

How We Change Romans 8: 5 – 8

- The Christian life is a life of change.

Ephesians 4: 22 – 24 (putting) off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- But how do we do that? How do we change?

Romans 8: 4 the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law is to live as:

Ephesians 5: 1 – 2 imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- To love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves is what it means to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law.

- But how does that happen in our lives? Notice the word walk appears in both Romans 8: 4 and Ephesians 5: 2.

- So, the Christian life is a walk that is taking you toward a destination.

Revelation 21: 3 “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

- The goal of the Christian life is to enter the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, and be in the presence of God forever. And because that is the goal, the Christian spends their life following Jesus, who is already there. He not only is in the heavenly city, but he is also seated at the right hand of God. Intently following Jesus leads us right to the eternal city.

- The world thinks that salvation is like going to Burger King, you can have it your way and get to heaven. You can follow Islam, or Buddhism, or just generally try to be a good person, or not even try at all, and you can get there.

- But that is not what Jesus said.

John 14: 6 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

- Jesus is the way the Father, and every other way leads to destination is apart from the Father, and to the Father, we must follow Jesus.
 - Jesus made this clear in his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7: 13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

- And then listen to what Jesus says in:



John 10: 7 Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.”

- Jesus is the gate to the narrow path. We are either walking in the Spirit following Jesus, or we are walking according to the flesh. There is no in between. No middle road.
 - This is the point that Paul is trying to get us to see in Romans 8.

Romans 8: 5 – 8 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.

1. Two different lifestyles

- The word for, at the beginning of verse 5, tells us that what follows is an explanation of what Paul said in verse 4.

Romans 8: 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Those who walk according to the Spirit fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. What does that mean? It is seeking to live your life as:

Ephesians 5: 1 – 2 imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- Or as Paul will put it in:

Romans 12: 2 by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- The way we fulfill the righteous requirements of the law is to take up our cross and daily offer ourselves as living sacrifices.
 - Think about that word living sacrifice. A sacrifice gives up its life for another.
 - Think of the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. It was the 10th plague that God was about to unleash on the Egyptians, to make Pharaoh bend to the will of God and set Israel free.
 - The 10th plague would be the Angel of Death taking of the life of every first-born son in Egypt. The only way the life of the first-born son would be spared would be if the family sacrificed a lamb and the blood of the lamb was painted on the doorframe of the house. If that was the case, then the Angel of Death passed over that house.
 - The Passover Lamb gave up its life for the life of the first-born son. What a picture of what Jesus would do for us. To walk in the Spirit, to walk in love is to be a living sacrifice—to voluntarily give up your life for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.
 - To live your life as a living sacrifice is to fully give your life to the one who loved you and gave his life for you.
- That sounds easy, but it isn't.

- Before he would go to be crucified for us, Jesus our Passover lamb, went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He prayed for God to find another way. Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus prayed so intently that his sweat fell as drops of blood to the ground.
 - The greatest temptation that Jesus faced wasn't to turn stones into bread, after being hungry for 40 days. It was to willingly lay down his life for your life.
- Now if Jesus, without a sinful nature, like we have, struggled with being the sacrifice for our sin to the point of sweating drops of blood, then shouldn't we, who live in sinful flesh, also very much expect to struggle with laying down our life as a living sacrifice?
- Of course, we will. The question isn't why we are struggling and sometimes failing. The question is are we engaged in the struggle? The broad way, walking according to the flesh is no struggle at all.
- If you are sensing a struggle to walk in love, and offer yourself as a living sacrifice, that's a good thing. It is a sign that you are on the narrow path.
- The Christian life isn't about achieving perfection it is about perseverance.

1 Timothy 6: 11 – 12 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith.

- You don't pursue something that you already have. You pursue what you desire to have. To walk according to the Spirit is to live a life perseverance. The measure of Christian faith isn't do I have all those things? It is, am I pursuing those things?
- Walking according to the flesh is to spend your life in pursuit of something other than godliness, righteousness, faith, steadfastness, and love. Walking according to the flesh is to live your life trying to fill the God shaped hole that is in the center of it, with everything else. Money, politics, comfort, relationships, success.
 - Walking according to the flesh is not just living a life of fornication and drunkenness. It is living your life in the pursuit of anything other than God. It is a lifestyle of ungodliness pursuing the things of the world rather than God.

Galatians 5: 19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God

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

- Flesh cannot please God. But the contrast to that is in Romans 8: 4 those who walk according to the Spirit can please God because they are fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law.
- Now before we look at the different outcomes that these two contrasting lifestyles lead to, let me just explain quickly how those who are walking according

to the Spirit fulfill the righteous requirements of the law even as they stumble, fall, and live not much differently than those walk according to the flesh.

- Those who walk according to the flesh are seeking to find their righteousness, their identity, their purpose in a life apart from God.
 - For years, even though I believed all the right stuff, I lived and walked much more according to the flesh than according to the Spirit.
 - I looked to Christ to forgive my sins, but rather than finding my identity and righteousness in him, I was pursuing success as my righteousness. If I could just be successful, I would be right.
 - Everything changed in my life the moment that I realized that Christ was my righteousness, rather than success. Through Christ I had a right standing with God because through his life and through his death Christ fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law for me.
 - As Paul put it in Galatians 2: 20, I was crucified with Christ, and I no longer lived. The life I lived in the flesh I began to live more and more by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me.
 - The more I walk by the Spirit, beholding what Christ has done for me, the more I gradually become what I behold, and thus haltingly and falteringly fulfill the law, more and more, in the way I live my life.

2. Two different outcomes

- To walk according to the Spirit is a walk that will one day lead you through the gates of the heavenly city and into the presence of God. To walk according to the flesh will lead you to hell, a destination far removed from the presence of God.
- God gives us in eternity what we pursue in life. If we pursue God we get God, if we pursue a life apart from God, God will give us that forever. God doesn't violate our free will He gives us exactly what we desire.

Romans 8: 6 – 7 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

- The outcome for those who walk according to the flesh is what? A lack of submission to God's law, hostility toward God, and death.
 - When Paul uses the word death in verse 6, he's not just speaking of physical death he is speaking of spiritual death. A person who is walking according to the flesh is unresponsive to the things of God.
 - Some who walk according to flesh are openly hostile to the things of God—denying God exists. But others who walk according to the flesh are more passive aggressive in their hostility toward God. They acknowledge God but it is a God of their own making.
 - You will hear people say things like my God would never do that. For instance, my God is loving and would never send people to hell. Well, maybe really bad people, but not most people. That is hostility to God. It is diminishing God not allowing God to be God.



- Why do people diminish God? Because they want to be their own God. They want to be the creator not the creature, so the creature usurps the role of creator and makes God in their image. It is an act of rebellion.
- A person who lives according to the flesh, never surrenders to God. The person who is walking according to the flesh may do some good things. They may have a thought that is good, or perform an action that is right. But they cannot please God, since it is a thought or action that is done in hostility toward God. Often, people don't think they are hostile to God, but think of it like this.
 - A man in a rebel army may look after his comrades, may keep his uniform smart, his weapon clean and so on. Those are "good"—but the rebel is doing those things in hostility to the rightful ruler. You would never expect that ruler to hear of this rebel's conscientiousness or generosity and be pleased by his conduct in rebellion!
 - In the same way, God can never be pleased with a person who is walking in the flesh, trying to be their own God, trying to control their own life.
- But a person who is walking according to the spirit lives a life of surrender life to God. The gateway to becoming a Christian is to surrender to Jesus. That is the starting point. A person who hasn't done that is not a Christian.
 - Now, once the Christian surrenders their life to Jesus there may be times where they try to wrest control back and forget that he's in control, but when they realize what they have done, they repent and surrender anew.
 - As a Christian lives their life by faith in Jesus they don't have to worry about what the world thinks, or having the things of the world, because their mind is fixed on Christ and what Christ has done for them.

Romans 5: 1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- A Christian has peace because they are justified through Christ, that is, they are declared to be right with God through Christ. From eternal standpoint, being right with God is all that matters, because being right with God, gives you God.
 - A person who is walking in the Spirit is like a person who is constantly living in the eye of a hurricane. The world they live in is trouble, chaos, and confusion all around them, but there in the eye of the storm is peace. Why? Because Christ is at the center of their life and Christ has overcome the world.
 - But that is not how it is for those who are walking according to the flesh. Because a person walking according to the flesh is trying to fill their life with finite things that are not big enough to fill the God shaped hole in their life.
 - The person walking according to the flesh is living the life of the preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1: 2 – 3 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. ³ What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 2: 1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity.

Ecclesiastes 2: 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

- Are you trying to fill your life with work, or pleasures or anything rather than God? It isn't going to work. Because there will never be enough of whatever it is to fill that God shaped hole, and even what you do get is swept away by the hurricane that rages around you.
- Listen to how God describes those who walk according to the flesh in:

Isaiah 57: 20 the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

- Why? Because they are always striving for something that they can never get enough of, and even if they get some of whatever it is, there is constant fear that one day it will be gone. So, they never know peace. In fact, it is no wonder why their life is filled with envy, jealousy, strife, divisions and fits of anger. They are desperate to try to get and hold onto what they think will be their identity.

3. Two different mindsets

Romans 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.

- What Paul is saying here is what you think about controls how you live.
 - When I was walking according to the flesh thoughts of success preoccupied my mind. For other people it's sex, or money, or comfort and ease. Whatever your mind is centered on is what controls your life.
 - Think about Peter. In Matthew 16, Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the long-awaited king. Jesus commends Peter.

Matthew 16: 17 "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah (Peter)! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

- Peter's proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah was Spirit driven. But Peter is still thinking according to the flesh. Right after Peter makes this proclamation about Jesus, and Jesus commends Peter, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples that being the Messiah means that he is going to be crucified. To which Peter replies:

Matthew 17: 22 "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

- Now listen to what Jesus says in response.

Matthew 17: 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

- "Peter, you are thinking like the world. Thinking according to the flesh. Thinking that the way to conquer is through might and power not humility and love."



- A person who is a Christian is called to think differently, because how you think controls how you live.

Colossians 3: 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Romans 12: 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,

Ephesians 4: 23 be renewed in the spirit of your minds

- They key to a changed life is to let the Spirit of God change the way you think about life and what is important in life.

Romans 8: 5 those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit

- The key to living according to the Spirit is to set your mind on the things of the Spirit. What are those things? Well in the coming weeks Paul will unfold those things for us. But let me just give you a brief preview.
 - Verse 14 will tell us that: “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”
 - Verses 15-16 will tell us that the Spirit removes a fear of rejection and assures us that we are God’s beloved children.
 - Verses 26-27 will tell us that the Spirit gives us confidence to approach God in prayer.
 - In other words, the rest of Romans 8 tells us what the Spirit is preoccupied with in our lives: how in Christ we are adopted, loved, and welcomed by the Father.
- Until a person hides their life in Christ and finds their identity in him, all they can think about is themselves and what they think they need to have identity and meaning. But in Christ we realize that we have all we need, so we stop striving for ourselves and instead strive for godliness, righteousness, faithfulness, and love.
 - What we think about determines how we walk, and how we walk leads to one of two possible outcomes. Either life and peace or death.

4. Two different causes

Romans 8: 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

- A Christian is not merely a person who believes in Jesus, they are a person who has been set free from sin and death. If you are free from death, then what you? Alive. Being alive in Christ, changes how you think, which changes not just the eternal outcome but how you live today.
 - You cannot think differently until you have been made alive again in Christ.
 - That is why in John 3, Jesus said this to a Pharisee named Nicodemus:

John 3: 3 – 7 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh,

and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

- Everything hinges on regeneration. Being born again and made alive in Christ. People who are spiritually dead can't think about spiritual things.

1 Corinthians 2: 14 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.

- But a person who has been born again, made alive in Christ can take in and discern the things of God.
- And who is it that gives life?

Ephesians 2: 4 – 5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

- If God has made you alive in Christ, you can take your mind off of your flesh and set it on things above, and if you do that, it will change how you walk.
 - Isn't that why you are here this morning? Didn't you come to be renewed and transformed in your thinking? To take your eyes off of the fleeting and momentary and put them on the eternal?
 - Jesus came to give you life and give it to the full. Don't you want that? Today is the day for you to be made alive in Christ, through faith in Christ. Don't leave here today without taking advantage of the new life Christ is offering to you.
 - How? By laying down your life to take up new life in him. Praying and asking God to forgive your sin through Christ's death for you, and then asking God to give you His Holy Spirit to live in you and change how you think, and you live.
- But for those of you who have already done that, let me ask you this. How are you walking, how are you thinking? Is it after the Spirit or after the flesh?
 - God has given us everything we need to thrive in Christ.

2 Peter 1: 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence

- For all those years, the reason I was so little like Christ was because I was wasting all that God had given me, because I was too busy still living according to the flesh. God gave me all that I needed, but I wasted it continuing to walk and think after the flesh. What about you?

Romans 12: 1 – 2 ^{NLT} I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.