

Spirit vs. Flesh

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Romans 8:1-11

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1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit

gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Last week, I discussed the dangers of living life simply by what brings you pleasure. If you remember, I mentioned the dangers to your health that would transpire by only eating sweets for every meal. We also talked about the carnal nature and how it can be easy to just do what we want to do instead of what we know we need to do. It is a struggle to pursue righteousness without an anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now we are going to dive back into Romans 8 again discussing the difference between serving the flesh and serving the Spirit.

Let's start by diving into verse 1. ***1 Therefore, there is now condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*** What does this mean? Is this saying that there will be no punishment or judgment brought upon anyone who claims the name of Christian? Is this essentially a "get out of jail free card?" Some may read this and get that impression. I can see where they would come up with that argument. However, that is not what is transpiring here. Instead, this isn't so much about freedom to commit sin, but rather it is about the freedom from the power of sin. Now pastor, I need you to explain that a little bit better. When we sin and get convicted, do we often feel shame and guilt? Sure we do. When we cry out to Jesus and we repent and are completely forgiven, does that sin now control us any

longer? Are we being held down by Jesus after acknowledging our sin and giving it to Him? No. In fact, Jesus simply tossing our sin from the east to the west in order for it to stop being a distraction to us and our mission of making disciples. There is someone named F. F. Bruce, that my commentary mentions, who is quoted as saying this: “There is no reason for those who are in Christ Jesus to serve sin as if they had never been pardoned and never been liberated from the prison-house of sin.”¹ I believe that Bruce has a point. We have been saved; we can be redeemed from whatever sin we have simply because of nothing more than the sacrifice of Jesus making it possible.

Verse 2: 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

When sin was brought into the world, it brought death and destruction with it. We have seen this transpire as we travel down the line of Adam until we reach modern day. Wars, disease, murder, rape, incest, lust, and so much more taking place because sin has had a major control of most of the world. Just look at how much our world is torn apart by so many denominations. Finding ways to agree is so hard anymore. People who are ruled by the flesh can never be satisfied. They want everyone else to sacrifice to make them feel better.

Whereas, as a follower of Jesus, we understand that we sacrifice what makes us “feel good” because we know that God will have good for us. God has better things planned for us if we can just

¹ The Complete Biblical Library; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 6:159£

put ourselves and our comfort out of the way so He can accomplish it.

We celebrate the fact that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. It's the very foundation of our faith. However, because we have that faith and follow the ways of Jesus, we have also gone through these stages. We make the choice to follow Jesus and allow who we were before Him to pass away. We are then going through this period of transition where we are in the process of changing. We are essentially buried because our old self has died, but our new self has not been completely formed just yet. Yes, we are immediately given new life when we accept Jesus, but what that new life consists of is not yet discovered. It is a process where we go from milk to solid food as we grow in our faith and maturity.

Verse 3. ***3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,*** How exactly can the law be weak when it came from God Himself? That doesn't seem to make much sense when read within just this verse, does it? God is all powerful and yet made something that was weak? I don't think so. So, that must mean that we have to dive a little deeper to understand what this is actually saying. Who were the ones who needed the law? That was the Israelites, essentially us, in order to know how to continue to follow God. This was our contract that we signed the bottom line on by saying we wanted to be

part of God's nation. However, just because we attempted to follow the law, did that stop people from sinning? No. "The Law was 'weak through the flesh' in that it could do nothing with flesh except stir it up (7:7-14). It could condemn the sinner (3:19), but it could not stop his sinning. Christ Jesus could and did solve both problems."² The law did not refute the power that sin held over us. We were still weak creatures who gave in to fleshly desires. However, when Jesus came, the power that sin held over us could be destroyed simply because He took sin upon Himself. "Christ's mission was 'for sin.' He came and condemned sin through the Atonement. Jesus became the perfect sin offering when He took our nature, lived a sinless life that condemned sin in our lives, and then, nailed to the cross, took God's condemnation of sin. By this act, conceived in the counsels of eternity, sin's doom was pronounced, and God rejected its claim upon us."³ Instead of attacking us and making us have to work to be forgiven with constant sacrifices, which was what it was like during the time of the law, now Jesus came and was now the only necessary sacrifice. Thus, God is fighting against sin's power instead of us fighting it like we are on our own. Guilt and shame no longer control us because we have given control to someone greater.

Verse 4: ***4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*** It is almost as though when we

² The Complete Biblical Library

³ The Complete Biblical Library

listen to the Spirit instead of the flesh, better things happen for us. Who knew? As holy and good as the law was, it was handicapped for us. It could never be fulfilled by us, and it could never truly lead us to salvation. They were just words written down, but they could not be revealed to us without a model. This is how Jesus comes to fulfill this very thing. “The Law could not become flesh and live within us. Jesus became flesh, fulfilled the Law, and now lives in us. As we walk after the Spirit, we are ‘dead indeed unto sin’ (6:11) and to self (8:8-10), and alive to God through Christ Jesus (6:11).”⁴ Jesus came to fulfill the law and to be an example of how the law could be lived as more than just words written down. This aligns with what we read in John about how the Word became flesh. The words that were just written down and read on some occasions, now was a living person standing in front of the disciples. That person left them in a physical sense and sent the Holy Spirit after ascending back to the Father. We now have that same Spirit living within us to guide us. We listen to that instead of the flesh because the outcome and the reward will be much greater.

Verse 5. ***5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live according with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*** Those who live by the flesh can make life look really good. We know that people exist who find pleasure in

⁴ The Complete Biblical Library

things like a “one night stand.” We see people who find pleasure in money because that is like their security blanket. We know that people exist who find peace by having all of the latest technology and gadgets. There are people who go out of their way to be recognized because constant pandering helps them drown out the feeling of loneliness the experience when they go home and only have their own voice to hear. Even after becoming a believer does not mean that we don’t have any of these desires. The difference is whether we give them power over us or not. A believer will hopefully call out to Jesus when these temptations come up, but one who is ruled by the flesh sees nowhere to turn or that there is anything wrong with seeking these pleasures as much as they do. “The believer does not have to walk after the flesh, but he can still allow the flesh to dominate his life.”⁵ As believers, we have the choice of whether or not to give in to temptation or to give the temptation to Jesus. We will not always be successful. We may find ourselves giving into the temptation about 40% of the time, but we can still turn back to Jesus. This doesn’t mean sin because grace abounds, but rather we can know we will do things wrong once in a while, but we know who has the power to help us eventually overcome whatever the struggle is.

6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. We know that sin results in death. We know that temptations are difficult to

⁵ The Complete Biblical Library

overcome sometimes. However, we also know that once we get just a little taste of whatever is pleasing, it becomes harder to give it up. This is why addicts have so many issues giving up things because their bodies have reached a point where it feels it needs whatever the addiction is in order to survive. People who try to give it up go through very bad withdrawals. The stronger the flesh becomes in getting what it desires, the more pleasurable the desire becomes. This makes it impossible to hear the voice of God when we need His help. We may cover it up with whatever it is that feels good at the time. Some people will even reach the point where waiting or listening for God is like being completely numb, whereas giving into the sin just allows them to feel “something.” However, if our spiritual desires are stronger, then God is easier to hear. The easier God is to hear, the stronger our faith can become. “A renewed spirit will result in a renewed mind as we walk after the Spirit.”⁶

Let’s wrap this up by discussing the last set of verses. ***7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.***

⁶ The Complete Biblical Library

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. It seems to me that it all comes down to choice. We can choose to seek a life of pleasure and that will feel good for a while but ultimately will lead to an eternity of destruction and torture as Jesus tells us to leave Him because He never knew us. Some in this world even think that this is worth pursuing. They joke about how hell is simply going to be a party. They imagine sitting at a card table playing poker with Satan and being able to win the game. This is not the case. Rather, they will simply desire that they had followed Christ instead, and not only that, but as the story of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us, they will desire that they could come back and warn those who have come after them. They will desire to free the ones who gave into their pleasure here from this torture, but it will not happen. Those people have made their choice, and nothing will convince them that they can have anything better. We, however, have the choice to sacrifice pleasure and comfort to follow Christ. It will not always be easy. It will not always be fun. However, it will be much more peaceful when we enter that throne room and have bodies that no longer break down. We will shed no more tears. We will have eternal joy and peace and that is worth living a little bit of pain now. We will always be at war with people who are so convinced that God is not real, but the reality is that we aren't at war with them, but rather the sinful flesh that Satan has taken hold of. He is the enemy. Following Him will

make it impossible to follow God. As I said, it comes down to choice. What choice will you make?