

# The Flesh and the Spirit

📖 Romans 8:5-9

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Last time we worked with the difficult Romans 8:1-4. The difficulty is the word “condemnation” in 8:1. This word is most commonly thought of in connection with justification. Thus the most common view of 8:1 is that Paul is reiterating the fact that we are no longer condemned because we are justified in Christ. This is true; we are not condemned because we are justified in Christ. However, the context dealing with justification is quite remote from 8:1. Paul covered the doctrine of justification in Rom 3:21-5:21. That is phase one of our salvation and it is vitally important. But from 6:1-8:17 Paul is discussing the doctrine of sanctification, which is phase two of our salvation. Therefore it is better to try to understand the “no condemnation” as related in some way to sanctification. John Murray is correct when he notes, “The word “condemnation” here can scarcely be interpreted apart from the immediately succeeding context in which it appears and so we must look for the specific complexion given to the word by this context to which it is so closely related.”<sup>1</sup> Since this context is sanctification then Paul is saying there is no condemnation in sanctification for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation to what? Since the verse before and the verse after are discussing the law of the sin nature as a controlling power then it is plausible to conclude that Paul is saying that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ to live under the control of the sin nature. This is a much more contextual interpretation. Further, it doesn’t detract anything from the truth that in justification Christ removes all condemnation positionally; it is merely adding the truth that in sanctification the Spirit removes all condemnation experientially. So the truth is that those of us in Christ are no longer condemned to live under the controlling power of the sin nature as we once were when unbelievers. There is a new way to live. Showers says it this way, “...Paul is saying that the believer is not condemned to a life of servitude to the sinful disposition.”<sup>2</sup> In 8:2 Paul explains why: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Two laws are contrasted here, the law of the Spirit of life and the law of sin and of death. Law is a governing or controlling influence. The reason we are not condemned to a life of control by our sin nature is because the control of the Spirit is available. Note that He has set us free from the controlling power of sin. This is an aorist tense, referring to a past point in time. The Spirit set us free from the controlling power of sin at the moment of regeneration. This setting free is a positional truth that establishes the basis upon which the believer can now enjoy freedom from the control of the sin nature experientially. Such freedom is not automatic as 8:4 indicates,

but requires that the believer be walking according to the Spirit. In verse 3 Paul gives explanation of how the Spirit's freeing us positionally came to pass. He says, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh..." The key thing that "the Law could not do" but "God did" is stated at the end of the verse as "condemn sin in the flesh." The verb "condemn" means not only to pass a sentence of judgment, which the Law could do, but also to execute the judgment, which the Law could not do. The Law was incapable of executing judgment on the sin nature because it was external to the person and could not get inside the person where the sin nature dwells. This is why it says of the Law that it was "weak...through the flesh." As bad as this situation is the good news is that what the Law could not do God did do. The way that God condemned the sin nature in the flesh was by "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin." This is the incarnation which is a prerequisite of the crucifixion. In the incarnation God the Son came in the flesh, not sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. In other words, Jesus was a true human being through and through. He had a human body, a human spirit and He was a human soul. But He had no sin nature. Therefore the sin nature is not a necessary component of true humanity. Adam wasn't created with a sin nature and he was also a true human. Jesus Christ avoided a sin nature by being conceived by the Holy Spirit. The incarnation was a necessary prerequisite for Him being offered up for the sin nature. Since He had no sin nature then He could then be offered up as a substitutionary blood atonement for the judgment due our sin nature. And thus God condemned sin in the flesh by executing the judgment due to us on His own Son. When we believe in Him Rom 6:3 says that the Spirit baptizes us into Christ; an event described in Rom 6:3-4 as us dying with Christ, being buried with Him and being raised with Him to live a new life. At the same time the Spirit also regenerates us and comes to indwell us permanently as the basis of the filling ministry. Rom 8:4 then goes on to show that when we walk according to the Spirit the holy requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us. The passive voice shows that it is the Spirit that meets the holy requirement of the Law and not us. Of course, if we choose to walk according to the flesh then we will only sin but the point Paul is making here is that we are not condemned to walk according to the flesh any longer. Now we can walk a new way, by the Spirit. And when we do He is the one that is controlling us and producing holiness through us. This is not automatic. Just because a person is regenerate does not mean that he or she will be characterized by a holy life. The only way to be characterized by a holy life is to walk by the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit is something that must be learned and therefore sanctification is a gradual process.

Now I'm sure you realized that there were many, many doctrines all strung together by the apostle Paul in this section. God the Father sent God the Son in the incarnation to be substitutionary blood atonement for our sin. On this basis the Father through the Son sent the Spirit to baptize the believer, regenerate the believer, indwell the believer and set the believer free from the power of the sin nature at the moment of faith. As the believer walks by the Spirit the Spirit controls the believer setting us free from the power of the sin nature experientially so that sanctification can progress. So there is a lot here and these chapters deserve a life of study and reflection in order to master the doctrine of sanctification...

Today we come to 8:5 and here Paul gives further explanation as indicated by the word **For**. **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.** Paul is still talking about believers and he's explaining how in verse 4 they can walk either by the flesh or by the Spirit. We make several observations. The first observation is that the word "walk" is not stated but it is understood from verse 4. In verse 4 he used the expression "walk according to," which in Greek is the word walk + *κατα* with the accusative. Paul's point there was that believers may walk either **according to the flesh** or **according to the Spirit**. Here in verse 5 he simply uses *κατα* with the accusative. "Walk" is implied. Since one's walk is his day by day living then in verse 5 the believer's daily life is in view. The second observation is that Paul begins with **For** in order to tip us off to the fact that he is explaining what influences a believer to live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. By and large it is tied up with what they **set their minds on**. If a Christian sets his mind on the things of the flesh, meaning worldly things, the things opposed to God, the things below, earthly matters, then he will walk according to the flesh. But if he sets his mind on the things of the Spirit, meaning spiritual things, the things of God, the things above, heavenly matters, then he will walk according to the Spirit. The Greek word translated **set their minds on** is *φρονουσαι* and means "to give careful consideration to something, to set one's mind on, be intent on." When we are intent on something that something tends to govern how we live. We become absorbed by it. Someone has well said that this is the chief passage that explains why a believer can live like a pagan. The reason is because a believer can set his mind intently on the things of the world. As a consequence he will walk according to the flesh and experience death, temporal separation from fellowship with God. The remedy is to set one's mind intently on the things of the Spirit. We must become absorbed by the things of the Spirit.

To accomplish this the believer should put himself in a position to be influenced by the Spirit of God. This might involve several elements. First, daily study of the word. Study of the word is non-negotiable. Study is tiring. It takes discipline and skill. If one does not study the word of God daily He cannot set his mind on the word of God. Consequently he will automatically default to the things of the flesh. Second, diligent prayer. Prayer is a non-negotiable. Prayer signifies dependence upon God. It takes concentration and diligence. If one does not pray for understanding and wisdom he cannot expect God to give it. You do not have because you do not ask. Third, attend a good church. By good church I mean a Church that teaches the word according to grammatical-historical interpretation and seeks to put that teaching into practice. You can't grow apart from the structure of a local church. Jesus Christ established the church and the main element in the church is to be teaching. Always and everywhere, apart from sound doctrine and application of the doctrine a local church will go to pot! Just read Rev 2-3 if you doubt me and there you'll see that Jesus Christ is always evaluating local churches and it's very serious because if a church doesn't shape up then Jesus Christ will just eliminate it.

Now having said you must daily study the word, you must pray and you must attend a good local church, don't come away thinking that doing those things in and of themselves is going to transform your life. They're not going to do that, but what they do is put you in a position to be transformed by the Spirit. So those three things

are instruments that the Spirit uses to transform you so that you more and more are setting your mind on the things of the Spirit.

In 8:6 we have an explanation of the outcome of the two mind sets. **For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.** By **death** and **life** Paul is not talking about hell and heaven but an experience of **death** and **life**. When we set our mind **on the flesh** the result is an experience of death. **Death** is always a separation and here it refers to a separation from fellowship with God and all that is tied up with death—the deeds of the flesh; jealousy, anger, immorality, sensuality, envying, drunkenness, etc...**But**, Paul contrasts, **the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.** When we set our mind **on the Spirit** the result **is life and peace.** **Life** is always a close connection and here it refers to a close connection in fellowship with God and all that is tied up with life—the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc... These things meet the requirement of the Law in verse 4. They are characterized as holy. The addition of the word **peace** should not be confused with the “peace” that we have in 5:1. In 5:1 Paul was speaking about some of the results of justification. Justification is a positional truth. One of the positional results of justification is peace with God. This means that legally we have peace with God. This peace comes to us in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace that is spoken of in 8:6 is peace that results from sanctification. Sanctification is an experiential truth. One of the experiential results of sanctification is peace with God. This means that experientially we have peace with God. This peace comes to us in connection with the Holy Spirit. So verse 6 gives the outcome of the two different mindsets that a believer may have.

In 8:7 Paul gives the reason why mind set on the flesh necessarily results in an experience of death. **Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God.** If we set our minds **on the flesh** we are setting it on the things of this world; earthly matters, the things below, things opposed to God. James said that “friendship with the world is hostility toward God.” The Greek word for “friendship” is *φιλια* and refers to a friendship type of love. When we have a friendship type of love with the world we have become hostile to God (Jas 4:4). The Greek word **hostile** means “enmity.” Paul couldn’t be clearer, when we set our mind on the flesh we are at enmity with God.

Why is this? Paul says in the middle of verse 7, **for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so...** The mind set on the flesh **does not subject itself to the law of God.** The word **subject** is the military term *υποτασσω*. It means “to submit to, to be subject to, to be subordinate.” In the military it referred to the importance of an officer being subordinate to a superior officer. He was required to line up in rank under the authority of the superior. The mind set on the flesh does not line up in rank under the authority of God. It does not submit to God. The present tense means it is continually insubordinate. The explanation for continual insubordination of the mind set on the flesh is stated at the end of verse 7 to be that **it is not even able to do so.** The mind set on the flesh does not have the power to subordinate itself to the **law of God.** The only power it has is to rebel against the **law of God.** This again is why no believer can be sanctified by putting himself under the **law of God.** But here Paul makes the application in verse 8 to unbelievers.

He says, **and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** The expression **in the flesh** is the same expression Paul used of himself in 7:5 when he was an unregenerate. There he said, "For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been 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." It is clear that 7:5 is describing Paul when he was an unregenerate and in verse 6 he contrasts to describe himself as regenerate. The expression "in the flesh" then refers to an unregenerate person. The identical expression is used in 8:8 to describe the unregenerate. Therefore, to be "in the flesh" in 8:8 is different than the expression in 8:4-5 "according to the flesh." The first expression "in the flesh" is *εν σαρκι* and refers to the unregenerate. The preposition *εν* signifies the sphere in which the unregenerate person is located. He dwells in the flesh. The second expression "according to the flesh" is *κατα σαρκα* and refers to the regenerate person who is walking according to the flesh. The preposition *κατα* with the accusative refers to a "standard." When a regenerate person is walking according to the flesh it means he is living his life in accordance with the standards of the flesh.

Therefore, Paul's application of his verse 7 statement that the mind set on the flesh is not even able to subordinate itself to the law of God simply means that "those who are unregenerate cannot please God." It is impossible for an unregenerate person to please God, no matter what they do. This is another way of saying salvation is not by works. God was never pleased by any action of any unregenerate person. They are, by nature, sin, they are, by nature, sinful. God is holy. Therefore they cannot please Him. The verse totally negates all human works systems. Salvation is always by grace. Another way of saying this is to say that because they are "in the flesh" they therefore always walk "according to the flesh." And the flesh can only produce sin and sin cannot please God. This, of course, is nothing new in Romans. We already learned in Romans 1:18-3:20 that "all are under sin." An unbeliever is under the domination of his sin nature. The sin nature is the master; they its slave. A slave is obligated to obey his master. As such they can never please God.

**However,** verse 9 says, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.** At this point Paul speaks to the Romans personally. He has been speaking generally but now he says **you are not in the flesh**, that is, you are not unregenerate. Paul wrote to the Romans who were regenerate. He wrote to train them in doctrine. The expression used by Paul to demarcate a regenerate person is to say you are **in the Spirit**. This does not mean that they always walk according to the Spirit. It is simply a way of referring to someone as regenerate. Then he virtually defines what it means to be **in the Spirit**. He says **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you**. The conditional conjunction translated **if indeed** is functioning as a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition and we may translate "since." Paul is saying that you are **in the Spirit** since **the Spirit of God dwells in you**. A. T. Robertson says, "...if as is the fact (cf 3:30)." The verb **dwells** is from the Greek *οικει* and means "to reside, to inhabit." This is the doctrine of indwelling. The Spirit has several ministries. He regenerates, He indwells, He baptizes, He fills, He seals, He restrains, none of them are the same; they are each distinct. The ministry here is His indwelling. This doctrine states that the Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence within all regenerate people during the

dispensation of grace which began on the Day of Pentecost. The permanent indwelling was not true during the dispensation of law. Only certain regenerate people during the dispensation of law were indwelt by the Spirit; namely, prophets, priests and kings and this indwelling was temporary. His indwelling enabled them to complete their special task of ministry to the nation Israel. When their task was completed He departed. For example, Saul was indwelt with the Spirit while He was anointed as king. But when Saul rebelled God took His Spirit from Him. Similarly, when David committed his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah he prayed, "Take not Thy Spirit from me," an obvious reflection of the doctrine of indwelling in OT Israel, that the Spirit only dwelled temporarily. But during the present dispensation of grace the Spirit has taken up permanent residence in every regenerate person.

As the end of 8:9 says, **But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. To not have the Spirit** is to be unregenerate. The verb **have** is *εχω* and means "to possess." If anyone does not possess the Spirit he does not belong to Christ. This should put to rest any strange doctrine like the need of a second baptism of the Spirit. Some groups say that there are two baptisms of the Spirit; the first baptism is *by* the Spirit and they claim that all believers are baptized *by* the Spirit; the second baptism is *in* the Spirit and they claim that only believers who speak in tongues are baptized *in* the Spirit and it's at that point that they have the Spirit indwelling them. The passages they use to teach this distinction all use the same preposition, not a different preposition. Further, this verse does not allow for such a distinction. The verse simply states, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. In other words, someone could not be a believer and not have the indwelling Spirit. If someone is a believer they have the indwelling Spirit. If someone is not a believer they don't have the indwelling Spirit. It is as simple as that.

Now there are two doctrinal issues we observe before we close. First, the doctrine of procession. The doctrine of procession is concerned with who in the Trinity sent who. Note in verse 9 that the Spirit is stated to be **the Spirit of Christ**. This is because the Spirit was sent through Christ. However, note earlier in the verse the Spirit is stated to be **the Spirit of God**. This is because the Spirit was sent by the Father. Whenever you see **God** without any modifier in the NT it always refers to the Father. Putting these things together the Father through the Son sent the Spirit. This is the doctrine of procession (John 14:26; 15:26). This order of procession is why the early church assigned the designations 1<sup>st</sup> person, 2<sup>nd</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person. The Father they said is the 1<sup>st</sup> person because He sent the Son. The Son is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person because He was sent by the Father alone. The Spirit is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person because He was sent by both the Father and the Son.

The second doctrine to observe is the doctrine of the Trinity. The three members of the Trinity are interlaced throughout this section. The Father and the Son and the Spirit are mentioned repeatedly. And the way they are mentioned is in such a way that they are equal in essence. The Father is no more God than the Son and the Son is no more God than the Spirit. To accommodate these types of descriptions the Trinity doctrine was formulated to state that God is one in essence and three in person. To state that God is one in essence means that there is

but One God and He is sovereign, righteous, just, loving, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable and eternal. That He is three in person means that there are three distinct persons, each having distinct roles, though they are all involved or intertwined. A good example is Ephesians 1:3-14. In this single sentence of 169 words Paul teaches that the Father is the architect of the plan of salvation, the Son is the executer of the plan of salvation and the Spirit is the applier of the plan of salvation. So you see that Father, Son and Spirit are all involved in salvation but each has a distinct role in salvation. Simply put, it was not the Father who was crucified or the Spirit, but the Son and yet salvation is all of God. So there is both unity and diversity within the Trinity.

In conclusion, in Romans 8:5 Paul explains what influences us to walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. Those who walk according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh. Fleshly things are the things of the world, the things below, earthly matters. If a regenerate person dwells upon these things then he will walk accordingly. But those who walk according to the Spirit set their mind on the things of the Spirit. The things of the Spirit are the things of God; the things above, heavenly matters. If a regenerate person dwells upon these things then he will walk accordingly. We gave some suggestions for how a regenerate person can put himself in the position to have a mind set on the things of the Spirit; he can daily study the word, he can pray and he can attend a good local church that expositions the word according to sound grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Doing these things does not transform the believer but it sets him in a position for the Spirit of God to transform him. In Romans 8:6 we see the further truth that when the mind is set on the things of the flesh the result is an experience of death. This is another way of referring to bearing the fruit of the flesh; hate, greed, immorality, anger, etc...But the mind set on the things of the Spirit will result in an experience of life and peace. Life is another way of referring to bearing the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control, etc...Peace itself is a fruit of the Spirit. In Romans 8:7 Paul explains why a mind set on the flesh results in an experience of death. It does so because it is hostile to God. All the things of the world are hostile to God. He then explains why, for it does not submit itself to the law of God. The present tense shows that it is continually insubordinate to the law of God. It is always and only in rebellion against God. He then goes further to explain that it is not even able to do so. The flesh cannot submit to God. It is not capable of submission to God. In Romans 8:8 he speaks of those who are not walking according to the flesh but those who are in the flesh. Those who are in the flesh are unregenerate, they cannot please God. It is not possible for an unregenerate person to do anything that is pleasing to God. It is possible for a regenerate person to please God and they do so when they walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh. In Romans 8:9 he says, You, however, are not in the flesh, meaning you are not unregenerate, since indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him he does not belong to Christ. So all who are regenerate in this dispensation have the Spirit indwelling them. If someone does not have the Spirit indwelling them they are not regenerate.

By application we can say several things. First, what you set your mind on will go a long way in determining the way you walk. If you set your mind on the things of the world then you will live worldly. If you set your mind on

the things of God then you will live godly. What are you setting your mind on? What are you filling your mind with? Are you filling it with worldly garbage that gives false images of what you should be? Of what marriage is? Of what family is? Of what success is? All these ways of thinking will direct how you live your life and whether it pleases God or not. Second, this is why it is so vital to being under sound doctrine day after day after day. You need to be listening to sound teaching, reading and studying every single day. If you don't you will fill that vacuum of your soul with something fleshly and that something fleshly will shape your life. It is not good to have false views of reality, false views of what God expects, false views of history and where history is going, false views of security and where security comes from. It is simply not healthy so get under sound teaching of the teaching of the word day after day after day and be a Berean, see whether these things are so. Third, don't be naïve about unregenerate people and their flesh. They cannot please God. There is nothing an unbeliever can do to impress God. This means they are under the wrath of God until they believe. Believing is not doing something, it is receiving something; it is receiving salvation, the gift of God. You don't do anything to receive a gift. If you did something you would have earned it. But if you've earned it it's not a gift but payment for what is due. So unbelievers can't do anything to please God. Just because someone looks nice and moral to you means nothing before God. Fourth, if you are regenerate you have the Spirit of God indwelling you. You are the temple, the *ναος*, the most holy place on earth! Live like it by walking according to the Spirit. But if you do not have the Spirit indwelling you you are not regenerate; you do not belong to Him; you belong to Satan.

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p 274-5.

<sup>2</sup> Renald Showers, *The New Nature*, p 109.