



## The Spirit and Our Sin

### Lesson 10 | Romans 8:1-17

Some wars last a long time. One of the longest conflicts in history was the Reconquista, which was a series of wars fought between Spanish Catholics and Muslims for control over the Iberian Peninsula. Although these wars had some breaks in the fighting, over 700 years passed from the beginning of the conflict until the last battles were fought! That is a long conflict for sure, but it pales in comparison to the war that has been going on in human hearts for millennia – the war between the flesh and the Spirit.

This is a battle that God’s children are all too familiar with. On one side is something Paul refers to as “the flesh.” This sinister force pulls us to sin and leads us down the path of death. On the other side is the Spirit of God, who empowers righteous obedience that leads to life. The difference couldn’t be greater. Death or life. Sin or righteousness. As Paul would say in Galatians “these [the Spirit and the flesh] are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17). Those who have been justified stand in the middle, feeling the pull of both sides and daily needing to choosing whom they will please.

#### ***Why do Christians still follow the way of the flesh and death?***

After explaining that everyone needs the gospel (Romans 1-3a) and sharing how we receive the gospel (Romans 3b-4), Paul begins describing the blessings we have in Christ (Romans 5) and explaining our new relationship to sin, death, and the law (Romans 6-7). This discussion ended with the frustrating observation that we struggle to do what is right because we are fundamentally broken, but fortunately the story doesn’t end there! In Christ we have now been given the Spirit who helps us to live out the righteousness that the law always pointed to as we conquer sin through His power. But such a process will not be easy or quick – it will be the battle of our lives!

#### ***Why do you think God did not allow our battle with the flesh to be quick and easy?***

### The Spirit Helps Us Overcome the Flesh (8:1-11)

If you were to get out a highlighter and began looking for words that show up repeatedly throughout this section, two words in particular would stand out: “flesh” (9x) and “Spirit” (11x). In this great battle for our souls and our wills, these perpetual foes stand opposed. In this section Paul lays out how these two relate to each other, showing what it looks like to follow one instead of the other and the difference that choice will make for our lives.

### **The Spirit breaks the power of sin (8:1-4)**

Paul has spent half of the previous chapter describing the frustration we feel when the law points out our sinfulness. We find ourselves unable to say no to the sins we do not want to commit, and when we learn God's law that only makes the problem worse. The reason for this is that the law was weak because of the flesh. The law couldn't bring about righteousness, not because it was broken, but because we are. But something new has happened now. Now the Spirit of God has come to dwell within us, and because of the indwelling Spirit we have the power we need to overcome the power of sin. As Paul says, we have been set "free from the law of sin and death" by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

#### ***If the Spirit has made us free from sin and death, why do we still sin?***

As we often see in the gospel, there is an objective, factual reality that needs to be lived out practically in our everyday lives. In these verses, Paul once again describes how Christ's death was a death to sin for all of us. God dealt with the sin problem by addressing it in the flesh of Jesus as He hung on the cross. Because of this, it is now possible to live out the righteousness intended by the law.

We do this, according to Paul, by walking in the Spirit. This idea is more fully developed in Galatians 5:16-25, but the idea is clear enough here. Walking in the Spirit means following the leading of the Spirit. When the Spirit leads us to do something, we do it. Often the leading of the Spirit will be opposed to what our flesh feels like doing, and so throughout the day we will have a hundred small choices of whether we will follow God's Spirit or follow our own sinful, fleshly desires. Before we were saved, we had no choice but to follow our flesh. Now that we are in Christ and have the Spirit, we can either follow sin or follow the Spirit.

#### ***If you had to explain walking in the Spirit to a new Christian, how would you do it?***

#### ***How do you know if it is the Spirit leading you?***

### **The Spirit changes our thinking (8:5-8)**

Walking in the Spirit means that your actions will line up with the righteousness that was always the goal of the law. But what you do is ultimately determined by how you think. Paul has told us that the Spirit has set us free from sin, but this means that we are going to have to start thinking differently. The things that fill our minds will reflect where our heart really is, and the meditations of our heart will lead to either good or disastrous behavior. Once again, Paul sets up a contrast, this time between the thinking of the flesh and the thinking of the Spirit.

#### ***What does it look like to "mind the things of the flesh"? What kind of things does our sinful flesh think about?***

#### ***What does it look like to "mind the things of the Spirit"? What kind of things does the Holy Spirit want us to think about?***

Paul explains the difference between the thinking of the world and the thinking of the Spirit by focusing on the different outcomes. Those who think like the world will find that such thinking leads to death. Those who think as the Spirit would have them think will find that such thinking leads to life and peace. This is true eternally, in that those who are in the Spirit will experience eternal life and peace while those who are still in the flesh will face eternal death. But the same principle is true for believers who are in the

Spirit but choose to think in the flesh. Even once saved, if we allow our sinful, fleshly thinking to dominate it will come out in our actions and take us down the slow path of death and destruction.

***How can thinking like the flesh lead to death? How can thinking in the Spirit lead to life?***

### **The Spirit indwells us and brings new life (8:9-11)**

The power of the Spirit and the ability to think rightly both come because the Spirit of God is now dwelling inside us. This is true for everyone who is in Christ – they are now the home of the Creator God Himself. The clearest sign that someone belongs to Christ is the possession of the Spirit. Everyone who is in Christ has the Spirit, no one who does not have the Spirit is in Christ.

***How can we tell if we have the Spirit of God living in us? What difference should that make in our lives?***

Paul makes the point that it is the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead who is now living in you. And the same resurrection power that brought Christ back from the dead is able to give spiritual life to you in your weakened flesh. The Spirit makes alive all those whom He indwells. This means you can and should have great confidence in your battle with sin if you are a believer because the all-powerful Spirit of God can bring you life and help you live a righteous life.

***How would our lives look different if we consistently gave attention to the fact that the Spirit of God was dwelling in us all the time?***

## **The Spirit Gives Us the Power to Live Victoriously (8:12-17)**

In Romans 6 we saw that because we are dead to sin, we should live dead to sin. The true reality of who we are in Christ should become the practical reality of how we live in Christ. In this section we see something similar: we are in the Spirit and therefore we should live by the Spirit by following His leading.

### **We live victoriously by walking in the Spirit (8:12-14)**

We are no longer debtors to the flesh to live by the rules of the flesh. As we saw earlier, living by the flesh means being a slave to sin, and sin will always lead to death. Now we have a choice, though. We can live the way the flesh wants us to live, or with the help of the Holy Spirit we can follow the path that brings life. But you have a part to play, and the Holy Spirit will not do your part for you. You can't do live the Christian life in your own power without the Spirit, but you do have to work hard with Him.

***How do we balance trusting in the power of the Spirit with putting forth the effort necessary? What does it look like to focus too much on the effort we must put forward? What does it look like to ignore the role we have?***

What does this working hard look like? It looks like killing (KJV "mortifying") what is fleshly in us and following the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2:12) and instead of following what our natural desires crave and must do what we know the Holy Spirit would want us to do. This means studying God's Word so that we know what God would want, praying regularly so we are in constant communication with Him, and then being sensitive to what He would have us to do.

***How can you practically make sure throughout the day that you are walking in the Spirit?***

### **We live victoriously because of our adoption (8:14-17)**

Adoption in the Bible works differently than adoption in America. In America, we adopt out of pity – we see a young child or infant without parents and in compassion we give them a family. Adoption in Roman times worked somewhat differently. The goal typically wasn't to give a child a home, but rather to give an adult an inheritance. Adoption in ancient times broke all previous debts and associations and completely brought some into a new family. Normally a wealthy Roman would adopt a servant or another adult so that they could inherit his family's wealth. In fact, several emperors adopted specifically so that they could pass on the emperorship to someone who was not a biological son. This doesn't mean there was no love or that the dynamic of being a family member was totally missing, but that a big focus of ancient adoption was on what would be inherited.

Understanding this background sheds some light on the image of adoption in the New Testament. Here as elsewhere we see that adoption is important in part because as sons of God we become heirs of the kingdom that God will bring to earth. We will one day rule and reign on earth with Christ (Revelation 20:6; 22:5), a position made possible because we are now set to inherit what Christ will inherit ("joint-heirs" is "coheirs" in Romans 8:17). And that position is secured and reaffirmed to us by the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee, the "downpayment" as Paul will argue elsewhere (cf Ephesians 1:14). Having the Spirit means that we are part of the family of God, and being part of the family of God means that we will inherit the world.

***Many believers focus on what God can do for us in the here and now rather than focus on what God will do for us in the future. Why do you think this is?***

***How can getting a vision for what God has destined us as believers to inherit impact our battles with sin and the flesh?***

This section of Romans transitions into the second half of chapter 8, which we will look at next week. Paul has been talking about the difference that the Spirit makes in our battles with sin. He will go on to discuss the difference the Spirit makes in the suffering we face living on a broken, cursed world. In our battles with sin and our battles with suffering, we should remember the powerful Holy Spirit who helps us to conquer both and to faithfully live out the righteousness we have freely been given.

***Why do you think we don't give more attention to the Holy Spirit?***