

Two Different Mindsets

Romans 8:5-9

As we started Romans 8 last time, Paul gave assurance that if we are in Christ, we are not now or ever condemned by God. Why? Because as 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.”** There is a new law, a new principle at work in those who are in Christ Jesus. Instead of sin and death ruling in our lives, the Spirit who gives life rules in us. How can this be? Because Jesus paid the death penalty of condemnation for us on the cross. The **“righteous requirement of the law”** is now being fulfilled through the work of Christ **“in us”** by the ongoing work of the Spirit. Paul concludes that section (8:4b) by describing those who have been justified by faith: they **“do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

Now the stage is set for seeing two lives, two ways, two walks: the walk according to the Spirit and the walk according to the flesh. In verse 4, the word *“walk”* refers our daily conduct, our way of life. There are only two ways presented here. We either live according to the Spirit or according to the flesh.

Now beginning in verse 5 Paul explains (“for”) why some walk according to the flesh and others walk according to the Spirit: It is due to their nature. Their spiritual nature of being either **“according to the flesh”** or **“according to the Spirit”** determines their spiritual behavior of walking according to the flesh or the Spirit. In 8:5-8, he mainly describes those who are “according to the flesh.” In 8:9-11 he focuses on those who are “in the Spirit.”

Listen for the contrast between these two ways of life as I read God’s holy word from Romans 8:5-13. Now I am sure we will not be able get through all these verses today, but I want you to hear them together as a unit so you can get the flow of the text.

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, the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

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.

10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

May the Spirit of God bless the reading and the preaching of His holy word today.

Two ways of life:

Paul paints a picture of these two distinct groups: those **“in to the flesh”**; and, those **“in the Spirit.”** You see it in 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.”** Paul uses these terms in the same way that he earlier used the terms “in Adam” and “in Christ.” He is describing the difference between those who are lost and those who are saved. There is a sharp contrast between those who are in Christ and those who are not.

The application of this is that your nature determines your behavior. If you are in the Spirit (in Christ) then you will walk according to the Spirit. If you are in the flesh (in Adam) then you walk according to the flesh.

I don't think that Paul is writing here about two types of Christians, spiritual Christians and carnal Christians, but rather about how non-believers differ from true believers in Christ.

I believe it is a mistake to think that there are two optional tracks for the Christian life, the spiritual track and the carnal track. Those who promote this mistaken idea teach that the spiritual Christian is on the discipleship track. He is the one who gives up everything to follow Christ, who denies himself and takes up his cross daily. He will likely suffer hardship, sacrifice, and perhaps even martyrdom but his rewards in heaven will be great. This discipleship track is for the super-committed.

The other track, the “carnal Christian track,” is for the rest of us more “ordinary” believers. They say that you can accept Jesus as your Savior but not follow Him as Lord. You get your ticket punched to heaven, but you don't have to be all-in like those spiritual Christians. Just attend church fairly regularly, drop something in the offering plate once in a while, occasionally volunteer to help out at the church. For the most part you can live like the world and still have heaven too.

But Jesus made it clear that there is only one track for the Christian life (Mark 8:34-38):

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

It's pretty clear that Jesus is talking about being lost or saved, about eternal life or eternal condemnation. True Christians die to self and follow Jesus. Paul describes that person as one who is “in the Spirit” and therefore walks “according to the Spirit.” The other describes those who are “in the flesh” and therefore walk “according to the flesh.”

So there are two ways of living in this world. You can live according to the flesh which leads to death or according to the Spirit which leads to life. Those two ways of living are diametrically opposed to each other. The flesh is on one side, the Spirit on the other. Those two ways of life are constantly moving in opposite directions.

The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the life of every true believer in Jesus Christ. When He moves in the Holy Spirit produces changes in us. These changes are the focus of this passage.

I. A Changed Mindset (8:5)

The first thing Paul addresses is the contrast that exists between the mindset of the flesh and the mindset that has been transformed by the Spirit of God. See it in verse 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, the things of the Spirit.”** The word “mind” here comes from a word that means inclination or purpose. It indicates direction or motivation. The idea here is that of a mindset, the natural bent, or the orientation of our thinking.

So the two mindsets are the mind that is set on the flesh and the mind that is set on the Spirit.

A. The mindset of the flesh focuses on the things of the flesh, the physical, material and other selfish concerns. If you look back to those days before you knew Jesus Christ, you will discover, as you look within, that the motivating force -- the thing that urged you on to do what you did, your mindset -- was your self-interest, the promotion of self in some form or another. It was certainly not the glory of God.

To set one’s mind on the things of the flesh is much the same as when John says (1 John 2:15-17), **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** Loving the world or setting one’s mind on the things of the flesh means to live for the temporal things that the world values, in disregard of God and eternity.

The mind according to the flesh may even think about religion, but it will be a religion based on what is in it for me and what I can do for myself. The Pharisees in the Gospels are examples of this. They were very religious, but it was a self-righteous religion. Their mind was set on themselves and their glory, not on God’s glory.

This is how we lived before we came to Christ. But in Christ we are a new creation. We have a new mindset.

B. The mindset of the Spirit. Verse 5 says, **“but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”** What a change God works in the minds of those who have been redeemed! The things of the Spirit are the truths revealed to us in God’s Word. To set your mind on the things of the Spirit does not mean that you go around with your head in the clouds, detached from everyday matters. It does not mean that you do not get your hands dirty with mundane things like work, paying bills, cleaning the house, fixing meals, mowing your lawn, or reading the newspaper.

Rather, to set your mind on the things of the Spirit means to relate all of life to God and His Word. To set your mind on the things of the Spirit means to relate all of life to God and His Word. It means to develop a biblical worldview, where you think about and process all of life through the lens of the Bible.

While the saved do falter from time to time, their minds are filled with thoughts of heavenly things. These are people who love God and all the things that pertain to Him. They love His Word, His people, His house, His worship, etc. The Spirit of God redirects the thinking of those redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

In Colossians 3:1-3, Paul commands us to set our minds on the things above. Listen to it,

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

So we are commanded to set our mind on Christ and seek the things above. But here in Romans 8 Paul says that this is what believers do. They set their minds on things of the Spirit. While it's a lifelong process that involves growth, we need to ask ourselves honestly, "Does this describe me? Do I set my mind on the things of the Spirit or on the things of the flesh? Which direction am I heading?"

II. The Result of the Two Mindsets. (8:6)

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

Paul is describing the current spiritual state of each group, which explains ("for") why the first group sets their minds on the things of the flesh and the second group sets their minds on the things of the Spirit. The first group is dominated by the flesh because they are spiritually dead. The second group is dominated by the Holy Spirit because He has given them life and peace with God.

A. The mind of the flesh is death.

Death is never a pretty picture. The mortician can make up a corpse to look its best, but we all know, that person is dead. And death is the spiritual picture of all who are outside of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:1, Paul writes, **"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."** He repeats (Eph. 2:5), **"Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ"** The unbeliever may be a good person. He may give generously to charity and devote himself to good deeds. But if he has not been born again by the life-giving Spirit, he is spiritually dead.

While the primary focus of this verse is the here and now, the future is also in view! To possess a carnal mind means that you are lost in sin and will eventually find yourself in Hell forever separated from God.

On the other hand, to have the mind of the Spirit is evidence of an eternity that will be filled with life and peace in the presence of the Lord in Heaven some day!

B. The mind of the Spirit is life and peace.

But the one who has been born again has life and peace. The life is called eternal life because it is indestructible. It cannot be taken away by any evil force (Rom. 8:33-39). It joins us in living union with Jesus Christ, who once and for all conquered death and who lives and reigns forever. Peace means that we now have peace with God because our sins have been completely forgiven: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Even in the midst of life's trials, we enjoy peace in Christ (John 16:33).

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condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Even in the midst of life’s trials, we enjoy peace in Christ (John 16:33).

III. The Devotion of the Two Mindsets (8:7-8)

A. The flesh is the enemy of God.

Paul tells us that the carnal mind is really the enemy of God. Why is this true? Because the carnal mind desires to be God! It is bent on the overthrow of God and is determined to enthrone itself as God in the unbeliever's life. As a result, it refuses to walk in the will of God. In truth, the carnal mind is so filled with evil that it cannot please God. What may appear good in the life of a lost person is still tainted by the sin in his heart. His motives and his sin tarnish all that he does. Even on his best day, he is still God's rival and God's sworn enemy!

B. The Spirit is opposite of the flesh.

What Paul does not say, but what is true nonetheless, is the fact that the spiritual mind, or the mind of the saved person finds itself drawn away from the things which please the flesh and drawn toward the things which please the Lord. What the flesh cannot produce in us, the Holy Spirit does produce! What a difference! What a Savior!

This is not to say that the believer has been absolutely perfected. However, when Paul refers to the sin of the believer, he is quick to point out that sin occurs in the sinful, mortal body and not within the redeemed, new inner nature, Rom. 7:15-25.

That is why it does not work to try to fight sin by means of the flesh. The flesh does not want to fight against sin. It wants to fight against God. The solution to the struggle with indwelling sin in the life of a believer is the Holy Spirit.

When we were saved, the Holy Spirit came to live in us. That’s what verse 9 says, **“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.”**

Believers are in Christ and not in the flesh. Our flesh is as evil as it has ever been and we are locked in a never ending battle with it. We will not be free from the flesh until we are home with the Lord and we receive our new resurrection bodies!

While we are here, we must fight! While the fight is real, it is a fight that we have been empowered to win, Gal. 5:16-17. The flesh is strong, but the Spirit of God within us is stronger, 1 John 4:4.

The application of our text is obvious: Make sure that you have new life through God’s Spirit and that you are not living according to the flesh! Don’t deceive yourself by thinking, “I’m one of those worldly or carnal Christians, but I’m going to heaven because I prayed a prayer to ask Jesus into my heart.” The issue is, do you have life and peace with God through the Spirit? Do you set your mind on the things of the Spirit? If not, repent and cry out to God to give you new life! If you’re sure that you’ve been born again, but you’re drifting into the things of the flesh or world, the solution is the same: Repent and don’t rest until your mind and focus are on the things of the Spirit.