

Uncharted Territory: Taking Life Where You've Never Been

Week Nine: *Do You Know the Difference?*

To successfully live in our new identity in Jesus Christ, we must understand the difference between walking and living in our **flesh** (*most often translated "sinful nature"*) and walking and living by the **Holy Spirit**. When we learn to discern between the promptings and instincts of the **flesh** and **Spirit**, we can choose to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit and live in step with Him.

The Bible tells us that we are made up of a compilation of three elements: our **body**, our **flesh**, and our **spirit**. Our **flesh**—*in the concept of the New Testament*—speaks of our whole self. It is all of who we are: our ideas, our intellect, our desires, our impulses, our fears, joys, personality, will. It our holistic **human nature**. While this **flesh** was made perfectly by God, it was then corrupted by our sin. When we live by our **flesh** (*our human nature*), we will not experience all that God desires. God is a spirit. To live with Him is to live by our spirit, not our flesh.

This week, make a commitment to *one space of quality time with God* to meditate on God's Word slowly and carefully, to journal through this exercise, and surrender to God for His help.

A Single Exercise: *Do I Understand the Flesh and the Spirit?*

Read slowly and carefully meditate upon **Romans 8:3-14**:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 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. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 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 nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. — Romans 8:3-14 (NIV)

Consider: Many modern Bible translations attempt to interpret the New Testament's original Greek language for us in a way that practically applies it to our circumstances. Translators often add modifying English words to their translation of the Greek that were not in the original writings. This can very subtly change our understanding of the text. While this does often make it easier for us to grasp the Bible's meaning, in the case of **Romans 8**, it ever so slightly—and *perhaps somewhat poorly*—shifts our perception of this vital teaching.

Modern Bible translations usually translate the Greek word "**flesh**" as "**the sinful nature**." This can cause us to accidentally read right past it because we do a quick gut check and say, "*well, I know where I sin and where I don't. So long as I'm not overtly sinning, I can move past these teachings as they do not reflect my current situation.*"

The problem is that our **flesh** does not just command the **bad things** we do. It also commands, controls, and leads the **good things** that we do. It cannot solely be recognized as the little red-caped, pitchfork-bearing devilish imp on our shoulder because our **flesh** is not always pure evil.

Simply put, our **flesh** is our **human nature**. God designed it and put it in us, so its origins were not sinful. Then... sin entered that nature (*thanks, Adam and Eve...hmmph...*). What was designed perfectly by God to be our essential nature was corrupted by sin—hence modern translators offer their interpretation that we are being led by our **sinful** nature.

With this backdrop, carefully and slowly read back through **Romans 8:3-14** with the original Greek language clarified below. Read with a new understanding that what is being addressed is not only your sin, but also the **whole** of your human nature (called "**flesh**") that must be submitted to God.

*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened {sick, infirmed} by the sinful nature [**flesh**], God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man [**flesh**.] ~~to be a sin offering~~ [**With respect to sin**.]—~~And so he condemned sin in sinful man~~ [**the flesh**] ...*

*...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met {filled up, supplied} in us, who do not live {tread about, companion} according [**in the motion of, direction towards**] ~~to the sinful nature~~ [**flesh**] but according [**in the motion of, direction towards**] ~~to the Spirit~~.*

*Those who live according [**are in the motion of, direction towards**] the sinful nature [**flesh**] have their minds {thought, affections} set on what that nature desires [**on the flesh**]; but those who live in accordance with [**are in the motion of, direction towards**] the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

The **[For]** mind of sinful man **[fleshly inclination, purpose]** is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit **[inclination, purpose]** is life and peace; the sinful mind **[fleshly inclination, purpose]** is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by **[resting in, on, at]** the sinful nature **[flesh]** cannot please {be properly behaving towards an established relationship with} God.

You, however, are controlled not **[resting in, on, at]** by the sinful nature **[flesh]** but by **[resting in, on, at]** the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have {to hold on to, to wear; literally: "to be with child"} the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

But if Christ is in {resting in, on, at} you, your body {vessel, container} is dead {separated from the enlivening influences of God} because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation **[are debtors]** but it is not to the sinful nature **[flesh]**, to live according to it **[in the motion of, direction towards the flesh]**. For if you live according to the sinful nature **[in the motion of, direction towards the flesh]**, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body {vessel, container}, you will live...

...because those who are led {to lead along, bring, carry} by the Spirit of God are sons of God. — Romans 8:3-14 (NIV adapted to the original Greek)

Prayerfully ask yourselves these questions, and ask God to reveal to you the truth about what is taking place within you:

- In what ways do I tend to rely solely upon my natural instincts? In what areas of my life do I depend on my natural impulses to guide me?
- Do these reflexive reactions bear the marks (the "fruit"—see **Galatians 5:22**) of God's leadership in my life? Why or why not?
- How might I react and live differently if I saw my natural impulses as something that needed to be consistently surrendered to God?
- How might God want me to think differently? Believe differently? React differently? Feel differently? Desire differently?

Pray: God, help me to recognize the deep and profound difference between my human nature and your nature, between my flesh and your Spirit. Help me to see how my natural impulses—while sometime aimed at good desires—may still be leading me away from what you desire for me. I choose to surrender to you my own personal authority over my life. I choose to surrender everything I think—even the way I think—to you. I surrender my instincts, my intelligence, my wisdom, my impulses, my will. I give it all to you. Take my life and live through it by the power of your Holy Spirit. I ask you to manifest in me the fruit of your Holy Spirit in every reaction to every circumstance in my life. In Jesus' name!

(**ALSO:** Consider praying **Psalm 25** or **Psalm 63** as your own prayer and worship to God!)

Notes: What is God revealing to me today?
