



Living in the Spirit

Romans 8:5-11

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We continue this morning in the greatest chapter of the Bible, Romans 8, looking at verses 5-11. As we look at our text this morning, I want you to particularly remember that it comes within the context of this broader chapter, that it comes especially on the heels of Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Now please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 8, beginning at verse 5:

"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. 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. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Lord, we ask this morning that you would open up your Word to us. We claim your promises that are found in your Word, that your Spirit will illuminate our minds and our hearts. We pray, O Lord, that you would make our hearts deep, rich soil for your Word to take deep root. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We look this morning at a text in which Paul describes two types of people. It follows on from his statement in verse 1 that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If that is true, then it is important to know whether we are in Christ Jesus or not and what it looks like to be *outside* of Christ and what it looks like to be *in* Christ. Our text this morning serves two purposes. Primarily, it is an assurance for those to whom Paul is writing, but it is also a call to those who do not know Jesus. The result is that Paul describes both groups so we can see where we are and have the truth applied to our lives.

This morning, the first thing we will see is *the unbeliever considered*. Paul lays out for us what the life and mindset of the unbeliever is. Then we will turn and see *the believer considered*. Not just the unbeliever but the believer as well Paul describes for us. Then, finally, we will see *the believer's benefits*, what comes to the believer in Jesus Christ. The unbeliever considered, the believer considered, and the believer's benefits.

The Unbeliever Considered

Let's begin by looking at the first person Paul describes: one who is in the flesh. This is the unbeliever who is often described as being worldly-minded. We have seen that this word *flesh* can mean several different things. It can be used to describe someone who's weak or even the humanity of someone, but we've seen Paul continue to use the word, especially in chapter 7 and now in chapter 8, as a synonym for *sinful*. That is, he's talking about the human nature that is corrupted by sin.

In chapter 7 and in the beginning of chapter 8, Paul talks about two kinds of people: those who are in the flesh and those who are in the Spirit. We said previously that this does not refer to two kinds of Christians. This passage actually makes that designation very clear. How Paul describes the one who is in the flesh leads us to see that person as being an unbeliever. Paul had said that those who are in Christ are free from sin because God has done what the law could not do, and the result of our salvation is that the law is fulfilled in us. We live and walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

What, then, does it mean to live according to the flesh, which is another way of saying *walk* according to the flesh, or we might even say, as Paul does here, to be *in* the flesh? What does that look like? It means a person left to himself without God acting at all upon him. It means a man, a woman, or a child left completely to their own devices. God has not broken into their life. God has not made a change. He has not worked a work of grace. It means to be under the authority of the flesh; that is, the sinful nature.

When Paul writes in verse 5, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh," he's talking about someone who's under the authority of their sinful nature. They are habitually dominated by sin. So what does that look like? What it looks like is a person without God who sets his mind on all of the things that are apart from God.

When Paul uses this phrase *sets his mind*, we need to be careful, because Paul is not just speaking of intellectuals. He doesn't mean just a mode of thinking. As the Bible so often does, it will speak about the mind or the heart as a substitute for the whole of a person. When someone sets their mind on something, it takes in all aspects of their personality...their mind, their affections, and their will. It is a deliberate setting of their mind on specific matters, and these lead to an outcome. It is habitual, not a momentary lapse.

You might think of it *this* way. Have you ever had interaction with someone who is bothering you and they continue to bother you? Perhaps they continue to give you advice you've already heard and you don't want, and they keep bothering you and bothering you. You look at them and say, "Hey, mind your own business." When you say that, you don't mean, "Oh, please go off and think about your budget" or "Think about how many square feet are in your house."

No, you don't want them to just *think*. You want them to think and speak and act in such a way that they get out of *your* business and into their *own* business. You want them to take the whole of themselves and be occupied with something other than you. I think that's a picture about the way Paul is using this phrase *set your mind upon*. It's a phrase that's used to describe not just how we think but how we act and how we speak and the things we desire.

Someone who sets their mind on the things of the flesh focuses on what gives them greatest satisfaction. They're thinking about themselves. They have no room for others and certainly no room for God. So what are these "things of the flesh"? Once again, I think we need to be careful. As soon as we use that phrase, *things of the flesh*, we think about bodily sins, things that are physical. After all, that's what our flesh is.

We might be tempted to think about only physical sins, like hitting someone or inappropriately touching someone or maybe stealing from someone. We think about people who have set their mind on sensual things, physical things, but the truth is far broader than that. In Galatians 5, Paul describes what he calls the *works of the flesh*, which is, I think, a parallel passage.

What are these "works"? Well, they're much more than physical things. The works of the flesh include harmful attitudes toward others. Paul says works of the flesh include strife and jealousy and anger and divisions and envy. Even beyond that, works of the flesh are also sins against God directly. Paul references sorcery and even idolatry as a work of the flesh. In a sense, you can't get less physical than idolatry because it involves worship.

In summary, these things of the flesh are worldly-mindedness; that is, everything that is opposed to God, but also everything that is in our lives without God. So any political interests you might have apart from God are the things of the flesh. Any social interests you might have apart from God are the things of the flesh. Any cultural things you might look to apart from God are the things of the flesh. All of these things that are considered apart from God and without a view toward God's Word are the things of the flesh.

What's the result of focusing our beings upon these sorts of things? The result, Paul tells us in verse 6, is death. "For to set the mind on the flesh is death..." There are two important aspects here that I think we need to see, and one of them leads to the second. Let's start with the second. Let's start with the consequence. This mode of thinking, this mode of being, we might say, leads to *death*. It is not the *only* result of sin, but it is certainly a result of sin and a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It leads to death.

This death results from what death *really* is: separation from God. That's the way Isaiah describes death in chapter 59. He says, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God." Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2: "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." The Lord had warned Adam that in the day he ate of the fruit he would die. He was separated from God. A gulf was affixed. The result of this way of living and thinking is death.

The mind that is set on the flesh leads also, Paul says, to *hostility* to God. Look at verse 7. "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." This, again, is where we consider all activities of the unbeliever. It encompasses thinking, desiring, acting, just as we said before about setting our minds on something. Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1: "You, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds..." It is the governing principle of an unbeliever's life to be hostile to God.

Now what does this look like? Again, we have to be careful. We might expect this to look like outbursts of anger, obvious hatred, but, first, some people can have moments of anger toward God. I'm not saying that if you have ever been angry with God you are an unbeliever. We know this from the Psalms. David was angry with God. The other psalmists were angry with God, but it is not a permanent state; it is rather a momentary emotional state someone experiences. We see this all the time in our relationships in our families.

I don't know about you, but I don't think there's a family where brothers and sisters don't get angry with each other at times, where husbands and wives don't have sharp words. I could tell you this right now: there is no Italian family that exists where people don't yell. Does that mean there's no family, there's no love because a few sharp words are exchanged or there are some voices that are raised? No, obviously not. Those are punctuated break-ins to the relationship we have. It actually highlights the depth of the relationship when we see what we are capable of.

Secondly, we have to remember that those who are hostile to God can hide it. It doesn't have to be seen outwardly. It's actually a matter of the heart. It's what happens when someone says, "I don't care what God wants. I want to do it *my way*." That can be an entirely internal matter. So we need to be careful how we think about this hostility. What we mean when we think about this hostility... It is what theologians call *total depravity*. The mind of the unbeliever is hostile to God. It is set on things that are against God. It only looks selfishly.

What Paul is telling us is we should not be looking for the good that is in people apart from God. There is a practical manifestation of what this looks like. Paul says, "[They are] hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law." The unbeliever will not listen to God or come to God. He will not submit. He sees God's law, which is a manifestation of his character, and he refuses to be under its authority. He doesn't want any part of this. This describes someone who is apart from God.

If I may say so myself, Paul is not exactly what you would call *seeker sensitive*. He's saying if you're not in Christ you're hostile to God, you don't want to be around God, you won't submit to his law, and you are totally depraved. But wait; there's more. Paul lets drop another phrase. He says not only is the mind that is set on the flesh hostile to God, not only does it not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

It's not just an unwillingness at whatever that point in time is that that hostile mind will not submit. No, it is bound up in the nature of that person. It is not possible for the unbeliever to submit to God and his Word. It is a moral impossibility for them to seek after God when they are wholeheartedly seeking after the things of the flesh.

So here there's a warning for us. What are *you* seeking after? If you find yourself seeking after the things of the flesh, beware. Run away. You may think all is fine, but the Bible tells you you need to take this seriously, because the result of this is an inability, Paul says, to please God. He says, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." The result is so serious. Verse 8 is a continuous thought from verse 7. It's connected grammatically in the Greek.

What Paul is saying is those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Full stop. No qualifications. Unbelievers are not only bound by a total depravity but by a total inability apart from the Spirit of God. This is a very dark place to be, but we have to remember that the main point Paul is making in our text is one of comfort and assurance to the believer.

The Believer Considered

Now we need to turn to the believer and consider him. The state of the unbeliever is very dark and hopeless, but remember, Paul is talking to people who *were* like that and who no longer are. A change has taken place, the change Paul has been describing as the power of the gospel since chapter 1. As a result of this change, the one who believes on Jesus is no longer like he was. He no longer sets his mind on the things of the flesh. He is no longer hostile to God, and his end is not death. Instead, Paul says, he sets his mind on the things of the Spirit.

The Christian (verse 5) is not worldly-minded but is, rather, spiritually minded. Now what does that mean? Well, all that we have said before about that phrase *setting our mind* applies here. When we talk about setting our mind on something, it's more than just thinking. When we are considering the things of the Spirit, it is a comprehensive change of life. It is not just having the right doctrine. It is more than that. It is living a life dedicated to God in the power of the Spirit.

Do you see these parallel phrases Paul keeps using? *Live according to. Set the mind on.* We can see what setting our minds on the things of the Spirit looks like by going back to our parallel passage in Galatians, chapter 5, where Paul tells us what the fruit of the Spirit is, what the result of setting our minds on spiritual things, of living in the Spirit looks like.

What does it look like in the believer? It looks like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's what it means to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, but it is more than just a superficial action. It is not just putting a layer of Christianese over our lives. It's more than just intentionally walking up to someone and calling them "brother" or "sister." It's more than just using the word *grace* as often as we can. No, it is a fundamental change of being.

It is thinking spiritually, Christianly, biblically about everything we do...about our jobs, about our relationships, about our hopes, about our dreams. They're informed by the Spirit. They're in step with the Spirit. They're in accordance with the Word of God. That's how we live our lives: with our minds set on the Spirit. You can think about it in *this* condensed phrase: it is thinking about the world the way Jesus would have us to do so. Setting our minds on the Spirit.

Now the unbeliever is not only spiritually minded, but the believer also has a different governing principle from the unbeliever. You remember the governing principle for an unbeliever is hostility toward God. For the believer, it is a relationship *with* God. To set your mind on the Spirit is a result of a changed relationship with God.

Paul describes this after he has described God's work. This is what he has been doing all along. It's not that we change our habits and our actions to try to get God to respond. No. We can't. Paul has just told us we can't. He says the mind that is not set on the things of the Spirit *cannot* please God, *cannot* love his law. So this has to be a *consequence* of God's work rather than a *requirement* of God's work.

What it shows us is that Jesus has brought life to you. Spiritual-mindedness brings life, Paul says in verse 6. "...to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." To set the mind on the Spirit is life, Paul says. That means it is fellowship with God. That's what true life is. Life is more than just continuing to exist. Life in accordance to the Bible is about having a relationship with God, having fellowship.

Jesus puts it this way in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Have you ever thought about how often the Bible links eternal life not with length of days, not even with what life will be like, but with the relationship we have with God and how we are bound to Jesus? That's *true* life, and that kind of true life, Paul says, results in peace. When we have fellowship with God and our minds are set on the Spirit, there is a peace that comes to us.

Have you ever wondered how you can get that peace that passes all understanding that Paul talks about in Philippians 4? You wonder, "Is there a way I can meditate?" or "Can I read some Christian books?" or "How do I get rid of all of the negative influences in my life?" or "How do I think the right thoughts? What do I do to make that happen?" What Paul is telling us is that peace isn't something we create or bring about. That peace is something that comes as a result of the work of Jesus.

We go back to Romans 5:1. Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith..." Notice the language. "Since, because, already in the past we have been justified by faith in Christ..." That's something that has already happened. It's done. It's a work that has been done in us. Since that has happened, we have peace with God. How? "...through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, this peace that comes to us comes because of the work of Jesus. The believer who has set his mind on the things of the Spirit has a relationship with God and has peace and life that comes from it.

What is being described here is not a momentary action. Instead, this is a permanent moral state. It only comes about through the work of God, which is described here as being in the Spirit. So the great evidence of being a believer is the indwelling of the Spirit. We know we are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in us. I want you to see how Paul describes this. He says the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. That means when you believe on Christ he sends his Spirit to you. You are never the same. You are changed. You live a different way because of the work of the Spirit.

Paul actually describes the same thing in three different ways. First, he says in the first half of verse 9 that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Then he says, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him," in the second half of verse 9. Then in verse 10 he says, "But if Christ is in you..." He's equating all of these three things. So if I want to know if I have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, I don't look for some second work. I don't look for some miraculous evidence.

What I say to myself is, "If I have the Spirit of God, I have the Spirit of Christ, and to have the Spirit of Christ I must be in Christ." And how do I get in Christ? Paul has been telling us that for seven and a half chapters. I'm in Christ by believing on Jesus Christ. So if I believe on Jesus, I'm in Christ and Christ is in me, and that means I have the Spirit of Christ, and that means I have the Spirit of God, and that is the great evidence to me that God is at work in my life.

The Believer's Benefits

The third and final thing I'd like us to consider is the believer's benefits that come to him. These blessings and benefits are grounded in God's work. The first of them is a new sense of life that comes to the believer. These blessings are grounded in God's work, and if we want to describe the present of the believer and the future of the believer, we cannot miss the believer's past as well.

Paul has just said that anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. Now in verse 10 he gives us the other side. If you belong to Christ, you have Christ in you. All of these three things we've been considering describe the change in the believer that God has done. In fact, what we've been looking at is what that change looks like. The believer has been delivered by God.

Where once you were under condemnation, you no longer are. Where once you were focused on the things of the world, you no longer are. Where once you were in the kingdom of death, now you are in the kingdom of life. The problem is we still see sin all around us. What we wish is that we would be completely free from sinning and, oh my, to be free from other people sinning against *us*, to be free from sickness, from pain, and from death.

We still see all of this around us. What does this mean? What Paul reminds us is that our bodies still have the seed of death in them. We've been told that the wages of sin is death. We saw in chapter 5 that as a result of the covenant God made with Adam God kept his promise and that because of Adam's sin death entered the world and spread to all, but that, my friends, is not the end of the story. Paul has prepared us for a contrast here. Do you see it?

He says, "...although the body is dead because of sin..." Although *what*, Paul? Tell me what has changed. Our bodies are mortal because of sin, but the Spirit brings life, Paul says. "...the Spirit is life because of righteousness." First and foremost, this means the spiritual life we talked about earlier focused on spiritual things and on our relationship with the Lord, and it shows itself in us by us becoming alive to God, alive to God's Word, and even alive to other Christians. This comes about because of Jesus' work.

Notice the last phrase in verse 10. "...the Spirit is life because of righteousness." What does that mean? It means the Holy Spirit does not work independent of the redemption that was purchased by Christ. He applies what Christ has earned for us. This righteousness is the righteousness of God that is revealed by faith and embraced by faith. What that means is right now you have a new sense of life. You have a new purpose. You have a new family.

This is a benefit that comes to the believer in Christ, but that's not the end. We need to see that there is more to our relationship with Christ than just a present change. In fact, our greatest hope is the future. It is grounded in the statement "although the body is dead because of sin." Death may come, but death does not have the victory. This makes sense from what we have been told up to this point. We have been set free from sin and death by the death of Jesus.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Death has no victory because sin has no power over those who are in Christ. That's why Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 15, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is in the law." What Paul tells us is *sin* has no power so *death* has no power. That's why the Christian has great hope, because death is not the end. Death has no victory over the believer.

Now this is not just a wishful hope. You know what I mean when I say that, right? It's kind of like when you hope something will happen, but you don't really expect it to come about. Like, you've applied for a scholarship you're pretty sure you're not going to get or you might hope you get a job promotion but you know there are a half dozen people ahead of you in line or you have this big problem in front of you and you hope just simply by kind of ignoring it and closing your eyes it'll go away.

That's not the kind of hope Paul is talking about here. This is a different kind of hope. It's a hope grounded in certainty. Paul makes it clear to us that we can trust this hope. He says in verse 11, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

He says, "You know the Spirit who dwells in you? Do you know what that Spirit did? That Spirit raised Christ from the dead, and if the Spirit can raise *Christ* from the dead, he will raise *you* from the dead." You can count on it. He will raise you also. There is no doubt that should enter your mind, not because you deserve it, not because you wish it would be so, but because we have God's established action to look to in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, death is not the end because Jesus has won the victory over death, but this means more for you than just life after death. It means a certain resulting life. It is an eternal life that is linked to Jesus forever. It is a relationship with God that nothing can break, not even death. You need to think about that when the clouds of circumstances block your view of Jesus. You need to think about that when you think you're just not good enough, when you're tempted to have no hope.

Your hope is not found in your life around you. Your hope is not found in how together you are. No, your hope is founded on the work of God, knowing that if you believe in Jesus you have the Spirit of Christ; that is, the Spirit of God in you, and he has you securely. Sin and death cannot claim you. You belong to Jesus. That is the hope we have. That is the hope we need. Look to Jesus and have *that* hope.