

OUR BODIES IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IV

Romans 8:5-8

INTRODUCTION

As we continue to think about spiritual transformation and being changed from the inside out to be more like Jesus, we are keying on Romans 7 & 8 because these chapters deal with making our physical bodies our allies rather than our antagonists in this process of re-forming our character.

Our physical bodies really do begin as antagonists to spiritual transformation. Our natural self-centeredness directs us away from God and to ourselves. We are body-centered rather than God-centered. Living to get our way produces attitudes and actions which become embedded in the tissues and organs of our body. Literally, without thinking, we say and do things that are disrespectful and disobedient to God even when we do not intend to do such things. This is the dilemma about which the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 7. Paul wanted to please God, but his physical body sabotaged his good intentions. In frustration he cried out in Romans 7:24:

Romans 7:24

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Every earnest Christian experiences this struggle. It is very encouraging, then, to read Romans 8:1

Romans 8:1

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

and realize that

God does not condemn us for experiencing this struggle.

The reason God does not condemn us for this struggle is because He has already punished our disrespectful ways and disobedience to His law through Jesus as Paul explained in Romans 8:2-3:

Romans 8:2-3

²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

Now, with the guilt of our disrespect and disobedience removed, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live in our bodies to provide the grace and energy we need to live as God wants us to live. This is what Paul is saying in Romans 8:4:

Romans 8:4

⁴in 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.

Now the trick is, how do we tap into the grace and energy of the Holy Spirit? How do we “walk according to the Spirit” rather than “according to the flesh”. How can our spirit be in control of our lives rather than our bodies?

All of us realize that this shift is not automatic. In fact, our tendency is to continue in many of the same habits we had before we became followers of Jesus. So how do we tap into the grace and power of the Holy Spirit?

It begins with the orientation of our minds!

As we read the entire passage of Romans 8:5-11, notice the emphasis placed on the orientation of the mind. I'll be reading from the New English Translation as I think it expresses these principles particularly well.

Romans 8:5-11 (New English Translation)

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. ¹¹ Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you.

Now verse five may be a bit confusing because the Apostle Paul reversed the order in which we usually express cause and effect relationships. *Those who live according to the flesh* is the effect or result; *have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh* is the cause. Here is the principle, those who think predominantly about themselves and this world live their daily lives as if they are primarily physical beings. In contrast, those who think predominantly about the things of God live their daily lives as spiritual beings. Here is the principle: **where we focus our minds determines who/what controls our lives.**

In verse 7 Paul said that

...the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so...

Why is the flesh hostile to God? Because at the core of the flesh is self centeredness. At the core of this world's thinking is; "My kingdom come, my will be done on earth and in heaven." It is a battle of wills; our will against God's will.

Verse 8 says that

⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

My understanding of this verse is that this refers to people who are not followers of Jesus; who are not reconciled to God. It seems to me that we must understand that Paul is making a distinction between being *in the flesh* and *living according to the flesh*. The reason I say this is because in verse 9 Paul assures his readers

⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in

you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness.

The original readers of the letter to the Romans were not *in the flesh* but they were *in the Spirit*. A person cannot be a Christian, a person cannot be relying on the blood sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus from the dead to make them right with God and not have the Holy Spirit of God living within them.

Having said that, however, the context of these chapters clearly indicates that those who are *in the Spirit* still have the potential of living *according to the flesh*. In other words, someone who is in the flesh is separated from God and can only live a predominantly self-centered, bodily oriented existence; they have no other option. Someone who is in the Spirit is reconciled to God, but they can be living either according to the flesh or according to the Spirit depending upon the focus of their mind. To make it really clear, someone who is not a Christian cannot live like Jesus Christ except in a superficial sense, but a Christian can live just like those who are not Christians or they can live like Jesus Christ.

Verse 11 completes this paragraph with a word of inspiration:

11 Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you.

Notice that the Holy Spirit is described as *the one who raised Jesus from the dead* not once, but twice. What do you think God is emphasizing? The ability of the Holy Spirit to *make our mortal bodies alive!*

Our mortal bodies are going to die unless the Rapture occurs in our life time. What then does Paul mean when he says that the Holy Spirit will make our mortal bodies alive? Is this verse talking about the resurrection of those Christians who have died before the Rapture? I don't think so and here's why: in this context Paul is talking about our bodies here and now. We know this because he calls these bodies mortal; they are mortal because they are going to die physically some day. In 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to our resurrection bodies as immortal bodies because our resurrection bodies will never die. So Paul is emphasizing the ability of the Holy Spirit to make these bodies we are living in now alive.

What does it mean for these decaying, soon to be dead bodies, to be alive? At a minimum it means that these bodies are no longer driving and ruling our lives as described in Romans 7. The idea of life is the opposite of death. Death is the state of being separated: physical death is the separation of our soul from our physical body. Spiritual death is the separation of we the created from God our Creator.

Life is the state of being connected: physical life is the connection of our soul with our physical body. Spiritual life is the connection of we the created with God our Creator. Our physical bodies are alive when they are connected to God and in step with God's will. Our physical bodies are alive when they are restored to their proper position of serving our spirits to accomplish God's will in this world. Our physical bodies are alive when we can once again desire and do the will of God. This is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But once again, how do we practically experience the power of the Holy Spirit? This passage teaches us that **we experience the power of the Holy Spirit to retrain our bodies when we set our minds on the things of the Spirit.**

What does this mean and what does it look like? I think we have several powerful illustrations of this principle in the historical book of Acts. Let's look at one example in particular, Acts 3-4.

- Peter and John heal a lame man (Acts 3:1-10).
- Peter preaches the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to the crowd (Acts 3:11-26).
- Peter and John persecuted by religious leaders (Acts 4:1-22).
- Peter, John and the Church pray for boldness in the prospect of persecution (Acts 4:23-31).

It is the prayer of the Apostles and church members that is surprising. We would expect them to pray for the persecution to end or at least to be protected from persecution. Instead, they prayed for boldness in the midst of the persecution. This is living according to the Spirit rather than living according to the flesh and its intense drive for personal security and comfort. How is it that these men and women would pray the way that they prayed? The answer is in Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and held everything in common, ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

What kinds of things were they doing prior to the persecution? They were focused on what the Apostles' were teaching. They were in community with each other, spending time together, caring for one another. They were in prayer. They were praising God together. These are all ways in which they were setting their minds on the things of the Spirit. These are all ways in which we can set our minds on the things of the Spirit today.

When the persecution began how did these people respond? In self protective ways? In self promoting ways? Did they begin to blame one another for the persecution? Did they begin to compromise their faith or drift away? No. They responded in a dignified, manner. They prayed for boldness. They remained steadfast. God shook them with His approval and energized them afresh through the Holy Spirit and they continued to share Christ with courage. They lived at a whole new plane of existence.

That's *being made alive!*