

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #29

Romans 8:5-11

The ability to defeat the flesh is not ours. The ability to defeat the law is not ours. The ability to defeat sin is not ours. The ability lies purely and totally in the work of the Holy Spirit !

Romans chapter 8 is a critical chapter which features victory because of the Holy Spirit. This chapter is totally misunderstood by many who make this a passage that deals with the subject of practical sanctification, but as you will see this text is referring to our position of being in Christ. As John Calvin said, "To be in the flesh or after the flesh is the same thing as to be without the gift of regeneration" (John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 19, p. 285).

IT IS NOT OUR FLESH THAT GUARANTEES WE WILL BE PLEASING TO GOD; IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO LIVES IN US THAT GUARANTEES WE WILL BE PLEASING TO GOD.

We will not go to heaven because of us; we will go to heaven because of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we are not even saved because of us; we are saved by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6-8).

THEOLOGICAL POINT #1 – The Spirit of God guarantees that we will be pleasing to God.
8:5-10

Now I want to point to **verse 8** because a very important statement is made. **"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."** It is impossible for one who is classified by God as being "in the flesh" to please Him. Now, what determines this classification? **The answer is in verse 9 - the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit indwells the person, God classifies that person as being "in Christ."** If the Holy Spirit does not indwell the person, God classifies that one as being "in the flesh."

This classification has nothing to do with how good we are or how bad we are. This classification has nothing to do with our works or our keeping the Law. **This classification is determined solely by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.** If the Holy Spirit lives in us, we are "in Christ"; we are not classified by God as being "in the flesh."

Now before we expound these verses, I want to draw to our attention a word that occurs four times, it is the word "mind" (**8:5, 6-twice, 7**). This is a Greek word that emphasizes the thought process of the mind. In this context, the emphasis is about what one really thinks . in his own mind will make him pleasing to God (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 474). **Carefully notice something extremely important here - Biblical salvation is an issue of how we think , not how we feel . The primary emphasis for being saved is what our mind believes will save us.**

Now we may grammatically observe that **verse 5** begins with a conjunction “for” which immediately connects us to the previous thought which is a discussion of how the Holy Spirit sets us free from the Law. The specific point of **verse 4** is that it isn’t us keeping the Law with our fleshly nature that makes us right with God; it is the Holy Spirit that makes us right with God. **Verse 5** gives further explanation to this idea.

Idea #1 - It may be determined whether one is “according to the flesh” or “according to the Spirit” by the focus of one’s mind. **8:5**

The prepositional phrases “according to the flesh” and “according to the Spirit” are phrases that describe what a person thinks with reference to what will save him and make him pleasing to God. The verb “set their minds” is present tense, meaning this is what one continually thinks will actually make him right with God and pleasing to God.

Now the person who is “according to the flesh” is one who continually and habitually believes that he can be right with God by his own keeping the Law.

The person who is “according to the Spirit” is one who continually and habitually believes that he cannot be right with God by keeping the Law but by totally relying upon Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit.

To determine the class we are in, all we have to do is to ask ourselves one simple question - what do I really think or set my mind on to make me right with God? Paul certainly did not believe his flesh or his works or his Law-keeping could save him or make him pleasing to God. He believed it was God’s grace and God’s Spirit that did this for him.

Idea #2 - It may be determined whether one has spiritual death or spiritual life and peace by the focus of the mind. **8:6-8**

One whose mind is focused on keeping the Law for salvation is one who does not have life or peace with God. He is spiritually dead.

The difference between one who has spiritual life and one who does not, is not sinless perfection; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The believer has the Holy Spirit in him which gives him a whole new status and power in the sight of God, whereas the unbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit in him.

Now **verse 7** begins with the subordinate conjunction “because” which introduces a series of reasons why one who believes in himself cannot ever have life and peace:

(Reason #1) - Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God. **8:7a**

The word “hostile” is one that means we are in a hateful state of being at enmity with God (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 192). Now look carefully at what this is saying - if a person continually believes in his mind and heart that he can be right with God by his own works or by his keeping the Law, he is in a hateful, hostile relationship with God.

(Reason #2) - Because the mind set on the flesh is not and cannot be subject to the law of God. **8:7b**

The word “subject” means to be under or to be in subjection to the rank of something or someone (*Ibid.*, p. 468).

Our flesh is not capable of submitting itself to God’s law. It won’t obey, in fact, it cannot . obey.

(Reason #3) - Because the mind set on the flesh cannot please God. **8:8**

One who has not been born of the Spirit of God cannot possibly ever please God. It doesn’t matter how religious, how moral, how educated, how successful - he cannot please God. God will not accept anything outside of Jesus Christ. He will not accept any worship or any community effort outside of Jesus Christ. People could be very religious and could sponsor food drives and concerts and have some public prayer and God would say - “I do not accept it and it is not pleasing to me.” There is not one thing one who is in the flesh can do to please God ever.

Idea #3 - It may be determined whether one is alive unto God by the presence of the Spirit in a person. **8:9-10**

If a person has the Spirit of God in him, he is not classified by God as being in the flesh even though he has a fleshly nature. God classifies such a person as alive unto Him if Christ is in the person.

The determining factor in all of this is the indwelling Holy Spirit. A logical question then is how do I get the Holy Spirit? What must I do to receive the Holy Spirit so I may have peace with God? Obviously this is a critical matter in the mind of God, so what must I do? The answer is found in **Romans 5:1**. If you want peace with God you must be justified by God. When you believe on Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God is given to you and instantly you are justified and baptized by the Spirit of God into Jesus Christ (**Romans 5:5**).

So a very important question for you to answer right now is what do you think in your mind and heart will actually make you justified before God and pleasing to God? If your answer is all of my faith for this is placed in Jesus Christ, you are justified and you are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in you.

THEOLOGICAL POINT #2 – The Spirit of God guarantees that we will be resurrected to live with God. **8:11**

In the case of Jesus Christ, He could raise Himself, but God wants us to realize that the Holy Spirit was involved in His resurrection. In our case, we cannot raise ourselves, but the same Holy Spirit involved in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one that guarantees our resurrection as well.

Notice there is nothing in ourselves that guarantees life or that we will be raised from the dead to inherit glory; it is the Spirit of God who guarantees it. It is the Spirit of God that gives resurrected spiritual life to our immortal soul and it is the Spirit of God that will give resurrected physical life to our mortal bodies.

Please do not flatter humanity. Not one person will ever get into heaven because he is good; the only way one may enter heaven is by the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can look nice, we can be nice, we can be sincere, we can have a real desire to go to heaven, but without His Spirit we won't go. These are not our terms, these are God's!

So the most important question for any person to ask is this: Am I in the Spirit or in the flesh? What do I truly believe in my mind and heart that will save me?