

Week #5 – Life by the Spirit Romans 8:5-17

Key Concepts:

Living according to the flesh v. the Spirit
The indwelling Spirit
Adoption

Background (Romans 6:1-7:25)

Now that we have a new **position** in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-23) through our belief in Him for salvation, we have a new relationship to the Mosaic Law; we have **died** to it (Romans 7:1-12). There is now a new law working within us that has the power to deliver us from the law of sin, but for whatever reason we still find ourselves in rebellion against what we know to be right. While we cannot escape temptation, we can turn to the one who grants us **victory** over it (Romans 7:13-25).

The Spirit of Life (Romans 8:5-11)

vv. 5-8 Living according to the flesh v. the Spirit

The term “flesh” (σάρξ) refers to the sin nature (cf. Rom. 8:8, Gal. 5:24).

The flesh “denotes the being of man which is determined, not by his physical substance, but by his relation to **God**.”¹

“The believer no longer lives in the σάρξ; he has **crucified** it. This message is new and typical of Paul. It stands behind all the formulations in which there is reference to the victory of God and of His promise and Spirit.”²

The term “Spirit” (πνευμα) refers to the Holy Spirit, not the regenerated spirit of a man. The contrast between those who “live according to the flesh” and those who “live according to the Spirit” clarifies two radically different spiritual lives; one is **life**, the other is **death**.

¹ Kittel, Gerhard (Hrsg.) ; Bromiley, Geoffrey William (Hrsg.) ; Friedrich, Gerhard (Hrsg.): *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976, S. 7:134.

² Ibid.

The phrase “live according to” means “having your mind set on” or to “keep on being mindful of or aspiring for” either what the sin nature desires or what the Holy Spirit desires.

The mind set on the flesh is death, “it is equivalent to death, or it leads to death in all its forms (physical and spiritual).”³

The mind set on the flesh:

- 1) is hostile to **God** (v. 7),
- 2) does not **submit** to God’s Law (v. 7),
- 3) is not **able** to submit to God’s Law (v. 7).

Therefore, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (v. 8). Those who are “in the flesh” are the unsaved.⁴

Even though we still maintain our “flesh” as Christians, we no longer live “in” the flesh. When we give in to our sin nature, we act like the unsaved person (cf. 1 Cor 3:3).

The mind set on or controlled by the Spirit is **life** and **peace**.

“For Paul orientation to the flesh or the Spirit, and hence life in the power of the flesh or the Spirit, is a total attitude which determines everything. The man ruled by the Spirit must no longer secure his life by the flesh, whether by wealth or by good works. But this means that the splitting of life into thousands of individual acts, which is typical of legalists and scrupulous penitents, is quite impossible. Life is determined as a totality by flesh or Spirit. It does not consist of many works; it is a single work. In the splintered view of Pharisaic pride or a sense of religious worthlessness flesh occupies the central point. But the man who has come to faith in the Son of God is no longer in the flesh, for he believes, and he has thus ceased to build his life on the flesh, which is to sin. That Paul is very far from being a perfectionist is due to his realisation that man has to receive and to practise his faith afresh each day.”⁵

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:470

⁴ Hoehner.

⁵ Kittel, S. 7:135.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between living according to the flesh (σάρξ) and living according to the Spirit (πνευμα)? Is it possible for a true Christian to live according to the flesh?
2. What is the danger of approaching your spiritual life with a to-do list of good, religious activities for the purpose of spiritual growth?

vv. 9-11 The indwelling Spirit

Christians are no longer “in the flesh,” they are “in the Spirit.”

The “if” in verses 9b, 10 & 11 introduces a conditional statement which in the original language is understood to be true. These statements could be introduced with “since” or “because.”

The Spirit of God dwells **within** us (1 Corinthians 3:16; cf. Ephesians 1:13). The Holy Spirit does not dwell within a separate part of our chest cavity visible through an X-ray machine, but rather He is present with us and constantly impresses upon us God’s **truth**. He prompts us to respond to God’s truth on a moment-by-moment basis.

The phrase “Christ is in you” “equates the indwelling presence of Christ... with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (vv. 9, 11). This adds further support to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.”⁶

The body is dead, or subject to death, because of **sin** (cf. 7:24); however, the Spirit is alive because of **righteousness**. You are now spiritually alive because you have been imputed with Christ’s righteousness. You have eternal life even though your body is mortal.

Our mortal bodies will be given life when raised from the **dead** on account of the Spirit. The Spirit is the reason we are raised.

As Christians, we do not have “two **natures**.” Rather, we have one fallen nature (our flesh, which is weak and susceptible to sin) and the Holy Spirit also dwells within us.

⁶Walvoord, S. 2:470.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be “in the Spirit?”
2. Should Christians embark on a spiritual quest to “receive the Holy Spirit?” Why or why not?
3. What difference does the promise of our resurrection make to how we approach daily living?

The Spirit of Adoption (Romans 8:12-17)

vv. 12-14 Living by the Spirit as Sons of God

We have an obligation to live dependent on the Holy Spirit. We ought to respond in obedience to God so that we will **enjoy** our spiritual lives.

Only through the **empowerment** of the Holy Spirit can we put to death (i.e. avoid carrying out) the deeds of the body (i.e. sin). The present tense of “putting to death” (v. 13) is a continuous idea – we never stop doing it. The deeds are put to death, not our **flesh**.

Disobedience, which comes by following the orders of the flesh, results in death. This death does not refer to eternal death. This death refers to a **miserable** spiritual life or **premature** physical death (6:23; cf. *1 Corinthians 11:30*; *1 John 5:16*). Obedience, which comes by following the orders of the Spirit, results in the Christian’s full experience of abundant life (*John 10:10*).

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** of God.

In verse 14, the term “sons” (υἱός) means “a child mature enough to take on adult family privileges and responsibilities.”⁷ In this verse “the Holy Spirit’s control and direction attests *the believer’s privileges in God’s family as a ‘son.’*”⁸

⁷Ibid, S. 2:471.

⁸Ibid.

Questions:

1. Why are Christians responsible for depending on the Holy Spirit?
2. How do you deal with the war waging in your members described in Romans 7?
3. What are the benefits of depending on the Holy Spirit?

vv. 15-17 Adoption as Sons of God

Christians are adopted sons, not **slaves**. The Spirit of God does not force us to obey God, but he **appeals** to us to obey as sons. Even though we are adopted sons of God, we enjoy the same privileges as natural-born sons. We can approach God intimately and address him as Father.

In verse 16, the term “children” (τέκνα) means “born ones.” In this verse “the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence attests *the believer’s birth relationship to God.*”⁹

Since Christians are God’s children, they are God’s heirs and co-heirs with Christ. We are now the recipients of all spiritual **blessings** (Eph. 1:3). As co-heirs, we also share in Christ’s sufferings now so that we will share in his glory in the future. We will one day share with Jesus Christ the **riches** of God’s kingdom.

Questions:

1. What is the significance of being “adopted” as children of God?
2. What does it mean to be a co-heir with Christ?

⁹Ibid.

Conclusion

“What the Lord Jesus Christ acquired by His death, burial and resurrection, the **Holy Spirit** applies through His indwelling ministry in the life of the Christian. What Christ has won for us positionally, the Holy Spirit works in us practically.”¹⁰

“God never intended man to live the Christian life by his own **efforts** and in his own **strength**. Provision for Christian living is in the Person of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

Definition of the “Spiritual Life:”

Part 1: *“Understanding your identity in Christ ...”*

Part 2: *“... as a slave to righteousness ...”*

Part 3: *“... who has been released from the Law ...”*

Part 4: *“...to experience victory over sin ...”*

Part 5: *“... as you live by the Holy Spirit of God ...”*

Key Terms:

Live according to the flesh
Live according to the Spirit
Indwelling Spirit
Adoption
Sons of God
Children of God

Key Verses:

Romans 8:5
Galatians 5:24
1 Corinthians 3:16
Ephesians 1:3

¹⁰ Bob Deffinbaugh, “From Agony to Ecstasy,” www.bible.org.

¹¹ Ibid.

Scripture Memory:

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (*Romans 8:5 ESV*)

Homework Assignment #5:

- 1) Memorize *Romans 8:5*.
- 2) **NextStep APPLICATION:** Live according to the Spirit by setting your mind on things of the Spirit. When temptation attempts to knock you off your spiritual footing, call upon the Spirit of God to rescue you from acting like an unsaved person.
- 3) **NextStep APPLICATION:** Meditate on your status as a co-heir with Christ and enjoy privileges that belong to you now that you have been adopted into God’s family.
- 4) Review class notes.

Next Week: Future Glory (*Romans 8:18-39*)