

# In the Flesh, Apart from God

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Romans 8.5-8

The first full third of this great chapter is about life in the Spirit. **But** Paul wants us to be keenly aware of the opposite – ‘Life in the Flesh’.

We can hardly call this life that is the way of death. So in 5-8 we feel like we are performing an autopsy. This is what we were before Jesus gave us life by his cross; and this is what all people are who are not in Christ, not in the new life of the Spirit.

It is one thing, Christian, to have flesh, sin and death still in you; it is quite another to BE in the flesh, sin and death still apart from Christ.

What a great and wonderful name that has taken you and remade you!

This passage has **two parts** to it – what life in the flesh is in itself, and what life in the flesh is apart from God. Paul has **four things** to say about both.

Life in the flesh is itself about a state of heart or nature. It is man in his now fallen, natural state. It is not man as originally created like Adam. It is not man in heaven or man in hell. It is not a regenerate and converted man.

In verse 5 such a man is according to the flesh – this idea of flesh is what rules and dominates all that is about him.

In verse 9, Paul goes further to say that we were in the flesh; again, at home in a fallen and sinful nature.

Sin is not an exterior thing for sinners; it is the fabric of their life.

Out of such a flesh or carnal nature, comes forth a **mindset**:

Such a one can only think in fleshly ways – that is, the whole mind is bent toward self and the things of this world. Ideas of God, heaven, salvation, repentance from sins and obedience just fly around their thoughts. They do not really land or take root.

The carnal mind is part of being in the flesh. As a man thinks in his heart so is he; a born again man thinks of Christ and glory and spiritual things. But that which is of the flesh is flesh; the evil tree can only produce evil thoughts. Out of the heart and mind proceed all kinds of godless and sinful things.

This then produces how one lives; such a one lives or **walks** according to the flesh. We pick this up from verse 4. The whole life then, inwardly and outwardly, is not of the Spirit but of the fallen carnal nature, with appetites for what is sinful, and pursuits that are ever sinful.

Even the so-called good that is done is sinful, because all of it is focused on self, on furthering this sinful life. The plowing of the wicked is sin, says the Bible.

So these things together – the flesh nature, the flesh mind and thoughts, and the flesh living – are all connected, are all one, are all indivisible. You cannot have a bad heart and produce a good life; nor can you have a good heart by grace, and produce an evil life.

This bad heart, bad mind and bad life then produces a **bad end** – a bad result – *death*; verse 6 – the mind set on the flesh is death; a present death, a life under judgment, and a life anticipating future death, both physical and eternal, the second death.

This dead tree cannot produce apples of life or pears of peace.

Before moving forward, let us assess this for a moment:

1. First of all, sin is dominating this soul. Sin is not a little matter for this person. It is at the center. Man is not basically good.
2. Second, this sinfulness is not infecting just some parts of this life, but all of it. The Greeks made a very big mistake in thinking that sin and evil did not affect one's ability to think. That couldn't be further from the truth!
3. Sin is not just outward in actions, but has a throne in man inwardly, in his heart and mind. Just washing the outside of the cup is not the answer. There must be radical surgery to take that old heart out and put a new one in.
4. Lastly here, recognize that such a life will not be receptive to the good seed of the Bible, of the Gospel, or of anything that is from the Lord. Man may be sad about being in the flesh, but not enough to change him. Like the pig loves the mire and the dog the taste of vomit, sinful man loves his sinful life. He doesn't see it as sin. He sees religion and law-keeping and believing the gospel as enemies to his life and his pursuits. Tertullian said it well: the first reaction of man to the gospel is hatred.

Now the second half is even worse than the first.

What we have said so far describes man's condition in the flesh. But now we see how such a man stands towards God. Here we turn from the horizontal to the vertical. And I say that this is even worse because God is more important than us. Way, way more important. Let me lose my eyes, or my hands or my feet, but let me not lose God!

But that is precisely what sin has done.

And as we have seen **four** things under the first, now consider **four** things under this second heading, 'apart from God.'

Verse 7 begins with how the mindset of man is hostile to God. There is an opposition to God and all that God is as God. If you make a false god, a god that is not almighty or all-wise or all-holy or in every place, then sinful man can adore such a false idol. But he cannot love or bow to the true and righteous and pure living God.

There is enmity in man. He doesn't just have enmity or manifest it at some times, but the mind of the man in the flesh IS enmity to God.

So here is the rebellion of a mind under sin. God says yes, man says no; God says no, man says yes.

This is the depravity of the flesh; it is twisted from the delight that man's mind once had before Adam sinned, and the delight which man can have in heaven again when made fully new.

Then **second** there is this inhospitable quality to life in the flesh. God is repelled to the Lord and all of his ways; particularly the law word of God. How man in sin hates and loathes the authority of God. God is obnoxious to such a life. It is unreceptive to God and all he stands for.

That is why one of the first thing a changed soul does is bow the knee to Christ as Lord! Until that change takes place, man is only forced to acknowledge God.

Then **thirdly**, man cannot please God in any way. Verse 8 – ‘Those in the flesh cannot please God!’ Nothing they think, or feel, or try to do, try not to do, is acceptable while this devil nature holds their heart. This is the inability of man apart from Christ, outside of Christ, and void of the Spirit. This is spiritual deadness of man, as Ephesians 2:1 states: dead now and dead hereafter – first death and second death.

This is how deep our sinfulness is; even trying to be better, to be good, to be religious, to worship, is futile, empty. And yet man is responsible to be perfect, holy and righteous – and not to try is worse than not doing so!

Then **fourth** and last we draw from verse 9 – such a one in the flesh, condemned for their sins and under the law of their nature to sin and death, is disowned of God – not only void of all good but void of the Lord Himself. God is not his God.

This is truly the last nail in this coffin! That man will not even accept the gospel, the offered love and grace and salvation of the Son of God sent to this world to redeem us from sin’s hold and sin’s hell!

Now Paul thankfully is presenting all this to drive us toward the main point of verse 9 – new life in the Spirit means a new mind, a new walk, and a new identity in Christ by the Spirit. He is the Spirit of resurrection in the future – 11; He is the Spirit of mortification in the present – 13; He is the Spirit of leadership – 14 and the Spirit of

liberty and adoption – 15-17; He is the Spirit of hope and endurance in suffering – 18-25; the Spirit of intercession – 26-27; the Spirit under God's purpose, the Spirit of love, who keeps you, makes you more than conquerors!

There is hope. But there is no hope in ourselves apart from the Lord Jesus!

There are only two kinds of people in the world – those in the flesh and those in the Spirit; those lost and those found; those going hell and those going to glory because of the risen Christ! Which are you?

The man in the flesh is at home in the flesh, at home in unbelief, at home in pride, at home in sin, and at home apart from God, from Jesus, from the Holy Spirit.

But a sheep is not at home in the mud of the pig – it is against his nature; a pig is not at home in a wide green pasture. Those who are in the flesh, who have not been born again, cannot see the kingdom of God! The things of Christ are foolishness to those who are perishing. The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; cannot even understand them.

But to be in the Spirit is to be at home in the new life, a new nature, recreated by God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

As we close, I hope you can see clearly these two ways – a way of life and peace and a live of death and everlasting suffering.

Man's ways, man's mind, man's hopes, are all cursed and of the earth; no escape at all!

Why else do men continue the same pursuits, trying to gain full satisfaction from this world, even though it fails us again and again and again and again.

Men have a taste for the grave, for what does not profit them, for what can never satisfy them – and yet they continue pursuing, until they find the edge of the cliff.

Men can do many things still in his fallen and fleshly estate, but he cannot, and will not, arise to the heavens. Drowning, and therefore should be greatly pitied; as sailors drowning at a distance and you stand on safe ground!

We must be changed in order to live for God. Life precedes living. And life comes not from ourselves but from the gospel, from Jesus who died to produce this very change in you. Do you know the gospel? Do you believe the gospel? Then fear these fleshly qualities then as they touch on the door of life:

1. Misunderstanding the gospel – should alarm you to no end.
2. Indifference to the gospel – an eclipse by love to the world over the grace of God, should terrify you.
3. Rejection of the gospel – knowing what the Bible says about faith and repentance but instead trust to your abilities and good works, religiousness and rituals, as well as mere sorrow for sins – this all is a false hope.

Flee to Christ today! Thank God there is forgiveness still! Have you come to him?