

The Flesh and the Spirit

Scripture Reading: Rom. 1:9; 2:28-29; 7:17-18, 20-21; 8:4-6, 9-10, 13, 16; 12:11

Day 1

I. The book of Romans is fully focused on life and is of three sections:

- A. The first section is on redemption for justification, the second section is on life for sanctification, and the third section is on building for the Body expressed as the local churches.
- B. In the section on life there are two key terms for our Christian life—*the flesh* and *the spirit*.

II. In order to live by the mingled spirit, the Spirit with our spirit (8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17), we must see what the flesh is:

- A. The flesh is the corrupted, polluted, and transmuted body:
 1. Man's body was originally pure, but through man's fall Satan injected himself into man, and man's body became the flesh (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 7:18a).
 2. Our body is "the body of sin" (6:6) and "the body of this death" (7:24); the body of sin is very active and full of strength in sinning against God, and the body of this death is weak and powerless in acting to please God (v. 18).
 3. As long as we are still living, until the day of our redemption, the body of sin and death is always with us (cf. 8:23).
 4. The word *flesh* also refers to our entire fallen being; man is totally flesh because the fallen being today is under the dominion of the fallen flesh (3:20; Gen. 6:3a).
- B. The flesh is the "meeting hall" and the compound of sin, death, and Satan; the flesh is a hopeless case and can never be improved (Rom. 7:17-18, 21; cf. John 17:15).

Day 2

Day 3

- C. The flesh is at enmity with God, not subject to the law of God, and can never please God (Rom. 8:7-8).
- D. Sin is Satan himself as "the evil" in our flesh (John 17:15; Rom. 7:21):
 1. "The evil" is the evil life, nature, and character of Satan himself, who is the indwelling sin in us; when sin is dormant within us, it is merely sin, but when it is aroused in us by our willing to do the good, it becomes "the evil."
 2. Sin can deceive us, kill us (v. 11), lord it over us, that is, have dominion over us (6:12, 14), and cause us to do things against our will (7:17, 20); all these activities show that sin is a living person.
 3. Sin is the evil nature of Satan, the evil one, who, having injected himself into man through Adam's fall, has now become the very sinful nature dwelling, acting, and working in fallen man (cf. Matt. 16:22-23).
 4. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me"; in Romans 7:17 he says, "It is no longer I...but sin that dwells in me," showing that sin is another person within us.
 5. In our flesh no good thing dwells, because the flesh is fully possessed, taken over, by Satan as sin (v. 18a).

Day 4

III. For the sake of His economy, God in His wisdom and sovereignty uses our sinful, ugly flesh to force us to turn to our spirit so that we may gain more of the Spirit for His building by the growth of God in us (Col. 2:19; Zech. 4:6):

- A. We are either in the spirit or in the flesh; there is no third place for us to be; the believer is a miniature garden of Eden—with God as the tree of life in his spirit, Satan as the tree of knowledge in his flesh, and his mind in between (Rom. 8:6).
- B. Judicially speaking, both Satan and our flesh were condemned once for all on the cross (v. 3; John 3:14;

Heb. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:21), but God allowed the flesh to remain with us to help us and force us to turn to Christ in our spirit and have no more confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).

- C. Without the help rendered by the sinful, ugly flesh, we would not be as desperate to gain the Lord or to have Him wrought into us (Rom. 8:6, 13).
- D. Our goal may be holiness or spirituality or victory, but God's goal is to work Himself into us; often when we are in a difficult situation, we are more open to the Lord and more willing to turn to Him and allow Him to work Himself into us (vv. 28-29).
- E. If we seek Him, even the sinful compound of the flesh will become a help to us in gaining the Lord; because we fail so often, we are desperate to turn to the spirit, and in this way we gain more of the Spirit (cf. Exo. 23:23, 29-30; Judg. 2:21-3:4).
- F. Our hardships, defeats, failures, and disappointments force us to realize that there is no hope in the flesh; the flesh is good only to force us to turn to Christ in our spirit, to press us into the spirit, to make us desperate to get into the spirit, and to keep us watchful to stay in the spirit (Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:17-18).
- G. The Lord does not care for whether or not we have a victory; the Lord cares for only one thing—that we gain Him as the Spirit (Phil. 3:8; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Day 5

IV. Our spirit is a wonderful compound—compounded with Christ, the Spirit, and grace (2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16; Gal. 6:18):

- A. God wants us to walk according to this wonderful compound spirit (to have our being and our living with all that we say and do according to the spirit) (Rom. 8:4; Phil. 1:19; 1 Cor. 6:17; cf. Exo. 30:23-25).
- B. Only the persons who walk according to the spirit can be the proper members for the building up of a local church; if we do not have such a walk, sooner or later we will be a trouble to our local church (Gal. 5:16-26).

C. Romans reveals that whatever we are, whatever we do, and whatever we have must be in spirit; this will keep us from the vanity of religion (1:9; 7:6; Phil. 3:3):

- 1. The reality of all spiritual things depends on the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is in our spirit; hence, the reality of all spiritual matters depends on our spirit, not on anything apart from our spirit (Rom. 8:5-6, 9-11).
- 2. Whatever is in us is vanity unless it is “inwardly,” in our spirit, not “outwardly,” in the flesh (2:28-29; 8:4, 10, 13; 12:11).
- 3. Everything that God is to us is in our spirit (8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22).

D. God has reserved the human spirit for His purpose (Zech. 12:1; Prov. 20:27).

Day 6

E. Our spirit today is the real Bethel, the house of God and the gate of heaven; when we turn to our spirit, we are in the third heaven (Eph. 2:22; Gen. 28:12, 17, 19).

F. When we are in our spirit, we are in the Holy of Holies, touching the throne of grace and being sustained by Christ to live a heavenly life on earth (Heb. 10:22a; 4:16).

G. In our spirit we can overcome the world, and the evil one cannot touch us; the only way to overcome Satan is to stay in the high tower of our regenerated spirit (1 John 5:4, 18; John 3:6; 14:30).

H. Because Christ as the life-giving Spirit has dispensed Himself into our spirit, our spirit is life (Gk. *zoe*) (Rom. 8:10).

I. Our spirit is the place of oneness; we can be one only if we worship God in our spirit, which is today's Jerusalem (John 4:23-24; Psalms 133).

J. Christ, the heavenly and spiritual food, is in our spirit, and we need to eat Him to be His testimony and grow up into Him for the building up of His Body (John 6:57, 63).

Morning Nourishment

Rom. For that which the law could not do, in that it was 8:3-4 weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Phil. For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by 3:3 the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

The Lord Jesus not only died on the cross instead of us to redeem us. He also died there with us. When He died there with us, He died there with Satan. He died on the cross with the human nature, and in this way He destroyed the devil. We all have to praise God for His sovereign wisdom. Satan thought he received the profit by entering into man's flesh, but he did not know that he put himself into a trap. One day the Son of God came to be that trap in form, and He brought this trap to the cross. . . . In the flesh, Christ dealt with the flesh. In the flesh, Christ dealt with sin. In the flesh, Christ dealt with Satan. Judicially speaking, in God's governmental administration, the flesh with sin, with death, and with Satan has been fully crushed (Rom. 8:3, John 3:14, and Heb. 2:14).

This flesh still remains with us when it has been dealt with and crushed. . . because it still has some usage for God. Judicially speaking, it is over, but practically speaking, it is still needed. It is not needed for God, but needed for you to force you to turn to your spirit. God is sitting on the throne judicially, and the troublesome flesh of His chosen people has been dealt with judicially. In His government there is not such a thing. But practically, all His children, while they are still on this earth, need this troublesome flesh to help them to turn to Christ. (*The Flesh and the Spirit*, pp. 30-31)

Today's Reading

If we did not have such an evil thing as the flesh with us, we might not pray so desperately. This flesh helps us and forces us to call on the Lord. We are forced by the hopeless flesh to turn to our

spirit. If we do not turn to the Lord, this is really bad. But if the flesh forces us to turn to the Lord, this is really good. . . . Are you still bothered by the flesh? You had better say, "Praise the Lord. The flesh helps me and forces me to turn to the spirit."

We have to realize that the flesh and the spirit are very close to each other. Romans 8:6 says that to set our mind upon the flesh is death, but to set our mind upon the spirit is life. Verse 4 says that we are to walk according to the spirit, not according to the flesh. Verse 10 says that if Christ is in us, our body is dead. That means our body is flesh. But if the Spirit dwells in us, our spirit is life. We can see from these verses that the Bible puts the flesh so close to the spirit.

God has no intention to take away the flesh until we are matured. When we become mature, we will no longer need the help of the flesh. The flesh is here helping us and forcing us to turn to the spirit. We should not be disappointed. We have the flesh, but we also have to say, "Praise the Lord! I also have the spirit."

We all need to turn from the flesh to the spirit. We need to realize that the flesh is a hopeless case and that it is here for our good. It is here helping us and forcing us all the time, moment by moment, to turn to the spirit, to trust in the Lord, and to have no confidence any longer in our flesh (Phil. 3:3).

The Lord's goal is not to let you have the victory. His goal is that Christ may be gained by you and that Christ be more and more wrought into you.

Through all the defeats, through all the failures, through all the bad experiences with your wife, husband, children, and the dear saints around you, day by day you are gradually gaining more of Christ. . . . We all need to turn to the spirit and gain Christ. This is all that God cares for. On the one hand, we are happy because our flesh has been crushed. On the other hand, we are unhappy because the flesh will remain with us until the day of our maturity. When we are fully matured, we can say good-bye to the flesh and thank it for its help. (*The Flesh and the Spirit*, pp. 13-15, 34)

Further Reading: Life-study of Romans, msg. 50

Enlightenment and inspiration: _____
