

## 2. Contrast between the flesh and the Spirit (8:5–13)

**8:5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**

**8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,**

The purpose of verses 5 and 6 is to explain why the blessings of Christ's death are *only* given to those who walk according to the Spirit (8:4). Verses 5 and 6 are probably coordinate in meaning; that is, each verse gives a reason why believers do not walk after the flesh.

Believers do not walk according to the flesh (8:4):

1) For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh (8:5)

And

2) For the mind set on the flesh is death (8:6)

The contrast in these verses is between those “who are according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα—8:5a) and those “who are according to the Spirit” (κατὰ πνεῦμα—8:5b). They are also called those “in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες—8:8) and those “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι—8:9). Although “according to the flesh /Spirit” may refer to the “lifestyle” or daily conduct of the person, the logic of Paul's argument suggests that “*according* to the flesh” in verse 5 is the same as “being *in* the flesh” in verse 8: “that is, a ‘propositional’ rather than a ‘behavioral’ concept” (Moo, 486). In other words, this is the language of ontology (Schreiner, 410). That is, “flesh” and “Spirit” involve the whole existence of the person.

In these verses, the flesh refers to our twisted, depraved human nature. Paul speaks of the flesh as weak (6:19; 8:3a; 7:14–25), easily aroused to sinful passions by the Law (7:5), in bondage to sin (7:14), possessing nothing good in it (7:18), serving the law of sin (7:25), as hostile toward God (8:7), not subjecting itself to the Law of God (8:7), unable to please God (8:8), devoid of the Spirit (8:9), and tied to death (8:13). Those in the flesh are therefore unbelievers.

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. Those in the Spirit are believers.

“Mind” is a word used to describe any type of mental activity, “any exercise of the intellect, will, or affections” (Hodge, 255). Here, however, Paul is speaking of a state of mind (Hodge, 256); we may use the word “mindset.” The idea is not just seeking the things of the flesh, but that state of mind that reveals itself in the pursuit of fleshly things (Hodge, 256). As Stott says, “Our mindset expresses our basic nature as Christians or non-Christians” (Stott, 223). To set your mind on something means to make it the absorbing object of our thought, attention, desire, purpose, and pursuit. “It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and give ourselves up to. All this is determined by who we are, whether we are still ‘in the flesh’ or are now by new birth ‘in the Spirit’” (Stott, 223).

Those who are in the flesh live (or, walk) according to the flesh; they are controlled by their nature which is corrupt and weakened by sin (i.e. an unbeliever). To set one's mind on things of the flesh, therefore, means to make the things of the world the object of our thought, attention, desire, purpose, and pursuit; it is to desire the things that pander to our ungodly self-centeredness. “Things of the flesh” include anything that does not belong to the category of “things of the Spirit” (Hodge, 255; Matt. 16:23; Phi. 3:19; Col. 3:2). Those who walk by the flesh or the Spirit do so because of who they are. Their nature determines their mindset (Stott, 223).

Those in the Spirit (8:9) are those who are under the control of the Holy Spirit. They have a state of mind produced by the Holy Spirit. Their mind is set on the things of the Spirit; they are alert to spiritual realities, hungry for God, desirous of pursuing holiness and glorifying Christ. They are the opposite of those who are in the flesh; they are not hostile toward God (8:7). They subject themselves to the law of God, for they are able through the Spirit to do so (8:7); they please God (8:8).

The mind set on the flesh is death. This does not simply mean that this state leads to death, but that death reigns both in this life and in the future over all who are outside of Christ (5:12, 15, 21, Moo, 487). The mind which is produced by the Spirit is life and peace. "Life" and "peace" are both present and future realities.

The reason why the mind set on the flesh is death is stated next.

**8:7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so;  
8:8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Verses 7 and 8 explain why the mindset of the flesh is a state of death.

1. The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God. It is in its nature opposed to God. It has deep-seated animosity against Him. It is antagonistic toward His name, kingdom and will, His people and His word, His Son, and His Spirit and glory (Stott, 224).
2. Furthermore, the mind set on the flesh does not subject itself to the law of God. This could be another reference to the Mosaic Law or a generic expression meaning "the demands of God" (Moo, 488). Both are the revealed will of God and express His nature. Those who oppose the law oppose God, the source of life. This opposition to God is not incidental; it arises from the very nature of the mind and is part of man's nature as fallen humanity (Ro. 1:18–3:20). The fleshly mind cannot follow God's demands (whether general or specific), for it has no inherent moral ability to do so. If it had the ability to do so it would not be in a state of death (cf. I Cor. 2:14).

The necessary consequence of this opposition is that such people *cannot* please God. It should be pointed out that the doctrines of total depravity and total inability do not mean that all people are as evil as they can possibly be. Nor does it deny that there is the knowledge of good in people. Rather, it means that all people apart from Christ are under the grip of sin. Their life-direction is away from God (Moo, 489).

To sum up, there are two categories of people (the unregenerate who are 'in the flesh' and the regenerate who are 'in the Spirit'), who have two perspectives or mindsets ('the mind of the flesh' and 'the mind of the Spirit'), which lead to two patterns of conduct (living according to the flesh or the Spirit), and result into spiritual states (death or life, enmity or peace). Thus our mind, where we set it and how we occupy it, plays a key role in both our present conduct and our final destination (Stott, 224).

NOTE: Some suggest that this describes believers who are "carnal [fleshly] Christians." However, this is not speaking of two natures that coexist in one person, but two different categories of people—a believer and unbeliever as verse 9 makes clear. As Moo (486, 487) says,

Paul's purpose in pursuing this series of contrasts is not "paraenetic"; that is, he is not warning Christians about two possibilities they face in order to encourage them to live according to the Spirit. Paul certainly does this, and in language similar to the language here (Gal. 5:16-26). But, as we have noted, being in the flesh (v. 8) is *not* a possibility for the believer; and when we add to this the lack of any imperatives and the general, third person, language of the paragraph, we are warranted in concluding that Paul's interest here is descriptive rather than hortatory. In some sense, then, it is fair to say that Paul is contrasting two groups of people: the converted and the unconverted. But Paul's main purpose is to highlight the radical differences between the flesh and the Spirit as a means of showing why only those who "walk /think /are" after the Spirit have eschatological life. Life, eschatological life, is conferred only on those who "walk according to the Spirit" (cf. v. 4b). For those who are "according to the flesh" can never escape death (v. 6); the flesh prevents people from obeying God's law (v. 7) or pleasing Him (v. 8). It is the Spirit, the Spirit of life (v. 2), who reverses this situation, making it possible, through Christ, for believers to fulfill the law (v. 4) and to be delivered from condemnation (v.1).

Verses 1–8 showed that the unbeliever is in a state of death. In verses 9–11 Paul will show how the spiritually-minded are in a state of life and peace.

**8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

"However" ("but" —δέ [de] in Greek) signals a change in direction from those in the flesh to those in the Spirit.

"In" flesh connotes the idea of "realm" (Moo, 486). The person who is in the realm of the flesh manifests the traits of that realm; the person in the realm of the Spirit manifests traits of the new age inaugurated by the death of Christ.

Possession of the life of God does not consist of only an outward profession of faith, but is determined by union with Christ and the indwelling Spirit of God.

This passage teaches that anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit is not a believer (he is not Christ's) and does not possess life (I Cor. 6:19; Jn. 14:17; I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16; II Tim. 1:14). Or, to state it positively, every true believer has the Holy Spirit.

**8:10 But if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**

To say that the Spirit of Christ is in us (8:9) is to say that Christ is in us which also means that the Spirit of God is in us (8:9); all three are used interchangeably here. This does not suggest that they are all the same, but that they all have the same divine essence and are inseparable in that sense (Hodge, 258). Thus, Paul can move from one to another almost unconsciously (Moo, 491).

There are two major consequences of the indwelling of the Spirit; each begins with an "if" clause. "But if Christ is in you" (8:10) . . . "And if the Spirit . . . dwells in you" (8:11). It should be noted that "if" can also be translated as "since" in Greek. Either fit the context well.

Verse 10 is difficult to interpret. Some see “body” as synonymous to “the flesh” in verse 9 (i.e. the corrupted sin nature). This verse would then correspond to Paul’s comments in Romans 6:6–7 that say we have died to sin. Others see it as the literal physical body (Haldane, 341; Hodge, 259; Murray, 289).

The meaning of the word “spirit” is also in question. Some think it is the human spirit in contrast to the physical body (Haldane, 341; Hodge 259). Others see it as yet another reference to the Holy Spirit (Murray, 289; Harrison, 90; F.F. Bruce, 164).

#### The body:

Reference to our physical body makes sense since verse 11 contrasts verse 10 and talks about the resurrection of our physical body. To say that our body is “dead” reflects the tension between the “already / not yet” state of existence that Christians experience.

Although believers are in the realm of the Spirit (the realm of life and peace), they are also still part of the old age until their salvation is finalized at the resurrection when sin and weakness will completely cease (8:11). Thus, “the body is dead because of sin” probably refers to the body that is mortal, still subject to death and destined for it (Stott, 226).

“The moment we enter into this world and begin to live, we also begin to die. Your first breath is one of the last you’ll ever take! . . . The principle of decay, leading to death, is in every one of us” (Stott quoting Lloyd-Jones, 226).

#### The Spirit:

If the physical body is in view, some conclude that Paul is talking about two parts of the human constitution, the body and the spirit (Haldane, 341; Hodge, 259; Stott, 226). The body is dead but the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

However, Paul says the Spirit is “life” (cf. 8:2; not “the spirit is *alive*” as in the NIV). This could not be properly said of the human spirit. Hence, it seems more likely that the Holy Spirit is what Paul had in mind, not the human spirit, for the Holy Spirit dominates the context. Verse 10 builds on the thought of verse 9 that believers are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. Then verse 11 explains verse 10 and there the Holy Spirit is in view (Harrison, 90).

If the above conclusions are correct, Paul is saying that the believer is new and possesses the Holy Spirit who is the source of spiritual life. Even though the body is still subject to temporal death, the death of the body will be overcome at the resurrection because the Holy Spirit is life-giving (8:11). Our new life will not be experienced in full until our salvation is complete.

If “the Spirit” is the Holy Spirit (and not the human spirit), what does Paul mean by “the Spirit is alive because of righteousness”?

“Because of righteousness” is not describing why the Holy Spirit is life, but why all this takes place. “The substance of verse 10, then, is that the believers will be raised from the dead through the life-giving Spirit on the basis of the saving righteousness of God, even though presently their bodies are dead because of sin” (Schreiner, 415).

**8:11 But 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.**

Verse 11 is essentially a recapitulation and elaboration of the second part of verse 10. If the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, we can be assured that He will also raise us from the dead. Two thoughts are included here: (1) possession of the Holy Spirit is a pledge that our bodies will be raised to life because all that is under the Spirit's dominion results in life (Eph. 1:13), and (2) Jesus' resurrection is a foretaste of what all believers will experience (I Cor. 15:23).

The Greek word translated as "give life" (ζωοποιέω - *zoopoieo*) does not simply mean "raise from the dead" (ἐγείρω - *egeiro*). It is a word only used of believers. It expresses the idea of receiving the life that comes from Christ. This life, as far as the body is concerned, results in conformity to the glorious body of the risen Son of God (Hodge, 260).

**8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-**

Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and live in the realm of the Spirit and life. This has implications in day-to-day life; namely, Christians are no longer under obligation to the flesh anymore. This does not mean that the flesh no longer attempts to influence us. Paul has said, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts" (6:12) and "consider yourselves to be dead to sin" (6:11) both implying that it is still possible to let sin reign in our bodies and not act upon the knowledge that we are dead to sin. What Paul is saying is that we do not belong to the sphere of the flesh any more. "Like freed slaves who might, out of habit, obey their old masters even after being released – 'legally' and 'positionally' – from them, so we Christians can listen to and heed the voice of that old master of ours, the flesh" (Moo, 494).

The necessity of holiness in relation to salvation is next stated:

**8:13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

The one who died with Christ will live with Him. Justification is never separated from sanctification. It is impossible to claim to be justified and continue on in sin.

Those who live according to the flesh reveal that they do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. These will die. But those who have the Spirit will by the power of the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body. The "deeds of the body" are those sinful deeds which are done through the body. This is the message of 6:11–14 all over again.

Christians have died to sin (6:11). Romans 6:6 states, "our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." This means that sin is no longer our master (6:14); we are no longer under obligation to submit to sinful desires. It does not mean that sin has died. Sinful desires do not die on their own or cease to exist because we have died with Christ. As Murray puts it, "The believer's once-for-all death to the law of sin does not free him from the necessity of mortifying [killing] sin in his members; it makes it *necessary* and *possible* for him to do so" (Murray, 294). In other words, our death to sin doesn't automatically kill sin, it makes it possible for us to kill it.

The imagery of putting sin to death describes the decisive and radical repudiation of sin when it is recognized. It is no different than when Jesus said we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Him, or “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire” (Matt.18:8).

As J.I. Packer says:

Now sin takes on, as it were, a life of its own, seeking to reestablish the dominion it has lost. Its power appears both in bad habits, which are often deep rooted and linked with temperamental weaknesses, and in sudden forays and frontal assaults at points where one thought oneself invulnerable. Of itself sin never loses its strength. The most that happens is that with advancing age, ups and downs in health, and shifting personal circumstances, indwelling sin finds different modes of expression. But wherever it appears, in whatever form, Christians are charged, not just to resist it, but to attack it and seek to put it to death – in other words to mortify it, in the biblical sense of the word (Ro. 8:13; Col. 3:5) (Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 108).

The believer needs to be actively involved in killing sinful deeds when they arise. But the manner in doing so is not by strength that has been endowed to us, but by the Spirit.

The comment, “if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” does not suggest that our salvation is dependent upon how well we put to death the deeds of the body; instead, it means that salvation is a package that includes justification and the pursuit of holiness.

The true believer may commit fleshly acts but he will hear the Spirit’s voice, feel the Spirit’s conviction and strive by the power of the Spirit to put the deeds of the flesh to death. This is the method God uses to sanctify His people.

As Philippians 2:12–13 says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” As O’Brien so nicely puts it, “The God who mightily raised His Son from the dead now by His indwelling Spirit effectively works in the Philippians to supply both the determination to obey His own gracious purpose and the power to carry it out” (Philippians, 287). “Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary, but that activity is never apart from, nor finally distinct from, the activity of God’s Spirit.”

#### **SUMMARY in CONTEXT:**

In Romans 5 -6 those in Adam are contrasted to those in Christ.

In Adam, we all were sinners (5:12, 14, 19, 21), enslaved to sin (6:17), judged (5:16) and condemned (5:16, 18). Sin and death reigned (5:12, 14, 15, 17, 21; 6:21, 23). We presented our members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness (6:16, 19). Lawlessness led to more lawlessness (6:19).

However, we died with Christ (6:3, 4, 6, 7, 8). Our relationship to Adam has ended. We have received grace (5:15, 17, 20, 21; 6:1) and righteousness (5:17, 18, 19, 21). We are justified (5:16, 18) and given life (5:17, 19, 21; 6:22, 23). Furthermore, when our old self was crucified with Him, our body of sin was done away with so we would no longer be slaves to sin (6:2, 6-7). Having been freed from sin, we became

slaves of righteousness (6:18, 19) and God (6:22) so we can walk in newness of life (6:4). We no longer need to present the members of our body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but as those alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness to God. (6:13, 19). The result is sanctification (6:19).

Based on our new position, we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (6:11) and not to let sin reign in our bodies to obey its lusts (6:12, 13, 19). That is, we are to affirm what God has said is true and live accordingly.

Being under the Law also affected us negatively. Sin reigned in death through the Law for sin increases under the Law (5:20). Because we were under the Law instead of grace, sin mastered us (6:14). As unbelievers we were "of flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (7:14). The sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death (7:5). We could not serve in newness of the Spirit (7:6). Sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death (7:5). The good that we wanted to do, we did not do, but practiced the very evil that we did not want (7:19). Because we had not died to sin (6:3, 4, 6, 8; 6:16) we were prisoners of the law of sin (7:23). Death still reigned under the Law. We cried out "Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

But praise God! What we were, we are no longer! "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1) Through the Son the requirement of the Law was fulfilled in us (8:4). The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death (8:2). Sin shall not be master over us, for we are not under law but under grace (6:14) for our union with the death of Christ freed us from the Law (7:1-5). Now we are released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (7:6).

As unbelievers, our fleshly minds were unable to submit to the Law of God (8:7-8), but now we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit (8:9). We are no longer slaves to sin, under obligation to live according to the flesh (8:12-13). We have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again (8:15). We no longer cry out, "Who will set us free from this body of death?" (7:24); instead we cry out, "Abba! Father!" for we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons (8:15).