spirit. But the suggestion wouldn't go away.

So then he started objecting to God that he really didn't want to go out right then. It was about ten at night. But the Spirit was persistent. So my friend went to the Laundromat. Once there he saw another young man. The H.S. told Michael to strike up a conversation with this man. Michael shared that he didn't want to do so but eventually did. In that conversation, he was able to share the good news of Jesus with the young man. The man did not accept Jesus that night, and my friend never saw him again. But God wanted that young man to hear the gospel from Michael.

The Holy Spirit has special assignments for all of us. I really believe this. He might tell you to do something as simple as "Pray about this." or "Read that article." or "Call that person to encourage her faith." or "Go visit that person who is sick."

Some of you say things to me like, "I meant to call that person. I thought of it, and then said I'd do it later. Then I forgot." Let me tell you what I believe happened. The Holy Spirit gave you an assignment and you treated it like some stray thought in your mind. You didn't believe that it was an assignment from God and you didn't do it.

Listen, this is the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit tells you to do something, do it right then or as soon as you can. When your phone rings you think you have to answer it. When the Spirit tells you to do something, now is the time to do it. Then you don't have to try to remember it later. If there is absolutely no chance to do it at that moment, at least right a note at that very moment, writing down what you are supposed to do and when you plan on doing it, and stick it where you will definitely see it later. And then do it!

The Holy Spirit is working to improve our obedience, our faith, our love of each other. And we keep letting the opportunities go by. Listen, God would do a whole lot more through us if we would just listen and obey when He tells us to do something.

There are lots of jobs that Jesus wants done this week. He has been planning for a long time for us to do these jobs.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God has good deeds planned for us to do. The Holy Spirit makes those assignments. Are you ignoring the assignments He is trying to give you? The new you that you want starts here. You have to be listening and obeying.

God might have a one time project for you. Or He may be moving you towards an on-going task. God might be giving you a burden for a particular problem or people group, like abortion, the homeless, the elderly, abused children, world missions, evangelism, personal witnessing, hunger issues, jail and prison ministry, and on and on. Some people seem taken with something like this. It becomes a major focus of their life. They are responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit in them. You are already involved in His church, but maybe not to the extent He wants you involved.

4. The Holy Spirit calls some to ministry as a vocation. (Mark 3:13-14; Acts 13:1-3)

This probably won't apply to you this year, but you can't dismiss the possibility. God doesn't call everyone to this, but He can call anyone to this.

Of the many disciples Jesus had, He chose twelve to be apostles. The word apostle means "sent ones". (**apostle = "sent ones"**) He had a special, on-going mission for them. Most were nobodies in society. Yet they became the leaders of the worldwide Christian movement.

In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were called out by the Holy Spirit to become missionaries. Even today, when someone wants to be a pastor or missionary, we talk to the person to try to discern if this was their idea or if they are responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We want to know that they are genuinely called out by God for this work.

God may be calling you to ministry as a vocation. He calls people of all ages and stages of life. Moses was 80 years old when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. You may be in mid life and mid career and God is calling you. My wife and I had several friends in their forties and fifties at seminary who left a career to become missionaries and pastors. You may even be retired and God is calling you. Don't assume God would never call you.

Maybe God has already been tugging at your heart. Are you ignoring God? Are you pushing Him away? Are you running from what He wants you to do?

You may be scared. You may feel inadequate. Or maybe you just don't want to do what He is calling you to do. Jeremiah didn't want to be called. Moses didn't want to be called. But God would not let them go. If God is calling you, He won't let you go either. And you will never be at peace in your soul doing anything else.

Now let me caution you of some things. First, **What you hear the Holy Spirit tell you, will not contradict what God has already said.** (1 Kings 13:1-34; 1 Corinthians 12:3)

If you think something is telling you to commit a crime, that's not the Holy Spirit. That is the devil. The Holy Spirit doesn't tell anyone to sin. The Holy Spirit won't tell a Christian

to marry a non-Christian. The Holy Spirit won't tell you that it is okay to have sex because you are engaged to get married. The Holy Spirit isn't going to tell you that whatever you want to do is okay, "just this once." The Holy Spirit won't tell you it is okay to divorce your spouse so you can marry someone else. He won't tell you it is okay to do what God already told you not to do. He won't tell you not to do what He told you last week to do.

The second caution is this. **Don't ignore the Holy Spirit because you have the Bible.**

The Holy Spirit's work didn't end when the New Testament was written. Those first Christians were very dependent on the Holy Spirit because He was all they had. They had no Bible. They had no apostles. They had no missionaries. They were very much dependent on the Holy Spirit. Christians in some other countries today, don't have copies of the Bible. They too are very dependent on the Holy Spirit.

We, on the other hand, have Bibles. Because of that, some Christians are tempted to ignore the Holy Spirit, with the excuse, "I have the Bible." If you ignore the Holy Spirit you are ignoring God. The Holy Spirit is God.

Not everything you will face this week is addressed in the Bible. The Bible is not a substitute for the presence of God in your life. Don't fall in love with the Bible and ignore the God of the Bible.

Maybe you have already been hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. But you blamed it on indigestion. You excused it as some random idea that just floated out of your own imagination. You never considered that it might be God speaking to you. Being a modern, civilized, educated person, you avoid anything that sounds like woo, woo. That's my mother's term for the mystical and supernatural.

Listen! Christianity is a supernatural religion. Christianity is a mystical religion. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live in each Christian. You can't see Him. He doesn't speak in an audible voice. But He is real. And He reveals God's will for you. And you better listen.

So if you are wanting a new you this year, a you that sins less and serves God more, a you that lives close to Jesus, then start paying attention to the Holy Spirit in you and obey.

Holy Spirit convicts of sin and spiritual truth. The Holy Spirit convicts us that we are sinners against God and facing judgment and in need of a Savior. God loves us and sent Jesus to save us from our sins. If you are ready to believe in Jesus today, ready to receive Him as your Savior, and ready to turn your life over to Him as your Lord, then now is the time to respond to Him in prayer.