

Woodland Baptist Church
April 25, 2018
Romans 8:1-17, Life through the Spirit

Verses 5-11
The Explanation of the Believer's Condition¹

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Here Paul began to elaborate the difference between "flesh" and "Spirit." This distinction is difficult to grasp because both terms have more than one meaning. To "walk according to the flesh" (v. 4) means to carry out in conduct what the human nature desires. To "be according to the flesh" (v. 5) means to allow the human nature to dominate one's life. To "be in the flesh" (v. 8) is to be unregenerate, to be devoid of the Spirit. To regenerate means to give dead sinners spiritual life. . . . The "Spirit" seems from the context to refer to the Holy Spirit, rather than to the regenerated spirit of man. Those who prefer the second view tend to describe man as having two natures: an old sinful one, and a new one that would be the same as this regenerated human spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16-17). In favor of the former view, the chapter began with a clear reference to the Holy Spirit (v. 2). Additional following references to "spirit" (Gr. pneuma) would therefore normally refer to the same Spirit. Furthermore, it is reasonable that in identifying the basis for Christian victory, Paul would point to the ultimate source—the Holy Spirit—rather than to a secondary agent, our human spirit. (Constable)

Paul still has in mind that those whose lives are dominated by "flesh" are strongly opposed to the things of God. His list of "the works of the flesh" in **Galatians 5:19–21** shows that we must not think only of gross sensuality, for Paul includes such things as enmity, jealousy, and anger. There are many ways of manifesting a disposition that is confined to the flesh. Those in the flesh, he now says, have their minds set on the things of the flesh. They are preoccupied with the flesh; they concentrate on the flesh to the exclusion of all else. It is this verb that Jesus uses of Peter when that apostle rebuked him at Caesarea Philippi, "your mind is not set on the things of God but the things of men" (Matt. 16:23). Peter was not being desperately wicked, but he was looking at things from a completely worldly point of view. Paul is saying something of the sort about fleshly people. They may have good intentions, but their horizon is bounded by the things of this life. The flesh is the focus of their whole life. And because they are concentrating on this fleshly life, they cut themselves off from the blessings Christ offers. (Morris)

The verb behind "set their minds," refers to the basic orientation, bent, and thought patterns of the mind or intellect itself. It includes affections, will and reasoning (Phil 2:5, 3:15). (J. Mac)

¹ Constable

6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

A "mind set on" following "the flesh" concentrates on and desires the things of the flesh (cf. Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:2). The end of that attitude is ultimately "death." However, a "mind set on" yielding to "the Spirit" will experience "life and peace." Peace with God seems to be in view here. Yet whenever there is peace with God, peace with other people normally follows. **(Constable)**

Paul continued the contrast by pointing out the consequences that necessarily follow each way of thinking. The **carnal** mind leads to death. Barclay writes that "to allow the things of the world completely to dominate life is self extinction; it is spiritual suicide." On the other hand, the **Spirit-controlled** mind leads to life and peace. The same contrast is found in **Gal 6:8**: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." **(Mounce)**

But Paul's emphasis in the present passage is on the state of death in which every unbeliever already exists, even while his body and mind may be very much alive and active, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," Paul explained to the Corinthian believers, "for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). **(J. Mac)**

It is death, v. 6. It is spiritual death, the certain way to eternal death. It is the death of the soul; for it is its alienation from God, in union and communion with whom the life of the soul consists. A carnal soul is a dead soul, dead as a soul can die. She that liveth in pleasure is dead (1 Tim. 5:6), not only dead in law as guilty, but dead in state as carnal. Death includes all misery; carnal souls are miserable souls. But to be spiritually minded, phronēma tou pneumatōs—a spiritual savour (the wisdom that is from above, a principle of grace) is life and peace; it is the felicity and happiness of the soul. The life of the soul consists in its union with spiritual things by the mind. A sanctified soul is a living soul, and that life is peace; it is a very comfortable life. All the paths of spiritual wisdom are paths of peace. It is life and peace in the other world, as well as in this. Spiritual-mindedness is eternal life and peace begun, and an assuring earnest of the perfection of it. **(Matthew Henry)**

"For to be carnally minded," even though that carnal mind is in a body that is dressed in silks and satins, "To be carnally minded is death," even though it be whitewashed till it looks like a spiritual one. "To be carnally minded," even though you sow the carnal mind with a few good garden seeds of the flowers of morality, will still be nothing but damnation to you at the last. "To be carnally minded is death," only, "to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God." **(C.H. Spurgeon)**

7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

A "mind set on the flesh" is essentially "hostile toward God." To set one's mind on the flesh is contrary to God's law. "'Being in the flesh' may almost be defined as 'pleasing (not God but) oneself'." From the end of verse 7 to the end of verse 8, it seems clear that Paul was thinking of an unsaved person (cf. vv. 9-10). Evidently he wanted "to expose the flesh in its stark reality as being totally alien to God and his purpose." What interests a person reveals his or her essential being. It is possible to walk according to the flesh (vv. 4-5) and not to be in the flesh, however. In other words, it is possible to live as an unregenerate person even though one has experienced regeneration. Some expositors have concluded that verse 8 teaches that regeneration precedes faith. However, Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." In this text, faith precedes regeneration. The solution may be that these two things happen simultaneously. **(Constable)**

The approach to life that is controlled by the lower nature is hostile to God (v. 7). The old nature is antagonistic to all that God is and stands for. It refuses to submit itself to the law of God; in fact, it cannot. By nature it stands over against the nature of God. James had this radical distinction in mind when he wrote that "friendship with the world is hatred towards God" (Jas 4:4). No wonder our best intentions fail when we try to reform the old nature or reconcile it with the indwelling Spirit. The enmity between the sinful mind and the Spirit is irreconcilable. The simple truth is that individuals who are controlled by their lower nature cannot please God (v. 8). How can they, since they are in bondage to a power that is in fundamental opposition to the nature and will of God? Not only are persons apart from Christ "totally depraved" (i.e., every part of their being has been affected by the fall) but also "totally disabled"—in their rebellious state they cannot please God. **(Mounce)**

God has given his law so that people may know what is right and submit to it. But the person whose general bent is towards the things of this earth, fleshly things, the person dominated by his fallenness, is by that very fact rebellious against God's law. Indeed, Paul says, such a mind cannot submit to God. By definition it is set on a contrary course. There is no possibility that anyone will at the same time set the course of his life on the merely fleshly and be obedient to God. This does not mean being horribly and blatantly wicked. Bowen quotes Bernard of Clairvaux: "So far from being able to answer for my sins, I cannot even answer for my righteousness!" People may do good with completely wrong motives; *they may try to gain control over God by paying Him His fee*. Bernard was concerned lest his good deeds be tainted by self-seeking motives, a danger to which we are all subject. **(Hendrickson)**

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

Ah, this will take some of your flimsy Christians to pieces. Half of your professors, we fear, will at the last be found not to have had “the Spirit of Christ.” It is one thing to profess religion, beloved, it is quite another thing to possess vital godliness. We may sit down at the communion table, but oh! if we never had the Spirit of Christ, we “are none of his.” We may plead our own goodness before the throne of God at the last; but Jesus Christ will say, “You have not my Spirit; you are none of mine;” and then, however much we may have striven to serve God, unless we have the Spirit of Christ, there shall be nothing for us but the fearful curse, “Depart! depart! depart!” “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” Let us ask him for his Spirit; let us plead with him for his grace; and though some of you have never had it, yet if you now ask for it, our God is a gracious God, full of mercy, and exceedingly pitiful; whosoever calleth upon his name shall be saved; and though the chief of sinners, if you sincerely ask for pardon and for grace, you shall receive it at his hand. The Lord help you so to pray, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen. **(C.H. Spurgeon)**

This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that corrects the false notion that baptism with the Spirit is a second work of grace for the Christian. “Nowhere in Scripture do we find a clearer indication that the Spirit enters a person's life **at the moment of conversion** (cf. also 1 Cor 12:13). If the Spirit needed to wait for some subsequent commitment to holiness, it follows that he would be absent between conversion and that later point in time. But that cannot be because Paul clearly indicated that a person without the Spirit does not belong to Christ.” **(Constable citing Mounce)**. (1 John 4:13)

Earlier he has spoken of believers as being “in Christ” (v. 1). Here he goes on to speak of the Spirit as “in” believers. He can also speak of Christ as “in” his people (v. 10; Gal. 2:20), and of the Spirit as likewise “in” them (here). Paul clearly has the thought of a mutual indwelling; he simply varies the terminology in which he expresses it. His habit, however, is to speak of believers as in Christ (rather than Christ in them) and of the Spirit as in believers (rather than they in him). Whichever way he puts it, believers live very close to God and the constant presence of God is important. **(Morris)**

None are his but those that have his Spirit; that is, [1.] That are spirited as he was spirited—are meek, and lowly, and humble, and peaceable, and patient, and charitable, as he was. We cannot tread in his steps unless we have his spirit; the frame and disposition of our souls must be conformable to Christ’s pattern. [2.] That are actuated and guided by the Holy Spirit of God, as a sanctifier, teacher, and comforter. Having the Spirit of Christ is the same with having the Spirit of God to dwell in us. But those two come much to one; for all that are actuated by the Spirit of God as their rule are conformable to the spirit of Christ as their pattern. Now this description of the character of those to whom belongs this first privilege of freedom from condemnation is to be applied to all the other privileges that follow. **(Matthew Henry)**

10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

What he had before said of the Spirit he says now of Christ, in order that the mode of Christ's dwelling in us might be intimated; for as by the Spirit he consecrates us as temples to himself, so by the same he dwells in us. But what we have before referred to, he now explains more fully -- that the children of God are counted spiritual, not on the ground of a full and complete perfection, but **only on account of the newness of life that is begun in them**. And he anticipates here an occasion of doubt, which might have otherwise disturbed us; for though the Spirit possesses a part of us, we yet see another part still under the power of death. He then gives this answer -- that the power of quickening is in the Spirit of Christ, which will be effectual in swallowing up our mortality. He hence concludes that we must patiently wait until the relics of sin be entirely abolished. **(Calvin)**

Note the close affinity between the Spirit (of God) and the Son (Spirit of Christ) in this verse and the last. "If" is again "since." The Spirit's indwelling means that God indwells (cf. vv. 9, 11; Eph. 3:16-17). "Spirit" ("the spirit") in this verse also probably refers to the Holy Spirit. The context favors this interpretation, as does the sense of the verse. "Alive" is literally "life" (cf. v. 2). The meaning of the clause evidently is this: The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual "life" for the redeemed person, who now possesses Jesus Christ's imputed "righteousness." The "body" represents the whole person, not just his or her physical shell. This was Paul's normal meaning when he used this word. Here he meant by "is dead" that the body is mortal, that it remains subject to death "because of sin." **(Constable)**

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

The presence of the indwelling Christ is the believer's guarantee of life. Although believers' physical bodies are subject to death, their spirits are even now "enjoying life" (Williams). Death comes as a consequence of sin; life is the reward of justification. Death is the absence of God; life is a right standing before him. Whether or not a person is indwelt by the Spirit is truly a life-and-death matter. Throughout his writings Paul drew a close connection between the resurrection of Christ and that of his followers. To the Corinthians the apostle wrote, "The one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus" (2 Cor 4:14; cf. 1 Cor 6:14; 1 Thess 4:14). In Rom 8:11 the Spirit (who lives in the believer) is the means by which God gives life. The prerequisite for resurrection is the presence of the indwelling Spirit. Since that is the case in the life of the believers (and the construction in Greek indicates that it is), then God, who raised Jesus from the dead, will give life to their mortal bodies. Not only has the spirit of the Christian been made alive (v. 10), but in time the body (now under the curse of death) will be resurrected as well. The indwelling Spirit is the guarantee of the believer's future resurrection. **(Mounce)**