

# Romans 8:5-8

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*Every believer has the power to choose to follow the Spirit, rather than the flesh.*

*If we dedicate our thoughts to the desires of our flesh/sin nature, we'll live that way. We'll live a sinful, selfish life and gain adverse consequences as a result. But if we dedicate our thoughts to the Holy Spirit and live our daily life in obedience to God, then we're living a new life in the Spirit. The flesh results in death and disconnection, while the Spirit results in experiencing life and peace. The flesh is a total enemy of God; it does everything it can to fight Him, and it only leads to ruin.*

Before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples that after He returned to the Father, He would send a Helper to those who believed in Him. The Greek word translated “Helper” in John 14, “paraklētos,” also translates to “counselor,” “advocate,” and “comforter.” This Helper is the *Holy Spirit*, the Spirit of God (John 14:16,17, 26), and through Him we experience life and peace. Paul has made references to the Holy Spirit sparingly so far in his letter to the Romans, but now he discusses His role in the Christian’s life.

In verses 5–8, Paul shows the relationship between actions and thoughts: *for those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh* (v 5). Conversely, *but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit* (v 5). Once again Paul is talking about living in obedience to God, in this newness of life that Christians have.

The natural outcome of putting our mind on anything is the actual practice of that thing. *For the mind set on the flesh is death*, (v 6) or disconnection. We often cannot control the thoughts presented to us, including thoughts that come into our mind. But we can control what thoughts we dwell on. And we can choose our perspective; we can either see sin as “fun, really living,” or we can see sin as “the thing that cuts us off from life, i.e., death.”

Paul is telling us here that what we dwell on and how we view sin will determine our choices. The alternative to sin, that leads to death/separation, is *the mind set on the Spirit* which leads to *life and peace* (v 6). Satan framed sin as a path to life when he deceived Eve in Eden (Genesis 3:4-5). He and his world system still present to us sin as life, when it actually leads to death. This “law” or teaching of sin and death that the world advocates.

Paul illustrates this outcome of death, or disconnection, in verse 7: *because the mind set on the flesh is* 1) *hostile toward God*, it does not obey what God wants, and 2) *it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so*. It lacks the capacity to obey even if it wanted to, which, in the final result, 3) means *those who are in the flesh cannot please God*. The flesh hates God, rebels against God, cannot obey God, and cannot please God. If we adopt this perspective, then sin loses its attraction.

To *please God* is the path to life. To *please God* connects us with God, and His (good) design for us. We were designed to live in harmony with Him, and with one another. We please God by loving and serving others, which connects us to them as well. This is the path to life.

It is important to recall from Romans 7 that this flesh Paul speaks of that hates God is *still in us*. It is our historical Self. The Bible does not ask us to have a positive self-image so much as a true one. A true self-awareness leads to living a transformative life; in this chapter, we will see that Jesus values us so highly He desires to share His throne with us. We were made for greatness. But that greatness comes through the humility of seeing things as they are, and walking in faith that God's ways lead to life, rather than the ways of Satan, the flesh, and the world.

This is another reason Paul gives to show it is not in our best interest to continue in sin. Competing Jewish "authorities" were telling the Roman believers that Paul taught that sinning was acceptable (Romans 6:1). Paul asserts, yet again, the falsehood of that claim, and insists he teaches that living sinfully, selfishly, following the flesh—that kind of life displeases God and therefore is unprofitable and to be avoided.

Paul asked the rhetorical question: Shall we continue in sin that God's grace may increase? (Romans 6:1): We can, Paul is clear about that. We cannot out-sin the grace of God. But that is not what Paul desires. "May it never be!" Paul exclaims (Romans 6:2). Sin is hostile toward God; it cannot please Him. Paul's epistles make clear that nothing in life mattered as much to Paul as pleasing God. And Paul wants us to understand, and adopt the perspective that sin brings us death; it separates us from all that is truly beneficial in our lives.

Thankfully, the result of putting our mind on the Spirit is both life and peace. This is the way God intended life to be, it is how He designed it. When we live in obedience to Him through faith, by putting our mind on the Spirit, and rejecting the destructive urges of the fleshly body, we harvest the harmonious and fulfilling joys God intended for us.

And as Paul's life demonstrates, and his writings instruct, that fulfillment transcends whatever circumstances we might encounter. Can we follow sin and still be in God's family? Yes. If we adopt a true perspective, however, we will realize that choosing sin leads to death and destruction, our own destruction, while the obedience of faith leads to life, peace, and fulfillment. Paul advocates we live righteously not because we *have* to, but because we *can*.

### **Biblical Text**

**5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**