

Chapter Nine

Death and Freedom

It's clear now, I hope, that the works of the flesh are sin. But unless we understand their effects in human life--the devastation that results--we won't have the full picture nor the motivation we need to truly help those who are in bondage to the flesh.

Remember, man was made to operate with Christ reigning in his spirit; that's the normal Christian life. Man is designed to be the temple of God, with God enjoying his rightful place in the temple, the place of worship. Worship means that in every situation God proves to be *worth* something to us. If he doesn't, we are not worshipping, and he is out of that place of worship. Whenever Christ is not reigning in the life, man reverts to operating out of a soul-level of life, not from the control center, which is the Spirit.

Paul, coming to a conclusion on this whole subject, says: "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--*for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live*" (Rom. 8:12-13, italics mine).

Looking at the local context, examine this eighth chapter of Romans up to the thirteenth verse, underlining the word *flesh*, and you will see that it appears thirteen times in thirteen verses. So it is obvious that Paul has in mind to give us the facts about the flesh. Then, if you put a circle around the word Spirit whenever it occurs, you will find that this word appears an almost equal number of times. So it seems clear that Paul wants us to understand about living according to the flesh and life in the Spirit. To examine just one instance, verse nine says: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you."

God has in mind our need to operate in an entirely different sphere of life, which is implicit in this verse. We have been taken out of the Adamic realm of operation and placed into the Christian realm. He says flatly, "You are not in the flesh." Now it's true that the flesh may be dominant in us at times, but we are not in the flesh if we belong to Christ. Do you see the difference? And if we lapse back into the flesh, we will die a little as the result of that temporary fleshly fling.

In this verse it seems clear that Paul is dealing with Christians--those in whom the Spirit of God lives. The "if" is not truly conditional here but could better be translated "since." To confirm this, when we get to verse twelve, he says, "Brethren," and brethren are Christians, so there is no doubt whom he is addressing here, is there? "*We* are debtors" (here he includes himself) "not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, for if you [notice, he has changed the pronoun from "we" to "you" since he has already decided not to live according to the flesh] live according to the flesh you will die." He is not speaking here of losing our salvation, but of dying. But how will we die? Here's what I think he is telling us.

Sin Pays Wages: Death

Have you ever said, "This thing is killing me?" That slang expression reflects Paul's idea exactly. Some emotional problem, we say, is "killing us." And it is, isn't it? When we operate in the flesh, we are actually losing out in some aspect of life. That's what Paul is talking about. This is what is so devastating about the flesh. The reason the Lord is so serious about our dealing with it effectively, is that *it kills us*, whether we are Christians or non-Christians.

When we are not experiencing the abundance of life that Christ came to give us, then we get what always accompanies absence of life--*death*. Death in the non-Christian is total for he is wholly unresponsive to God. "You who were *dead* in trespasses and sins," Paul says in Ephesians 2, speaking of the Ephesian Christians

before they knew Christ. But a Christian can be operating in the flesh and the result is just as deadly as in the non-Christian; it produces the same results--*death* because life is only experienced in the one who is our life that is, in Christ. It is only as we allow him to prevail as Lord in our lives that we experience that abundance of life which he came to bring us. So, as you can see, the options are very real, and the flesh is devastating in whomever it functions. See how clearly the Lord spells it out through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans:

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh (Rom. 7:18).

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh could not do (Rom. 8:3).

To set the mind on the flesh is death (Rom. 8:6).

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot (Rom. 8:7).

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8).

For if you live according to the flesh you will die (Rom. 8:13)

So it's not surprising that he adds, by way of conclusion: "*Put* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *make no provision* for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14, italics mine).

Facts about the Flesh

What the Lord wants to do is spare us the kind of pain and death that inevitably results from operating in the flesh. Let's consider each of these Scriptures one by one: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is my flesh" (Rom. 7:18). Do you believe that? Most people don't, you know. The non-Christian doesn't believe it, and many times we Christians don't either. Paul was saying this about himself, and I suggest that if it was true of him, it's true of you and me, too.

In Romans 8:3: "For God has done what the law, weakened *by the flesh* could not do." What did God do that the law couldn't do? He gave us the capacity to fulfill the requirements of the law, to live righteously. The flesh, that is, our dependence on our own ability, was what kept the law from accomplishing true righteousness. To put this in its setting: Romans 7 is the admission of failure to achieve--the key feature is: "What I want to do I don't do; what I don't want to do is what I end up doing." That is utter frustration, part of the devastation of the flesh.

"The mind set *on the flesh* is death" (Rom. 8:6). This verse says that if we think in accordance with a fleshly approach to life, we are going to experience death. Expanding on his point Paul continues, "For the mind that is set *on the flesh* is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Rom. 8:7, italics mine). This tells us there is no way the flesh can perform in fellowship with God. It is hostile to God and it *cannot* submit to what God has in mind. Very assertive and dogmatic statements, aren't they? "What *is your* mind-set?" is a question I often ask.

Finally, "Those who are *in the flesh* cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8, italics mine). Here we must ask, who are "those who are in the flesh"? Is it not the non-Christian? The flesh is the sphere in which he functions; it's all he knows. This brings us back to our first responsibility as counselors to non-Christians: Help them to know Christ, so they will have a better world to live in--the world of the Spirit.

Enjoying Life

Now we are ready to turn the corner and discover the way to freedom from the flesh. Christ came to bring us LIFE, and in chapter thirteen of Romans there is this very important statement: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision *for the flesh*, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14, italics mine). God wants us to make no allowance for indulging the flesh. If we believe it's possible to do this and see the high stakes that are

involved, then we will begin to be sensible and learn to live in accordance with all that God has made available to us in the Lord Jesus. Notice the positive and negative: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," that's the positive; and "make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires," the negative!

A man told me not long ago, "I pray about this matter of my attitude all day long and still don't gain victory." Here is a place where prayer is totally ineffectual, but not because God is unfaithful. In this case it was because this man was making provision for the flesh; it was a smoke screen. My reply to him was, "Did you ever think that maybe the Lord is saying to you, *"Don't talk to me about it, I've already talked to you about it?"* So often that is what the Lord has to say to all of us: "I've told you how to deal with it. Now, do it! Don't try to fake me out with words; just do what I have told you!" Isn't it atrocious how deceitful we are? This man was utterly sincere; he was just as open and non-defensive as he could be; he wasn't trying to cover up, but he didn't understand what the flesh was doing to him.

Earlier in our conversation he had said bitterly, "I could kill my mother. She's the one who ruined me." What does that say about his problem? What manifestation of the flesh is this? Blaming someone else for my problem becomes a means of justification, does it not? And as long as I'm trying to blame another for my failure, the real problem can never be solved. Sure, his mother had wronged him, but he doesn't have to be stuck with that. Paul said, "...if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). New deal!

That this illustration shows is how devilish and deceiving the flesh is. And I dare say all of us have one or more areas where we demonstrate the same kind of blind spot as this man did. Indeed, one of the most subtle and damaging ways we reveal that we are operating in the flesh is to express confidence that we are walking in the Spirit. A young man walked into my office one day and said, "I've learned to walk in the Spirit 80 percent of the time." I said, "It's not the 80 percent we're worried about! It's the other 20 percent!" Spirituality is like humility--when you brag about it, you've already lost it!

Freed from Slavery

The way to render the flesh inoperative (what a marvelous prospect!) is to *judge it*. That's how the job gets done! You see, God has *already* judged the flesh IN CHRIST. What we must do is to agree with him that the "old man" is dead and has no right to try to assert himself in us. Romans 6 tells the way it works:

1. YOU DIED WITH CHRIST.

"For we know that *our old man was crucified with Him so that the body as it was characterized by sin might be put out of work and we ?night no longer be enslaved to sin* (Rom 6:6, literal rendering).

This is GOD'S EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION--and the key word is "know." We start by *knowing* this FACT: I am identified with Christ in his death--so *I died with Christ*, in God's reckoning

COUNT ON IT.

"So also all of you [as with Christ] reckon yourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God" (Rom. 6:11, literal rendering).

"Reckon" is the word here. This is the step of FAITH believing the FACT. God has *said* it--now *I believe* it!

Incidentally, "dead" here means "unresponsive to," or *separated from the necessity of responding to the "old man."*

3. GO FREE.

Stop yielding your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God, *as men who have been* brought out of death to life, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6:13, literal rendering).

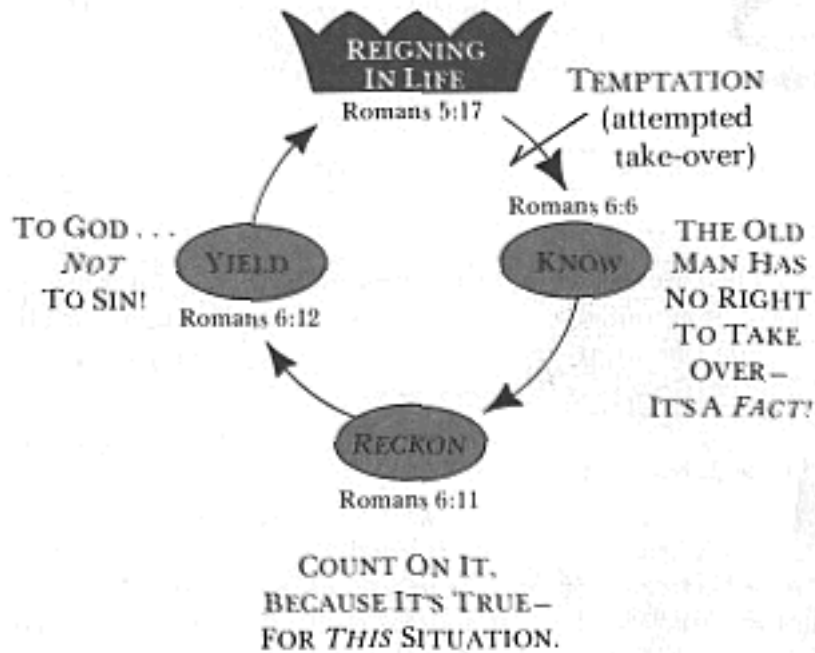
True liberty is being what God designed us to be--instruments of his grace. Now since our *old* man died with Christ, we have the liberty to choose to serve God--to be his men and women. So the key word here is YIELD.

We gain victory over the flesh as we:

KNOW RECKON YIELD

Then we can walk in newness of life "...for since we have been united with him in conformity to his death, so also we shall be in his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5, freely rendered). The chart following shows how it works.

HOW TO LIVE LIKE A KING . . .
instead of a slave.



We take this ATTITUDE: "Always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" 2 Corinthians 4:10.

True Liberation

The Christians' heritage through the saving work of Christ is to be freed from slavery to sin and to live like kings, because we are the royal residence of the KING! For "...those who receive the abundance of grace [all the resources and ability of our risen Lord] and the free gift of righteousness [right standing with God--full acceptance before him] *reign in life* through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17b, italics mine). This is a description of the normal Christian life--God's provision for *every one* of his own, not just for super-saints!

The apostle supports this truth on the other side with...sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Grace supplies what law never could; a Savior who died for us--*that he might live in us*! "Indeed, since we died with Christ, we believe that we shall live with him" (Rom. 6:8, a literal rendering); "...so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4b). Do you see the implications of this truth? We are no longer enslaved by sin!

If I had been a slave when Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States, issued his Emancipation Proclamation, I believe I would have carried a copy of that document wherever I went, even if I couldn't read it. Then if some red-necked sheriff had laid his hands on me and said, "Hey, boy, you're a slave," I would have flashed the proclamation and replied, "No sir, I'm free!"

That's exactly what God wants us to do when sin tries to take us captive. We can say, "I'm free! When Christ died, 'Old Bob' died. I refuse to accept those old shackles! I'm going to live like a king!" To me it's nothing short of inspiration that chooses the opposing figures of *slavery* and *kingship* to display the high value of the liberty we have in Jesus Christ. For who wants to be a slave? And who wouldn't want to "live like a king"? Public Enemy Number 2 is a defeated foe, through him who loved us and gave himself for us--and *to us*.

The Theory Applied

You may be saying, "Sounds like good theory, but how does it work?" Let's look at an example. Often, in counseling, I find that Christians are beset with inferiority feelings. This is always the result of comparing themselves with others and coming out second-best in their own estimation. Evaluating their worth in this way is an example of the flesh because it totally ignores God and his Word on this subject.

If we turn to check out God's viewpoint on our worth we get information like this:

...with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

Notice it says *commendation*, not *condemnation*, because for the Christian "there is therefore now no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1). I have no business making inept and unfounded comparisons--from which feelings of inferiority flow--and, therefore, I have no business feeling inferior. I just need to be a faithful steward of all that God entrusts to me regardless of what anyone else does, as the context of this passage declares: "...it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:2).

I love the Apostle Paul's handling of this problem of comparisons, as recorded later in the Corinthian letters. He was being compared (unfavorably, it seems) with other preachers by the Corinthian believers. In his response he said, with subtle irony, "I regard myself not the least inferior to your super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5, freely translated). Do you see how completely he dealt with any possible feelings of inferiority (or superiority, for that matter)? He just refused to acknowledge that there was any competition, knowing that the ministries of various Christians are *cooperative*, not competitive. That's the whole point of the church being the body of Christ. As with our human bodies, so in the church the various members cooperate rather than compete with one another. In commenting on the sheer folly of making comparisons, Paul had this to say: "Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12).

What a wonderfully liberating word this is. God says "Inferiority, what's that? Who's comparing?" And the whole matter is settled. The flesh is put in its place--on the cross with Christ and I'm saved from all kinds of related problems like self-pity, self-protectiveness, depression, anxiety, and so forth. We are not indebted to the flesh or held captive by it, if we choose to act in accord with God's emancipation proclamation.

So the process of judging the flesh--in this case, feelings of inferiority--is first to *know* what God has to say about our worth and why comparisons have no validity in the kingdom of God. Then, we must believe what God has said, *counting* on his word as truth, and finally, turning our back on the sin. We must give ourselves over once more to the control of Christ in our lives--*yielding* to him and not to the feelings of inferiority.

Futility--Or Fulfillment?

I have learned to correlate the term "death" with frustration and futility, and the word "life" with fulfillment. The life that Christ came to bring us is not just heaven-by-and-by but it is *fulfillment* here and now, and heaven later--adding up to total fulfillment all the way. The contrast of these terms is very significant, and it makes *life* very desirable. I like what I know about Jesus Christ, the life he has given me, and all that he unfolds to me day by day. It's from this kind of a thankful, appreciative understanding of the astounding advantage we have as Christians in terms of *really living* that we're able to share the wealth with whomever the Lord put on our program in our counseling ministry.

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