

Message Eleven

The Flesh and the Spirit

Scripture Reading: Rom. 1:9; 2:28-29; 7:17-18, 20-21; 8:4-6, 9-10, 13, 16; 12:11

I. The book of Romans is fully focused on life and is of three sections:

- A. The first section is on redemption for justification, the second section is on life for sanctification, and the third section is on building for the Body expressed as the local churches.
- B. In the section on life there are two key terms for our Christian life—*the flesh* and *the spirit*.

II. In order to live by the mingled spirit, the Spirit with our spirit (8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17), we must see what the flesh is:

- A. The flesh is the corrupted, polluted, and transmuted body:
 - 1. Man's body was originally pure, but through man's fall Satan injected himself into man, and man's body became the flesh—Gen. 3:6; Rom. 7:18a.
 - 2. Our body is "the body of sin" (6:6) and "the body of this death" (7:24); the body of sin is very active and full of strength in sinning against God, and the body of this death is weak and powerless in acting to please God (v. 18).
 - 3. As long as we are still living, until the day of our redemption, the body of sin and death is always with us—cf. 8:23.
 - 4. The word *flesh* also refers to our entire fallen being; man is totally flesh because the fallen being today is under the dominion of the fallen flesh—3:20; Gen. 6:3a.
- B. The flesh is the "meeting hall" and the compound of sin, death, and Satan; the flesh is a hopeless case and can never be improved—Rom. 7:17-18, 21; cf. John 17:15.
- C. The flesh is at enmity with God, not subject to the law of God, and can never please God—Rom. 8:7-8.
- D. Sin is Satan himself as "the evil" in our flesh—John 17:15; Rom. 7:21:
 - 1. "The evil" is the evil life, nature, and character of Satan himself, who is the indwelling sin in us; when sin is dormant within us, it is merely sin, but when it is aroused in us by our willing to do the good, it becomes "the evil."
 - 2. Sin can deceive us, kill us (v. 11), lord it over us, that is, have dominion over us (6:12, 14), and cause us to do things against our will (7:17, 20); all these activities show that sin is a living person.
 - 3. Sin is the evil nature of Satan, the evil one, who, having injected himself into man through Adam's fall, has now become the very sinful nature dwelling, acting, and working in fallen man—cf. Matt. 16:22-23.
 - 4. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me"; in Romans 7:17 he says, "It is no longer I...but sin that dwells in me," showing that sin is another person within us.
 - 5. In our flesh no good thing dwells, because the flesh is fully possessed, taken over, by Satan as sin—v. 18a.

III. For the sake of His economy, God in His wisdom and sovereignty uses our sinful, ugly flesh to force us to turn to our spirit so that we may gain more of the Spirit for His building by the growth of God in us—Col. 2:19; Zech. 4:6:

- A. We are either in the spirit or in the flesh; there is no third place for us to be; the believer is a miniature garden of Eden—with God as the tree of life in his spirit, Satan as the tree of knowledge in his flesh, and his mind in between—Rom. 8:6.

- B. Judicially speaking, both Satan and our flesh were condemned once for all on the cross (v. 3; John 3:14; Heb. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:21), but God allowed the flesh to remain with us to help us and force us to turn to Christ in our spirit and have no more confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).
- C. Without the help rendered by the sinful, ugly flesh, we would not be as desperate to gain the Lord or to have Him wrought into us—Rom. 8:6, 13.
- D. Our goal may be holiness or spirituality or victory, but God’s goal is to work Himself into us; often when we are in a difficult situation, we are more open to the Lord and more willing to turn to Him and allow Him to work Himself into us—vv. 28-29.
- E. If we seek Him, even the sinful compound of the flesh will become a help to us in gaining the Lord; because we fail so often, we are desperate to turn to the spirit, and in this way we gain more of the Spirit—cf. Exo. 23:23, 29-30; Judg. 2:21-3:4.
- F. Our hardships, defeats, failures, and disappointments force us to realize that there is no hope in the flesh; the flesh is good only to force us to turn to Christ in our spirit, to press us into the spirit, to make us desperate to get into the spirit, and to keep us watchful to stay in the spirit—Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:17-18.
- G. The Lord does not care for whether or not we have a victory; the Lord cares for only one thing—that we gain Him as the Spirit—Phil. 3:8; 2 Cor. 3:17-18.

IV. Our spirit is a wonderful compound—compounded with Christ, the Spirit, and grace—2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16; Gal. 6:18:

- A. God wants us to walk according to this wonderful compound spirit (to have our being and our living with all that we say and do according to the spirit)—Rom. 8:4; Phil. 1:19; 1 Cor. 6:17; cf. Exo. 30:23-25.
- B. Only the persons who walk according to the spirit can be the proper members for the building up of a local church; if we do not have such a walk, sooner or later we will be a trouble to our local church—Gal. 5:16-26.
- C. Romans reveals that whatever we are, whatever we do, and whatever we have must be in spirit; this will keep us from the vanity of religion—1:9; 7:6; Phil. 3:3:
 - 1. The reality of all spiritual things depends on the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is in our spirit; hence, the reality of all spiritual matters depends on our spirit, not on anything apart from our spirit—Rom. 8:5-6, 9-11.
 - 2. Whatever is in us is vanity unless it is “inwardly,” in our spirit, not “outwardly,” in the flesh—2:28-29; 8:4, 10, 13; 12:11.
 - 3. Everything that God is to us is in our spirit—8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22.
- D. God has reserved the human spirit for His purpose—Zech. 12:1; Prov. 20:27.
- E. Our spirit today is the real Bethel, the house of God and the gate of heaven; when we turn to our spirit, we are in the third heaven—Eph. 2:22; Gen. 28:12, 17, 19.
- F. When we are in our spirit, we are in the Holy of Holies, touching the throne of grace and being sustained by Christ to live a heavenly life on earth—Heb. 10:22a; 4:16.
- G. In our spirit we can overcome the world, and the evil one cannot touch us; the only way to overcome Satan is to stay in the high tower of our regenerated spirit—1 John 5:4, 18; John 3:6; 14:30.
- H. Because Christ as the life-giving Spirit has dispensed Himself into our spirit, our spirit is life (Gk. *zoe*)—Rom. 8:10.
 - I. Our spirit is the place of oneness; we can be one only if we worship God in our spirit, which is today’s Jerusalem—John 4:23-24; Psa. 133.
 - J. Christ, the heavenly and spiritual food, is in our spirit, and we need to eat Him to be His testimony and grow up into Him for the building up of His Body—John 6:57, 63.