

## Walking in the Spirit: Part 1 Romans 8:1-9

### Introduction

From Chapter 5 to Chapter 8 in the Book of Romans, Paul discusses spiritual growth and sanctification and how we ought to serve God. In 6:14 and 7:6, he describes two different ways to approach this; either through the Law of Moses or through the Grace of Christ. One emphasizes the letter of the law, while the other focuses on the newness of the Spirit.

Trying to serve God under the law usually devolves to trying to serve God through your own self-effort. What could make more sense than to focus on God's commandments and try as hard as you can to keep them? But Paul shares from his own attempt to serve God this way that it only leads to failure. Despite his best intentions, he is doomed to experience defeat.

He describes this in Chapter 7 verse 21, "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." (Romans 7:21-23)

Paul realizes what most of us have learned; trying to keep the Law is impossible. But thankfully, there is another way. In verse 24, he says, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind, I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7:24-25)

Thanks to the Cross, Jesus Christ sets us free from this bondage, so we don't need to strive to keep the law. The Spirit of Christ within us gives us the strength to overcome the temptations of our sinful flesh. In chapter 8, Paul describes the benefits and results of following Jesus, which he calls walking in the Spirit.

First of all, in verse 1, he writes, "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

Now, whenever you encounter a "therefore" in scripture, how many of you know you should always find out what it's there for! And this "therefore" points us back to Chapter 7 and how, in the struggle over sin, the Law condemns us, but Christ frees us. According to Paul, what the law of Moses could not accomplish, is accomplished by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When you receive Jesus as your savior, you are completely set free from the law of sin and death and even the condemnation of it. This freedom is real because the indwelling Spirit of Christ produces it. Christ's divine intervention puts an end to the struggle that wages within our soul. Whenever we repent of our sins and unite

with the Spirit of Christ, our sinfulness and fear of the final judgment of God are removed.

Our union with Christ defeats the power of sin that wants to control us. Paul says this only happens to those who are in Christ Jesus, "who live and move and have their (spiritual) being" in Christ. As we reach up to take hold of faith in Christ, The Spirit of Christ reaches down to us and infuses His overcoming faith within us.

## **I. The Law of the Spirit of Life Liberates Us**

Verse 2 says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2)

Even though the "law of sin and death" is more powerful than our moral will-power, the "law of the Spirit of life" is greater than the "law of sin and death." The law of the Spirit of Life has the power to liberate us, which is the law God chooses and uses to overcome the law of sin and death. The Spirit of Christ creates within us the Law of Life. And the Law of Life in Christ not only includes a positive immortality but includes the divine power we need to resist and overcome sin. Because of our union with Christ, the Law of the Spirit frees us from the law of sin and of death.

Verse 3 says, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh."  
(Romans 8:3)

The Law cannot save you. The law can only point out where you have failed, but it can't do anything to correct the problem. The Law is like a mirror. It shows you what is wrong but it can't correct the problem. The Apostle James says, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:23-25)

The Spirit of Christ now defeats the sin that used to triumph over us. The Spirit of Life that dwells within us has the power to expel sin. The Law of Moses could not do this. The Law can never expel sin; it can only point out and condemn sin. Temptation and sin love to take root in our fallen human nature, and they are too strong for us to overcome. Even the moral influence of the Law cannot overpower sin.

Paul says the Law was limited because it failed to overcome sin. That is why the Old Testament Sacrificial System was instituted. Those who failed to keep the Law were required to offer a "sin-offering."

But, when we embrace Christ as our Savior and Lord, he breaks the hold that sin has upon us and frees us from the penalty of sin. When we receive Christ, our sin is hauled into the court of Heaven and declared null and void, and it loses all of its rights and claims over us. Because whom the Son sets free is free indeed! Why did Jesus do this?

Verse 4 says, "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:4)

If you try to serve God under your own power, it only results in failure, and you ultimately wind up in violation of God's moral Law. The only choice we have is to either give up and live like sinners or invite the Spirit of Christ to destroy the sin that seeks to destroy us.

Unfortunately, you can't ignore the righteousness of the Law. You will face the just requirement of the Law and its rightful claims. Without the covering of Christ, we will all have to give an account of our sins, just as Hebrews 9:27 says, "it is appointed for men to die once but after this the judgment." But thanks be to God, Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross pays the penalty for our sinfulness and gives us a new life to live guided by the Spirit of Christ. Thank God, you do not have to cave into the temptations of the flesh and sin.

We no longer walk after the flesh; we follow the leading and guidance of the Spirit that indwells us.

## **II. The Battle For The Mind**

The battleground for this freedom and victory over the flesh is mental. The war is waged in the mind. Verse 5 says, "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, the things of the Spirit." (Romans 8:5)

In Galatians, Paul writes, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Galatians 5:17)

Eventually, those who cater to the flesh become slaves to the desires of the flesh. Your whole mental and moral focus becomes consumed with gratifying these sinful cravings. The Discovery Bible says, "The phrase "who mind" is not confined to the exercise of the intellect, but includes the affections; in fact, it includes all those lesser motives, thoughts, and desires which are involved in carrying out any great principle of action—whether it be selfish and "carnal" or spiritual."

Verse 6 says, "For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace." (Romans 8:6)

The mind that focuses on the flesh leads to death, but the mind that focuses on the spirit enjoys life and peace. You can't experience a spiritual awakening if your mind

is absorbed with worldly thinking. Living a life of sinfulness not only deprives the soul of life in this physical world, but it will also result in eternal death as well.

Serving God by your own power only results in failure and defeat but serving in the power of God's Spirit results in life and peace. Who wouldn't want this? Why would you walk in darkness when you can walk in the light? The key, according to Paul, is learning to "walk according to or by the Spirit."

In verse 7, Paul says, "Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:7-8)

The carnal mind leads to death because it implies enmity with God, and enmity with God *is* death. (Enmity is a term that means animosity or hostility.) Walking in the Spirit is to fix your mind upon following the ways of God. Some believers think walking in the Spirit is a subjective experience where you intuitively sense God's presence and guidance. It's true; there is a subjective dimension involved in walking by the Spirit that I hope to discuss next week. But this is not what Paul focuses on here.

Others think walking in the Spirit is primarily about making some behavioral changes. Of course, walking according to the Spirit does produce behavioral changes. But if we define walking in the Spirit as behavioral change, we're back to serving God under the law. Paul says the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.

To set your mind on something involves rational reflection, which includes what the bible calls meditating on the Word. Biblical meditation is not only what you think about, but the perspective from which you view the different facets of your life and how God and His Word impact your life.

Spiritual growth begins with our minds (how we think), not with our behavior (what we do) or with our experiences (what we feel). Paul emphasizes this in Chapter 12 when he says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

Behavioral and experiential transformation flow from renewing your mind by thinking the thoughts of Christ, who is the Living Word of God. As we learn to set our minds on what God says, the Holy Spirit unleashes the power of God that transforms our character and behavior. That action is what fulfills the law's requirement and grants us an increasing experience of God's peace.

Paul says to the Corinthians, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

The more we learn and consciously view what Christ has given us, the more God's Spirit will transform our lives.

Our mental "default setting" causes us to think about the things of the flesh and desire the things of this world. Paul says we must choose to "set our minds on" God's Word and God's ways. This is why at Crossroads Chapel, we emphasize biblical content so much. It's why we encourage going to Bible studies, discussing scripture with one another, evaluating your thought-life and the messages coming at you from the world in light of what God says.

### **III. Holy Spirit Indwelling Presence**

We are talking about walking in the Spirit, but before you can walk in the Spirit, you must be indwelt by the Spirit.

Look at verse 9, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." (Romans 8:9)

Not everyone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit--only those who belong to Christ. Jesus said it himself in John 7:37, "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)

We are not born with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We receive him when we thirst for something more than this world, and we choose and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It's what we call "being born again." We are born naturally, but we are also born again, spiritually. Before you can grow spiritually, you must be born spiritually. Just as a baby cannot grow to maturity until it is born, we cannot grow and mature spiritually in our relationship with God until we are born spiritually by establishing a relationship with Christ and receiving his Spirit.

It all starts with a process of spiritual awakening. Our "thirst" for God gradually becomes an awareness of our need for God until we accept God's offer of relationship through Christ. Then we experience a process of growth that leads to spiritual maturity. But the point that connects these two processes of awakening and spiritual growth is our decision to follow Jesus.

If you're at the point where you are ready to accept Christ and follow Him, there is no better time to do it than today!

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me say that believers do not live negatively (or at least they should not) "in the flesh." Our new nature in Christ does not long for the things of this world. Our desire is for the things of God.

Believers desire Christlike transformation in every part of their lives. How does that happen? - Through the Spirit of God who dwells in us. The presence of the Holy Spirit abides in those who belong to Christ. When Christ lives within us, the flesh is dead to sin, but the body is full of life through the Spirit.

Christ puts to death the desire to sin, and our body is cleansed and becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Christ creates within us the Law of Life. And the Law of Life in Christ gives us the divine power to resist and overcomes sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He (the Godhead) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The Law of the Spirit of Life has come to set you from the law of sin and of death. Don't accept the ways of the world; listen to the Holy Spirit and experience a fresh new awakening in your soul, and follow Jesus to a life of freedom, liberty, and peace.