

FLESH-WALKERS & SPIRIT-BREATHERS PT2, ROM.8:1-17

Pax Romana 18

◆**Intro:** Years ago, with another Council in another church, we went on retreat to seek God. I gave the men the assignment of going somewhere in solitude and asking God four questions: 1) God what do you like about me? 2) God, what do you want to change in me? 3) God, who should I pray for? 4) How should I pray for that person? They had an hour before regathering. I donned my winter hunting clothes since it was January and snowing, and headed to the woods with my notebook. I sat along a little creek and asked God the questions, waiting for answers. When I asked who to pray for the name of one of the elders on that retreat, and a close friend of mine, came to mind. We'll call him Ed because that's what his name is, and because I asked him if he minded if I share this story. I assumed that perhaps God was answering my question and so I prayed "God, how should I pray for Ed?" Straight away a voice in my head said, "He doubts his significance." So I prayed for Ed, that God would show him how significant he was to him.

◆When we regathered in the fireside room, all 21 of us, we went around the room sharing only question 3 & 4. Every man had a specific name come to mind and a specific subject as well. I went last. I was nervous. Ed was sitting two to my right. Boy was I gonna look dumb when I said that I prayed for Ed and it turned out to just be something I made up in my head. So I took a breath, turned to Ed and said, "I prayed for you, Ed. God told me you doubt your significance and I think he wants you to

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know that you are." Elder Ed began to cry right there. But quickly recovering himself, he asked, "When were you praying about me?" I still remember, it was 9:50am, in the woods, by a creek, outside the retreat center. When I told him, he said, "At that very time I was asking God about my significance." That's when my hair stood up on the back of my neck, and my heart rejoiced, because as several others would say later, "God showed up!"

◆ I tell you that story for one reason: to help you believe that the Holy Spirit is real. That he talks to people. That he lives in Christians. How else could that have happened? When I ask people what they've heard from God, most say they don't hear from God. I say he's talking all the time, like radio waves in the air which we don't see, and we don't hear.. unless we have a radio receiver. Turn a radio on and, low and behold, it turns out there's all kinds of words in the air all around us! That's the way it is with the Spirit at Pentecost in the beginning of Acts. And all through the Acts the record shows that the Holy Spirit talked to people all the time!

◆ "The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."" Acts 8:29, NIV.

◆ "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."" Acts 9:17, NIV.

◆ "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you." Acts 10:19, NIV.

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- ◆“The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house.” Acts 11:12, NIV.
- ◆“Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.” Acts 16:6, NIV.
- ◆“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” Acts 20:23, NIV.
- ◆““What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’” Acts 22:10, NIV.
- ◆God’ Spirit speaks, but we don’t hear because we don’t recognize his language, or we don’t tune in. Guess what? You can tune in! Why do so many Christians not know this? Why do so many assume that this kind of thing only happened in the Bible days.
 - ◆[One piece of this is that the Bible teaches that God’s revealed Word is complete and needn’t be added to. We hold to that too. *But that doesn’t mean that every conversation you have with God is scriptural revelation!* Nevertheless, Scripture is full of stories of people having conversations with God!]
- ◆**Pentecost:** Our opening video today told the story of Pentecost as recorded in Acts chapter 2. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God –it’s all the same one– he came and filled human people with abilities not their own. They could do things they should not be able to do. They could know things they

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should not be able to know –all by the power of the Holy Spirit. And people became followers of Jesus because of it.

◆**recap:** Last week we began to see that while Romans 7 explained that a Christian has *indwelling sin*, his fallen sinful self inside that wars against the new self as a follower of Jesus, Romans 8 explains that there is also inside a believer the *indwelling Holy Spirit* who is our weapon against our own tendency to sin and do evil things.

◆**Aside:** Some of you here today have never noticed such a tendency or struggled with it, or even cared about it. But for those of you who have, I have encouraging words: The very fact that a part of you does not like the wrong things you find yourself choosing means that the Holy Spirit of God is working on you! God's Spirit is calling.

◆**2: I have a superior weapon in the Holy Spirit.**

◆**A.** In the first place, the Holy Spirit gives me faith to believe in Jesus as my savior from sin. That is to say, there is no salvation apart from the Holy Spirit. You and I cannot believe in Jesus on our own! Neither can your neighbor. She never will, unless God sends his own Spirit after her! The Spirit causes my regeneration!

◆“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” Romans 8:6-8, NIV.

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- ◆ "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:14, NIV.
- ◆ *"he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," Titus 3:5, NIV.*
- ◆ No true Christian believes in Jesus Christ because they finally wise up. Everyone who falls in love with God does so because God chooses to come to them first! What grace! You can be confident in God's continuing love because his love started in him, not in you! (8:29-31)
- ◆ **B.** Secondly then, Jesus has made us free from the penalty of sin (justification). We have now the eternal consequence of his righteous life, death, and resurrection: life with God (regeneration). The next step is freedom from the *bondage* of sin in this life (ch.7). We have a power for that too. Now God in his wisdom has not chosen to make us holy robots. He has given us help, available training, spiritual weapons, and his Spirit. *As believers in Jesus, we have come to a place in existence where we can, with the presence of the Spirit of God, say no to sin and yes to righteousness.* We couldn't do that before (v7). We didn't even really care about it. But now we care. And now it can happen (v8), but God is letting us cooperate.
 - ◆ "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful na-

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ture, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live," Romans 8:12, 13, NIV.

◆ I believe Paul is talking here about our experience of growing holy (sanctification) on this earth and it is the Spirit again that enables my sanctification. Do not neglect this truth, friends. It is possible to say yes to righteousness. It is possible to progress in defeating sin! That's good news! Sin always leads to some kind of dying. Seeking the Holy Spirit always leads to some kind of living. Seek the Spirit! What are you doing daily to seek the Spirit of the Living God?

◆ **C.** So this is a continuation of what we began to think about last week: death of the old self, coming to life of the new self. The inner spiritual war. We call those two things mortification and vivification. Mort-ify: to cause to die. Mort-al: able to die. Vivify: to bring to life, to re-vive, to sur-vive. This is how the Heidelberg Catechism puts it.

◆ 88 Q What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

◆ A. Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the coming-to-life of the new.

◆ 89 Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

◆ A. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.

◆ 90 Q. What is the coming-to-life of the new self?

◆ A. It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.

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◆What, or who can enable us to actually do good and right, to mortify and to vivify? The answer is the Holy Spirit of Jesus. Paul mentions the Spirit 17 times in the 17 verses of our text. Attention to the Spirit is how we win the war over the sinful nature. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is in the earth. The Bible says the Holy Spirit actually lives inside every Christian. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit speaks, and reminds us of things, primarily of and always consistent with the things Jesus taught when he was here. (John 16) Now ever since chapter 6 Paul has been writing to the Roman Christians about putting sin to death, and coming alive in Christ.

◆As we have observed, every time the NIV translates “sinful nature” that is the word “flesh”. The “flesh” is always contrasted with the “Spirit”. Please understand that by flesh Paul means more than the meat on your bones. He is not saying that the body is bad and the spirit is good (the gnostic heresy, or Platonic dualism). And the gospel of Jesus is not that God redeems your soul but not your body (cf.v11). *By flesh he means this lower, fallen, frail, broken existence, in contrast to the higher, heavenly, holy existence in which God lives and in which he intends for man to live with him. That, he calls life in the Spirit.*

◆Our daily question is **WILL WE LIVE ACCORDING THE THE FLESH (5) AND EXPERIENCE DYING (6) OR WILL WE LIVE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT (5) AND EXPERIENCE LIFE AND PEACE**

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(6)? WILL WE BE "FLESH-WALKERS" OR "SPIRIT-BREATHERS"?

◆C. We can win over sin, as we guard what we put in, to our minds.

◆Let me illustrate. We had a Kids Hope dinner in the gym a few weeks ago. Part of the fun was a bounce-house obstacle course. It's an inflatable tunnel/forest/mountain/slide. It's super spongy, and full of air. I walked around it and discovered a lot of the seams were leaking air. This house had been bounced on more than once. But the contraption still remained filled with air. Why? Two powerful electric blowers were constantly blowing air into it as a rate far higher than the rate of it's leaks. Lets say the leaks are like the "flesh" and the air blowers are like "spirit" (Spirit is also translated "wind" in both biblical languages!) It all depends on what we are giving our attention to, or our "Minds".

◆Flesh-walkers are people "minding" the flesh, this leaking, frail, less-than, stained existence. Spirit-breathers are "minding" the Spirit. Flesh-walker accept sin as the inevitable slow leak of life. Spirit-breathers have connected to the high volume, fresh air pump of holiness because they don't like the leakiness of this broken world.

◆*"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right*

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hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:1, 2, NIV.

◆ Paul is telling us to be far-sighted. To have vision! To look at the bigger picture. He’s also re-minding us that we are what we think about, which has huge implications for the music we listen to, the books we read, the shows we watch. Put garbage in something, and when you look inside what do you find? nuff said.

◆ **D.** Killing sin takes more than a few gentle strokes. Thankfully our old self and new self are inversely proportional. That is, as one grows the other shrinks. As we feed the one the other starves. So lets get practical. Here are some starters to get going.

◆ 1) Find the corresponding grace to whatever sin you are struggling with and feed the grace. Are you hot tempered? Practice answering in full sentences as politely at possible in norm situations. Do you know yourself to be tight with your money? Share, give, tithe as a habit, a spiritual habit. Are you constantly looking for glory and praise? Make it your mission to praise others as often as you can today.

◆ 2) Practice calling on the Holy Spirit. (wanna hear my duck call?) A lot of Christians, though they say they believe the Bible and that it tells them the Holy Spirit lives in them – still “live in the same house but never talk”! Pray every morning for a week, before anything else and ask the Holy

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Spirit to rule your day, to invade your mind. Offer him your thoughts. Invite him to show you things, or to tell you things. Say it in-so-many-words! Write it on a note if you can't concentrate. I don't mean pray like, "Holy Spirit bless this day, thank you for this food. Amen." (unless you're eating in bed). I mean,

◆*"Holy Spirit, you say you're inside of me. Well then talk to me today. Tell me what to do. Take ownership of my body. I invite you to control my mind. Show me what you want to change in me."*

◆If as many did that with the Holy Spirit as do that with evil spirits our world would change in a hurry, I think.

◆Do that for a week straight and **then, see** if you want the same things you wanted before. See if things you used to be fine with start catching your notice. And the best part is, as you ask about specific things, and as God answers specifically, you are gathering your testimony! You are interacting with God and you have something to share when you or your friends wonder if he's real or not!

◆**Conclusion:** Listen, God's people are not destined or condemned to a life of defeat in the war with indwelling sin (ch7). We have the indwelling Spirit (ch8). The Holy Spirit of God. It's Pentecost! God's Holy Spirit lives in his people. Things can get better. You can make progress. He can answer your questions

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along a creek, in your bedroom, on the way to work -but you'll have to pray and ask. Ask, seek, knock!