

London Justice House of Prayer - Donna Taylor

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Romans 8:5-11

I. The Spirit Gives Life

In the first four verses, Paul is clearly emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, because the guilty verdict of condemnation has been fulfilled through Jesus' work of the Cross. But, he ends verse 4 by saying, "as we live not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit."

When we walk according to the Spirit, righteousness is the fruit of our lifestyle. Therefore, righteousness is of the spirit and sin is of the flesh. This designation will help us be aware when we are getting off balance. Paul continues on in explaining how we are able to do this in the following verses 5-11.

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 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 dwells in you. Romans 8:5-11 (ESV)

Let's look at this. Now Paul begins to explain how we live according to either the flesh or the Spirit, which depends on our mindset, what we set our mind on. When we set our mind on the flesh, we enthrone the flesh as lord of our life. Take note, it is the person who determines whether the flesh or the Spirit will be in control. This is a truth most people miss. We find Paul's instructions in other passages, such as Galatians 5:16-17.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:16-17 (ESV)

The flesh is hostile toward God because of the carnal, inbred tendencies of fallen humankind. This is the most immediate enemy of the believer who desires to live a life under the control, influence, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Paul says the desire alone to do good is not enough to overcome our flesh, Romans 7:21. Rather, we are called to war against the flesh; to live our lives in a tug-of-war as our flesh urges us to indulge in sin and the Holy Spirit constrains us to righteousness.

Learning to “walk in the Spirit” will bring victory in this war as we abide in right relationship with Jesus and continually submitting to the urging and unction of the Holy Spirit. It is a gradual movement from memory rules and disciplines to an obedience rooted in the heart’s judgments and convictions.

Some think that sin comes upon them from outside of self, but the reality is that sin comes from within, from the meditation of the mind. For example, James 1:14-15 reveals that people are drawn away by their own lust, which is produced from the soulish realm (mind, will and emotions).

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. James 1:14-15 (NKJ)

In other words, sin is formed in the emotions, which are produced by what the mind is focused on. Once sin is fully formed in the emotions, it will result in corresponding actions. As stated before, we will not do anything with our body that we have not done first with our mind. The body simply follows the direction of the mind.

The same can be said of the Spirit. The one whose mind is set on the Spirit will live according to the Spirit. The most effective way to do this is to focus our mind on the Word of God. We have to be intentional to do this and set a time in our daily life to spend time in the Word, reading and studying. Being word minded means that we will be Spirit governed.

Paul expects that Christians ordinarily will live according to the Spirit. This involves holiness, not only in actions and words, but all in the thoughts that fill our minds each moment throughout the day.

To get to the promised resurrection we see in verses 9-11, and to the ultimate verdict of ‘no condemnation,’ we cannot go the way of the flesh, the corruptible and sinful human self. But once we determine to walk ‘in the spirit’ and not ‘in the flesh,’ all things are possible.

II. Living In The Flesh vs. Living in the Spirit

Another vital parallel passage is Galatians 5:16-26, one which we are all familiar with, where Paul places in contrast ‘the works of the flesh’ and ‘the fruit of the spirit.’

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:16-26 (ESV)

He is talking about the *basic orientation* of someone's life. In particular, he's talking about the *basic mindset*, the *focus* of the mind and its *habitual patterns*. He clearly doesn't teach that Christians are now sinless, or that they never suffer from wandering thoughts or sinful actions. Had they been sinless, he wouldn't have had to give such repeated moral exhortations.

Paul is obviously very concerned, in this letter and in his other writings, about outward bodily behavior. Here he is thinking particularly of the mind, the thoughts. Verse 5, those in the flesh as people whose lives are determined by human flesh, think about, focus their minds on, matters to do with the flesh. They focus attention, in other words, on the things he lists in Galatians 5 as 'works of the flesh,' things such as sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, sorcery, strife, jealousy, and so on.

It takes a constant effort to drag our mind away from such things and to focus instead on the things of the spirit, such as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness and so on, and how to bring them about. Paul points out here, as he does constantly in Philippians, is that Christian living doesn't just happen. It takes what we call a *mental effort*, a concentrated exercise of the mind to focus on God's way of being human. In verse 6, Paul refers back to this whole way of learning how to think and what to think about using the term, 'mindset.'

6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:6 (ESV)

He doesn't mean that as long as your mind is focused on the right place, you can do what you like with your body! On the contrary, as in Romans 12:1, the way you present your

whole selves, your *bodies*, is by being, as he says, ‘transformed by the renewing of your minds.’ The way we learn this is by regular and disciplined practice, what we think will show up in our outward behavior.

Here we find again in Deuteronomy 30 and in Joshua 6, two choices. We are instructed by the Lord to choose life, not death! Here, Paul urges us to choose the ‘mindset of the spirit,’ rather than the ‘mindset of the flesh.’ It requires the effort of choice, a choice to be made over and over. A mindset is a deeply engrained habit. Christian living includes restraining the habits of heart and mind. It requires the thousands regular and difficult choices of focusing on kindness, gentleness, love, peace, etc., rather than envy, malice, strife, immorality.

We have to go on making those choices until they become, as we say, ‘second nature,’ the well-formed, spirit-led way of life. Even then, there will always be fresh challenges. We can never get in a place of letting our guard down in thinking because we have overcome a huge mountain in our life, that there won’t be another coming. This is especially something every Christian leader needs to hear and be reminded of all the time.

Paul says here in this verse, it is not just life, but it is life and peace. Malachi 2:5 was God’s covenant with Levi for ‘life and peace.’

5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. Malachi 2:5 (ESV)

To walk in the fear of the Lord doesn’t mean being ‘afraid’ of God, but having a reverential fear of Him, knowing that as we follow Him in obedience to His ways, the result is experiencing his life and peace. We find further explanation in many of Paul’s writings in how we can maintain a life of peace. We are continually reminded to renew our minds with the washing of the water of the Word.

7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:7-8 (ESV)

Here we find again the contrast of flesh and spirit leading us back to the question of Torah. The mindset of the flesh, he says, is ‘hostile to God.’ God is the God of life. The flesh, heading for death, is like a slap in the face for God the good creator of life.

That is why the whole sacrificial system in Leviticus and elsewhere in designed to keep the holy place clean of any reminder of death, so that God may dwell there. Again, Paul is making the point that the Torah could only give death, but God gives the life the Torah only promised, through Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit. This is the last mention of the Torah in the long argument Paul has made. The focus will now be on the Messiah and his spirit in the giving of life that Torah could not.

Verse 7 shows that having your mind set on the flesh creates enmity or hostility in your relationship with God. That means there is hostility from you toward God, not Him toward you. If you are experiencing hostility in your relationship with God it is a result of what your mind is set on. It is not because God is pushing you away or denying you access to Him. It is because you are creating a stronghold in your soul (mind, will, and emotions) that is operating as a barrier to the Spirit. The fruit of this is that we live in opposition to God.

Most Bible scholars agree that Paul is referring to unbelievers in verse 8, when he uses the term ‘in the flesh,’ describing those who cannot please God. Because unbelievers, those who are in the flesh, are in bondage to sin and unable to do what God commands, they fail to please God. To say ‘those who are in the flesh,’ characterizes people’s very nature and is a stronger description than the activity of walking according to the flesh. This situation is not true of believers, as we will see in verses 9-11.

III. Resurrection Life Now and in the Future

For Paul, resurrection is vital; and the moral choices implied in verses 5 to 8 are themselves *part of the promise of resurrection itself*. They are about the new way of life that is God’s advance gift from the ultimate future. It is primarily a matter of inaugurated eschatology. The Spirit comes to us from God’s future, enabling us to live as already-renewed humans even in the midst of a world of sin and death. The following is what is meant by ‘inaugurated eschatology,’ which we have studied in the Kingdom of God teaching:

- 1) The kingdom of God began with Jesus’ first coming.
- 2) The kingdom of God is both “already” and “not yet.”
- 3) The kingdom of God’s promises are available to the church now.
- 4) The kingdom of God will be fully consummated when Jesus returns.

Again, we need to retrain our thinking as we try to understand the mindset of first-century Jews rather than the mindset of our western way of thinking. We need to think as second-Temple Jews understanding of the crucified and risen Messiah, which is the Temple-theology of verses 9-11. We know in Paul’s other writings, we are now the temple of the Holy Spirit as born again believers.

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 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 dwells in you. Romans 8:9-11 (ESV)

In verse 9 you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if the spirit of God *dwells* or lives in you. In verse 11, speaking of the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwelling in you, he goes on to say bodily resurrection results from the spirit dwelling in you. Paul is again drawing from how God rescued his people from Egypt so that they could leave the land full of idols and worship Him in the desert.

The idea was that, after coming through the Red Sea and being given the Torah, God could establish his Tabernacle in their midst and then come to *dwell* there in person. He was living alongside his people, leading them to their inheritance. He is making this comparison to the life as a born again believer. As we saw in Romans 6-8, Paul is referring to Exodus - Torah - Tabernacle - Inheritance. This is God's plan all along.

Paul's answer is in how they keep the Torah now is the spirit coming to actually *dwell* within humans themselves, not just in a tent outside the gate of the camp. This is the new Tabernacle. And, we find the spirit *leads* God's redeemed people to their *inheritance*, which is not 'heaven,' but the entire renewed creation. More on this as we continue our study. Paul adds a warning here in verse 9a, if someone doesn't have the Messiah's spirit, they do not belong to him. Paul is again speaking of the new Spiritual birth in Christ. Of course, the spirit is not confined to only dwelling in the lives of believers, but he is living and active all around us, so that when the spirit dwells within us we are in tune with the new-creational purposes of God.

In verse 10, the phrase, "the body is dead because of sin," is referring to the effects of sin in our bodies and soul (mind, will, and emotions). When we were born again our spirit became a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). However, our body and soul did not become a new creation, so they are still dealing with the effects of sin.

The good news for the believer is that we can live by the effects of the Spirit over the flesh to the degree we submit to his Lordship through the renewal of the mind. The spirit is life because of righteousness, and here can also be translated, 'covenant justice.' Paul stated in Romans 1:17, 'the righteous shall live by faith.' When we read through the whole book of Romans, it becomes clear the 'justification by faith' depends on the workings of the Holy Spirit within us.

Here in verse 11, Paul makes a distinction between 'Jesus' at the beginning of the verse and 'Messiah,' *Christos*, in the second half. The name 'Jesus' refers specifically to the human Jesus, the man from Nazareth; the word *Christos* refers to the same person, but *seen as the representative of God's people*, the anointed one. At the end of Romans 4, he speaks of Christian faith as 'faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.' Now, he says, if the spirit of the God who raised Jesus from the dead indwells you, then the one who raised the *representative Messiah*, the *Christos*, from the dead will give life to the mortal bodies of the Messiah's people, too, *through* that spirit, his own spirit, who dwells in you.

IV. Conclusion

These first 11 verses are simply the first part of the larger argument of the whole chapter 8. We should stand amazed in the revelation that the living God comes not to just dwell among us, but within us. The ancient promises of YHWH'S return to Zion are coming true not 'in heaven,' but here in the new creation. And the new creation, which will involve the renewal of the entire creation, and the personal bodily resurrection, which we are promised, includes the resurrection in the present moral life.

Everything that Paul has been saying up to this point has been about present-day experience. Therefore, if the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead is in us now, that means we have access to that resurrection power now. Even so, our bodies and souls (mind, will, emotions) are still susceptible to the effects of sin, which is death in all its forms. We can still live in victory over sin through the power of the Spirit. This is the point Paul is making in context.

This paves the way for verses 12-16, which again uses exodus-language, and brings into focus the challenge of learning to think and live in the spirit rather than in the flesh.