

“do not inherit the kingdom of God”). Are you currently engaged in any of these sins? If so, seek the help of your small group, spiritual mentors, or pastoral staff, to be reconciled to God.

Day Six: The Other Side of the Coin Galatians 5:19-21

In contrast to the pernicious deeds produced by sinful human nature, the indwelling Spirit yields such attractive fruit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Are there fruit on this list that your family members or friends might suggest need to develop further in your life? Pick one, and share with your small group, so that they can encourage your growth over the next couple of months.

**Core Value #3
Transformed, not just Forgiven**

“The preacher’s emphasis is the parishioners’ excess”: this old adage proves true in contemporary Christian faith and practice.

Early in his career as a monk, sixteenth-century Martin Luther struggled with an overwhelming sense of guilt before a holy God. Turning to Scripture to assuage his conscience, he initially found only heightened awareness of his flaws, and condemnation for his sins.

But particularly in Paul’s letter to the Romans, he grasped hold of the notion that acceptance with God depends not on our own virtue, but on Christ’s death for our sin. All we need do for salvation is to hold out empty hands to God (Luther’s own characterization of faith). From that time, he boldly proclaimed salvation through faith alone, apart from any human virtue, obedience or merit. This marked the beginning – and became the core doctrine – of the Protestant movement.

Though salvation through faith alone was Luther’s emphasis, however, it was not the totality of his doctrine. He insisted that the living faith which brings salvation also produces holiness and good works, just as a live tree produces fruit.

Yet even in his lifetime, Luther had to correct the excesses of misguided followers who used ‘faith alone’ as an excuse for riotous living and sinful indulgence. He complained: “If grace or faith is not preached, no one is saved; for faith alone justifies and saves. On the other hand, if faith is preached ... the majority of men understand the teaching about faith in a fleshly way and transform the freedom of the Spirit into the freedom of the flesh.”

This excess continues today. In a way which Luther never intended and actively opposed, many Christians assume that because they have prayed to receive Christ, and believe in him, they are saved no matter how they actually live, regardless of whatever sins they might commit, or how little good they do anyone.

Scripture teaches, to the contrary, that Jesus does not merely die for us; we die with him (to sin), and rise again with him (to holiness). Christ does not merely forgive our sins; he also transforms us by giving us his Spirit.

And so, if we truly believe in him, we will not live perfectly, by any stretch of imagination. But we will live differently. Because God has given us his Spirit, who guides and impels us into moral living and works of service. And if our lives do not reflect such changes, then there are grounds for us to question our professions of faith and our experience of God's grace.

Day One: The Old Testament Promise Ezekiel 36:26-27

As Israel suffered in exile for sin, God looked forward to a new day. Not just a day of forgiveness, because then the sin would recur, and with it, yet another exile. It was to be a day of re-creation, when the sinful human spirit driving the people into sin would be replaced by the holy spirit – or Holy Spirit – driving God's own virtue and life. With God's Spirit supplanting their own, Ezekiel predicted, the people would finally follow God. This, the New Testament insists, is what happens for Christians: Christ gives us his Spirit, to transform us on the inside, leading to changed behavior on the outside. Take time today to thank God not just for saving you, but also for transforming you, and consider in what areas of your life this transformation still needs to take hold.

Day Two: We Have Died and Risen Romans 6:5-8

According to Paul, our salvation is not simply a matter of Christ dying for us. For one thing, he is not the only one who dies: we also die with him, to sin. For the other, Christ does more than die; he also resurrects to new life. And so, again, in union with Christ, do we; only in our case, it is to a new life of holiness that we rise. And so, Paul concludes, "if we died with Christ" (that is, if his death counts for our sin, and we have died with him to sin), then "we will also live with him" (that is, we will live a resurrected life of holiness in union with the risen Christ). Does some sin still have you in a stranglehold? Grab hold of this truth, that you have died to sin with Christ, and have risen to holiness with him.

Day Three: Two Reasons We Escape Judgment Romans 8:1-4

Why is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ? Instinctively we answer, "because Christ died for us." Paul actually gives *two* answers: (a) because Christ died for us ('in Christ Jesus' 'through Christ Jesus' 'God sent his own Son as a sin offering'); and, (b) because the Spirit is at work within us, so that we live holy lives ('set me free', 'the righteous requirements of the law [are] fully met in us', we live 'according to the Spirit'). In other words, are not condemned: (a) because Christ died to atone for sin committed before we came to faith; and, (b) because once we do come to faith, the Spirit empowers us to avoid that sin which warrants condemnation. Take a moment to thank God for your two-fold deliverance from sin, from its guilt and from its power. Open yourself to the transforming power of the Spirit. And take to heart the warning that those who continue to obey their sin natures run the risk of judgment (Romans 8:12-14).

Day Four: Not so Black and White Galatians 5:16-25

Romans 8 paints the alternatives as stark opposites: either we live by the Spirit or we follow the flesh. Galatians 5 portrays the reality with more nuance: "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Gal 5:17). What determines whether we live by Spirit or by flesh? Largely our Spirit-empowered decision and resolve: "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal 5:16); "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Is this your resolve? Are their specific areas where you need help not only from the Spirit, but also from your small group, to adhere to this resolve?

Day Five: Considering Some Specifics Galatians 5:19-21

Apart from a general warning that sin leads to judgment, with no exemption offered for those who claim to be Christians, Paul delves into some specifics: sexual immorality, debauchery, spirit worship, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, excessive ambition, dissensions and factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, etc. Those who do such things run the risk of exclusion from heaven (in Paul's language, they