

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

9/7/08

Romans 8:5-13 “The Flesh & the Spirit”

Intro. Today I want to speak to you about pleasing God. I hope you have a desire to please God. Do you? If God is important to you, you will want to please Him. So this morning I will talk about who can please God, and how you can please God.

There was a certain medical missionary. He gave up a much better income to serve on the mission field. Someone asked him why he would be willing to give up a lucrative medical practice in the states to go and work among poor people in another country. He replied that one main thing he is concerned about is getting to heaven and seeing his Heavenly Father smile at him and his work.

In v.4 Paul tells us who truly fulfills the righteous requirements of the law, & thus pleases God. It is not those who walk “according to the flesh” but those who walk or live “according to the Spirit.” Those who are indwelt, led, & empowered by the Holy Spirit are the ones who please God with obedience. In our text today Paul is explaining more of what he means by his descriptions of those two kinds of people.

Essentially, Paul is contrasting the saved and the unsaved. After all, there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who live under the control of the sin nature, and those who live under the control of the Spirit. God does not divide people the way we do, by sex, culture, race, or education. He divides people based on their spiritual condition. You are either saved or lost, indwelt by the Spirit or not, either walking in the Spirit or living under the control of the sin nature. Granted, there are degrees within each category. But the fact remains that you are either indwelt by the Spirit or you are not. There is no middle ground.

Now Paul makes some very strong contrasts between those who are “in the flesh,” and those who are “in the Spirit.” Based on what he says here, you don’t want to remain “in the flesh.” Instead, I want you to experience what it means to live “in the Spirit.” Now let’s look at these two ways of living.

I. MOST PEOPLE LIVE CONTROLLED BY THE FLESH

Paul mentions in v.5 “those who live according to the flesh...” The other terminology is found in v.8 where he says, “those who are in the flesh.” “Flesh” in each instance does not refer to physical flesh. Rather, it is a metaphor to denote the sinful nature of man. It is the fallen & depraved part of man. When Adam & Eve sinned, all children born after them receive their sinful nature. We see evidence of the fallen, sinful nature of man all around us. As I pointed out last week, to live “according to” (*kata*) the flesh, is to live under the dominating control of the sin nature. The sin nature of man is indeed a dominating influence in most people’s lives.

Due to the sin nature of man, I see 4 effects of the sin nature upon the person who is dominated by the sin nature rather than the Holy Spirit. These are the reasons why you need to be delivered from the oppressive control of the sin nature. First of all, if you are not saved:

A. The Sin Nature Will Dominate Your Thinking— Paul says in v.5 that such people “set their minds on the things of the flesh.” The verb “set their minds” (*phroneo*, from the noun *phren*,

the mind) is to direct the mind to something, to seek or pursue. It refers to what you are interested in. To “mind the things of the flesh” is to make sin the absorbing object of your thoughts, interests, affection, and purpose. It is a present tense, referring to the fact that unsaved people habitually set their minds on the things of the flesh.

Unsaved people generally seek after things like immorality, pornography, drunkenness and partying. They think about such things day & night. However, since the word “flesh” does not refer to the body, but the sin nature, we will see that the things of the flesh are not merely sensual things. In Gal. 5:19-21 we see that the works of the flesh also include hatred and various forms of strife. People think about how they can get even or win in some conflict. Furthermore, in Phil. 3:19 Paul spoke of those who “mind earthly things.” They have worldly interests. 1 John 2:15-16 says that if a person loves the world, he is not of the Father; rather, he is bent toward the world. Their mind is not set on God; they seek the things of the flesh. The true Christian understands and follows the truth of Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

To illustrate where the interest of most people is, just look at their spending habits. For example, back in the late 50’s, the total amount of all religious expenditures amounted to a little over one billion dollars a year. And yet the nation spent 4 times this amount on cosmetics and related products; 10 times as much on alcohol; 12 times as much on amusements, and 15 times as much on gambling! I don’t think things have changed much. It’s obvious that most people are dominated by the flesh and mind the things of the flesh.

This is one way you can tell if you are living under the control of the flesh or the Spirit. What kinds of things are you interested in? What do you read? What do you watch on TV? What do you talk about the most? What do you spend your money on? How do you spend your weekend? Are you interested in coming to church or not? If you are frequently thinking about the things of the sin nature, then you are probably still under the control of the sin nature.

Their fleshly nature causes them to have sinful & worldly thinking patterns, which become manifest in their behavior. The book of Proverbs says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” So we see another effect of the sin nature:

B. Living Under the Control of the Sin Nature Will Create Enmity Against God - Paul says in v.7, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God...” Literally, Paul refers to “the mind of the flesh.” Such a mind creates “enmity” between you and God. James 4:4 says that friendship with the world is enmity with God. This opposition on the part of the carnal mind is not casual or occasional. It arises out of its very nature. The word translated “God” in the original does not have the article, so this denotes the foul nature of the carnal mind in its reaction, not against the personality of God, but against His character, essence, and nature. That’s why an unbeliever doesn’t obey the law of God. His bent against God is seated deeper than mere disobedience: An unbeliever’s acts of disobedience are just the external manifestations of the mind’s disposition.

Now in the last of v.7 Paul explains why such enmity is created, “for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” “Subject” (*hupotasso*) is a military term meaning “to line up under the orders of a commanding general,” for instance. The essence of sin is to be against God, & refuse to submit to His commands. The sin nature will lead you into rebellion against God. And notice that the sin nature cannot be subject to the law of God. It has no ability to change itself. Until Christ comes into your life, you cannot live right! God has no plan for improving the sin nature. It has to be eliminated. However, that won’t fully happen until we die or Jesus comes again.

Surely you do not want to set yourself as an enemy of God. That's a fight you can't win. He's an enemy you can't defeat.

Now notice what else happens if you are not saved:

C. Living Under the Control of the Sin Nature Will Make It Impossible to Please God – Based on these truths, Paul concludes in v.8, “So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” That's sad, because God created man to please Him. We should be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:12). If we can't please God, then we have forfeited the main reason for our existence. Furthermore, anything that the flesh produces is not acceptable & pleasing to God, even those things that are considered good works by men.

This clearly reveals one reason why you cannot save yourself. Until you become a born again Christian, you cannot please God. Until you are born again, you cannot submit to God. You will have a rebellious bent until you are born again.

D. Living Under the Control of the Sin Nature Will Lead to Death – Paul says in v.6, “For to be carnally minded is death....” “Death” here probably refers to a present state of spiritual death, the absence and the opposite of spiritual life. The unsaved person is dead spiritually. Eph. 2:1 says, “...you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” To be without God and living in the flesh is to be dead. As long as you are alienated from God, you are dead. You may be alive physically, but not spiritually. Of course, as Paul has already said back in 6:23, “the wages of sin is death.” The unregenerate sinner is not only dead spiritually, but he will also die physically. Death is inevitable.

Surely this is not what you want. You do not want to be an enemy of God. Instead, don't you want to please God? Don't you want life instead of death? Yet this is the natural state of man. We need an intervention from heaven to change the terrible condition we are in. This is why Jesus said, “You must be born again.” Jesus went on to explain in John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” If you realize today that you have not been saved, that vv.5-8 describe you, then I call upon you to repent of sin, and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. He died on the cross that you may have life. He wants to set you free from the control of your sin nature.

So we have seen that many live under the control of the sin nature. But we also see from this text of Scripture that:

II. YOU SHOULD LIVE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT

Here Paul makes an important contrast. In vv. 5-8, Paul uses the word “they.” However, in v.9, he uses the word “you”. He emphatically states that *you* who believe in Christ are not “in the flesh.” You are no longer slaves of sin. Christ has set you free. Therefore, you are no longer in opposition to God. You and I are able to fulfill His law (v.4) and please Him.

Now my challenge to you this morning is to make sure you know what it is to live “in the Spirit,” as Paul says in v.9. Otherwise, the sin nature will continue to dominate your life, with all its tragic results. Now let's see how we can experience the life of the Spirit. First of all:

A. Make Sure You Are Indwelt by the Spirit – According to v.9, all true Christians are indwelt by the Spirit. There Paul says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” The

word translated “dwells” (*oikeo*) does not mean simply to visit, but literally to live in a house. According to Paul in 1 Cor. 6:19, your body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit.

We have to warn people that anyone not having the Holy Spirit does not belong to Christ. If you are not conscious of the presence of the Spirit of God in your life, you need to consider whether you are truly saved. 2 Cor. 13:5 says, “Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith...” Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Being in the Spirit is not a matter of professing Christ, looking holy or attending church. The evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit within. As we see from vv.14-16, the Spirit will lead us, and assure us that we are children of God.

So how do we receive the Holy Spirit? Well in the first part of v.10, Paul says, “if Christ is in you...” You see, if you receive Jesus, you also receive the Holy Spirit. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” So put your faith in Jesus. Ask Him to come into your heart, and He will. And you will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Then, you not only need to make sure you are indwelt by the Spirit, but furthermore:

B. Make Sure You Are Controlled by the Spirit – This is the main point I am making. Again, the last part of v.5 says that we Christians live “according to the Spirit.” As I pointed out last week, that means to live under the control of the Spirit. It is not enough for us to have the Spirit; the Spirit must have us! You do not need more the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit needs greater control of you.

You know what it is to be under the control of something. Those who are filled with anger come under the control of anger. Those who get drunk come under the control of alcohol. Well Paul said in Eph. 5:18, “do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Allow the Spirit to fill you, and control your mind, your tongue, and your actions.

How can you know you are controlled by the Spirit? One major test is found in the last of v.5. There Paul indicates that we set our mind on “the things of the Spirit.” He also says in v.6 that we are “spiritually minded,” or literally, we have the “mind of the Spirit.” This is a mind possessed or controlled by the Holy Spirit. Col. 3:2 says literally, “Think on things above, not on things on the earth.” Do you frequently set your mind upon the things of God, such as His Word, His work, & His worship? The things of the Holy Spirit include the things revealed in the Word of God. 1 Cor. 2:10 says “God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” Are you interested in the Word of God? Do you have a love for the Word of God? What can we conclude when a person shows little or no interest in coming to church and learning more about God’s Word? Do you want to come to church to worship the Lord? That is included in “the things of the Spirit.” Furthermore, are you interested in the things that the Holy Spirit is seeking to do? He is seeking to save souls. Are you interested in winning souls to Christ? According to Acts 1:8 the filling of the Spirit will be evidenced by witnessing for Christ. The Spirit is interested in making you grow as a Christian? Are you interested in your own spiritual growth?

I well remember what happened after I gave my life to Christ. I became interested in the things of God. No one had to make me go to church. I *wanted* to go to church. I wanted to read the Bible. I wanted to serve God. I hope you have had a similar experience. If not, you need to question if you are indwelt by the Spirit, & if you have yielded your life to the control of the Spirit.

So if your life isn’t showing evidence of the Spirit of God, then you don’t belong to Christ. If you aren’t desiring to walk in the way of the Spirit and if you do not seek the things of the Spirit,

then He is not in you. You need to be saved today. Let this day be the day that you receive the blessed Holy Spirit into your life by faith in Jesus.

Now if you are indwelt by the Spirit, and especially if you are controlled by the Spirit:

C. Then You May Experience the Blessings of the Spirit – I see from this text 4 blessings of life in the Spirit. These are also additional tests of whether or not you are indwelt & controlled by the Spirit.

1. Those Who Are in the Spirit Can Live in Righteousness - Based on the contrast that Paul makes between those living in the flesh verses those living in the Spirit, we may conclude that the Spirit-controlled person can obey God, & usually does obey God. He or she fulfills God's moral law & pleases Him because of the enabling work of the Spirit. Remember what Paul said in v.4, "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Living right without the Spirit of God is impossible. But we can live right when we rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh, what a blessing it is to live in victory over sin & the flesh, rather than defeat!

2. Those Who Are in the Spirit Have Life - Paul says in the last of v.10, "but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." He also indicates in v.6 that the product of the Spirit of God within us is life. When you come to know Jesus as your Savior you are born again. God implants new life within you. "Life" is contrasted with "death" and it includes the knowledge and fellowship of God (cf. Jn. 17:3). It includes full satisfaction. It is a present state of life, not just a kind of life we enjoy in heaven. There is love, joy, strength, & vitality in the life of the Spirit.¹

What is the only way to have such life? As we see in v.10, we can have life "because of righteousness." "Righteousness" appears to be used in the sense of justification. It refers to the righteousness accomplished by Christ. The Holy Spirit cannot impart life to us apart from the accomplishment of redemption by Christ.

3. Those Who Are in the Spirit Have Peace - Paul says in the last of v.6 that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." We have peace with God. The enmity spoken of in v.7 is over. Our sins are forgiven. We also have the peace of God. We experience well-being regarding the present and future. Can you say, "It is well with my soul?" Do you have this peace?

Finally, another blessing of the life of the Spirit is this:

4. Those Who Are in the Spirit Have Hope – Hope is only active against the backdrop of suffering & death. Well Paul says in v.10, "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin...." When a person becomes a Christian, God saves their soul, but not their body in this life. The body is dead in the sense that it is the seat of death & decay. The Holy Spirit gives new life to your soul, but not your body. That's why Christians still get sick & die. We remain subject to the pains, the sorrows, the trials of life, and the necessity of dying, although partakers of new life in Jesus. Ah, but notice our hope stated in v.11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." God's salvation is a complete work. He not only saves your soul, but He will also save your body. Two ideas may be included in the last part of v.11: first that the very possession of the Spirit is a pledge and security that our bodies shall rise again. Likewise, after speaking of our glorious future in 2 Cor. 5:1-4, Paul mentions in v.5 that the Holy Spirit is the earnest, or guarantee of our future. Secondly, the resurrection of Christ also

¹ I do believe Paul is speaking of the Holy Spirit rather than the human spirit. It would be strange if the apostle would set up the human spirit of the believer as that which stands in antithesis to the death which is overtly predicated of the body.

secures our resurrection. The apostle designs to show that the life which we derive from Christ shall ultimately affect a complete triumph over death.

That's a great truth! Not only do we have a spiritual resurrection when we come to Christ, but we will also have a bodily resurrection someday. If you were regenerated spiritually, you will be regenerated physically as well.²

So we have many wonderful blessings from our life in the Spirit:

D. Therefore, We Should Fulfill Our Obligation to God – Paul says in v.12, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors....” However, Paul is quick to point out that we are not indebted to the flesh. Though the sin nature can offer some temporary sinful pleasure, in the end it brings nothing but trouble into our lives. It brings bondage & death. Therefore, we do not owe the flesh anything. We are not obligated to live under the control of the old nature. It is no longer our master.

The same thing is true of your non-Christian friends. You are not indebted to them. They may pressure you to go along with them in doing wrong, but you don't own them anything. They have never died for you, but Jesus has. They cannot offer you the kinds of blessings the Spirit does.

Rather, we are indebted to the Lord for all He has done for us. He is the One who set us free from the terrible condition described in vv.5-8. We are deeply in debt to our Liberator.

Back in the days of the Roman Empire, many people served as slaves. But occasionally, someone would come along a purchase a slave's freedom. Sometimes a man would fall in love with a female slave & purchase her freedom that he may marry her. When that happened, the freed slave would be indebted to the one who set them free.

Even so, we are indebted to the One who set us free from the bondage & death of sin. We are indebted to God, who has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings He brings, including life, peace, and hope for the future. We are debtors to God, for through His Spirit, we have power over sin. God has gone to the depths of Calvary and the heights of the resurrection in order to furnish us with a power that will make it possible for us to live lives of victory.

Specifically, what are we obligated to do? This is indicated in the last of v.13, “if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” This debt is partially paid by killing the sinful deeds of the body. It's not the body itself that is evil. We are not to put the body to death by committing suicide. Rather, we should put to death those *deeds* the sin nature does through the body. We still have a sin nature as believers, and we have to deal with it decisively. “Put to death” (*thanatoo*) refers to activity on your part. It is something that you must do. No one can do it for you. It is your choice. This is similar to Paul's statement in 6:11 to “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin.” However, here the emphasis is not upon making a decisive decision to put our old sinful self to death, but rather putting the sinful *deeds* to death. What's interesting to me is the fact that it is a present tense. You have to keep on putting those sinful deeds to death.

You can kill weeds in your garden, but new ones have a way of cropping up, and the battle continues. It never really ends in this life. You have to keep on putting to death the sinful deeds of the body.

Now let's get even more specific. Turn over to Colossians 3. V.5 says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Then vv.8-9 says, “But now you yourselves are to put off all

² Some [Barnhouse, p.49] believe v.11b refers, not to a future bodily resurrection, but to an infusing of life in our bodies in this life, similar in meaning to v.10. What a change Christ makes in our bodies! This throat, once a grave, has now become a flowing fountain; this tongue which once used deceit now speaks the truth in love. These feet, once swift to shed blood, are not swift to proclaim the glories that flow from the blood of the Redeemer.

these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”

Can we put such sinful deeds to death with mere willpower? No! Notice back in v.13 of our text that it is always “by the Spirit” that you “put to death the deeds of the body.” You cannot do it alone. You must rely upon the Holy Spirit to enable you.

A little boy coming home from school was being beaten up by a big bully. Then he looked up from his defeated position on the bottom, and he saw his big brother coming. The big brother took care of the bully. Even so, the believer has the Holy Spirit to deal with the flesh, that big bully. I learned a long time ago that I can't overcome it. So I have to turn it over to Somebody who can, the Holy Spirit.

Do you know that many of the sins of my past are dead? Some of the sins of my youth, such as profanity, have *never* been repeated. I trust that the sins of stealing and lying have been put to death. I know that victory is possible. What sins are there in your life that *you* still need to put to death?

Conclusion: Do you see yourself in the message today? Do you see yourself in vv.5-8, always thinking about worldly & sinful things? Do you have little interest in the things of God? Are you here today because you are not out to please God, but please a family member or friend? That says a lot about your spiritual condition.

If you realize that you are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that you are trying to live life on your own, I urge you to turn to Jesus Christ. He died to bring forgiveness & liberty from sin. Ask Him into your heart, & you will be born again. You will receive the Holy Spirit. You will have new desires, and a new power to live in righteousness. You will have peace & hope for the future. Today could be the first day of a new life in Christ.

There are others here today who have been born again. You have seen past evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, but you have not been fulfilling your obligation to God by putting to death the sinful deeds of the body. Whatever sins you are still having trouble with, I call upon you to put those sins to death today! Repent of them; receive forgiveness, and rely upon the blessed Holy Spirit to continue to put those sins to death every time temptation comes your way.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, “God’s Heirs” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes on Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).