



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Benefits that Flow from Christ, Part 2

### A Capricious God

In the 1970's when I was growing up, bean bag chairs were the "in" thing. They were vinyl bags filled with tiny little pieces of Styrofoam designed to be an easy chair. And so like most, our family acquired two of these chairs.

I don't recall how or when the first of these chairs 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 I should mention that my brothers were quick to remind me of this fact.

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 ran out to meet him; so that my brothers couldn't betray my plan by telling on me.

The first thing I asked was, "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", I said, "Good! Because I had accidentally broke the remaining 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 in the church today, their approach to God is no different than my approach to my father. We believe that God is accessible so long as we perceive that He is in a "good mood."

- When we have done right.
- When the obligations have been fulfilled.
- When we haven't sinned too terribly bad.

Then we know we can enter His presence and He will receive us. BUT let us fail just once, and we revert back to the child who waits for the right moment to enter into his father's presence, lest we be condemned.

## Fellowship

Now brothers and sisters, the relationship I have just described runs contrary to the Word of God. In fact, those who approach God on the basis of their performance do so in contradiction to the text we are addressing. Our text details the various benefits which flow from the cross of Christ. Paul identifies "Fellowship" as one of these fruits.

Romans 8:4, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, **who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**"

Paul wrote this as another description of the child of God.<sup>1</sup> In light of this, we learn here that besides not being under condemnation, the Christian is one who "walks... according to the Spirit." What does this mean?

The term *walk* is used to refer to the whole of a man's manner of living. It's the term used to describe Christ when He walked in the world ministering grace. And thus, its primary reference is to ALL of life!

Now in a society where transportation usually occurred on foot, the concept of "walking" was full of rich meaning. Walking was not the means of getting from point "A" to point "B". Rather, walking was an activity in which close and intimate communion took place. We see the Jewish idea of walking in Luke.

Luke 24:13-15, "And, behold, two of them went [walking] that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them."

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Romans 8:3-4

risest up.”

Genesis 3:8, “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.”

In the mind of a Jew, to walk with someone was to commune with them. 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. It is to

- Be conscious of His presence in our lives.
- Fellowship with Him through God's word.
- Be led by Him.
- Filled with Him.
- Ever and always be influenced by Him.

That is the idea here. And yet, almost every religion ends in communion with their deity. Recognizing this, Paul here shows that this benefit ONLY belongs to the child of God, the Christian. Indeed, not everyone has fellowship/communion with God. Only certain ones do, which raises some important questions:

- WHO are the ones who have this "Fellowship" with God? All people? Only Christians? Only obedient Christians?
- Does this text imply that the Benefit of Fellowship is static- a constant and never changing relationship in the life of the Child of God?

I want to answer these questions by looking first at the CAUSE of this benefit; fellowship with God.

### Fellowship with God

Romans 8:5, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.”

This verse explains why we are the ones who are walking according to the Spirit. Paul does this by contrasting two people groups: those who walk according to the flesh and those who walk according to the Spirit.

Now there are two words that are key in our understanding here. The first indicates a person's fundamental essence, bent, or disposition, it is our English phrase “that are after” or “according to” the Greek word *kata*. Thus, to be walking "according to the flesh" is to say that an individual is given to and controlled by his fallen humanness; his "flesh." This is obviously referencing the non-Christian.

“According to the flesh” is contrasted with "according to the Spirit" is to say that an individual is given to and controlled by the Spirit of God. This is obviously referencing the Christian. And so by this phrase, we conclude that Paul is making reference to the two states/conditions in which all of mankind can dwell: saved or not saved. Now notice, that which we are "according to"— whatever our condition before God — will dictate the character of our life.

The second phrase is “do mind” or “set their minds.” This refers to the basic orientation and thought

patterns of an individual. It refers not to the intellect per se, but to a person's affections, will, and reasoning. To have a mind "set" on something is to be preoccupied with it; it is to have one's whole being centered upon it.

And so notice the correlation described in this verse. Our relation to the "Spirit of God" or the "Flesh" will determine HOW we will live. If we are "according to the Spirit" the focus of our life; and thus the character of our life will be of the Spirit and thus we will enjoy fellowship with Him.

Philippians 3:15, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Paul tells us here to have this attitude or mindset and pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God. If we are "according to the flesh" the focus of our life and thus the character of our life will be of the world!

Philippians 3:19, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)"

Here Paul describes the enemies of the cross of Christ. Notice what they do, "Whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." This leads us to conclude that "whose" we are; that by which we are controlled, will dictate the character of our life: whether or not we have fellowship with God!

If we are going to experience the Benefit of "Fellowship with God" described in Romans 8:4 as "walking according to the Spirit" and referenced in Romans 8:5 as "setting our minds on the things of the Spirit" we must first must be living "according to the Spirit" which means we must be a Child of God!

Thus the CAUSE of the benefit of FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD is

- Salvation.
- And more specifically, the Spirit of God!

Now once again, take special note of this: It is so important! The CAUSE of the NEW LIFE that we have in Christ is the Work of the Spirit, not

1. Faith.
2. Our Merit!
3. Even our Diligent Effort.

To miss this truth is to potentially plunge ourselves into a bottomless pit of despair! Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990) wrote these words 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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Ortlund, Jr. *A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans*, Crossway Books; 1 edition

It is not

- What we do, but what we have- The Spirit of God!
- Who we are, but Whose we are!

This determines

- Our standing before God.
- God's view of us.
- And our ability to have Fellowship with God!

With that let me ask you these questions:

- On what basis do you live your life before God and thus enjoy Fellowship with Him?
  - Personal quiet time with the Lord?
  - The discipline of Scripture memory?
  - Various and sundry ministries?
  - The knowledge of a clear conscience?
  - A good track record?

Now I dare say that most of you will affirm that the fellowship you enjoy with God is based on the work of Christ alone. And that is right. However, what you say and the standard by which you live are two different things. Let me ask you: Does your life testify to the despair of Tolstoy or the peace/joy of Augustine?

If your life is characterized by despair, then truly though you talk a good talk, nevertheless you are living according to a false religion. Henry Scougal (1650-1678) wrote this:

"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."<sup>3</sup>

That is the essence of what is being addressed in Romans 8. If the Spirit of God has entered into your being such that you are "according to the Spirit" then your mind now is set upon the things of the Spirit- which means AT ALL TIMES you are to have FELLOWSHIP with God!

Fellowship with God is primarily a noun, not a verb. It is a relationship we enjoy with God based on the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 108-109

presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a state we enter into by God's grace and beckoning! With this, Paul makes a clarification as to why the nonbeliever can't fellowship with God.

### Non-Believer's Cannot Fellowship with God

Romans 8:6-8, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

The non-Christian cannot have fellowship with God. Instead, their lives are characterized by "death!" Paul gives four reasons for this. First the non-Christian is at enmity with God.<sup>4</sup> Their mindset is hostile towards God. They are in utter rebellion and directly oppose God. A person of this world has a disposition that places them in opposition to God thus they are

- Far from receiving the promise that God would protect, guide, and aid them...
- The one and only God now opposes them!

This is why the "mind set on the flesh" is DEATH!

Secondly, the non-believer is in rebellion against God.<sup>5</sup> The non-believer does not subject himself to the law of God and this is one of the tragedies of sin. The Law of God, which if followed would result in life, is rejected by the sinner for a counterfeit. And this rejection is viewed by God as nothing less than rebellion! Recall what Paul wrote in Romans 1:22-23.

Romans 1:22-23, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."

The whole of mankind is NOT seeking after God the best that they know how, BUT is desperately fleeing from God to their false-gods; god's made in the image of "corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." And thus, far from seeking God, the "mind set on the flesh" is running from God in rebellion. That is why the "mind set on the flesh" is DEATH!

Thirdly, the non-believer is enslaved to sin.<sup>6</sup> The "mind set on the flesh" testifies to a state of being that is NOT ABLE TO OBEY GOD EVEN IF IT TRIED!

1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

See, so often we hold the belief that the non-Christian is one who would obey if only they were given the chance. We believe that if only they were educated they would seek after God. Yet the truth is that the non-Christian does not need more or new information; but a new heart. And thus, so long as they are without this new heart, they will be unable to obey the word of God! That is why the "mind set on the flesh" is DEATH!

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Romans 8:7a

<sup>5</sup> Compare Romans 8:7b

<sup>6</sup> Compare Romans 8:7c

The fourth reason is that a non-believer is displeasing to God.

Romans 8:8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

When the non-Christian, living according to the world system, performs religious service of any kind, God is never pleased!

Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

See, the NonChristian lacks the very thing essential for pleasing God: Christ's righteousness granted through faith! To be without faith, is to be dead in one's sins, and thus unable to "please God." That is why the "mind set on the flesh" is DEATH!

For these four reasons, the mind set on the flesh is bereft of the fellowship that a man can have with God! And because of this "bereavement", the unsaved individual's life is rightly identified as "death!" This is such bad news! Accordingly, if you should be one this day who does not have fellowship with God turn from your self-effort and 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. Vow to follow Christ and the benefit of this passage will be yours!

Truly wait no longer. Turn from your sin and go to Christ. He will save you!

The Catalyst for Fellowship with God

Yet what about the believer? Can a believer fellowship with God and remain static? Or is the fellowship with God something he is able to enjoy more deeply? This brings us to the catalyst for fellowship with God.

Romans 8:6, "For to be carnally minded is death; **but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**"

Notice that there are two consequences which flow from fellowship. The first consequence of fellowship is life. In Scripture, life speaks of the new life in Christ. Life always has reference to the age to come! Thus, to say that we have "life" in Christ, is to say that

- Our citizenship is in heaven!
- When Christ returns, He will return for us!
- To live is Christ and to die is gain!

And yet, all of this is but secondary. In fact, the essence of "life" in Scripture is a love relationship with God.

John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee 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. This is the essence of the LIFE mentioned here. And thus, to have "life" is to have fellowship with God!

The second consequence is peace. Now, the Greek world understood this to refer to the "absence of war or strife." Yet, in the New Testament the word is used in a positive way. It denotes one or both of the following

- The STATE of being reconciled with God (Rom. 5:1-2), and/or...
- The resulting CONDITION of inner serenity, knowing that all is well!

According to the context of our passage, the emphasis is on the latter. When our minds are set on the Spirit, the natural result is the assurance that regardless of what is occurring in the world, "all is well between me and my God!"

Together, these two words describe further the fruit of the relationship we have received in Christ:  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD!

Now notice a very important point. Fellowship leads to fellowship. If we as believers set our minds on Christ we will enjoy a deeper and richer communion with God. Accordingly the Bible goes to great lengths to exhort the child of God with regard to his "mind."

Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Colossians 3:1-2, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection (mind) on things above, not on things on the earth.

Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Ephesians 4:22-23, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Romans 7:23, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

2 Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Each of these texts implies that a "mind set on the Spirit" is something that we can and should influence. Yet what does that mean?

2 Peter 1:20-21, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

From this verse we conclude that the Holy Spirit inspired the word of God. As such, Scripture contains His mind and will. Accordingly, if we are going to have a "mind set on the Spirit;" a mind preoccupied by the mind and will of the Spirit, doesn't it follow that we need to be a people whose minds are being instructed and taught by the word of the Spirit?



Indeed it does! Notice the effects of the presence of the Word of God in the life of the believer:

Colossians 3:16-17, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

Compare the effects of having the word of God in your life with the effects of being "Spirit filled."

Ephesians 5:18-21, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Truly the key to being Spirit-filled is being word-filled- endeavoring to submit by the grace of God to the word of God! David, contrasting the possible sources of trust for an individual; man or God, sets the truth about man and God side by side. Notice what he says about God.

Psalms 36:7-9, "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light."

Truly it is as the child of God submits themselves to the "light of God's word" that they will they see light, that is enjoy fellowship with God.

Psalms 19:7-8, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalms 19:11, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

As we submit ourselves to the word of God as ones trusting in Christ, we reap the benefit of peace and joy in our lives. Truly the fellowship which God established with the child of God leads to the enjoying of fellowship.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Indeed! 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 dwell upon.

And thus we see a CATALYST when it comes to the BENEFIT of FELLOWSHIP with God: the proper stewardship of our mind. This stewardship includes not only WHAT we think, but also our affections,

will, and reasoning!

Don't misunderstand or take this truth and isolate it from its context. In Romans 8:1-4 Paul clearly teaches that the first benefit which flows from Christ is NO CONDEMNATION! With this right/assurance flows a second benefit; fellowship.

Now it should be obvious from all that we have seen that fellowship in Scripture is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it references the relationship that every child of God enjoys with God in Christ today; a relationship not predicated upon what we do, BUT on what Christ did on the cross! As a verb, it references the existential communion we enjoy with God when we set our minds on Christ!

And so today we live as ones who know that Christ ever and always is with them. And because of this truth, we strive to submit our minds to the word of the Spirit that our fellowship with Christ might be enhanced! Such is the calling and the consequence of the second benefit which flows from Christ!

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found [Biblical Thinking](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 31, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church