

July 23, 2017  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Peace in Chaos  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Romans 8:6-9.

1. What is the flesh as Paul used the word in this text?
2. Describe how **you** set your mind on the flesh.
3. List four problems that result from having a mind set on the flesh.
4. What is the end result of setting our minds on the flesh?
5. What makes some people different from those who set their minds on the flesh?
6. What difference does the indwelling Holy Spirit make?

### **CHAOS OF THE FLESH OR PEACE OF THE SPIRIT** **Romans 8:6-9**

A recent study has revealed that a large number of couples my age are moving out of the United States to take up residence in several nations generally considered to be third world cultures. The top nations receiving American retirees are Panama, Ecuador, Belize, and Nicaragua. Part of the reason for the move is because those nations are more affordable and the retirees' pensions are not taxed into nonexistence. Another important reason for moving though is that these nations remind older people of how life was lived in America fifty and sixty years ago. This different lifestyle is due in

part to the cultures' less intrusive governments. Because there is not an abundance of money in those cultures, their governments are not able to be as involved in the lives of the citizens—which some of us consider to be a good thing.

Christians don't have to listen to a lot of reports about what is going on in our culture to make us think about moving. Paul warned us in Romans chapter one that when cultures travel down the path of sin, it does not end up in a good place. He warned that the wrath of God is being poured out against people and their nations when they purposely reject God's self-revelation and suppress the truth about Him (vv.19-21). He warned that people like this claim to be wise, but in reality they have become fools as they reject God and embrace their own conclusions (vv.22-23). It is significant that Paul revealed one of the major characteristics of a society that has rejected God and is under His wrath is sexual perversion (vv.24-28). They stand without excuse before God (1:20; 2:1).

That is a frightening condition not only for an individual, but for a whole people group. But that is where America is. What began as something sinners call the innocent sexual revolution in the 60's has degenerated into rank stupidity—and is being taught as fact in the major universities! In four decades our culture has quickly digressed from sex education in the classroom, to sex in the back seat of the car, to Woodstock, until today there is utter chaos and confusion because men and women honestly cannot figure out what they are.

And their confusion is a civil right that the rest of us are supposed to honor. As a result, photographers, cake bakers, and all other entrepreneurs are subject to lawsuits, arrests, fines, threats of imprisonment and being forced out of business. It is only a matter of time before preachers will be harassed, picketed, fined, and imprisoned for preaching the Bible which is perceived as an attack, a hate crime perpetrated against sinners.

We should not be surprised that the overall state of such a culture is confusion, fear, and an unsettling chaos. God promised that would be the result. The big question is, "How are **you** doing, my Christian friend?" Are you distraught, agitated, or angry that the devil has wrecked your world? That is an expected kind of response. However, while we are living right in the middle of this perfect storm, we should have peace ruling in our hearts.

God gave us the contrast of our text to encourage our hearts. The mind that is set on the flesh cannot understand God and cannot obey God. That always results in destruction. Contrasted to that is the mind that is set on the Spirit of Christ. We who think about Christlikeness experience life and peace. And boy do people like that stand out as obvious in a culture that is running pell-mell to oblivion.

### **The Deadly Mind (vv.6a,7-8).**

Verses six through eight of our text lay down an important warning. *To set the mind on the flesh is death, . . . 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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:6a, 7-8).* Maybe the most obvious statement in these verses is that the flesh is opposed to God. That is a serious matter indeed. It should cause us to want to identify what this thing is that is opposed to God.

What is the flesh? On one hand, it is a general description of humanity. The word *flesh* speaks of the human body as opposed to a spirit. Therefore, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, took on flesh in that He was born in a human body just like we have (John 1:14). Flesh and blood (human wisdom) did not reveal to Peter that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ (Matthew 16:17).

On the other hand, when “flesh” is used in contrast to “the Holy Spirit” it refers to the natural condition of unregenerated humanity. The works of the flesh are represented by all kinds of sexual, attitudinal, and inter-relational sins (Galatians 5:19-21). The defilements of the flesh are the traits of unsaved humanity (2 Corinthians 7:1). Flesh, our natural condition, is at war with God. In light of this meaning, the NIV translates the Greek word *sarx* as “sinful nature” in this chapter. So in this text our natural sinful condition, the condition of the majority of the human race, the condition that is considered to be normal, is contrasted with being born again, which is being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the flesh is a battleground even for people who are born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminded the disciples that the spirit wants to do right but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38). As a result of this natural condition, we desire to carry out the

right thing but because the flesh is not good, we fight to do the right thing (Romans 7:18). The desires of the flesh are against the desires of the Spirit and they war against each other (Galatians 5:16-17).

Okay, the flesh speaks of our natural fallen condition. It is a good description of the body we live in that is so attentive to sin and temptation. Then what is a mind set on the flesh? This phrase refers to thinking according to the flesh. The contrast between a mind that thinks about the pleasures of the flesh and a mind that thinks about the Holy Spirit refers back to the verb in verse five where we read, *For the ones being according to the flesh, are thinking of the flesh, but the ones according to the Spirit of the Spirit (Romans 8:5 MyPreferredTranslation).*

The mind set on the flesh has the person's thoughts flow from the fallen, sinful nature. These thoughts are governed by, fenced in by, the natural condition. The natural condition is focused on self and human wisdom. Such thinking is not always and necessarily wicked by human standards. Often people who think according to the natural condition appear to be nice folks. They are often kinder and gentler than even some born again believers. Sometimes these people are not even opposed to making sacrifice to benefit others or even the society as a whole. Think about it: The majority of people who sacrificed their fortunes and lives to found this nation, to preserve our freedoms in wars, thought according to the flesh. In fact, all man-made religion comes from minds set on the flesh.

And yet, while the mind set on the flesh can appear to be kind or even just uncommitted, and certainly not always evil, still the mind set on the flesh *is hostile to God (v.7a)*. All outward appearances aside, the mind focused on the desires of the flesh is at war with God. It is not that such people are uncommitted to God or neutral regarding God. They might claim to believe in God, or not believe in God, or just wonder about God's existence. But regardless of the temperament, personality, or beliefs, this person is always hostile toward God.

We are all born taking sides with the world against God. It is our default condition. James declared, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4)*. Though it is often deemed a harsh and

unnecessary conclusion, God draws the line and every person is either a child of God bought by the blood of Jesus or they are God's enemies and adversaries.

Therefore, the very kind, humble, pacifist who spends her life doing good for the needy children stuck in poverty is actually God's enemy. The preacher who is so loving and tolerant, but who preaches a man-made religion of positive thinking and good works is actually God's enemy. Your wonderful neighbor who will do anything for you, who says he believes in God, but who has never trusted Christ to save him is actually God's enemy. This is serious business.

Furthermore, the mind that is set on the flesh *does not submit to God's law (v.7b)*. The person who lives according to this world's standard rejects God's law. They might be very religious—like the ancient Pharisees. But they are not governed by God's law. They do not arrange their lives according to the teaching, plans, and purposes of God's law. People who try to do God's law honestly have to conclude that they cannot and must have a Savior from its penalty for breaking it. Most people never come to that honest conclusion.

The mind set on the flesh not only refuses to submit to God's law, but even worse, *it cannot submit to God's law (v.7c)*. It is not just that flesh governed people are at war with God and, therefore, do not submit to His law. They are incapable of submitting. There is no power or ability within them to even know God's law. Therefore, humanity left to themselves becomes a law unto themselves. And the laws humanity derives, being ignorant of God's truth, are astonishingly foolish.

For example, are you Cisgender? That is a fairly new term created necessarily to help identify a certain class of people in this very uncertain world of gender identity. A Cisgender person is one who identifies with the biological gender he or she was born with. In other words, a Cisgender is the kind of person who was born a woman, feels like a woman, and is perfectly content to be a woman. The same is true of the man who is content to be a man. Now we are learning that Cisgender people are not good and useful for the culture. Cisgender people have too many natural privileges like knowing which restroom to use, not causing confusion as people address them as a man or a woman, strangers not having to ask your real name, or

being able to flirt with the opposite sex and establish a meaningful relationship.

This is so incredibly absurd, so incredibly far from the simple truth of God's plan, law and order, that we might think it is a joke. It is not a joke. It is the very real and very sad end at which wicked, God-hating people, who cannot please God, must arrive.

Therefore, *those who are in the flesh cannot please God (v.8)*. Notice the verb change from “think according to the flesh” to “being in the flesh.” To be in the flesh is to be in union with, to be in an intimate association. Again, the people who are not born again by God's grace have no other choice but to be in perfect accord with that which is opposed to God and seeks to replace God as ruler.

That is not a good condition to be in because thinking according to the flesh results in death. *To set the mind on the flesh is death (v.6a)*. How does a person set his mind in such a horrible direction? The mind is the intellect, the point of reason and decision making. We are all born fully infected with the sin principle. Therefore, our thinking and our reasoning will be focused on the needs and desires of our fallen condition, our flesh. This is so normal, so expected, that any exception to this kind of thinking makes the person odd, suspect, and definitely out of the main stream. But that way of thinking naturally leaves God out. The result of leaving God out of our reasoning and decision making is death.

What kind of death is the result? The most obvious penalty is physical death. In the opening chapter of this letter from Paul to the Roman Christians, he laid down this scenario that ends in tragedy with no uncertain terms. He wrote, *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. **Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:28-32)***. The sentence for rejecting God is physical death. It has passed on to all of Adam's posterity.

But the first death is spiritual death, a deadness toward God, which is our natural condition. Satan's temptation of Eve appealed to her emotions and to her intellectual pretensions—her desire to determine truth on her own, apart from God's guidelines and instruction. "Disobedience to God led not to happy feelings, but to shame. Fallen man has a distinctively fallen complex of emotions: hatred of God, His word, His creation, His people; love of the world, the flesh, the devil." (John Frame, p.756).

Eve and Adam demonstrated the reality of God's warning if they disobeyed Him by not trusting His instruction. Immediately, their relationship with God died. Instead of finding happiness, they brought upon themselves guilt, shame, and regret. They also began to die physically. And every person born in the lineage of Adam and Eve (the only lineage in humanity) begins being spiritually dead toward God and following the same path of living toward the point of physical death. A mind set on the desires of the flesh results in death while we live, and death in the end. That is not a pretty picture. The good news is that the contrast given in this text offers a very pretty picture.

### **The Peaceful Mind (vv.6b,9).**

Some people are different (v.9). God describes those different kind of people as being in the Spirit. *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you (v.9a)*. The words, *You however* spell out a wonderful exception. If the Spirit dwells in us, we are not in the flesh. The indwelling Holy Spirit marks off special people from the rest of the world. The indwelling Holy Spirit draws a clear line of distinction between those who are spiritually dead and hostile toward God, and those who are controlled by God.

The only way for the Holy Spirit to indwell a person is through the miracle of regeneration. A natural person, with his mind set on the flesh, one day begins to ponder the reality, existence, and truth of God. God draws that person through conviction of sin as he acknowledges that he cannot understand God's law and certainly cannot keep it. God opens the person's eyes to the truth that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for his sins through the blood He shed when

He was crucified. By faith, the flesh-minded person expresses faith in Christ alone to save him from the penalty and power of sin.

This is regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul described it like this: *He [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)*. At that moment, the Holy Spirit literally takes up residence in the believer's heart. That is what Jesus promised He would do. *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17)*.

Because of this new condition, life changes for the person. We are no longer unable to please God, but enabled to please God. We are no longer ignorant of God's law, but sensitive to God's law. We are no longer the enemy of God, but the child of God.

This dramatic change indicates that these special "some people" are owned by Christ. Stated negatively Paul wrote, *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (v.9b)*. The Holy Spirit is the seal of ownership. God sends the Holy Spirit to take up residence within us in order to remind us that we are His. *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13)*. The indwelling Holy Spirit also reminds us that God will complete the redemption transaction in the future. He is like the down payment that guarantees, God will bring the contract to fruition. *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14)*.

Where there is no residence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, there is no possession of that person by Christ. People who desire to run their own lives cannot belong to the rightful King, our Creator. If they do not belong to Christ, they are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Some people want to fulfill their own fleshly desires but are keenly aware of this truth about the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is popular to fake "having the Spirit." Emotionalism is not the same as

being possessed by the Spirit of Christ. Feeling is not the same as being possessed by the Spirit of Christ.

This kind of confusion is to be expected because Satan makes himself appear to be an messenger of “light.” Speaking of false professors, Paul warned: *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

This is a great problem today in much of the contemporary church. A brief analysis of much of what passes itself off as the “Body of Christ” reveals that the popular brand of the “church” today is precisely the same fraud that we perpetrated by the wildly popular Charismatic movement three decades ago, only without the miracles. The tongues thing and claims of miracles made that movement suspect in the minds of many religious people. Satan brilliantly removed the suspicious stuff to make a religious experience that is devoid of the Spirit of Christ appear to be the real thing.

However, in contrast to a falsifying of the Holy Spirit’s work, there is great reward and great benefit for those who belong to Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As a result, some people enjoy life and peace. *But to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace* (v.6b). These are people who set their minds on the Spirit. Redemption does not make us more emotional as the Charismatics teach. Redemption does not make us more intellectual as some Reformed scholars teach. Rather, redemption consecrates the intellect to God, whether it is a lot of intellect or a little intellect, it is a mind set on God. And redemption consecrates the emotions to God, whether they are high emotions or few emotions.

We set our thinking on the Spirit of Christ and the result is that we experience peace, which is a feeling—a very important feeling. According to our text, these people experience life and peace. What is meant by life? Jesus the author of life gives fullness of life to those who are His. He promised, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10). Abundant life is life lived with an eternal perspective now.

Eternal life focuses on eternity not on the passing things that please the flesh. Eternal life is life as God our Creator intended it to be.

The person who enjoys that kind of abundant life also enjoys peace. Eternal life is a life of peace. It is the peace that Jesus gives. It is the peace He promised to those who trust Him. While the world around us is in upheaval and chaos, we have an abiding confidence that God is in control. The Holy Spirit living in us teaches us the promises of God from the Bible which promises give us emotional rest. We are confident that we will spend eternity with our Savior. Therefore, the disposing of, arranging of, or even possession of passing things really does not affect us.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to indwell His people. He called the Holy Spirit the Comforter. The promised Holy Spirit brings us peace as He teaches us and reminds us of God’s truth. The vast majority of the people in our world are devoid of the Holy Spirit. They are hostile toward God, cannot understand God’s truth, do not care for God’s truth, cannot do God’s truth. The result of rejecting God and His truth is spiritual death, which looks a lot like chaos and eventually physical death. Therefore, we should see an obvious contrast between the peace experienced by those who are possessed by the Holy Spirit and those who are possessed by the desires of their flesh.