



Romans chapter eight has been described in various exalted ways.

- The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith
- The tree of life in the midst of the garden of Eden
- The highest peak in a range of majestic mountains.

It is sometimes dangerous to take a book of the Bible much less a chapter of the Bible and exalt its status too highly. You can quickly become imbalanced in your theology and thinking if you do this. But if you are familiar at all with the Bible, you know the significance of Romans chapter eight. After two weeks in this chapter we have only managed to cover the first three verse so we will keep moving forward this morning especially focusing on The Power of the Holy Spirit. I trust you won't mind if we read the first section of this chapter once again.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 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. 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.*

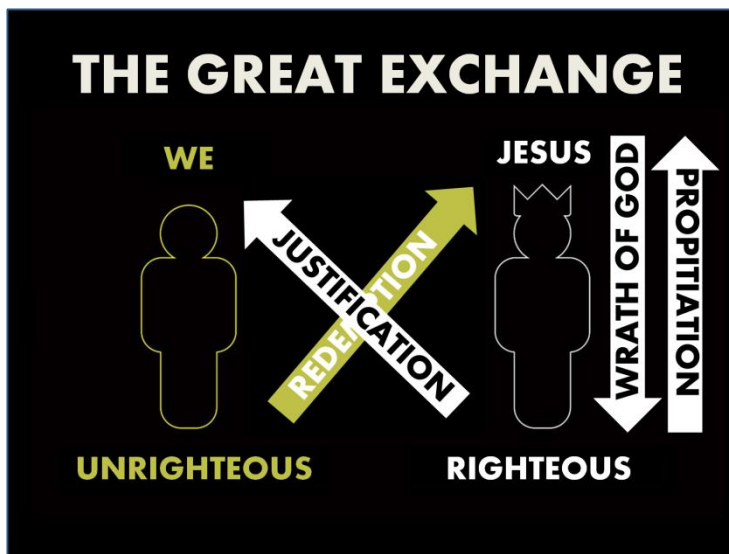
*9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you,*

*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.*

*12 So then, brothers, 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. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

### **1. Walk according to the Spirit (4)**

Verse four tells us that we walk according to the Spirit. But the first part of the verse is a continuation of verse three. The Father sent the Son to be condemned in our place *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.* What is required for any person to gain entrance into the presence of God? There are actually two things which must be true. First, that man or woman has to be without any trace of sin. God is infinitely holy and nothing unholy can come near him. But it is not enough to merely be without sin. The same person must also fulfill the law set forth by God.



By now you are becoming somewhat familiar with the Great Exchange. In addition to understanding the salvation terms that Paul used in his letter to the Romans, such as redemption, propitiation and justification, here is a simply way of describing the Great Exchange. "Christ becomes what we are so that we might become what Christ is."<sup>1</sup> You see, not only are we given the righteousness of Christ, In crediting Christ's righteousness to us, it is as if we perfectly obeyed the Law. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law so when his righteousness is credited to our

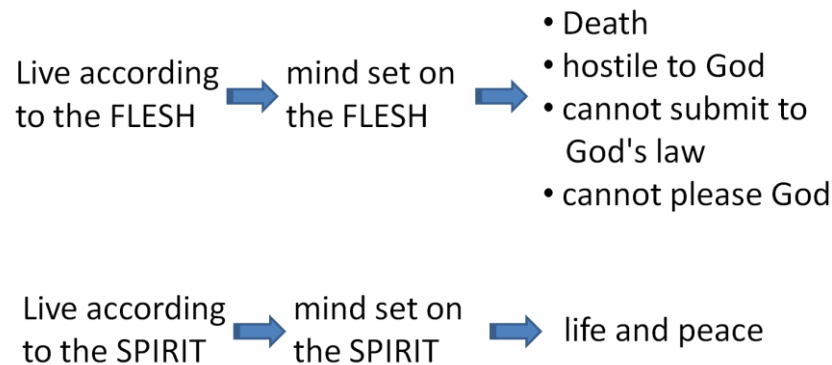
account, it is as if we have fulfilled the law. The righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled in us. This is how Augustine summed up this truth. "Law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the Law might be fulfilled."<sup>2</sup>

Then in the next phrase we are called people *who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Now if you were brutally honest, would you say that every day in the past month you walked according to the Spirit? Most of us would be honest enough to say that we did not walk according to the Spirit with that level of consistency. However, if we did not walk according to the Spirit, that would mean that we were not saved. If we did not walk according to the Spirit, then the righteous requirements of the law could not have been met in us. By definition, all believers "walk according to the Spirit." Paul will explain this more fully in the next few verses.

## 2. Living according to the Spirit (5-8)

*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.*

These four verses set up a drastic contrast illustrated by this diagram.



The flesh is all that is opposed to God. To live according to the flesh means that your mind is set on the flesh which brings all manner of consequences: death; hostile to God; cannot submit to God's law; cannot please God. But to live according to the Spirit means your mind is set on the Spirit which brings life and peace. A potentially confusing word in this section is the word flesh. The flesh in chapter eight has a very different meaning that it does in chapter seven. If you recall, in chapter seven, the flesh is the part of us that wants to do evil. We are not the flesh in the sense that it does not define us, but nevertheless, it is with us. We are not a slave to the flesh and by God's Spirit we can have great victory over the flesh but until the day we die, we will always be at war with our flesh.

But the flesh in chapter eight means something very different. the flesh represents the world and all that is opposed to God. The consequences of setting your mind on the flesh show that this is the path of the unbeliever: death, hostile to God; cannot submit to God's law; cannot please God. Now at first glance it might seem like these are just negative consequences for a backslidden believer. After all, if you live according to the flesh--that is the flesh from chapter seven--you could argue that in that moment, you are not pleasing God, you are not submitting to God's law and you are hostile to God. Scripture sometimes describes immature believers in language similar to this. But the main difference is the word death. By death, Paul could not have meant physical death because all believers will die one day. Even the most mature believer you could ever imagine will taste death unless Christ returns first. So this is not physical death but rather spiritual death. So there are two kinds of people in the world and only two ways to live.

So what Paul is saying is that there is no middle ground in this life. There is no place of neutrality. Switzerland is the oldest "neutral" nation in the world. The Swiss have not not fought a war since the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1815. For Americans, I think we have a hard time understanding and relating to this kind of political neutrality. We have all lived through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of us remember the Gulf War and at least one of you were there. if

you are a little older you lived through the Vietnam War. Some of you lived during the Korean War and a small number even recall World War 2. If you have ever opened a history book, you know that our nation has been engaged in wars since we declared our independence from the British. Not that any of us loves war but we understand that sometimes it is necessary. That's why it's hard to understand Switzerland's 200 year position of neutrality. How can you turn your back when the likes of Hitler are determined to rule the world? How can you sit back and do nothing while evil men kill tens of millions of men, women and children for their own evil agenda? On the other hand, I think neutrality toward evil nations is better than siding with evil nations.

But Paul's point is that there is no such thing as a "spiritual Switzerland." There are only two ways to live. Either your mind is set on the Spirit or else it is set on the flesh. Jesus often divided the world into two stark differences. *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.* (Luke 12:23) The sheep and the goats. the narrow path that leads to life and the broad path that leads to destruction. There is no position of neutrality in the spiritual realm.

On the one hand, I think this is meant to shake us up so that we are not fence sitters when it comes to God. An agnostic is a fence sitter, right? An agnostic is a spiritual Switzerland who does not want to take up sides. Now there are honest agnostics who are truly seeking the truth, but in my opinion, most agnostics are too lazy to choose one path or the other. But sadly, no choice is a choice, isn't it? There is no middle ground. There is no place of neutrality and for the unbeliever, this is meant to shake them to the core of their being. If you are here this morning and you have not made a firm decision to follow Christ, if you have been in any way sitting on the fence, please do not stay there any longer. On judgment day, God will not listen to your excuses of neutrality. You can't say to him, "Well I wasn't a Muslim or an atheist or anything like that. I knew Christianity was the right way, but I just wasn't really 'into it,' ya know what I mean? I sent my kids to their programs and my wife was all gung ho, but I didn't want to fully commit myself to all of it." Are you in or are you out? There are only two ways to live and you have to choose. There is no middle ground and if you think you can be neutral, then you have actually sided with the world and against Christ.

So that's the warning for the believer. But for the believer this warning is actually a statement of assurance. For even when our flesh gets the best of us, we are not "living according to the flesh." Stumbling is not irrevocably falling. A sin does not separate you from God. Paul continues to build upon the assurance of verse one. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If you are in Christ Jesus then you are living according to the Spirit. If you are not fully convinced, then verse nine should settle the matter for you.

### **3. Indwelt by the Spirit (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.*

Paul is saying, yes, there is a struggle between flesh and Spirit. There are two ways to live and you better make sure you are not stuck in some middle ground. But you, Christian, "are not in the flesh but in the Spirit." This is tremendous assurance! And how do we know that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit? Because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit: *if in fact the Spirit of God*

*dwells in you.* if you have turned from your sins and turned to Christ as your only hope of salvation, then not only has "Christ become what we are so that we might become what Christ is." Not only have you died to sin and the law and been set free from its dominion. Not only will you never be condemned for all eternity. Not only have you been born again and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, but that same Spirit literally resides within you. ALL believers are "in the Spirit" because the Holy Spirit is within us!

Here is how one commentator put it. "God not only provides in Christ the full completion of the law's demands for the believer, but he also sends the Spirit into the hearts of believers to empower a new obedience to his demands."<sup>3</sup> That is Holy Spirit power and that is blessed assurance all intimately tied together.

But if you are like me, I was still trying to reconcile this difference between having the flesh within us but not being "in the flesh." This is especially true when you consider other clear texts like 1 Cor. 3. *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

This is the classic "carnal Christian" passage. The old King James translated this with the word carnal. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even as unto babes in Christ.*" So how do we resolve the tension between 1 Cor. 3 and Romans 8 use of the word flesh? Both are written by the apostle Paul so there cannot be a contradiction but we need to come to some kind of understanding.

I think it is helpful if we use the difference between positional and experiential truth we talked about last week.

<b>POSITIONALLY</b> we are...	<b>EXPERIENTIALLY</b> we are...
Made holy	Growing in holiness
One flesh with our spouse	Working toward oneness
Unified as a body of Christ	Working toward unity
Bathed, clean	Need our feet to be washed
"NOT in the flesh" (Rom. 8:9)	"still of the flesh" (1 Cor. 3:2)

Therefore, positionally we are "not in the flesh" but experientially we are "still of the flesh" at times." ALL believers are "in the Spirit" and CANNOT be "in the flesh," even though we can live "of the flesh."

Notice one last thing about this verse. I have focused on the fact that the Spirit dwells within us but it also says that we are in the Spirit. So it is a little like being "in Christ." We are in Christ. We are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. Now it gets even more interesting in the next verse.

#### **4. Alive because of the Spirit (10)**

*But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

Now this verse is interesting because it says that Christ is in us. But Paul just told us that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So which is it--does the Holy Spirit dwell within us or does Jesus Christ dwell within us? Yes--both. This fact is confirmed by other Scriptures.

*Gal. 2.20--I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

*2 Cor. 13.5-- Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

There seems to be an intermingling of the members of the Trinity here, doesn't there. Here is one way to look at it. "The Holy Spirit and Jesus and distinguishable but inseparable."<sup>4</sup> Now it is also an established fact that Christ is not with us in bodily form. If that were true, there would be no second coming, no glorious return of Christ to bring in the final consummation. Christ is not with us bodily but his Spirit is within us. Now is the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit within us or does Paul mean that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ? Again, I would say that the Holy Spirit and Jesus and distinguishable but inseparable.

### **5. Resurrection by the Spirit (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.*

In this verse we have a future promise of resurrection. Just as the Spirit raised Christ from the dead, so will our mortal bodies be given life. This is a one verse summary of what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15. *What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body* (1 Cor. 15:43-44).

### **6. Debtors to the Spirit (12-14)**

*12 So then, brothers, 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. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

Here's the application. We are not debtors to the flesh. We owe the flesh nothing and the Spirit everything. As believers bought with the blood of Christ and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we have no obligation to the flesh. We are not debtors to the flesh but the implication is that we are debtors to the Spirit. Dave Ramsay wants us to be financially debt free but spiritually, we are "in debt" to the Spirit.

OK, so how does this affect my daily life? If you are a believer, here's what I assume. I assume that you want to obey the Lord. If you are growing in spiritual maturity, I assume that you want to go even deeper. If you are caught in a tough sin or even an addiction, I assume you want to be released from that. So wherever you are at, I assume you want to change and grow. So how do I do this starting today? How can I not yell at my kids when they make a huge mess or get in the 100th argument for that day? How can I make good on my promise to regularly read the Bible? How can I demonstrate genuine Christ-like love toward my enemy? How do I turn away from powerful temptations that seem to have such power over me at times? You want to climb higher in your walk with the Lord, but how do you do it?

To start you off, watch this 60 second [video clip](#).

Fifteen times the character Jimenez said "I can't." That's always the starting point in the Christian life. "Lord, I can't do it. You are going to have to do it for me." We walk according to the spirit, we live according to the Spirit, we are indwelt by the Spirit, we are alive by the Spirit, we will be resurrected by the Spirit. None of that you did yourself. We are debtors to the Spirit. We owe him everything and are absolutely dependent upon him for every ounce of growth.

Rich Maurer  
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<sup>1</sup> Moo, p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> On the Spirit and the Letter, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, © 1996, p. 485

<sup>4</sup> Moo, Romans.