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### **The Holy Spirit is in Us, and We are in the Holy Spirit Romans 8:5-13**

When I was a sophomore at the University of Oklahoma, the Christian apologist Josh McDowell arrived on campus and spoke at the student union. If you've ever heard McDowell speak, you know that he is incredibly articulate and persuasive. He spoke that night on a wide range of topics, but focused primarily on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The many facets of that gospel which we have been examining thus far in Romans were addressed.

I attended that event with a couple of my fraternity brothers, one of whom was a Christian and the other was not. Upon leaving the lecture, we began to talk among ourselves. Needless to say, I was thrilled by what I heard. So too was the other Christian who had joined me. But our non-Christian friend, when asked what he thought about McDowell, said matter-of-factly, "I don't have the slightest clue what that man said. It was entirely meaningless and incoherent to my way of thinking."

Now, think about the diverse reactions to McDowell's gospel message. One of my fraternity brothers was fascinated and blessed by what he heard. The other was bored by it. It wasn't as if one paid attention and the other spent time on his cell phone, checking his Twitter feed. Cell phones didn't exist in 1971. I know many of you who are considerably younger than I am find that hard to believe. You are bewildered by how anyone could possibly have survived and been happy in the absence of a cell phone. But we managed fairly well! In any case, the respective reactions to the lecture that night are something of a commentary on the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. There he wrote,

"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

It is crystal clear to me that those two young men and their respective responses to the message of the gospel are a perfect illustration in real life of what Paul is saying in Romans 8:5-13. Here in our passage, just as in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul describes for us two forms of human existence, in fact, the only two forms of human existence. All humanity, male and female alike, find a place in either of these two categories. The distinction Paul outlines for us is not between Christians, as if he is speaking of either Baptists or Methodists, Calvinists or Arminians, or of believers who hold to differing views on the end times. No, the distinction is between Christian and non-Christian.

There are, says Paul, two and only two types of people in this world: those who are in the flesh and those who are in the Spirit. There is no in-between. There is no hybrid. These two types of people either live "according to the flesh" or "according to the Spirit." As a result, there are, respectively, two mentalities or outlooks on life. Those who are "according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh" (v. 5a). Those who are "according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (v. 5b). Consequently, there are, therefore, two destinies or outcomes. For those who set their minds on the flesh, there is "death" (v. 6a). For those who set their minds on the Spirit, there is "life and peace" (v. 6b).

If I may be allowed once again to quote John Stott, he says this:

"If we are in the flesh, we set our mind on the things of the flesh, we walk according to the flesh, and so die. But if we are in the Spirit, we set our mind on the things of the Spirit, we walk according to the Spirit, and so live. What we *are* governs how we *think*; how we *think* governs

how we *behave*; and how we *behave* governs our *relation* to God – death or life” (*Men Made New*, 88).

The purpose of these verses is *not* to say that believers are partly dominated by the flesh and partly by the Spirit. Rather, those who are “of the flesh” and “in the flesh” are unbelievers who will die while those who are “of the Spirit” and “in the Spirit” are believers who will live.

Why did I and one of my fraternity brothers rejoice at what we heard? Why did it make sense to us while our friend was befuddled, confused, and perhaps even offended? The answer, says Paul, is that two of us, by God’s grace alone, had “set our minds on the things of the Spirit” while our friend had set his mind “on the things of the flesh.”

This is the world in which we live. There are many who regard the Christian faith to be stupid and dangerous and incoherent. There are also many who see in the Christian faith truth and beauty and life. The former are seeing and viewing and interpreting the world through the flesh, that is, in accordance with their unregenerate minds. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, the truths of our faith, as found in Scripture, are “folly” or foolishness to him. He cannot understand them. We, by God’s mercy and kindness and grace, have been born again and made recipients of the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to discern and see the glory of what God has revealed in Scripture.

Our passage today falls into three parts. In vv. 5-8 Paul describes those who live according to the flesh. In vv. 9-11 he describes those who live according to the Spirit. And then, by way of conclusion, in vv. 12-13, he tells us how we can put to death the sinful deeds of the body.

#### *The Mind Set on the Flesh (vv. 5-8)*

The inability Paul envisions among unbelievers is not physical or intellectual or due to a lack of some essential mental or emotional faculty. When a person’s mind is “set on the flesh” it isn’t because they have a lower IQ or, for that matter, a higher IQ. It has nothing to do with whether or not they went to college or how many languages they can speak. The condition Paul describes isn’t traceable to where you were born or whether or not your parents are in the flesh or in the Spirit.

Paul is describing a ***voluntary inability: they can’t see or understand or believe the truths of the gospel because they won’t***. Their inability isn’t due to an external power resisting their well-meant attempts to do what is right. They *could* do what pleases God if only they *would*. But they *won’t*. Their will is an expression of their heart. That is to say, choice is the fruit of nature. The crucial question is: *are they able, of themselves, to change their nature?* The testimony of Paul and others in the NT is No. That requires the sovereign grace of God. More on this later in Romans.

To “live according to the flesh” is to live and breathe and think by virtue of one’s own natural endowments. To see things the way God made them one must have the Holy Spirit in one’s life. The perspective of those who “live according to the flesh” is entirely governed and controlled and shaped by the flesh, that is, by a sinful, morally corrupt, and selfish orientation to life and reality.

Those who live according to the flesh, says Paul, “set their minds on the things of the flesh” (v. 5). To set one’s mind on something is to be most deeply interested in it. The “flesh” and all that it entails is one’s chief and principal concern. A person is preoccupied with and ambitious for fleshly or worldly or merely natural things. The “flesh” is what dominates their thinking and demands their affections and devotion. The “flesh” is what brings greatest satisfaction to their souls. They prioritize worldly, earthly, and altogether natural and sinful values and actions and beliefs. But the “things of the flesh” are more than ideas or beliefs. They also include desires and ambitions. Here is how Paul put it in Galatians 5:19-21,

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Gal. 5:19-21a).

And if you should think that these are minor or inconsequential matters, don’t overlook the second half of v. 21 where Paul declares,

“I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21b).

Here in Galatians 5 Paul speaks of not inheriting the kingdom of God. In Romans 8 he speaks of “death” (v. 6a). They both refer to the same thing: eternal separation from God, what John in the book of Revelation calls “the second death.” But why? This seems so harsh and unrelenting. Why would Paul speak so definitively of the eternal destiny of those whose minds are set on the flesh? He tells us in vv. 7-8 in four stunning statements.

**First, “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God”** (v. 7a). He/she hates God. “Oh, but Sam, I know a lot of people who don’t believe in Jesus and they aren’t hostile to God. They don’t hate him.” Yes, they do. What you perceive as innocent unbelief is outright defiance. In their unbelief, they are saying: “The unimaginably splendid and glorious God of the universe isn’t worth a minute of my time, much less the devotion of my entire life. If he exists at all, he’s a bore, an unappealing drag on life and hardly worthy of my heart’s affection.” This is the mantra of angry atheism that says, “There is no God, and I hate him.”

As my friend Ray Ortlund has said, “Being good can be a way of being bad, if being good is a way of protecting one’s little earthly kingdom from God” (*Supernatural Living for Supernatural People*, 51). In other words, “You may be a fleshly Playboy or a fleshly Pharisee,” says Ortlund, “but it is the same flesh” (37). And the fleshly Pharisee is just as hostile to God and his will as is the fleshly Playboy, even though he appears to be living a righteous life.

**Second, the mind that is set on the flesh “does not submit to God’s law”** (v. 7b). All God’s commandments, his standard for righteous conduct, is an offense to those who live according to the flesh. They are rebellious and defiant toward all that God says. They refuse to bow the knee and acknowledge that their Creator has ultimate authority to set the terms for how we, his creation, are supposed to live. One example, so prominent in our public discourse, is the law of God regarding sexual conduct and marriage between one man and one woman. Instead of submitting to this law, many defiantly declare and parade their pride by living in direct contradiction to it.

**Third, not only do they not submit to God’s law, they “cannot”** (v. 7c). Don’t be misled by this statement. Paul isn’t saying that there are people everywhere who want to believe but God won’t let them. The only thing keeping them from belief is their own nature and desires. God does not prevent anyone from believing nor will he turn away anyone who does believe. Those who live according to the flesh are *unable* to submit to God because they are *unwilling* to do so. Their will is an expression of their nature, and their nature is altogether of the flesh. That is why there must first be a supernatural work of grace in the heart of an individual that the NT refers to as being “born again” or regeneration. It is only when God sovereignly replaces the heart of “flesh” with the Holy Spirit that those who would not submit to God now can.

Note also that Paul does not exonerate them from being morally responsible for their actions simply because they “cannot” submit to God’s law. Their “inability” is no one’s fault but their own.

**Fourth, those who are in the flesh “cannot please God”** (v. 8). They neither desire to obey God nor do they. They live only to “please” themselves. Unlike the unbeliever, the mark of the Christian who lives

according to the Spirit is the constant beat of a heart that says, “Oh Lord, I long to fully follow you and honor you with every fiber of my being. I long to please you in all that I say and all that I do.”

*The Mind Set on the Spirit (vv. 9-11)*

What is the distinguishing feature of a person who believes, who seeks to please God and longs to submit his/her life entirely to him? Paul’s answer in v. 9 is this: “the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

The person who is devoid of the indwelling Spirit is devoid of Christ. He doesn’t say that you are in the Spirit if you believe in Jesus, although that is undoubtedly true. He says that the way we might know if we are truly born again and truly believe in Jesus is if the Spirit dwells within us.

But how might we know if the Spirit dwells within us? First, have you truly believed in Jesus for forgiveness of your sins? If so, the promise of Scripture is that the Spirit instantly takes up permanent residence in your heart. Also, back in vv. 5-6 Paul said that you live according to the Spirit, that is to say, the Spirit lives and dwells in you, if you “set” your “minds on the things of the Spirit” (v. 5b). Later, in v. 13, Paul will say that the person in whom the Spirit dwells is the one who puts to death the deeds of the body, that is to say, the person who does not live in the sort of life that Paul describes in Galatians 5:19-21. He will go on to say that those in whom the Spirit dwells are the ones “who are led by the Spirit” (v. 14a). They are the ones who understand and enjoy their adoption into God’s family as his sons and daughters and cry out, “Abba! Father!” (v. 15). They are the ones to whose spirit the Holy Spirit bears witness that they are true children of God. They are those who willingly suffer with Christ (v. 17).

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Let me slow down and say several things about Paul’s language.

**First**, in his many references to the Spirit, Paul couldn’t have been any clearer: the Christian life is profoundly, from beginning to end, *a supernatural life*. It is a life that is energized and sustained by the indwelling presence of the omnipotent Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity. By “supernatural” I don’t mean New Age powers or demonic activity. By “supernatural” I mean the active empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to live beyond and often in defiance of our natural inclinations.

**Second**, what does it mean to say the Holy Spirit *dwells* in us? It’s not the same as what you are doing right now. You are *sitting* in an auditorium. But you don’t “live” or “dwell” here. The Greek word Paul uses is quite explicit. It points to a permanent, abiding presence. There is a profound difference between a squatter and a homesteader, between a momentary and casual visit to a place and putting down your roots where you will live indefinitely. The Holy Spirit doesn’t come and go. He doesn’t appear momentarily and then just as quickly disappear. He lives in us permanently. He has made himself at home in our hearts.

**Third**, back in v. 5 Paul spoke of those who have the Spirit living in them as setting “their minds on the things of the Spirit.” Do you think often of the Spirit? Do you listen to his voice? Do you submit to his guidance? Do you ponder the glorious things that God has done for you in Jesus? Do you spend time reflecting on the majesty of Christ? Do you desire deeply to worship him in song and to pray to him fervently? Do you interpret life and its many questions and challenges through the lens of what the Spirit has said in Scripture? John Stott is again helpful. He says that to set your mind on the things of the Spirit is to make spiritual things, spiritual truths and values,

“the absorbing objects of thought, interest, affection and purpose. It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and give ourselves up to” (223).

Here’s an example of what it means to set your mind on the Spirit. What is the ultimate moral authority in your life: your feelings or God’s Spirit-inspired Word, the Bible? When what you think or feel or desire or believe is most fair and just runs counter to what Scripture says, who wins? If you defiantly cling to your

personal preferences, you are living according to the flesh, and you will die. But if you submit your heart and mind and beliefs to God's revealed Word, you live, you experience God's "peace" (v. 6b).

**Fourth**, did you notice in v. 9 the three ways in which the Holy Spirit is described? He is first called "the Spirit" (v. 9a). He is then called "the Spirit of God" (v. 9b). Then he is also called "the Spirit of Christ" (v. 9c). There are not three Spirits, but one Spirit who simultaneously sustains the same relationship to both Father and Son. This one Holy Spirit, fully God, is entirely equal in every way with the Father and the Son. But this Holy Spirit is also in intimate and eternal relationship with the Father, and is thus the Spirit *of* God. He is in intimate and eternal relationship with the Son, and is thus the Spirit *of* Christ. This is one reason we call ourselves **Trinitarian** Christians.

This is a good place for us to slow down and give some serious thought to who God is. By that I mean, serious thought on our confession of God as Triune. You may not be aware of this, but there are many who profess to be orthodox evangelicals who deny the Trinity. They hold to what has been called "Oneness" doctrine. They affirm, as we do, that there is only one God. But they deny that this one God exists eternally in three co-equal persons.

To put it simply, they argue that there is only one person in the Godhead. This one person *manifests* or *reveals* himself as the Father when he creates the world, as Son when he saves sinners, and as the Holy Spirit when he takes up residence in our lives and empowers us for holy living. But the key words here are "manifests" or "reveals." ***There is a world of difference between saying that God manifests or reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and that God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of whom are equal in glory and power and deity.*** Let me give you an example of two typical "oneness" statements of faith.

"There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is the creator of heaven and earth, and of all living beings. He has revealed Himself to humanity as the Father (Creator), in the son (Savior), and as the Holy Ghost (indwelling Spirit).

It took shedding of blood for the remission of the sins of the world (Hebrews 9:22), but God the Father was a Spirit and had no blood to shed. Thus He prepared a body of flesh and blood (Hebrews 10:5) and came to earth as a man in order to save us, . . .

The Holy Ghost is not a third person in the Godhead, but rather the Spirit of God (the Creator), the Spirit of the resurrected Christ."

Note carefully that according to these statements the Father, Son, and Spirit are merely ways in which God "has revealed himself to humanity." Father, Son, and Spirit are not three distinct, eternally existent and co-equal persons. And take special note of the statement that "God the Father . . . prepared a body of flesh and blood . . . and came to earth as a man in order to save us." No! God the Father didn't come as a man in human flesh. God the Son did. We saw in Romans 8:3 that we were saved by God "sending his own Son." This is simply another affirmation of the truth of John 3:16.

One of the most famous of all TV preachers, whose name most of you would easily recognize, stands in the "Oneness" tradition. On his church website, we read this statement:

"There is one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in three manifestations: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Again, observe that Father, Son, and Spirit are not three eternally existing persons but "manifestations." This is the ancient heresy of **Modalism**, which asserts that the names, Father, Son, and Spirit, are simply different "modes" by which the one God "manifests" or "reveals" himself.

Modalism and Oneness theology are serious distortions of the nature of God and can easily lead into complete delusion and destruction. But the Apostle Paul and all the other NT authors affirm repeatedly the personal distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one God, sharing a single divine nature, a single divine will, but three persons, each of whom loves and adores the others and works in perfect harmony with one another.

**Fifth**, Paul's point in v. 10 is that since Christ is in you through the indwelling Spirit, although you must die physically because of sin, you are guaranteed of resurrection life. This, then, is the answer to the cry of 7:24. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead through the Spirit. The Spirit now lives in you. Therefore, the Father, through that same Holy Spirit, will likewise raise you up from the dead. His point is that "believers will not be saddled with their weak and corruptible bodies forever. The Spirit is a life-giving Spirit and will overcome sin and death through the resurrection of the body" (Schreiner, 409). So don't fear death. Anticipate resurrection!

What, then, does Paul mean when he speaks of "life because of righteousness" (v. 10b)? I think he's saying that whereas we die physically because of sin we are raised and glorified because of righteousness. This "righteousness" is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that has been imputed or reckoned to us through faith.

**Sixth**, it is extremely important to note that Paul not only says that the Spirit is "in" us but also that we are "in" the Spirit (v. 9). He means we live every moment under the influence of his power. Just as to be "in" the flesh means a person is subject to its enslaving influence, to be "in" the Spirit means he is in control; his hands are on the steering wheel of your life. The Spirit doesn't hover outside of us, shouting his commands. He lives within us, working to transform our hearts and change our values and then strengthen and empower us to live in accordance with them.

*So, what do Spirit-filled people do with their sin (vv. 12-13)*

The relationship between vv. 9-11 and vv. 12-13 is clear. Since we are in the Spirit and not in the flesh, we are not debtors to the flesh. We have no obligation to follow its dictates or live according to its prompting. Our responsibility, instead, is to kill or put to death the sinful deeds of the body. Let's be clear: "the Bible isn't calling us to suppress our sinful urges. It's calling us to kill them" (Ortlund, 73).

Verse 13 points to the need for us to ruthlessly reject and repudiate anything inconsistent with life in the Spirit. And if we do not? It was the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan theologian John Owen who put it best: "**Be killing sin,**" said Owen, "**or it will be killing you**" (6:9). Again,

"When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even when there is least suspicion" (6:11).

The "deeds of the body" are not all sinful. We use our bodies to serve and honor God and to help one another. Here, though, Paul has in mind the sinful deeds that we carry out by means of our bodies: our minds, mouths, hands, actions, decisions, etc. These are the "deeds" that we are to kill "by the Spirit," that is, by drawing on his presence and power and trusting in what he says and how he leads us.

But wait! Does this mean that if I fail to kill my sin by the power of the Spirit I will perish eternally? What happened to the security of my salvation? You are still secure, if you have truly believed in Jesus. But the reality of your salvation and relation to Christ is **displayed, demonstrated, and proven** by the war you wage against sin. Putting to death the sinful deeds of the body leads to eternal life, not because by doing so we earn salvation, but by doing so we give evidence that we are already truly saved.

But if you are instead living “according to the flesh” there is no compelling reason why we should think that you are truly saved and justified. Putting to death the deeds of the body is not how you get justified. Putting to death sin in your life is one of the ways God shows that you *are* justified. If you don’t care about putting sin to death in your life, if holiness means little or nothing to you, you are likely not born again.

I recall reading the story of a man named Donald Wyman who, in 1993, was clearing trees from a forest in Pennsylvania. In the process, a tree fell on him, pinning him to the ground. He cried out incessantly for help and did everything possible to extricate himself from the tree. But he soon realized that he was probably going to die there. So he took a leather boot lace and used it as a tourniquet. He then took his knife and cut off his leg some six inches below the knee. And yes, he lived to tell his story. How serious are you about killing the sin in your life? To what lengths will you go to mortify the deeds of the flesh? Maiming or injuring or punishing our physical bodies isn’t the answer. Turning to the Spirit and by his power killing sin is the only lasting remedy (cf. Matt. 5:29ff.). And if you do, you will live!

### *Conclusion*

How important is it for us to *put to death* even the “little” sins? Alan Johnson shares this story:

“Several years ago a pastor friend of mine moved to Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had occasion to ride the bus from his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him ten cents too much change. As he considered what to do, there alternately appeared to him little angelic figures sitting on his shoulders and whispering instructions into his ears. One appeared and said, 'You better give the dime back. It would be wrong to keep it. Christ wouldn't keep it.' On the other shoulder a voice said, 'Oh, forget it. It's just ten cents. Who would worry about this little amount? Anyway, the bus company already gets too much fare. With their millions every day they'll never miss it. Accept it as a gift from God and keep quiet.' When his stop came up, he paused momentarily at the front door, and, handing the driver the dime he said, 'Here. You accidentally gave me too much change.' The driver replied, 'Aren't you the new pastor in town? I have been thinking lately about going to church somewhere. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you ten cents too much change.' When my friend stepped off the bus, ***he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, held on, and said, 'O my God, I almost sold Your Son for ten cents!'***” (20).