



“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13).

Walking After the Spirit

Central Truth: The inner motivations of the Holy Spirit bring victory over those of the flesh.

L399. Date: January 1983. **Text:** Romans 8:1-13.

Topic: Holy Spirit: Filling of.

“If Holy Scripture was a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans a precious stone, chapter 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel” (Spenser). Such words are not too exaggerated to describe the lesson text for this study. Here is the mountain peak of the Bible.

The eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans begins with “*no condemnation*” and ends with “*no separation,*” with “*no defeat*” written in between! The key concept of the chapter is the Holy Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned twenty-one times in chapter 8, more than any other chapter in the New Testament. It shows how the Christian life is initiated, sustained, directed, and enriched by the Spirit of God.

How different chapter 7 is from chapter 8. Chapter 7 has “*I*” thirty-three times, “*me*” twelve times, “*our*” two times, “*we*” seven times, “*my*” five times, and “*myself*” one time in the King James Version. But the Holy Spirit is never mentioned. The result is confusion and defeat throughout. Chapter 8 mentions the Holy Spirit twenty-one times and “*I*” occurs only two times. The result is victory and assurance throughout.

Romans chapter 8 is an appropriate text for a study on “Walking After the Spirit.”

I. THE SPIRIT AND THE LAW

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-4).

There are two approaches to life: legal and spiritual. The first is based on what man can do for God. The second is based on what God does for man. That is the point of emphasis in Romans 8:14. “*Law*” in the passage refers to the regulative principle that exercises control over a person, whether it is the law of Moses or some other principle.

A. The law is weak and unable to make man righteous. There were some things “*the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh*” (verse 3).

What was it that the law could not do? It could not deliver from condemnation and ruin caused by sin; it could not lead unbelievers to obey and practice it; it could not lead them to repent after having broken it; it could not make an atonement for sin which had been committed. Demanding what human nature apart from God could never provide, the law could never bring righteous standing to any person.

What did the law do? “*By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20). A mirror can reveal the dirt on a man's face, but it is powerless to wash the dirt away. So the law shows man his sin, by showing the right way, but law can never take away the sin or its guilt.

B. The Spirit is powerful and able to change man. The Holy Spirit effects regeneration by placing a person “in Christ” at conversion. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*” (verse 1). The Holy Spirit frees the repenting sinner from the judgment of God upon his sin.

Do you see the victory? The demands of the law fail because of man's inability to work. The promises of the gospel succeed because of God's ability to work by His Spirit. God demands a righteousness which man can never achieve but which the Spirit can freely perform in the man.

The Holy Spirit makes it possible “*that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (verse 4). Think about it! The very thing that was impossible by legal

demands upon the flesh becomes gloriously possible in the power of God by the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord!

The Holy Spirit who lives the life of God in the human spirit makes possible holy conduct day by day and moment by moment. Here is the secret of Christian holiness. Never think of justification by faith and sanctification by struggle. It is all by grace. The same God who justifies us by the Holy Spirit also makes possible a life of holiness in our conduct by the same Holy Spirit. It is grace all the way.

Here is the secret of holiness. The believer is not to struggle against sin with the thought that victory is to be his accomplishment. He is to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Timothy 6:12), depending on God for victory over the indwelling law of sin. The Holy Spirit within is the power for purity.

II. THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH

“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:5-9).

The terms “*flesh*” and “*carnal*” (same word in the Greek) occur six times in Romans 8:5-9. The terms “*Spirit*” and “*spiritual*” occur six times in Romans 8:5-9. The section deals with “*flesh*” versus “*Spirit*” in Christian living.

The term *flesh* occurs many times in the Bible with eleven different applications. Some of the more prominent uses are: the soft substance of the human body (Genesis 2:21); the intimate and permanent relationship in marriage (Genesis 2:24); the animal creation which breathes air through the nostrils (Genesis 6:13); that which is spiritual and immaterial as over against that which is material and tangible (John 1:14); and the unredeemed portion of human nature in which the power of sin dwells and which is the basis of all temptation to evil (Romans 8; et. al.). It is the last meaning that applies to this discussion. How does one overcome the flesh nature?

“*They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh*” (verse 5). That is the course of the flesh nature. To be “*after*” it means to follow it, to be habitually dominated, governed, and controlled by it. Such a person “minds” the flesh. That is, he gives the entire bent of his thought, feeling,

and motive to it. The will of his whole inner being is dominated by it. He understands, thinks, and agrees with it. The mind dwells on the carnal, agrees with the carnal; so his actions are fashioned according to unregenerate nature. That is what is manifest in modern secular novels, songs, and entertainment today. And that is why a Christian cannot participate in them and be spiritually minded.

“To be carnally minded is death” (verse 6). That is the curse of the flesh. To be *“carnally minded”* means to be controlled, dominated, possessed by the unregenerate flesh nature. That *“is”* (is what it already is, not that it leads toward) death. The death is eternal death, separation from God. The teaching is not that if a Christian becomes carnally minded he will “fall from grace” and be lost. The teaching is that the person who lives in the flesh (unregenerate nature) is already lost and has never been saved.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (verse 7). The term *“carnal mind”* indicates actual hostility. *“Enmity”* does not denote action, but nature; it is not a verb, but a noun. Such a spirit and condition never submits to God, but lives in permanent revolt. No wonder it is death. *“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (verse 8).

There is hope, praise God! One can be *“after the Spirit”* and mind *“the things of the Spirit”* (verse 5). Such a lifestyle is to be *“spiritually minded”* and is *“life and peace”* (verse 6). He whose mind is possessed and controlled by the Holy Spirit will have a relationship with God which is power and blessedness (“life and peace”).

What is the condition of the Christian? *“Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”* (verse 9). To be saved means one has received the Holy Spirit. There can be no doubt about that fact. The flesh no longer governs such a person, but *“the Spirit is life”* and results in righteousness in him (verse 10).

He who is unsaved cannot walk in the Spirit because he is controlled by a flesh nature which is in absolute and unceasing rebellion against God. He who is saved cannot walk in the flesh, *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (verse 2). That is the basis for Christian victory.

III. THE SPIRIT AND THE BODY

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is

none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”
(Romans 8:9-13).

The physical body is the place of the residence of the Holy Spirit of God. Paul's statement, *“if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you,”* indicates no doubt about it. The grammatical form indicates the meaning: “if, as in the case of fact it is, the Spirit of God dwell in you.” We are in the Spirit because the Spirit is in us. This blessed doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is one of the most assuring and encouraging doctrines of the Christian life.

The life of the Spirit of God is lived in the body of the Christian. *“If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness”* (verse 10). By nature, the human body has the seeds of death in it. A person begins to die the moment he begins to live in the flesh. Death is inevitable and inescapable. But something new and wonderful happens when a person is saved. A new and undying life begins to be lived in the human body when *“Christ lives in me”* (Galatians 2:20). *“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). It is the life of Christ lived in the Christian, the life of Him who said, *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen”* (Revelation 1:18). His life will not end.

Here is the Christian assurance of resurrection of the body. God will raise us up by His Spirit just as He raised Jesus from death (verse 11). Jesus' body did not decay, so He was *“raised”* (awakened). Our bodies will decay in death, so we will be *“quicken”* (caused to live again). The Holy Spirit who lives in us now will raise us up then.

Let us learn who is our master. *“We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh”* (verse 12). No duty binds us, no profit motivates us, to follow the directions of the flesh nature. We have been set free from the tyranny of its service and liberated to live in righteousness. We owe nothing to the flesh. We disown its demands upon us. The new birth ended the domination of the flesh in our bodies.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (verse 13). To live by its standards and seek to gratify its desires is to live in death and be dead. God

does not tolerate carnality. He warns of eternal spiritual death which follows the flesh-life.

“But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (verse 13). To *“mortify the deeds of the body”* means to put to death that which the flesh nature demands. The flesh cannot be destroyed in this life, but its deeds can be. We will kill sin or sin will kill us. The person who is saved will not live in sin because he has been born of God (I John 3:6-10).

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.... They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 24, 25).

Questions

1. Why is Romans 8 the “assurance chapter” of the Bible?
2. How does chapter 8 differ from chapter 7?
3. How is the “law” weak (Romans 8:3)?
4. How does Romans 8:4 say we can be righteous?
5. What does it mean to “walk after” flesh or Spirit?
6. How does one “mind” the flesh or the Spirit?
7. What is “the carnal mind,” and how does it bother Christians?
8. How is the Christian described in Romans 8:9?
9. How can you obey Galatians 5:16?
10. How can you keep from grieving the Holy Spirit?