

THEY WALK AMONG US!
Romans 8:5-8

INTRODUCTION

TEXT: Romans 8:5–8

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.

6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

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.

8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

This text is about two kinds of people: Those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. The two are compared.

Similarities and differences of those who are “according to the Spirit,” or according to “the flesh”:

1. They both live in a regular body.

Paul is not referring to the body, when he says, “Flesh.” Rather he is referring to the normal human life. All people have bodies. What is guiding them within? What is their life force, if you will. The normal natural state of any person is to be “of the flesh.” The soul of a man is in line with his physical body and physical life on earth. He may think of what lies beyond this earth, but he has no access to it, no understanding of it.

Likewise, the one lives according to the Spirit is one who lives in a natural body, but something within is different. His inner-working transcend this life. He is oriented differently. He has access to the spiritual.

2. They both set their minds on something

a. Those of the flesh: on death

The normal human being sets his mind on death, says Paul. What does this mean, to set one's mind on death? Does it mean one chooses to focus on death? Is this like Goth gone wild? Is this choosing to have a fascination with violence and slasher films? Does mean you sit in your room listening to the Doors or Marilyn Manson while you draw skulls all over your body? Absolutely not.

To have our minds set on death is not an obsession with the macabre nor is it a love for violence, although such thinking is a symptom of a mind set on death. Rather, this is a setting of the mind that you can't choose nor unchoose. Your mind is “set” like this. It is like the setting of a dryer. Or it is like the setting of the idle on your car. Or like the setting of the operating system on your phone. These things are set at the factory. They do not set themselves. So it is with the mind of the flesh.

The mind focuses on the self, on providing for the self, on preserving the self, on gaining pleasure for the self, on defending the self, on exalting the self. To put it in blunt language, the normal state of a person is to live a selfish and sinful life. There is a lyric to an old song that goes like this:

“There's a deadness in this world, and I know why.

People look for life from things that make them die.”

And so it is. The natural state of all people is to live futile lives, seeking to preserve the selves, but unable to do so. We are wrapped in sin. As the Bible says:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. --Proverbs 16:25

A human left to the workings of his own mind, will never gain eternity nor eternal life. Why is it that mankind is stuck living out his life with his mind set on death? The Bible tells us it is because the entire human races is fallen into sin, and against God:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—Romans 5:12

We all sinned, and we all sin. And so, we walk around in bodies that seem to be alive, but our souls, our minds, are set on the setting of death.

But there is another kind of person.

b. Those of the Spirit: on life and peace

If there are “those of the flesh,” by contrast there are “those of the Spirit.” If the mind of those in the flesh is set to death, then what is the mind set to for those of the Spirit of God? Life and peace.

Who are these people? These are people who have been saved by Jesus. When Jesus saves us, the Bible says we are made “new creatures.” What is new is not our arms and legs and faces. No, what has been made new is within –not our internal organs either. Rather, what is made new is our souls, our lives, who we are at the core goes from being dead to being alive. As the Bible says in Ephesians two:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...But God, being rich in mercy, ...made us alive together with Christ –Ephesians 2:1,4a,5b

Take an ordinary man, woman, boy, or girl, and they are dead inside, and their minds set to the flesh lead them sinfully towards death. But then God engages that person, and resurrects his soul, giving him life, and re-setting his mind on the things the Spirit.

There are people on earth who, though they walk around in bodies, like everyone else, have had a change in the settings of their mind. Their Maker, God, has adjusted the settings! He set their minds away from death and onto life and peace. What is meant by life and peace? Before explaining that, it would help if we finish out Paul’s explanation of the mind on the flesh, which he gives in verse 7 and 8. Let’s look there again:

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. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Description of the mind set on the flesh:

1. A mind set on the flesh does not, and cannot submit to God’s Law.

The startling condition of all mankind is sinfulness. What is worse, is that he can do nothing about it. This mind-boggling idea in the Bible causes many to stumble; the idea that mankind is

helpless against his own sinfulness. People are bothered by this truth. They say, “No, man is basically good, with a few bad eggs among us.” The Bible says, “No, all of you are evil, you just have a hard time seeing it in yourself.”

... For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” –Romans 3

The proof is everywhere. It is called history. It is called the daily news. It is called your life. We have seen, in our streets, over the last month, law abiding citizens of cities, and well-behaved college students, rioting, and burning, and stealing the property of others, beating and even killing some people. And the rest of us have all gone and purchased guns so that we can shoot them if they show up in our neighborhood. A peaceful country reduced in moments to a population at one another’s throats. And we say, “What has gone wrong? Why is this happening?” The answer: humans are just being humans. Life without cops won’t work because people do not behave. If societal conditions deteriorate, we are all capable of great evil towards others. You may want to look down on Cain for killing Abel, but you ARE Cain –so am I.

We naturally set aside God’s law for our own. We say we like God’s law, but only if it benefits us. We break it with ease and claim we had a good reason. We denounce it when it works against us.

2. A mind set on the flesh cannot please God.

So, what can we do about our sinful selves? How can we improve? How can we stop breaking God’s laws and please Him? We cannot. There is only one way to please God, and that is to remove our sin –if we do that, there is nothing left, because sinners are we!

The human being, in His natural state, cannot please God.

Some say, “that’s not fair. I did not ask to be made like this. I did not ask to be here at all. How can God hold me accountable for being this way when I had nothing to do with my own existence?”

Really? Who are you to tell God what is fair? You whose mind is twisted towards the self at the expense of all others? You who are finite and sinful? Do you know all? Fair? Would you tell God what is fair? Don’t be a fool.

3. A mind set on the flesh is hostile with God.

Here is the reality: our minds are hostile towards God. Our desire to sin, to do other than that which is good and right, is the way we make war with God. You may say, “How can that be?” The answer is, every time a person seeks to do a sin, God opposes Him. God says, “No. To do that or any sin is an insult to Me, the Holy One. So do not do it.” And yet we twist up our will and say, “I will do as I please! I will not be stopped by you from doing that which is wrong.”

God is good and holy and pure. Any evil, done anywhere, by anyone, at any time? It is an assault on Him. Imagine a beautiful home, filled with beautiful things. You are invited to enter, but your heart has no love for the owner. So in every room, you break what you see, you stain things with sewage, and do harm at every point. Do you not see that everything you did was hostile towards the owner? So it is with every little sin committed by mankind. You are made in the image of God, and every evil thought or act or word is an attack on His beautiful and luxurious holiness. People are hostile to God by nature, enemies with Him. What becomes of His enemies? Jesus told a parable about a nobleman who went away to a far country, leaving 10

servants to do business. But his citizens hated him and did want him to reign over them. When he returned, he asked his servants to give an account. When he was finished, he declared the following:

But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me. Luke 19:27

To be hostile with God is to fight the most foolish of battles, for who can beat God?

The Solution

Well, then, what can be done? Humans have their minds set on the flesh and it leads to death. Humans are helpless. The only way to fix the problem we have is if God initiates a change in us. And that is what He does. Let's go back to that one section of the text that I moved quickly over:

...but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. Vs.6b

What is it like to have a mind set to the Spirit? It is life and peace. Instead of being dead in soul, there is life. Instead of hostility with God, there is peace. Look at this promise from the Bible:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

We could not help ourselves, but Jesus helped us. We were dead, and He made us alive. As for our sins and hostility against God, He made the peace. How? By nailing our guilt to His body on a cross. God loves us, even though we were hostile towards Him.

A question should occur to you about now. If not, I'll pose it. If we were dead, and not seeking God, and unable to help ourselves, how did we get to the "made alive," part? Or, if someone is not yet "made alive"—and they can do nothing about it—how do they become made alive?

The answer is that God, in His kindness, brings them the message of Jesus. That message we call the gospel or the good news. God, through His Holy Spirit, using the understanding of that message, to give a person faith. And that faith, pleases God. Let me show you with two simple verses:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.—Romans 10:17

You have heard that Jesus died to take away your sins. Now I ask you, what do you believe? Do you believe it is true? If so, will you surrender your life to Him? If so, He will save you, and give you a new spirit, one that is alive. And though you will look the same, on the inside you will be changed. With your sins removed by faith in Jesus, the Spirit of God will give you life within. Your mind then will not be on things of earth, but on things of heaven. You will see the meaning of life, and live a meaningful life.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” –Romans 10:13

And,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. –2 Corinthians 5:17