
“Life in the Spirit pt. 2”

ROMANS 8:4-11

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AT A GLANCE

In Christ, we receive a new identity. That doesn't stop the enemy from throwing our old identity back in our face, though. It's in those moments we need to remind ourselves of who we are and where we stand. We read of this identity change and positional change in Romans 8:4-11.

INTRODUCTION

Several weeks ago, I shared that my Army friend's daughter was entering West Point in the class of 2027. This week she and her classmates will complete Cadet Basic Training, known as “Beast Barracks,” with a 14-mile ruck march from Lake Frederick to West Point. The “March Back,” as it's called, is significant in that it serves as a sort of transition point for each new class. The following day the entire Corps of Cadets will march together to the Official West Point March and the class of 2027 will officially be accepted into the Corps.

My friend's daughter will have something of a new identity at that point. She will no longer be a new cadet, but a cadet. The upperclassmen will likely use this as an opportunity to harass her and her classmates. For six weeks they have been addressed exclusively as “New Cadet.” That is their identity while in Beast Barracks. They've been trained to stop walking or to give their attention to any upperclassman who calls out, “New Cadet.” But doing so after the march back is cause for correction. It's not who they are any longer. It might be a game of semantics, and let's face it, upperclassmen are still college students who like to have a good time, but it's part of the tradition and it's purpose is to help these young people understand who they are as a member of the Corps of Cadets.

Something similar happens in the life of a believer. In Christ, we receive a new identity. That doesn't stop the enemy from throwing our old identity back in our face, though. It's in those moments we need to remind ourselves of who we are and where we stand. Like the new cadet has to remind herself something has changed, believers have to remember what Christ has done for them and how that has changed everything in their lives. We read of this identity change and positional change in Romans 8:4-11.

ROMANS 8:4-11

⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For 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. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹You, 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. ¹⁰But 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.

WHY CAN'T THOSE IN THE FLESH FULFILL THE LAW?

Verse 4 says **in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

Why is the righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit? He begins by explaining why it is not fulfilled in those who walk according to the flesh. Or why it cannot be fulfilled by walking in the flesh.

For or because, **verse 5, 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.**

Four times in two verses Paul uses the phrase “set their minds on.” Four words in English, one word in Greek, *phroneo*. It does have to do with the thought life, but it’s much broader and deeper than that. According to the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament this words mean “to employ one’s faculty for thoughtful planning, with emphasis upon the underlying disposition or attitude...” It’s more than just your thoughts. It’s your attitude. Your reasoning. Your worldview. Your affections. Your desires. Your passions. Your intentions. Your motives. Your emotions. It’s everything that makes you, you. When you live according to the flesh, the flesh is what makes you, you. It’s what controls you.

Let’s be clear, to live according to the flesh is not to occasionally think carnal thoughts. It’s not to struggle with lustful, greedy, selfish, proud thoughts from time to time. It’s to be consumed by them. These form the essence of the person living in the flesh.

In the same way, to live according to the Spirit is not to occasionally think spiritual thoughts. To live by the spirit is not to occasionally be generous, occasionally be pious. It’s not to polish up your Christianese while you’re at church. It’s not to quote your favorite verse from time to time. To live by the Spirit is to be consumed by the Spirit, controlled by Him.

HOSTILITY, NOT NEUTRALITY

Paul continues his explanation of why the righteous requirement of the Law is not fulfilled by those in the flesh in **verse 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.** The mind set on the flesh is not only unable to achieve salvation but is in fact, **hostile to God!**

It’s important for us to grasp the full weight of the word Paul chose here. **Hostile** is not a passive or neutral word; it describes active resistance. Paul is describing something here that we need to be clear about: those in the flesh are at war with God.

You might look around and see people who seem to be pleasant, thoughtful, kind, generous, peaceful, and loving. But the bible is clear that those in the flesh are at war with God, even if they claim neutrality, and frankly even if they claim allegiance to Him.

Why? Paul continues, **for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.** Humans are image bearers of God. Humanity is the crowing jewel of creation upon which God has placed His glory. He has uniquely designed you and I to multiply all over the earth so that as the water covers the globe so, too, the glory of God through multiplied little image bearers would cover the earth. So when image bearers deny their Creator whose image they bear, and refuse to submit to Him, this is not neutrality, it’s mutiny! When the creation refuses to submit to the Creator, it’s war.

The person who lives in the flesh sets his mind, all of his faculties, on things of the flesh because he wants to do what he wants to do. He is at war with God because he is repulsed at the concept that someone other than himself would have authority to dictate how he lives, how he speaks, how he thinks, what he prioritizes, what he values, everything.

THEY CANNOT PLEASE GOD

For obvious reasons, **verse 8** continues, **Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** Those who are mastered by the flesh are not able to please God. It's impossible. That's a provocative statement. What about people who make an effort? The Old Testament makes it clear that God is not pleased with sacrifices; He desires obedience.

“And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.’” 1 Samuel 15:22

I think Paul's simple assessment in Romans 14 sums it up, *“For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Romans 14:23* Faith is the key. We are justified by faith. We are made right with God by faith.

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Hebrews 11:6 And faith is exactly what those in the flesh do not have. Therefore, those in the flesh cannot please God. Thankfully that's not where we're going to end today.

YOU, HOWEVER

In **verse 9** Paul changes his address from impersonal pronouns, **those**, to personal pronouns, **you**. At first, he was describing a general principle, now he is speaking personally to his audience.

To his Christian audience, Paul says **You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

Not only are we no longer known as sinners, but as saints. Not only are we no longer slaves of sin but slaves of righteousness. Not only are we no longer enemies of God, but children of God. But watch this, we are no longer **in the flesh**, but **in the Spirit**. We have a new identity *and* a new position. Our identity in Christ changes our position and changes what masters us.

You, however...can you think of a more liberating pairing of words? You, tired of your sin, but not giving up on the fight, used to be slave to sin, but now you're a slave of righteousness, used to be sold under sin, but now you're set free in Christ Jesus, you. **However**, unlike those who are controlled by the flesh. God has done in you something you could never do yourself. **You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.** Do YOU know who you are and where you stand?!

ON ONE CONDITION

Now, this is conditional. Paul said **if in fact** which calls for self-examination. Because after this, he said that if this condition isn't true, you don't belong to Christ. Remember the context of Romans 8 is condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” What about for those who do not belong to Him? Sobering. Hebrews 10 speaks about those who hear the truth and reject it, who “profane the blood of the Son of God” and who “outrage the Spirit of Grace.” The author asks, if those who break the Law of Moses are put to death by two or three witnesses, what do you expect is going to happen to you? What do you think is going to happen when the profaned Son of God and the outraged Spirit of grace testify against you? What is left for you except condemnation?

While the thrust Romans 8 is positive and while Paul believed they really were in the Spirit, nevertheless, we are right to examine ourselves. We all know there are people in the world who do

not belong to Christ and Paul leaves the possibility that even some who hear this letter fit that condition.

You know that you are **in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you**. That is, if you have been born again by the Spirit and indwelt by the Spirit, then you know that you are in the Spirit and you belong to Christ.

Rather than asking yourself, “Am I a good person or am I a bad person?” Ask yourself, is there evidence that the **Spirit of God dwells in me**? If you have the **Spirit of God dwelling in you**, you know you belong to Christ.

So how do you know if you have the Holy Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is “...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*” *Galatians 5:22-23* Granted, the Holy Spirit also gifts us in certain ways, but those can be faked. Internal character that bears itself out through trials and testing, however, is much more difficult to fake. It’s better to not look so much at the things you do, but to what is being done in you, to discern whether the Holy Spirit dwells within. Do you see the fruit of the Spirit growing in you? If you do, there’s no doubt that fruit is expressing itself in external ways, too.

If so, praise the Lord because there is a whole litany of benefits that the Holy Spirit brings to your life which Paul unpacks for us in the rest of the chapter. Chief among them comes from Ephesians 1, though. He is the seal of your salvation and the guarantee of your heavenly inheritance. *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* *Ephesians 1:13-14*

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit reminds us of our new identity. *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”* *Romans 8:16* and calls us to come before our heavenly Father as His beloved children. *“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”* *Galatians 4:6*

SPIRIT OF CHRIST

Notice that Paul changes the title from Spirit of God to **Spirit of Christ**. In fact, when we look at verse 10 next week we’ll see Paul equates the presence of the Holy Spirit with the presence of Christ Himself. This is not to say they are not distinct, but rather that they are perfectly unified and that salvation benefits flow from God the Father, His Son, and His Spirit.

Paul implies here that through the Holy Spirit we begin to experience something of Jesus’ character. We come to think like Him more and more, love like Him more and more, resist temptation like Him more and more, prioritize like Him more and more. In a word we begin to grow in the “ethos” of Jesus as our life gradually comes to imitate His. He who perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law for us, dwells in us, and He reshapes our character to His, and causes us to love God with a true heart and to love others as ourselves. Isn’t He good to work in us that which is pleasing in His sight? What a merciful God we serve!

Now, suppose you realize that despite all your best efforts, you really do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. What should you do? You should confess your sin to God and plead with Him to forgive your sins and you should believe the Gospel, you should believe that Jesus Christ is your only righteousness and your only hope; that His death, burial, and resurrection is how God forgives your sins. You should confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved. You cannot manufacture this in your own life, you must be born again of the Holy Spirit.

As we prepare for communion, I'd like to return to verse 8 for a moment. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul told us to examine our hearts whenever we come to the Lord's table. We want to make sure we're not knowingly profaning the elements. So I want to return to verse 8, Paul says **Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** Christian, you are not **in the flesh.** Your identity and your position have been changed. But you can certainly be living a fleshly life. You can be tolerating sin. You can be hiding your sin from others, and possibly over time even from yourself. It is for this reason that we ought to sincerely invite the Lord to search our hearts and see if there is any grievous way in us. I'm also reminded of the communal nature of the Lord's Supper. That's why it's called communion. We commune not only with the Lord, but with one another as we remember our Lord's sacrifice and reflect upon the nature of the body of Christ, the church.

AN APPEAL TO THE MEN

In light of these two realities, that we should examine ourselves for sin and that communion recognizes a corporate relationship, I make one final petition to the men of Wildwood Church to gather with us on August 18th at the You Are Not Alone men's rally unless you are kept from being there by something outside your control. At last count we had about 90 men signed up. That's phenomenal! But there are more than 130 more who regularly attend who have not signed up. Even if the sin of pornography is not your struggle, I feel strongly compelled to gather the men of this church together for a night of worship, of beholding the glory of God, and allowing His glory to expose sin in our church, not simply sin in your own life, but sin in our corporate body. Men, if we lead in anything, it ought to be in confession of sin and repentance. It is time for the men of Wildwood to stand together in repentance and humility before the Lord.

In the flesh, we cannot please God. No matter what you think you're doing to make up for your sin, whatever it is, if you're living a fleshly life, you are not pleasing God. If there is a corporate carnality, we as a congregation are not pleasing God. I have no idea what the Lord is going to show us at our rally, but I am humbly calling every man to be there and to come ready and eager to put the flesh to death in you and in us.

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