



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 21 Issue 9

February 27, 2022

Fellowship with God

Romans 8:1-27

A “Bean Bag Chair” is a large piece of vinyl filled with Styrofoam beads designed to be an easy chair. When I was growing up, it became the “in” thing. Our family had two of them.

I don’t recall how the first of these broke. What I do recall was that my dad got very upset. And that is why, when I broke the second chair, I spent the day in mortal grief. I knew that when my dad got home, I was going to “get it.” And so, I began to scheme and

strategize a plan that I hoped would enable me to live.

At 5:00 p.m., I put the plan in motion. When my dad pulled into the driveway, I went out to meet him. I asked him, “Are you in a good mood?” He said, “Yes.” To which I replied, “Are you in a *really* good mood?” By this time, we were in the house, and I needed to confess my sin. After my dad answered my second question with a “Yes, why do you ask?”, I said, “I accidently broke the bean bag chair!”

I’ll never forget my dad’s response. He said, “You did? That’s alright.” And then he went upstairs to change.

Now for many of us, our approach to God is no different. We approach Him so long as we perceive that He is in a “good mood” when we have done right, when the obligations have been fulfilled, and when we haven’t sinned too terribly bad. At these times we know we can enter His presence and He will receive us. BUT let us really fail, and we revert back to the child who waits for the right moment to enter into his father’s presence.

Yet this is in direct contradiction to what the Scripture teaches. Paul details the various benefits which flow from the cross of Christ and identifies fellowship as one of these fruits.

Romans 8:4b, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

This is another description of the child of God. So, not only is the child of God NOT under condemnation (Romans 8:1-4a), BUT they “walk... according to the Spirit.” What does that mean?

“Walk” περιπατέω (*peripateō*); is used to refer to the whole of an individual’s manner of living. In a society where transportation usually occurred on foot, the concept of “walking” was full of rich meaning. It was NOT simply the means of getting from point “A” to point “B”. RATHER, it was an activity in which close and intimate communion took place. For example, recall God’s charge to parents.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

God’s plan for parents is that as they “walk with” their children, they invest in them! Christ spoke to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:13-15, “And behold, two of them were going [walking] that very day to a

village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing..."

The picture here is one of deep fellowship! After Christ gave a strong word of exhortation, we read this:

John 6:66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."

This gives us keen insight into Genesis 3:8 where it says that God came "walking in the garden in the cool of the day." From the Biblical use of the term "walking" we understand that God's approach to Adam and Eve was for rich communion. That no doubt is why they "hid themselves" from God's presence!

Accordingly, in the mind of a Jew to "walk" with someone was to converse, commune, and invest one's life — which no doubt is why "walking" is a common word in the Gospels used to describe the ministry of Christ! And thus, the person who is "walking according to the Spirit" is the one who has an intimate, moment-by-moment relationship with the Spirit of God, talking, communing, and fellowshiping with Him! Is that NOT why we refer to one's relationship with God as "our walk"?

This is the focus of Romans 8: Fellowship with God! We begin looking at the basis of our fellowship.

Romans 8:5, "for [in explanation of how we know that we are ones who are 'walking according to the Spirit', v. 4b] those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

Paul draws a contrast between two people: (1) those who walk "according to the flesh" and (2) those who walk "according to the Spirit." With that, two words are key to our understanding here.

The first is "according to": *κατά* (*kata*); in the context this indicates a person's fundamental essence, bent, or disposition. Thus, to be "according to the flesh" is to say that an individual is given to and so controlled by his fallen humanness- his "flesh." This obviously is referencing the non-Christian. In contrast, to "walk... according to the Spirit" is to say that an individual is given to and so controlled by the Spirit of God. This obviously is referencing the Christian.

And so, by this phrase Paul is making reference to the two states/conditions in which all of mankind dwells: Saved or Unsaved (lost). With that, notice that whatever we are "according to" — whether we are saved or unsaved- will dictate the character of our life! That is the thought behind...

“Set their minds”: φρονέω (*phroneō*); the word refers to the basic orientation and thought patterns of an individual. It refers NOT to the intellect per se (that would be νοῦς [*nous*]), BUT to a person’s affections, will, outlook, and reasoning. To have a mind “set” on something is to be preoccupied with it; it is to have one’s whole being influenced by it.

Accordingly, and this is so important, the basis of the fellowship that we have in Christ is the work of the Spirit — NOT our faith, merit, or performance! Listen to how John put it:

1 John 1:3, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

John here speaks of “fellowship” as something we enter into with God when we are saved. See, “fellowship” (κοινωνία [*koinonia*]) is a noun. When we hear the word, we take it as a verb and so something we do! Yet in Scripture, it first and foremost is NOT what we do BUT what we have with God on account of Christ. When we were saved, we were connected to God as if by a lasso (the Holy Spirit) such that everywhere He goes, we go! And so, we can’t be “out of fellowship” with God. For to do so would be to lose our salvation!

Accordingly, the basis of the fellowship we have as a result of Christ’s cross-work is salvation. It is from this that the rest of our Christian walk comes! Yet so many miss this and so suffer spiritual depression as a result. MalColossiansm Muggeridge (1903-1990) wrote in his diary:

Walking around St. James’s Park I thought intensely of the difference between Tolstoy and St. Augustine. Tolstoy tried to achieve virtue... through the exercise of his will [performance]; St. Augustine saw that, for Man, there is no virtue without a miracle [salvation]. Thus St. Augustine’s asceticism brought him serenity, and Tolstoy’s (brought) anguish, conflict, and the final collapse of his life into tragic buffoonery.” (Ortlund, 2002, p. 110)¹

With that let me ask you: On what basis do you enjoy fellowship with God? Is it your personal devotions with the Lord? The knowledge of a clear conscience? A good track record?

No doubt most of you will affirm that the fellowship we enjoy with God is based on the work of Christ alone. However, what we say and how we live are two different things. Does your life testify to the despair of Tolstoy or the peace/joy of Augustine?

Assuming that Christ is your Lord and savior, hear this well: If your life is characterized by despair, floating guilt, an ongoing sense of alienation from God, then the religion you are

practicing is NOT Christianity- no matter how religious you may be when it comes to reading the Bible, praying, going to church, and the like!

“No condemnation” means just that! And “walking according to the Spirit” translates to an intimate, moment-by-moment love relationship with God- a relationship that “casts out fear” (1 John 4:18)!

Either you have fellowship with God, or you don’t! And to demonstrate this further, Paul makes an important clarification.

A Clarification when it Comes to Fellowshiping with God, vv. 6a, 7-8.

Romans 8:6a, “For the mind set on the flesh is death...”

The implication behind this is that the non-Christian can NOT have fellowship with God. Why? Paul gives four reasons.

- The Non-believer is at Enmity with God, v. 7a.

Romans 8:7a, “Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God...”

The word for “hostile” is strong. It denotes utter rebellion and has reference to those who directly oppose God. Recall Matthew 24:51 how the disposition of the one in hell is “gnashing their teeth.” The non-believer cannot love God because in the most fundamental part of their being, they hate God!

When a person’s disposition is that of the world, they are in a position which opposes God. And thus, far from receiving God’s protection, guidance, and aid, it is just the opposite. God now opposes them! That is why the “mind set on the flesh is death”! Notice a second reason the non-Christian’s life is characterized by death.

- The Non-believer is in Rebellion against God, v. 7b.

Romans 8:7b, “...for it does not subject itself to the law of God...”

This is one of the tragedies of sin. The “Law of God” if followed results in life (Romans 7:10; cf. Genesis 2:16-17; Psalms 19:11; 119:105)! And so, in rejecting God’s word, the non-Christian reaps only death in his life (cf. Romans 1:22-23). That brings us to a third reason the non-Christian’s life is characterized by death.

- The -Nonbeliever is Enslaved to Sin, v. 7c.

Paul speaking of the fallen mind wrote this:

Romans 8:7c, "...it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so."

The "mind set on the flesh" testifies to a state of being that is NOT able to obey God even if it wanted to!

1 Corinthians 2:14, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

Speaking of one of the consequences of salvation in the life of the non-Christian:

2 Timothy 2:26 "[That] they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

So often we hold the belief that the non-Christian is one who would obey if only they were educated! Yet the truth is, the non-Christian does NOT need a better argument in order to believe, BUT a new heart! And thus, so long as they are without Christ, they will be unable to obey the word of God! The final reason the non-Christian's life is characterized by death is that...

- The Non-believer is Displeasing to God, v. 8.

Romans 8:8, "And those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

When the non-Christian, living according to the world and their flesh, performs religious service of any kind, God is never pleased; in fact, He's angered! Why? Because everything they do is out of rebellion against God. Explaining why God's wrath is set against the non-Christian Paul explains:

Romans 1:25, "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen"

Romans 8:24, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity [and what is the result? Death!], that their bodies might be dishonored among them."

For these four reasons, the "mind set on the flesh" is bereft of the fellowship that we have with God! And because of that, the unsaved individual's life — NOT just their ultimate end, BUT the life they endeavor to live and enjoy- wreaks of "death"! Describing the non-Christian, Paul wrote:

Romans 3:13-17, "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and

bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known.”

If you should be one this day who does NOT have Fellowship with God/you are NOT saved, it is NOT too late! Turn from your self-effort. Go to Christ, the giver of all gifts, and confess your sin. Ask God to forgive you on account of Christ’s work on the cross and the benefit of this passage will be yours!

Yet what about the believer? He has fellowship with God, so, what difference will that make in His life? That brings us to a result of this fellowship.

Romans 8:6b, “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.”- this speaks of two consequences that flow from “a mind set on the Spirit”...

The mind set on the Spirit is LIFE: this is an eschatological term. In Scripture, when “life” is used as a description of salvation it always and ultimately has reference to the Age to Come! Recall the expression “eternal life” it comes from two Greek terms: αἰώνιος [aiōnios] ζωή [zōē]- literally, “life-age” or “life pertaining to the age.” And what “age” is that? The age to come!

That being said, what constitutes this life? How in Scripture is this life defined? Christ gave the answer in His high priestly prayer.

John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee [which speaks of a love-relationship with God], the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

Because we have “eternal life,” we will spend the rest of eternity participating in a love relationship with God — a love relationship we have the moment we believe! Yet there is more, notice “the mind set on the Spirit is life and PEACE:” the Greek world understood this to refer to the “absence of war or strife.” Yet, in the New Testament the word is used differently. It denotes one or both of the following:

1. The STATE of being reconciled with God, Romans 5:1-2- Saved! And/or...
2. The resulting CONDITION of inner serenity, knowing that all is well (Philippians 4:6-7)!

Based on the context of this verse, the emphasis is on the latter. When our minds are “set on the Spirit,” the result is the assurance that regardless of what is occurring in the world, “all is well between us and our God!”

Together, these fill out our understanding of the Fellowship we have with God. What is this fellowship? It speaks of saving relationship with God which results in the tangible

benefits of “life and peace”!

Now, there may come times when we don’t tangibly experience this life and peace, recall David! Because of his unconfessed sin, what did He forfeit? It was NOT his relationship with God, BUT the joy of His salvation.

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer.*”

In fact, notice his prayer.

Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation...”

David’s sin did NOT cost him his salvation... just its joy. But then he confessed his sin and something fantastic happened... His joy returned! Upon God’s forgiving grace, this is what David said this:

Psalm 32:7, “Thou art my hiding place; Thou dost preserve me from trouble; Thou dost surround me with songs of deliverance.”

You say, “I want this affirmation! But it always seems to allude me.” Well, let me ask you: where and on what are you “setting your mind”? Based on the text before us, there are two possibilities as Christians: either your mind will “be set on the flesh” (whose fruit is death and so a lack of joy) or your mind will “be set on the Spirit” whose fruit is life and peace! Understand, while “the mind set on the flesh” is a description of the non-Christian (that is all that they can do because they are slaves of Satan), nevertheless through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Power of Sin has been severed such that now we have a choice!

Accordingly, listen to the exhortation frequently given to the child of God in Scripture²...

Colossians. 3:2, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

Romans 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

Ephesians 4:22b-23, “...lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

Each of these texts indicates that a “mind set on the Spirit” is a choice for the believer... a choice which will mean the difference between a life of spiritual depression and a life of

joy and peace.³

So how do we “set our mind’s” on the Spirit? It will be by striving to have the word of the Spirit be that which determines our goals, wants, and desires. This is what Paul was referencing when he spoke of the “renewing of our mind” (Romans 12:2). Notice to what David attributed the joy and delight He had in His relationship with God:

Psalm 36:7-9, “How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. [This is fellowship] They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights [this is the result of fellowship: life and peace]. For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we see light.”

Truly it is as the child of God “sets his mind on the Spirit”, he shall be satisfied! Yet how practically do we “set our mind on the Spirit”? The text gives the answer: “In Thy light [God’s word] we see light”! Truly, “a mind set on the Spirit” is a mind that is being driven by the word of the Spirit. Accordingly, notice the impact the word of God has in the life of the believer when he lives in light of it,

Psalm 19:7-8, “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”⁴

When a person comes to Christ, they are NOT a finished product. RATHER, they have received a “transformed mind” with the exhortation that if they are going to enjoy more fully the benefits of this transformation, they must carefully guard what they allow their minds to be molded and shaped by!

Finally, lest there be any who respond to the exhortation here to be in the God’s word in the context of “performance”, finally why ought we to respond to the call here? To ensure that God will bless us? NO! We do it because God already has blessed them in Christ, in Him we will never receive condemnation! Bryan Chapell put it this way:

I think it’s fair to say that many people honor God out of mere duty — or because they dread his anger. How many times have you heard someone say they did something wrong, and now they’re waiting for the proverbial bolt of lightning to strike?

Yet, God wants the prime motivation of his children to be very different! That’s why his greatest commandment is for you to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37-8).

That love relationship changes everything in our Christian walk God’s love assures

us that his rules are for our benefit, not the arbitrary commands of an eternal killjoy. Loving God makes our service to him joy, rather than a burden or a bribe.

When we truly understand God's heart of grace through the revelation of Jesus Christ's sacrifice that turned God's wrath from our sin (as a "propitiation"), then we never fear his condemnation. Instead, we're drawn into a relationship that's filled with love. (Teaching based on 1 John 4:10-11)

References

Ortlund, R. (2002). *A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans*. Nashville: Crossway Books.

End Note(s)

¹ Henry Scougal (1650-1678) wrote, "I cannot speak of religion but I must lament that among so many pretenders to it so few understand what it means. Some place it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions... Others place it in the outward man, in a constant course of external duties and a model of performances... Others again put all religion in the affections, in rapturous hearts and ecstatic devotion... Thus are these things... frequently mistaken for the whole of religion... ¶ But certainly religion is quite another thing, and they who are acquainted with it will entertain far different thoughts... They know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God... the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, it is 'Christ formed within us.' Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed than by calling it a divine life." (Ortlund, 2002, pp. 108-109)

² cf. also Philippians 2:5; Romans 7:23; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

³ cf. also Ps. 19:7-8, 11 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

⁴ Compare the effects of having the word of God in your life (Colossians. 3:16-17) with the effects of being "Spirit filled" (cf. Ephesians 5:18-21) and you will note that they are nearly identical! Truly the key to being Spirit-filled is being word-filled- endeavoring to submit by the grace of God to the word of God!