

Romans: Flesh and Spirit

Romans 8:5-11

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 8. For the summer months we're going to be in this great chapter. It's a chapter that many of us have turned to in time of need, a chapter of great encouragement. We said that there's a theme that runs throughout this chapter, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. And one of the first ways we saw the Spirit working in an encouraging way in our lives was looking at verses 1 through 4 of Romans, chapter 8, and answering the question: well, we've learned from Romans 7:13 to the end of the chapter that believers still struggle with sin; that believers aren't sinlessly perfected, and they continue to have this principle that sin within them that the spirit wars against and constantly there are struggles and sometimes discouragements. So, how in the world then can a believer have assurance in that kind of a setting? How can a believer be joyful? How can a believer go on with a sense of victory and triumph and ultimately hope?

Well, the apostle answers right in the first four verses of this great chapter. And he says there's another principle at work in you, it's the principle of the Holy Spirit. It's not you versus sin; it's the Spirit versus sin in you. And so because of that the believer is able to be assured, and the believer is comforted and encouraged even in the midst of his struggle with sin.

Well, Paul has more encouragement in store for us in this great chapter, as he works through the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. And today in particular, he shows us a contrast between a person who is in the Spirit, in whom the Spirit dwells, and a person who is not in the Spirit, but rather in the flesh in whom the Spirit does not dwell. And he says, look at the difference of the character, look at the difference of the desires, the attitudes, the conduct between someone who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and someone who is not. Now in the course of sharing this, the apostle's goal is to encourage Christians. But surely as we think on that kind of a subject, all of us ought to take stock and ask ourselves whether God has done a work of grace in us, and whether we are, in fact, trusting in Jesus Christ. So with that in mind, let's look to God's word, and begin in Romans, chapter 8, verse 5:

"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, this is Your Word. By Your Spirit, teach us the truth that Your Word reveals to us about the Spirit, and especially about His work in us. This we ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Recently there have been a number of news programs devoted to some of the calamities that we see happening around us in the culture. One recent news program was looking at the increasing number of incidents of parents showing incredibly aggressive behavior at their children's sporting events. And these aggressive behaviors are not only becoming more frequent, but they are becoming more intense. In fact, you'll remember that around a year ago, there was a man at a hockey rink, who literally killed another man in the context of a child's hockey game. And during the course of one of these youth programs, the people were debating, and the question was asked, can psychologists and others who read the culture and who read people tell us who is going to act this way? Can we predict the persons who are going to use this kind of violent behavior, who are going to explode in this kind of anger? One of the things that everyone was frustrated about on this particular program was that no one could actually predict who is going to be this way. They can't distinguish. A person may act very normally, and they have no inappropriate socially aggressive behavior, and suddenly you put them in the context of a sporting event, and they turn into someone that you've never known before.

I had a professor in seminary that got so carried away, that he was actually asked to never come back to the basketball league games that his son played in. And when he was being ejected for the last time, someone said, "What does he do?" And, of course, there was a mumbling of, "Well, he's a professor at the seminary," not Reformed Theological Seminary, by the way. But they can't predict. Perfectly normal people completely lose themselves in these circumstances.

Well in this passage, Paul is saying, from God's perspective, notwithstanding those kinds of difficult predictions, there are fundamental differences between those who are in Christ, and those who are not. There are fundamental differences between those who are in the Spirit, and those who are in the flesh. There are fundamental differences between those who are godly, and those who are worldly. And he is concerned to set those out before us. But his primary reason for doing so is to show us what life is without the Spirit, to remind us that it is the Spirit who gives us life, and then to remind us just how great the power of the Holy Spirit is. And that's really the outline of our passage. In verses 5 through 8 we see the absence of the spirit, and it's result. In verse 9 we see the presence of the Spirit and its result. And in verses 10 and 11 we see the power of the Holy Spirit. And perhaps that will serve as an outline for those of you who are outlining. But don't get frustrated, I didn't get through point one last time. Well, let's look at this passage together in these three parts.

I. Believer and Unbeliever contrasted.

In verses 5 through 8, the apostle is giving you the marks of someone who is after the flesh. Now when we say *in the flesh* or *after the flesh*, or *controlled by the flesh*, and *the mind set on the flesh*, let's be clear what we are talking about. Paul is talking about the flesh as human nature corrupted, directed and controlled by sin. And so when he says after the flesh, or speaks of someone who mind is on the things of the flesh, or who walks after the flesh, he's talking about a basic moral condition, an inward frame of mind. And a practice that comes from that inward frame of mind which is not Spiritual with a capital S. It's not produced by the Holy Spirit. It's characterized by an absorption with the things of this world and our own agenda. Some of those things are good, but they're not sought after in the frame of glorifying God. Some of those things are evil. And this is what Paul is speaking of when he speaks about after the flesh or walking in the flesh.

And in this passage, he actually, from verses 5 to 8, describes for us a person who is walking after the flesh. And it may surprise you. He doesn't give you a list of horrific crimes that this person commits. He doesn't give a list of sins, which are so grave that they set themselves apart from the other kinds of sins that people commit. No, he actually talks more about the disposition of the heart towards God and His Word.

Look at what he does. In verse 5, he says That those who are after the flesh, he's speaking of pagans here. That pagans set their minds on the things of the flesh. They're thoughts, they're interests, they're desires, they're purposes are focused on this life. And they do not look at the things of this life from the standpoint of God's glory, or their neighbors good. They are self-centered, and they are pursuing their own agendas, and they have set their mind on the things of the flesh, things that will pass away.

Secondly, notice in verse 7 at the very beginning of that verse. He indicates that they are hostile to God. "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God." So the reason the mind set on the flesh is death is because it is hostile to God, to be against God, to reject His rule by doing what they want to do rather than what the Lord commands. This, by the way, doesn't indicate some sort of an outburst of anger against God. We have perhaps known friends, in the midst of tremendous trials in their lives, who have become angry toward God. The apostle is not talking about that here. He's not thinking so much of an emotional reaction against God. He's not even talking about something you could necessarily see outwardly. He's talking about a person who decides, "I am doing this my way, I don't care what God says. I know that God says for me to be faithful to my wife, but I don't want to. I know that God says for me to have these as my priorities, but I want these as my priorities." This is a person who is going to do his own way; he's hostile toward God.

And, Paul goes on to say thirdly, that his mind does not subject itself to the law of God. Look at the second part of verse 7. He says, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God." In other words, Paul is saying, a concrete manifestation of this hostility to God is that it refuses to submit to God's word. God's word says, "Do this." And the hostile mind says, "Well, I don't want to." God's word says, "Don't do this," and the hostile heart says, "Well, I do want to." The concrete manifestation of hostility to God is a resistance of His Word, a resistance of His rule. And how often do we see people who grind their teeth against the restrictions of God's word, or its positive commands? And the apostle says that's an example of a mind that is set on the flesh.

Fourthly, notice again at the end of verse 7. He says that the pagan mind is not even able to subject itself to the law of God. Paul is saying here that it is morally impossible for the pagan to subject himself to the law of God. Now you might be thinking, "Well, that doesn't seem fair. God holds him responsible for it. Why would he do that if it's morally impossible for him to do?" Paul is not saying, "Well, somehow there's this grand scheme whereby God forbids people from doing what they want to do." He's pointing to the heart again, and he's saying, "Look, if your heart is set on the things of the flesh, it is impossible for your heart to at the same time be set on the things of God, the things of the Spirit." If I may borrow Jesus' words, "You cannot serve both God and mammon." It's impossible to do. It's a moral impossibility to seek after the things of God while you are wholeheartedly seeking after the things of the flesh.

And so, he says fifthly in verse 8, that the pagan cannot please God. It is absolutely impossible to please God and love the flesh and love mammon at the same time. And so Paul gives these indications of a person who is in the flesh, a person who is apart from the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Now, he describes for us the Christian by contrast. He only gives one explicit contrast between the pagan and the Christian. You see that in verse 5. Whereas, the pagan's mind is set on the flesh, the Christian's mind is set on what? The things of the Spirit. But by implication and by inference in the rest of this section, he tells us what a Christian looks like. A Christian sets his mind on the things of the Spirit. His heart is controlled by the Spirit. His reason, his desires, his will reflect the Spirit's work. His purposes are spiritual. He's at peace with God because of justification. He is reconciled to God, and he has life, a true knowledge in fellowship with God, and he has a tranquility, a peace even in the midst of difficult circumstances because of that justification that God has granted to him.

In verse 7, the Christian, in contrast to the pagan, does subject his mind to the law of God. The mind of the believer is subject to the law of God. He has a reverence for, a love for, a subjection to the law of the Lord. It's the mark of the spirit. He wants to be a Bible Christian. He wants to obey what God commands in His Word.

Fourthly, the Christian is able to subject himself to the law of God. Whereas the unbeliever is not even capable of subjecting himself to the law of God, the believer is able. Because of the Spirit's change of our hearts, we love the law. And notice again the Christian in verse 8 is able to please God in contrast to the pagan, and he does. The Christian loves to fulfill the law, the Christian loves to fulfill his chief purpose in life, his chief end in life, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It's something that he delights in.

One of my favorite scenes from the movie, "Chariots of Fire" never happened. It's the scene where Eric and his sister, Jenny, are arguing on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh. Jenny, by the way, was totally supportive of his athletic career, but in order to make the movie have a little bit of tension, the screenwriter of the movie wrote in this argument between Jenny and Eric. And you remember, perhaps if you saw that movie, that she is objecting to the fact that he is continuing to train for the Olympics and continuing to run races when he ought to be preparing for the mission field, when he ought to be involved in Christian work. And you'll remember his response. His response is that he loves the Lord's work. And that he loves to be involved in it, and he's going to be involved in it, and he has not been sidetracked from it. But he goes on to say this, "But Jenny, God made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure." His running was entirely framed with the purpose of glorifying God. And as he glorified God, he experienced the pleasures of God.

And so the Christian is just that way. It is not that the Christian is simply thinking about spiritual things all the time and never thinking about the things of this life. It is that the Christian is indeed glorying in these spiritual things, the truth of the word. But even when the Christian is thinking about this life, he's thinking about this life Christianly. He's thinking about the resources, the job. He may be a

woodcarver. He may be a truck driver. He may be a doctor. He may be a lawyer. He may be a banker. He may be a paralegal. He may be someone in a fairly menial position. He may be a CEO. It doesn't matter. In everything that he does, he looks at it Christianly. He has a frame of reference, which is entirely different from the flesh. And the apostle is saying here that God's work of saving grace always produces a heart change in believers that manifests itself in their lives so that their attitudes, their goals, their purposes are different from those who are unbelievers.

II. So what makes the difference? The presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now friends, that presses some very serious questions on us, because in a congregation of this size, surely there's someone who is walking after the flesh. And Paul has given you a checklist to ask yourself, "Are you walking after the flesh?" Now if you answered the question Yes, I am." You are still only part of the way down the road, because you need to know, okay, what next? So, maybe I am. What do I do? Well, the apostle Paul is waiting for you. He's talked about what happens when the spirit is not present. Now he talks about the presence of the Holy Spirit in verse 9. What makes the difference between a person who is walking after the flesh and walking after the Spirit? And the answer is simply this: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It's not that one person is inherently better than another person; it's not that one person is inherently a more faithful person than another; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Why is it that some people walk after the flesh? They are not indwelt by the Spirit. Why is it that some people walk after the Spirit? Because they are indwelt by the spirit, the apostle says in verse 9.

Paul expresses his confidence in the state of these Roman Christians in verse 9. But he also gives them a warning. Look at what he says. "You are not in the flesh but in the flesh." He says, I'm not accusing you of not being believers. You're not in the flesh; you're in the Spirit. But he does want to stress to them in the second half of the verse that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Paul immediately sets these Christians at ease by reminding them of his estimation of them. They are believers indeed.

But what makes them that way? Well, Paul tells them in the second half of the verse. The life-giving force in the believer is the Holy Spirit. He's the difference between their being in the flesh or not. You know, sometimes we will say, when we're apologizing to someone for something that we have done, we'll say something like this, "Oh, I was in the flesh." Now usually we know what we mean. Usually we assume that a person who says that to us is saying that they were acting out of character, they weren't acting in a Christian way. But that is not how Paul uses these terms. "In the flesh" is a description of a permanent moral condition, which always attends the one that is apart from Christ. And "in the Spirit" is a permanent moral condition, which attends the life-giving work of the

Holy Spirit. And Paul is saying the difference between a person who is like that and a person who is in the Spirit is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how this verse reminds us of the inseparableness of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It shows us that a Christian by definition is in Christ. You know, so many people will teach that first you receive Christ, and then at some later time you receive the Holy Spirit. Well, the apostle Paul would have said, "What?" For Paul, to be in Christ is to be in the Spirit, and to be in the Spirit is to be in Christ. And if you are not in Christ, you are not in the Spirit. And if you are not in the Spirit, you are not in Christ. You see the inseparableness of Christ in the Spirit.

In fact, if we were to pause today, verses 9 through 11 would actually supply us tremendous material for a study of the doctrine of the Trinity, because in this passage we see the deity of Christ set forth. We see the procession of the Spirit, not only from the Father, but also from the Son, what the Western Church called the *filioque*. We see the mutual inherence of the three persons of the Trinity and the essence of the one true God, what the theologians call *circumincessio* or *perichoresis*. And I know you're thinking to yourself, "Thank heavens, he's not going to talk about that, "but it really would be glorious if we could. But in the context, you see Paul is lavishing your plate with truth. You don't have enough time to think about it, but his point in telling you this is precisely this: The believer turns and looks at his own life, and he says, "Well Paul, I've seen all too many marks of the flesh in me." And the apostle Paul says, "The difference in you is the Holy Spirit. That's the difference in you." So it's not that you are trying to keep the law a little bit more than someone else. The Holy Spirit in you is the dynamic, is the life-giving force. It's the Holy Spirit who is the power that enables your Christian living.

III. The indwelling of the Spirit assures the believer of the resurrection of his mortal body.

And then he gives you a promise at the end. He knows that believers are all too aware of their own shortcomings, of their own failings, of their own sins about not measuring up to what we ought to be in Jesus Christ. And so he says, I want you to think about this for a minute. He offers an amazing word of encouragement for the believer. He says this. The indwelling of the Spirit assures your resurrection. Verse 10 is a difficult verse, but the thrust of verse 10 and 11 is very clear. Paul is basically asking you to ask two questions as you hear what he says in verses 10 and 11.

First, he's asking you to ask the question who raised Christ from the dead? And he gives you this answer. God, the Father, raised Christ from the dead by the Spirit. And he does that by calling the Spirit a special name. He calls him the Spirit of the Father. He's the Spirit of God. He's the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then he wants you to ask a second question. Who is it that is dwelling in me? And his answer is the same. The Spirit of the Father is dwelling in you. And then Paul wants you to contemplate for a minute. If God the Father by the power of the Spirit raised Jesus Christ from the dead, what is it that is at work in me? Who is it that is at work in me? It is the Spirit of the Father who is at work in me. And if He raised Christ Jesus from the dead, then I am assured that I, too, will be raised from the dead. And not only raised from the dead, but He will continue to perfect in me that which God had first begun. And so the apostle Paul is pointing again to the fact that the law in and of itself cannot supply the power to save, it cannot supply the power to sanctify. It continues to be the standard of sanctification, the believer loves it as he embraces Christ in grace, but it is the Spirit that enables us to live the Christian life.

Now let me come back to those of you who may be saying, "I'm sure whether I've seen the marks of the Spirit in me. I see the marks of the flesh. What do I do?" Well, there's nothing you can do. There's absolutely nothing — you can bring nothing to the table. Clairveaux himself said, "It's not my sins alone that keep me from God, it's my righteousness." There's no righteousness that you can bring to reconcile yourself to God to condition His grace. No, you must cast yourself on the mercy of the Lord. And you must trust in the one whose righteousness made for the provision of the Holy Spirit, and as you trust in Him, and you say, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Your cross I cling." Then you will find that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will not only ground you and transform your life, but He will grant to you the security that belongs to only those who have abandoned their own attempts to come into relationship with God and have begged for the mercy of God and have found it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we ask that by Your grace, the Spirit would descend upon our hearts, wean us from the love of this world and woo us to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in His name, Amen.

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