

# The Mind Set On The Flesh and the Work of the Spirit

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're in the book of Romans.

We've been traveling through Romans for quite some time. Took a little bit of time off during the summer, but we are fully back in Romans in the middle of chapter 8. And so this morning I would like us to pick up in verse 5, and we're going to travel down to the end of verse 9.

So right here, verses 5 through 9 this morning of Romans chapter 8. And I know you just sat down, but I'd like to ask you to stand as we read the Word of God together. The Apostle Paul tells us, 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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

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.

[ 1 : 18 ] You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

We give you thanks, Father, for this Word. We give you thanks that we know that as we meditate on it, the Holy Spirit spoken of in these verses, the Holy Spirit speaking through these verses, will open our hearts and our minds to see and understand and cherish.

The truth we learn here. We give you thanks for that. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I have a tendency when I go about things to sort of look off in the distance and set a goal for myself, set a goal for whatever I'm trying to do, and then I just sort of aim at that goal regardless of what I need to do to get there.

That's just sort of how I work. Another way to say that is that I have a lot of big ideas and don't really know how to get there. That's another way to say that. That a lot of times I'll think of something that is a great idea and I know where I want to head, but I don't always, initially at the outset, I don't always have every step planned along the way.

Or sometimes I haven't thought as fully about every step as might be necessary to get done whatever I know that I want to get done. And so right now we're in the middle of a kitchen renovation.

[ 2 : 48 ] Most of you know that. You've seen some pictures on Facebook. We're in the middle of this kitchen renovation. And it's a great idea. Okay? We have good plans for what we're going to do. And yet last night, I stood in the middle of my kitchen and looked around and there were no more cabinets.

There was no more pantry. In fact, there's really nothing left in there but light fixtures. Most of the sheetrock is gone. The pipes are exposed. The wires are hanging out of the ceilings and the walls and all over the place.

And that's the point in time where I start to think, maybe I didn't quite plan out every detail in exactly the way that I ought to have. But that's kind of sort of how I work.

I have goals. I know where I'm headed. But a lot of times, I don't know exactly how I'm going to get there. I just aim myself and I just keep plowing ahead until I arrive at the goal or come to the conclusion there's no way I'm ever going to get where I'm headed.

That's just sort of how I work. And to a certain extent, that can be good because a lot of people walk around with no goals whatsoever. So it's a good thing to have goals. It's a good thing to have an end in sight and to know that you're headed somewhere because otherwise, we only live in the moment, we only live in the day, and we only do small things.

[ 3 : 58 ] Nobody does great things if they don't look ahead and try to do something that they can't do today. And so in some respects, that's a good thing. God, of course, is always in the business of doing great things.

God is always in the business of accomplishing massive goals. And the Word of God reveals to us some of those goals. God, unlike me though, has every step along the way planned.

He knows exactly how He's going to accomplish all of His purposes. The Bible tells us that He never fails to accomplish any of His purposes, which means that He never fails to accomplish all the things that He needs to do to arrive at His purposes.

And the blessing that we have in being able to open the Bible every week is that we can see and know what God is doing. The Bible doesn't just tell us who God is and what God is like.

The Bible tells us what God has done in the past through the history of Israel all the way up to the time of Christ and through the lives of the apostles. The Bible tells us what God is doing currently now.

[ 5 : 02 ] And the Bible even tells us many things that God is going to do in the future, what His final, ultimate goals are. And in Romans chapter 8, at least in these first 17 verses that we're spending some time on over these next few weeks, God gives us insight into what the goal of the Holy Spirit is in the lives of God's people.

What exactly is the Spirit of God up to as He works in us and among us? What is He trying to accomplish and how is He going to accomplish that?

So that last week as we looked at the first four verses of Romans, one of the things that we saw is that the work of God in saving a people for Himself is such that He saves us so that we might become the kind of people who obey His law.

He saves us so that we might become holy, sanctified people. In fact, I want you to look up a couple of verses to where we were last week where God tells us in verse 3 that God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

So He tells us what God has done. God has sent His Son. He sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus really did become human. He didn't appear to be human.

[ 6 : 29 ] He didn't look like a man. He really was a man. And He faced all the temptations that we face. That's the point of saying that He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus did not have a sinful nature.

He was not fallen like we are. He was unfallen as Adam was in the beginning which is why He's called the second Adam or the last Adam in Scripture. Yet Jesus faced all the temptations that we face in a fallen world.

God sent His Son into a fallen sinful world and He sent His Son for sin. That is He sent Jesus to be the sacrifice for the sins of those who failed to live up to the demands of God's law.

He sent Christ into the world to redeem those who need redemption. So Paul tells us what God has done in Christ but he also tells us why.

Why? In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. And we saw last week that that means that God actually intends among those whom He saves He actually intends to make them into holy and righteous people.

[ 7 : 39 ] That's what God is doing in the hearts of His people. And that's what His Spirit is doing. Which is why that verse continues on and refers to those in whom God is working to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law as those who walk according to the Spirit.

This task of turning sinful people into righteous people turning sinners into saints actually is the work of the Holy Spirit and His goal in what He's doing in our lives is to make us into sanctified glory seeking people of God.

In fact if you look down a few verses in verse 29 of Romans chapter 8 we're told we're getting sort of the big bird's eye view of God's work of salvation. Those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

That's where it's heading. That's where it's going. That's what the Spirit is up to. He's conforming God's people into the image of His Son. Now you might want to take a step back and you might want to say but isn't the goal of God in saving people ultimately His own glory?

Isn't the goal of God in saving people ultimately so that God receives praise? And the answer is absolutely. Because as you continue to read on in Romans 8 past verse 29 you can see that where Paul gives what's often called the golden chain of redemption.

[ 9 : 04 ] Foreknown, predestined and then we see there in verse 30 those who be predestined He also called. those who be called He also justified. Those who be justified He also glorified so that we end up in a state where we are able to give to God the praise and honor and glory that He deserves.

But if you say but how? How does He go about creating a people for the sake of His own praise? How does He do that? What does it mean precisely for God to glorify His people?

It means that He's making us into holy and righteous people. If you ask what kind of people does God want to praise Him for all eternity?

What sort of man what sort of woman does God want to sing His praises for all of eternity? The answer is a sanctified person. A person who has the capacity to not only see the glory of God but to savor and love what they see.

And so the end of the work of the Holy Spirit the goal of the work of the Holy Spirit and all that He's doing in our lives is to conform us to the image of God's Son.

[ 10 : 12 ] That is to sanctify us to make us holy so that the righteous requirement of the law is actually fulfilled in us. That's the end of the work of the Holy Spirit. That's where it's all heading so that God actually has a people to praise Him but a people who've been cleansed and purified and made holy.

In Romans chapter 8 verses 1-17 show us how that process works. How exactly is God going to arrive at the place where He has a people to praise Him who are holy and righteous?

That's what these verses are about. But they're not disconnected from everything that He's said before. I don't want you to think that suddenly we've jumped on to a new topic here in chapter 8 that has nothing to do with the first seven chapters of the book of Romans.

In fact, if you'll recall beginning in chapter 6 of Romans Paul is very much concerned with the idea of practical holiness and righteousness in the life of a Christian.

That's what he's concerned about in chapters 6, 7, and 8. That's what he's been writing about now for over two chapters. His focus is on answering the question okay, if a person becomes righteous in the sight of God that is if a person is saved or redeemed or guaranteed eternal life not on the basis of works not on the basis of their obedience to the law but simply by faith in Jesus alone if that's the case then why should we have any hope that people that are saved by faith apart from works why should we have any hope that they would actually ever be righteous people?

[ 11 : 55 ] Because if God counts you to be righteous or declares you to be righteous when you're not righteous just because you trusted in Jesus which is what justification means in the book of Romans if God does that then why would anybody who knows that they're saved not by anything they do but by what Christ has done why would they actually turn around and live a holy night?

Why not just enjoy grace and then go out and continue to live the way that you lived before? Paul has been answering that question since verse 1 of chapter 6 and a part of the answer to that question is that Christians are those in whom the Spirit of God now dwells so that the Holy Spirit is doing something in us we don't become right in God's eyes because of what we do but once we've been justified by faith in Jesus the Spirit begins to do a work in us to change and transform us and now here in chapter 8 we're beginning to see what that work actually looks like and how he goes about it so we know the end of this work is a people to praise God who've been glorified and sanctified and transformed and a people who fulfill the righteous requirement of the law that's the end that's where it's headed but what's the nature of it?

how does the Spirit do this? what actually happens? well we begin to get a glimpse in these verses that we're looking at this morning I want you to take a look at verse 5 where Paul Paul begins to contrast two things he begins to contrast the flesh and the Spirit and he actually began this contrast really at the end of verse 4 where he contrasts those who walk according to the Spirit with those who walk according to the flesh so there's this contrast in our passage between the Spirit and the flesh notice it's throughout the passage verse 5 we have those who live according to the flesh and set their minds on the things of the flesh compared to those who live according to the Spirit and set their minds on the things of the Spirit in verse 6 we're told that the mind set on the flesh is death and then the converse of that the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace and then again in verses 7 and 8 we have a focus on the flesh it's hostile to God cannot obey

God's law and then in verse 9 those not in the flesh those not in the flesh are in the Spirit so this contrast throughout the passage between what it means to be in the flesh and what it means to be in the Spirit what it means to live or be or walk according to the flesh what it means to live or be or walk according to the Spirit and what's amazing is that Paul is telling us that the Holy Spirit is capable of taking those who were once so enslaved to the flesh that they were incapable of obeying God's law and he now transforms them into people who fulfill the righteous requirement of the law that's massive but we can't fully wrap our heads around that until we really meditated on what Paul has to say about how entrenched those who do not know Christ are in the flesh how controlled and enslaved to the sin and flesh we are before we come to

Christ I want you to take a look down here at verses 7 and 8 where Paul more than probably any other place gives us insight into what it means to be a lost person what it means to not know Christ what it means to be in the flesh verse 7 the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God it does not submit to God's law and then here's a key phrase indeed it cannot it cannot submit to God's law and then to add an additional punch those who are in the flesh cannot please God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit to infuse spiritual life into us we are incapable of pleasing God and incapable of obeying God our sinfulness is so deeply rooted in who we are that we do not on our own even possess the ability to respond to God's word in a positive way we cannot do that apart from the power of the Holy

[ 16 : 31 ] Spirit it just cannot be done so if you turn over to Ephesians chapter 2 where Paul contrasts again in another place what it is to be apart from Christ and what it is to be in Christ in Ephesians chapter 2 he says and this is another description of those who are in the flesh he says in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 that you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked you were dead that's what it means to be in the flesh to be spiritually dead incapable of making any positive to move toward God or with reference to his commandments dead in your sins unable to obey God unable simply dead he says the same things just a couple of books later if you look over in Colossians chapter 2 verse 13 it will be on the screen if you can't turn that quickly Paul says and you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh spiritual death all of us come into this world enslaved to the flesh spiritually dead and unable to truly and rightly obey

God's law or please God now I think sometimes we might ponder those kinds of statements and we might say but surely that's taking this too strongly surely that's not precisely what Paul means after all I know non-Christians who've never murdered anyone I know plenty of non-Christians who've never killed anyone so if they've never killed anyone haven't they obeyed at least a portion of the Ten Commandments you shall not murder or I know plenty of married Christians who've never committed adultery they've never done it so surely couldn't we say that this non-Christian this person in the flesh can to some degree obey the law of God which I think Paul would answer and I would certainly say not truly they have not truly from their hearts fully obeyed the law of God and I say that because Jesus tells us that sort of thing I want you to hold your place in Romans I want you to turn all the way back to the gospel of Matthew if you would

Matthew chapters 5 and 6 and 7 are the sermon on the mount the longest single sermon that Jesus gives at any given time in his ministry and in these chapters particularly in chapter 5 Jesus begins to address the issue of obedience to the law so I'd like to just look quickly at a couple places in Matthew chapter 5 verse 21 Jesus says you have heard that it was said to those of old you shall not murder well there we are there's the commandment and whoever murders will be liable to judgment and Jesus says but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire you see Jesus standards for you shall not murder go beyond mere external obedience to the command externally it's possible to avoid murdering anyone but internally have you hated your brother have you insulted them at least in your mind if not out loud with your lips have you have you called them a fool in your heart then in the heart truly you are a murderer you have you have insulted and afflicted one made in the image of God or we can consider the command about adultery verse 27 you have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart it is not

Jesus says merely a matter of externally avoiding intimate contact with another person no this is a matter of the heart and if you have lusted in your heart then you have become an adulterer in your heart you have violated God's law so is there anyone on the face of the earth other than Jesus who apart from the power of the Holy Spirit to change and transform them is capable of obeying God's law no there is not anyone who can do that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit we cannot obey God which means of course that we we cannot on our own even trust in the gospel God must do a supernatural work inside us to take dead hearts and make them alive before we will ever make any move toward God of any kind and the nature of the work of the Spirit is to do just that the nature of the work of the

Holy Spirit is to take those who are spiritually dead to infuse spiritual life into them and to begin to cause them to walk according to the Spirit to begin to cause them to fulfill the law by loving God and loving others that is the nature of the work of the Spirit the Spirit turns us from those in the flesh unable to obey God to those who walk according to the Spirit and fulfill!

[ 21 : 56 ] He's able to do that because He is the Spirit of life and because He's capable of giving life to us that's what He does that's what He specializes in He's the Spirit who gives life to those who are spiritually dead so if we look back at those two passages Ephesians chapter 2 and Colossians chapter 2 where we are described as those who are spiritually dead we will see again you were told but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us even when you were dead in your trespasses made us alive together with Christ God makes the dead alive so that they trust in Jesus and then they begin to obey the law from their heart that's what God does and he does it through the power of the Holy Spirit or Colossians chapter 2 that you who were once dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh God made alive that's what he does and he does it through the power of the

Holy Spirit and that's what Paul is talking about here in Romans chapter 8 he's talking about the spirit of God capable and powerful enough to give life to those who are spiritually dead this is the greatest miracle!

of all how does God cause those who cannot obey him to obey him he imparts life but what do we mean when we say that even what do we mean when we say spiritual life what exactly does that entail because it sounds like a nice platitude it sounds good but what does it mean what does it entail I think we can get insight into that if we pay attention to Paul's language throughout these verses notice verse 5 again those who live according to the flesh literally it's those who are according to the flesh those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh I want you to note that phrase set their minds and then again those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit and then a to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile toward

God you see this language about the mind being set on something or a mind set this is a word in Greek that is very difficult for us to actually communicate in English it's a word that is so full of meaning that there's no single phrase or term in English that we can use to render it and convey all of that meaning because this particular word indicates not just how we think but it indicates all of who we are internally it's our affections it's our emotions it's our heart it's our mind it's our entire inward disposition who you really are that's what he's talking about so he says that the mind set on the flesh that's someone are fixed on the things of the flesh and those who are in the spirit or live according to the spirit they are those whose affections their heart their feelings their thoughts their mindset is all about the things of the spirit so that when we say that the holy spirit infuses life into those who are spiritually dead what we really mean is he's giving us new desires he's giving us a new mindset he's giving us new affections he's causing us to delight in things in which we once did not have the capacity to delight apart from the work of the spirit you cannot and you will not delight in

God you will not take joy and pleasure in who Jesus is and in all that he has done for us you cannot do that apart from the work of the Holy new set of desires he's giving you a new heart is what the prophet Ezekiel would say he is fundamentally transforming who you are on the inside which is why when the spirit begins to work the natural outworking of that is faith in Jesus because what is faith in Jesus what is it it is a it is a new inclination toward him it is a savoring and delighting in all that he has done for you to trust in Jesus is not merely to agree with what the Bible says about who he is and what he's done that's obviously necessary but to trust in Jesus is to be satisfied in

[ 26 : 47 ] Christ and all that he has done for you but in order to be satisfied in Christ you you need a new appetite!

and the Holy Spirit imparts new appetites to people that's what he does the technical terminology that we use for this often time is regeneration the more common term that we use for this is to be born again that's what Paul is saying is absolutely necessary you need a new birth you need a new nature you need new desires and new life and that comes about through the new birth!

and who is it that causes us to be born again Jesus tells us in John chapter 3 that it is the Holy Spirit he tells Nicodemus you must be born again and that confuses Nicodemus because it's an even more confusing phrase perhaps than the spirit gives life but then Jesus follows that confusion up by saying it's okay that you're confused it's okay because just as the wind blows wherever it wants you don't know if it's coming from this direction or that you don't know where it's coming or where it's going you don't know so it is with the work of the Holy Spirit there's great mystery!

in how he does this there's grace but it is uniquely his work it is the work of the Spirit to create new desires new delights and to infuse life into people so that a person who once was incapable of pleasing God now has the faith that pleases him a person that once was incapable of obeying God's law now through the power of the Spirit fulfills the righteous requirement of the law through love this is an incredible miraculous work that the Holy Spirit does look down at verse nine real quickly before we finish I want you to notice this because it provides a test for us you who however are not in the flesh but in the spirit so he has said things about those who are in the flesh that are hard to stomach they cannot please

God they cannot obey his law he encourages the Romans a bit by saying but you you're not in the flesh you're in the spirit if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you anyone on the other hand who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him how do you know that you belong to Christ where does what we often call assurance of salvation where does it come from what's the basis what's the foundation of us feeling really good and strongly about our salvation to know that our faith is real to know that we genuinely love Jesus where does that come from well it comes from on the one hand just believing the promises of God about what Christ has done and that's absolutely true but it also comes from seeing evidence of the work do you have desires for

[ 30 : 05 ] Christ that you previously did not have do you actually delight in Jesus do you take joy in who he is evidence of the work of the spirit do you find your love for Christ overflowing in love for your neighbor and therefore do you find yourself fulfilling the law not because you're trying so hard but just because you have a new found love for your neighbor!

that wasn't there before the spirit of God has put within you that's a source a powerful source for assurance of salvation in our lives but it is also a strong and powerful test for us to ask the question am I in Christ do I belong to Christ because of all of this coming to church and singing songs and reading your Bible and listening to sermons if all of this matter of habit then it may be that the spirit is not in you and you don't belong to Christ in which case you need to call out to him and plead with him to save you and then begin the process of sanctifying you it means that when you begin to pray for those in whom you do not see the work of the spirit or for those that you know for a fact are not yet followers of Jesus it means that you now know how to pray you're not praying vague prayers you're praying for

God to actually do something you're praying! and asking Holy Spirit would you come and give them life Spirit just not interested in Jesus so make them interested in Jesus give them a heart that longs for him and that reaches out to him and clings to him and grasps him and takes hold of him that's how you begin to pray that's how you pray for your kids when they're little because they don't come into this world in Christ they come into this world in Adam so you pray for your children that at some point the spirit would do the work of regeneration and change their hearts and you would then have kids who love Jesus and for whom Christianity is not just a handed down thing that they do because mom and dad do it new desires pray for new desires I know you say but you said and Jesus said that we don't know when the spirit is going to move we where it's going we just like the wind we don't have control over that so what are we asking for

I don't think this is any different than what we see for instance in 1st Corinthians 1st Corinthians Paul is dealing with an entirely different subject but he's still talking about the work of the spirit he's talking about spiritual gifts tells us in 1st Corinthians that the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to whomever he pleases so it's sovereignty again for the spirit whomever he pleases he wants to give you a gift he gives you a spiritual gift he doesn't want to give you that spiritual gift he's not obligated he's sovereign in the distribution of gifts and yet Paul says earnestly desire the greater gifts and yet Paul says that it is entirely right for us that we should pray for the gifts that we desire spirit is sovereign and yet we can pray and ask him for things and the same thing is true in the matter of regeneration spirit is sovereign we don't know where the wind is going to blow we don't know where it's coming from the spirit is going to do!

do make the wind blow here cause it to happen right here to this heart transform the way that you pray for your kids and your neighbors and even at times for yourself let's pray