

Two Ways to Live: Part 2
Romans 8:5

3/8/15

We have been in a study of salvation for the past few weeks that has led us to our text this morning in Romans 8:5. I want to focus on what is said in that one verse because it provides practical insight for how we can live our lives in victory. But to get some context, let's read Rom 8:1-8. I'm reading from the New International Version.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. 5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

In Romans 8:5 we find two related concepts. The first we introduced last week. Christians are faced with a choice as to how they will live: two differing paths are set forth in the text; then, secondly, the key to taking the right path is identified; we will deal with this next week.

Keep in mind that Paul has written this letter to Christians. The first thing Paul does in this letter (Rom 1:8) is to thank God *"...for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world."* These were people of faith. Yet Paul talks with them about the choices they will be making in their daily lives.

In our text he contrasts two ways of living.

One is to *"live according to the sinful nature"*; the other is to *"live in accordance with the Spirit."*

One path for the Christian is to follow his own selfish desires—to simply do what he wants to do. Paul says that leads to death. The other path is to follow the desires of the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence in us. That leads to life and peace. Let me read verse 6 in the Amplified version, *"Now the mind of the flesh [which is the sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death [death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter]. But the mind of the [Holy] Spirit is life and [soul] peace [both now and forever]."* Two paths/ two very different end results for the Christian. Every day, you and I are making choices that affect our future in this life and affect our future in the life to come. *"Do not be deceived,"* Paul says in Galatians 6, *"God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."* We usually hear those words as a warning not to live according to the desires of our sinful nature. And there is a caution to that effect in the passage. But more than that, it is a word of encouragement to those who are serving the Lord. Your labor for the Lord is not in vain. Sowing good seed, living in obedience to the Lord, will bring blessing to your life. That's why Paul goes on to say, *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* Anyone a little weary in well doing? Anyone tempted to give up? Paul says, don't give up—for payday is coming for you! God Himself is committed to that. The real test of faith is the delay between sowing and reaping. A farmer does not sow his seed in the ground and the next day, reap the harvest. It happens *"at the proper time"*, or as the KJV puts it *"in due season."* There are some people here today who have a season of joy ahead of you. *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."*¹ *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* Joseph spent some time in a pit. He was persecuted by his own brothers. He was lied about by Potiphar's wife. He spent time in prison. And the butler did him wrong. But his day came. His turn around was quick and amazing.

¹ Psalm 30:5

God can change it all with one word, one event. Do not be weary in well doing, for in due season you will reap a harvest—just don't give up!

Let me go a little further with this contrast between walking in the flesh (*sarx*) versus walking in the Spirit (*pneuma*). Paul has written on this subject in Galatians 5 and that passage helps clarify our text. So I want us to turn to Gal. 5:13-15 and read what Paul says there. *"You, my brothers², were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."*

I want to take a few statements in this Galatians passage and process them with you as a foundation for understanding our text in Romans 8:5.

1. Verse 13 *"But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature...."* Paul is talking about our freedom from the Law of Moses, a works system. In the New Covenant we are not under the rules and regulations that were set out in the Old Testament. But that liberty from the tedious precepts and statutes should not be understood as *"freedom to indulge the sinful nature."* Grace should not lead to debauchery.³ It should lead to love and obedience. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:14 NKJV). Grace does not teach us *"to indulge the sinful nature"*; it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-12). By grace you're called to freedom; *"But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature...."*

2. Verse 16 *"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."* It's so important that we understand the order Paul is presenting here. The way you overcome the demands of the sinful nature is by walking in the Spirit. Yes, we must say "no" to sinful desires. But the victory comes as we give ourselves to God and experience the influence of His Spirit in our daily lives. We are going to talk more about how we "live by the Spirit." But we need to understand first that it is living in the power of the Spirit that is the key to overcoming our own fleshly desires. This is what Paul is saying in Rom. 8:2 *"...the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* It's the operation of the Spirit in our lives that trumps the desires of the flesh. *"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."*

² Again, this is a message to Christians. Some people understand Romans 8:9 as proof that all Christians walk after the Spirit and all unbelievers walk after the flesh, relegating the Rom. 7 struggle to unbelievers. But if that were the case, this would be a rather senseless message in Galatians 5:13 and Romans 6-8 would be of little value. It is true that every Christian is "...not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you" (NKJV). The Christian is "in Christ" and not "in the flesh." Every unbeliever is "in" the flesh and lives accordingly. Rom. 8:9 is a reminder to the Christian as to who he is and therefore sets up the exhortation in Rom. 8:12 *"Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it."* This is like a father saying to his children, "We are Tows (family name); we do not live the way those other people live." Gal 5:25 puts it this way, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (NKJV). Note to Rom. 8:8-9 in the New Spirit Filled Life Bible says, "Those who are in the flesh characterizes people's very nature and is a stronger description than the activity of walking according to the flesh. The phrase therefore refers to unbelievers who cannot please God. This situation is not true of believers, as the following verse shows. 8:9 He is not His: All Christians have the Holy Spirit within them. Anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit within is not a Christian. Though Paul says that Christians are in the Spirit, he also warns that they can from time to time live 'according to the flesh' (vs 13." (New Spirit Filled Life Bible, Jack W. Hayford, ex. Ed., Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2002, p. 1561). Donald Grey Barnhouse writes, "There is a great difference between a man being in the flesh and the flesh being in the man. I am not in the flesh though the flesh is in me" (*Romans: God's Heirs Romans 8:1-39, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1959, p. 41*

³ For example in Matt. 19:8-9 and Mark 10:2-9 Jesus explained the Mosaic law of divorcement. God gave that as a boundary to restrain evil in Israel; but it came short of His intent for humans. His desire is that people would live in love; and be joined together in an enduring relationship. So the moral law of love actually exceeds the requirements of the Mosaic Law, just as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

3. Verse 17 *“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”* You cannot just follow your own wishes. There is a battle going on in the life of every Christian. Do not think that you’re the only one going through it. Do not say, “Well this is just the way I am and I can’t help it.” According to 1 Cor. 10:13 (KJV) *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man...”* and for every temptation He provides the way of escape. The Living Bible states this very simply, *“13 But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren’t anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation’s power so that you can bear up patiently against it.”*

It has become popular in our society to excuse sin by simply saying, “I was born that way.” Well, that’s the problem every one of us have. We were all born sons of Adam; we were all born with a sinful nature. The propensity toward a particular sin varies from one person to another. One person may be sorely tempted toward homosexuality. Another may be tempted heavily toward adultery. Another may be terribly tempted toward gluttony or alcohol abuse.⁴ Just because the temptation is strong does not mean the sin is justified. I’ve known people who could hardly resist gossiping, and other people that hardly talked. Dispositions differ and temptation toward a particular iniquity differs. This I can assure you: if you’re part of the human race, you’ve got some desires that are not pleasing to God and must be resisted. Be kind to those who may have devils to fight that you know little about.⁵ But don’t justify anything that is contrary to what God has declared in His word. I was very impressed with the insight Carrie shared last week about sin. It’s one thing to be struggling with a sin, but acknowledging it as sin. It’s quite another to find a justification for the iniquity and just give yourself to it. That’s a whole different level. *“Let God be true and every man a liar”* (Rom. 3:3). God’s word is eternal; it will stand when everything around you has fallen. If God says it’s wrong; then it is wrong. He is gracious and merciful to us as we struggle with various issues. But never call Him a liar in order to justify wrong action.

So the struggle between the flesh (the sinful nature) and the Spirit is one that every Christian faces. It is a battle that we face every day of our lives. The pressing question is how do we win that battle. Romans 8:5, gives us crucial insight for answering to that question. *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”*

The key to living *“in accordance with the Spirit”* is found in how we manage our thought live. *“...have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”* That will be our subject next week. How does our thinking affect our lives and what can we do about it?

⁴ This genetic reality is evident in the inherited weaknesses toward schizophrenia, heart disease, etc. That’s why the doctors want to know the patient’s family history.

⁵ Matt 5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”* We must guard against a harsh, judgmental spirit while honoring God’s word at the same time. This requires wisdom from the Holy Spirit. The heart of God is always redemptive (2Pet. 3:9); but sin must be dealt with for what it is (Eph. 5:11-12; 2Tim. 4:2-4; Ezek. 33:8-9).