

- ***READ II Corinthians 5:1-7*** Our existence in this world is defined by matter. Everything that surrounds us is composed of molecules, and the vast majority of it is tangible meaning that it can either be touched, tasted, seen, heard, or smelt. However, this text tells us that the guiding force in our lives is not that which can be touched, tasted, seen, heard or smelt. That which guides our lives as disciples of Jesus is our faith. While there are many in this world who can understand that sentiment, there is a growing percentage of people who shake their heads while simply not being able to understand.
- Those of the atheistic, agnostic, and materialist persuasion don't believe that there is anything beyond what is material within this world. They live their lives completely based on what can be touched, tasted, seen, heard, or smelt, but we as people of faith have a confidence in things that are not seen. We believe in the divine inspiration of this book that we hold so dear. We believe that there is a spiritual component to mankind that is outside the realm of that which is seen. This belief leads us to strive to live life from a spiritual perspective while so many live only from a material perspective in this physical world.
- This year, our congregation here at Pleasant Plains has dedicated the first Sunday of each month to focus on the theme of living godly in this ungodly world. We have been called out of this world of darkness to live in the glorious light of God and that often demands that we live differently than that of so many in this world around us. While so many are living this life from the perspective of all that exists is material and before our eyes, we live with the perspective that there are things unseen and even beyond this life. Let's take this idea and narrow it down to four characteristics of the spiritually-minded disciple of Jesus Christ. When compared to those of the world, these characteristics (two positive & two negative) should cause of to stand out from the rest.

4 Characteristics Of The Spiritually-Minded Disciple

I. Faith in God and the unseen.

- A. While so many are content with only having faith in that which they can tangibly interact with, we as Christians believe that there is a God who is unseen to us. And yet, we truly believe that He exists in a very real and very powerful way. The Hebrew writer states concerning our faith in God, *"Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen."* (**Hebrews 11:1**) How can others identify that we believe in a God that none of us have ever touched, tasted, seen, heard, or smelt? They can know of our belief based upon our faith in Him! It is this same faith that led our spiritual ancestors to being approved by God. It is the same faith that will help us to be pleasing to Him. (**Hebrews 11:6**)
- B. Now, some might charge that our faith is blind because there is no tangible or material evidence that proves there is a God. However, we can look to the Scriptures and ourselves use the same evidence used by the Apostle Paul to make the point that we would be foolish to not believe in the existence of a Divine God and Creator. Paul writes in **Romans 1:18-20**, *"For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse."* For us to be able to live in this world that is so incredibly made, so delicately balanced, and so amazingly unique can and ought to only lead us to recognize that there is a Divine unseen Creator who fashioned this world into existence. Like the Gentiles of Paul's day, we are without excuse when it comes to believing in the unseen God who created this material world. Yet, we also recognize that there are more to reality than just what we see around us.

- C. Spiritually-minded disciples believe that an unseen Creator fashioned not only this world into existence, but we also believe that there is a supernatural place where our God and other supernatural beings dwell. I don't believe that we can come to any other conclusion that this when we consider the fact that God dwells in His place that we ought refer to as heaven. It was from that place that Jesus left in order to come to earth (**Philippians 2:6,7**), and it is to this place that He returned to assume His appropriate seat at the right hand of God the Father. (**Acts 2:33**) It is this unseen realm in the heavens where spiritual forces dwell and continue to strive against one another. It is the existence of this realm that leads Paul to remind disciples, *"Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand."* Yes, we are material within our bodies, but there is so much more to reality that what is materially before us. Spiritually-minded disciples have faith in God and recognize and acknowledge the existence of that which is unseen. We live by faith in the unseen and not simply by sight.

II. Living with an eternal perspective.

- A. A part of that which unseen is also part of our existence and that is the presence of our souls. Spiritually-minded disciples realize that we as humans are comprised of more than simply a material body. We believe the words of **Genesis 2:7** which speaks of Him forming man out of the dust of the ground and breathing the breath of life into his nostrils. We believe that we, out of all created things, have been made in the image of God and endowed with attributes beyond any other created being. One of those attributes is the fact that our existence will not cease with the death of this body in this world. We are told in **Ecclesiastes 12:7** that our souls will return to God once this body fails us in this life. With this being the case, we are compelled as spiritually-minded disciples to take great care in how we live this life.
- B. We recognize that our souls returning to God includes the fact that each of us will be called before God to give an account for how we lived in this life. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."* (**II Corinthians 5:10**) Jesus Himself describes this great scene as the sheep being divided apart from the goats. (**Matthew 25:31-46**) The righteous sheep will enter into great rest with God while the wicked goats will enter into eternal punishment apart from God.
- C. If we truly believe this to be the reality of our future, then we must be determined to live in such a way that we find ourselves surrounded by the mercy and grace of Jesus that comes by faith in Him and His incredible sacrifice on the cross. We must make it our aim and absolute goal to live with a mindset of preparing for that day when we will have to give an account. I can't think of a better text that ought to be adopted by everything one of us as our mission in life than that of **Philippians 3:13,14**, *"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus."* Those who live with a spiritually focused mind are bound and determined to consider eternity with whatever it is that we do in this life because we are convinced that there are eternal implications with how we live this life.

III. Not gratifying the sinful desires of the flesh.

- A. Yet, we are not the only ones who recognize the eternal implications of how we live in this life. The evil one is also well aware of these truths, and from the beginning (**John 8:44**) he has been a liar and a murderer. He desired for the downfall of mankind in the garden of Eden in **Genesis 3**, and he continues to desire our downfall in our own lives. He is well familiar with the weakness of

mankind, and he seeks to exploit them to the degree that we love ourselves more than God and seek to do those things that please us even if they bring great dishonor to God and cause us to be lost. **(I John 2:15-17)**

- B. In the text that was read at the beginning of this assembly, we find the desired behavior of mankind from the evil one's perspective compared with what God desires from us. Paul acknowledges the struggle that exists between the spirit and the flesh, and he plainly lays out the options that are before us. We can either give into the desires of the flesh and be set against God which will lead to us not inheriting the kingdom of God, or we can discipline ourselves to produce only fruit that shows the Spirit of God working within us and our having crucified the passions and desires of the flesh for the sake of Christ. **(Galatians 5:16-26)**
- C. Many people who do not live with this spiritual mindset might ridicule us for the discipline we practice in not giving into the sinful desires of our flesh, but we, as spiritually-minded disciples, recognize the incredible importance of living in this manner. This brings us to a text that does a great job of combining everything together that we have discussed up to this point. Paul writes in **Romans 8:5-10**, *"For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. Now the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace. The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness."* Spiritually-minded disciples have realized the great value of discipline and self-control that helps for them to withstand the temptations of the evil one for our desecration through sinful behavior. We, as those people, are resolved to live with our minds set on the things of God that will lead to our purity and righteousness.

IV. Not neglecting our bodies or this world.

- A. However, this does not mean that we simply write off this world and this body all together. This was an error made by some religious people in the first century who came to be known as gnostics. They believed and taught that the body was inherently evil and all that needed to be focused on was making sure that what people thought and believed was correct. There was not need to give much attention to the body or making sure it was used in the proper way, and this could not be any further from the truth. We have established very clearly that it does matter what we do with our bodies and we better make sure we are using them appropriately.
- B. While we might not say things exactly like the gnostics said them, I do wonder if we might have bought into some sort of pseudo-gnostic thinking by simply washing our hands of this body and this world. What I mean by this is that we draw a bold line dividing our spirituality from anything involving the body and the world. We might express it with the thought or statement, *"well this body is just going to die and this world is going to burn in the end, anyways..."* Friends, let me tell you that I believe this attitude that flies in the face of Scripture. We need to recognize that God created us with this body and put this world under our dominion and charge. Though Adam and Eve fell from that wonderful place of the Garden of Eden, I don't see where God told them that they were no longer to have dominion over this earth, care for it, and populate it with other image bearers of God. In fact, what I see as being their punishments for the sin of breaking His commandment to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that their experience in carrying out His commands for our earthly experience would simply get more difficult. The woman's birthing pains would be worse and the man's caring for the ground would also be more difficult. **(Genesis 3:15,16)** Therefore, we must assume that God still expects for us to give great care to how we use the bodies and this earth He has blessed us with.

- C. I believe this also means that God's expectations for how the Garden should have been run continues to be the pattern for the environment we create today on this earth. God's own characteristics of love, righteousness, and justice should be reflected in the way that each of us live our lives. We ought to love one another, seek to be righteous towards one another, and be a people who uphold that which is just. Paul really sums up these thoughts well in **Galatians 6:7-10**, *"Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith."*
- D. Spiritually-minded and focused disciples realize that part of our spirituality is making sure that we seek the things that are key attributes of God's character. When we show love towards others, that is a spiritual action. When we are righteous towards others, that is a spiritual action. When we seek to uphold justice, that is a spiritual action. Sure, I am fully aware that we will never have those things perfectly in this life because of the presence of sin, but may we never use that as an excuse to not give effort towards upholding love, righteousness, and justice as being pillars of a people who's collective minds are focused on God, eternity, holiness, and reflecting His images to all of those around us.

I'll be honest with you, it would be a whole lot easier to simply hunker down in our little holy huddles and not be active in displaying our spiritually focused minds to the world at large, but we have been called to be light in a dark world and salt to a world that is tasteless. May each and everyone of us be committed to making sure that these characteristics can be said as being true of ourselves. May we all focus our minds on the priority of spiritual things while also recognizing that our spirituality is undeniably intertwined with the way we use this body and treat one another. The reality is that we will all one day die, but another reality is that we will be raised again to stand before God. When we do so, will we be able to stand before him as righteous sons and daughters? Or will we stand before him as rebellious goats who are destined for destruction? May we keep these verses on our mind as we go throughout this week seeing to live spiritually in this physical world.

"So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons." (Romans 8:12-14)