

Sermon 7-19-26
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost. Text: Romans 7:18-25; 8:1-27

Spirit and Flesh — Part 2

In last week's sermon, I put forth a thesis. In Romans chapters 7 and 8, Paul makes a sharp distinction between our human spirits and our human flesh. Both have been corrupted by Adam's fall into sin. Both are subject to Yahweh's righteous judgments as a result of Adam's sin. Therefore, both are in need of rescue — salvation — from the corruption.

Jesus perfectly accomplished the necessary rescue by resisting the temptation to grasp at equality with God to the point of death — even death on a cross. And so the salvation of all who put their trust in Jesus is secure.

However, the rescue occurs in a certain sequence. In this life and on this earth, our spirits can be redeemed from the effects of the fall. On the other hand, in this life and on this earth, our physical bodies are not redeemed. They remain subject to the full effects of the fall into sin. The bodies of those whose spirits have been born again in Messiah will not be made perfectly righteous and immortal until the resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, every devout Christian lives a bizarre dual existence. As Paul put it in Romans 7:18-23, "18. . . I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."

A very frustrated Paul finally cried out in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" But then he immediately came back with this glorious cry in Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus truly is the powerful answer to our wretched situation. Nevertheless, every Christian must wait until the resurrection for the glorification of his or her human body.

Therefore in the remainder of verse 25 we find confirmation of the thesis as the apostle writes, Romans 7:25, "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Paul knows that with his spirit and mind he is able to serve Yahweh because his spirit has been redeemed already. But the power of Original Sin remains in his body. Occasionally it will drag even his mind where he doesn't want it to go. However, his spirit will remain secure in Jesus.

Here's the thing about Adam's Original Sin. It causes every human born into this world to be born a little god. We're forced to live like a god, deciding good and evil for ourselves and then acting on our definitions. This is the sinful nature. And it produces two results. First, the sinful nature very jealousy preserves its right to be god. It especially protects this

right against the true Creator God of this universe, Yahweh. Second, the sinful nature is totally and completely unable to be in righteous union with Yahweh because it is its own god. Therefore, even the born again Christian finds it difficult to walk in righteousness with Yahweh.

And in all of this, Yahweh's holy Law cannot help us. As we saw last week, it says in Romans 8:3, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son. . . ." (NIV) This means that in the contest between the sinful nature and the Law, the sinful nature is stronger.

However, there's also Gospel Good News in this verse. For, Yahweh sent One who is stronger than our sinful nature. In the contest between the sinful nature and Jesus, Jesus is absolutely stronger. Therefore, it can be shouted again, "thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord!"

Now from verse 3 onward we get a fuller explanation of chapter 7, verse 25, "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." So, here we go. Romans 8:3-4, "3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (NIV)

Before there could be any righteous life in the Holy Spirit available to any human being Adam's Original Sin and all human Sin had to be dealt with. Think about it. If Yahweh were to leave all sin and all unrighteousness un-condemned and unpunished, He would be evil Himself. But because Yahweh truly is the source of all Righteousness, He must also be the very source of Justice in this universe. He must be the beginning and end of all Justice. Therefore, in order remain Just, Yahweh absolutely had to condemn and punish all human sin.

But, how was Yahweh going to save us from sin and yet remain just and punish our sin? For Yahweh there are no dilemmas. As it was planned from before the foundation of the world, God, the Son, presented Himself in human flesh to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And so through His Passion and Death, Jesus accepted in His flesh all the punishment necessary to satisfy the righteous requirement of the Law that all disobedience should be punished.

Once Jesus did this for us the righteous requirement of the Law was fulfilled for each one of us. And so, the living in the flesh that leads to eternal death could be replaced in you and me by the living according to the Spirit of God that leads to eternal righteous life.

However, as we've noted, salvation is in two separate steps. Our spirits are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone in this life. However, our bodies cannot be saved in this life. That salvation awaits believers in the resurrection of the dead where we finally get a body totally free from Original Sin and all its effects. So, we're left in the incredible tug of war Paul spoke about in Romans 7, the tug of war between spirit and body, mind and flesh.

Romans 8:5-8, "5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Those who live life without Jesus live a sinful life. Period. And those who live a sinful life delight in sin and can't wait to sin some more. The mind is set on sin. Those who live a sinful life are hostile to their Creator God — as in “don't tell me what to do!” And they are on a path where Yahweh will let them fulfill their desire to live without Him and without His righteousness in hell. It will be an eternity filled with one's own cruel evil joined in the terrible company of those equally filled with cruel evil. Those who desired the Second Death get to be their own gods in the most complete and absolute sense.

But this is not the fate of the believer in Jesus. As we read in Romans 8:9-11, “9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

These verses define the distinguishing mark of the Christian. His or her inner spirit being is set upon the righteousness and goodness that Lord Holy Spirit brings to the believer. And since Jesus is more powerful than the sinful nature, the delight in the things of the Kingdom of God that Lord Holy Spirit brings to those in Messiah Jesus — that delight is more powerful than the things of the flesh. The Spirit brings delight in the fact that Jesus will give us immortal righteous life in resurrected righteous bodies. This and more is what distinguishes the Christian.

However, Paul states flat out that our bodies are dead because of sin. They can only be set free from sin and death when we are resurrected with Jesus. And it is Lord Holy Spirit who will resurrect the dead in Christ on the great Day of the Lord. Therefore, Romans 8:11 is one of the reasons we speak of the resurrection of the dead in the part of the creeds where we confess a “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 8:12-13, “12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 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.” A debtor is someone who owes money. So, we don't owe our sinful nature even the time of day! Everything that the sinful nature loves to be, say and do, all the mud it loves to roll in, must die — and this by your decision and mine. That's what repentance is all about.

But our decision alone is not enough to fight a zombie. For, the Christian's sinful nature is a zombie. It's already dead with Jesus. But somehow it still moves and refuses to be dead. That's the frustration Paul yelled about in chapter 7. But here in these verses Paul tells us how to keep a zombie dead and buried. He's called Lord Holy Spirit. If we appeal to the Spirit and in prayer name to Him the sin that needs to die within us, His amazing supernatural power does what no mythical weapon can do. It kills zombies.

Now, calling upon Lord Holy Spirit in this way signifies something. We read in Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” If Lord Holy Spirit leads you to let Him kill your zombie, then it's clear that you have been made a son of God. (Ladies don't let the masculine “son” bother you. The term is generic. After all, if we men are part of Christ's Church, we're “the bride of Christ.”)

A child has special status. A child belongs to its parent in a way no one else does. So, a son of God belongs to Yahweh and will never be rejected by Yahweh. Jesus in His human flesh belongs to God as a Son. Indeed, both at Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration Yahweh called from heaven and declared Jesus to be His beloved Son in whom He is well

pleased. Therefore, all those connected to Jesus by faith in His Name have been adopted by Yahweh as His children.

So, now we come to something quite amazing. Romans 8:14-15, “14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Yahweh is Almighty and most holy. What sinner can be so bold as to call Him “Abba”, the familiar form for father — “Daddy?” No one except those who have been born again in Messiah Jesus and delight in the new way of the Spirit. For only by the Spirit of God can we know the Gospel Good News that Jesus has reconciled us to our loving Father in heaven so completely that we have been adopted by Him as His beloved sons.

Before we go on, the business about slavery and fear refers to the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant the people of God were like slaves. Without Jesus and without Lord Holy Spirit they could not keep the commandments of the covenant so that Yahweh would be pleased with them. This is why they lived in fear of punishment.

However, with Jesus and Lord Holy Spirit all is different. For as it said in Romans 8:1, those in Messiah Jesus are no longer under condemnation. For Jesus took our condemnation upon Himself and satisfied Yahweh’s wrath. On account of Jesus, therefore, those in Jesus no longer live in terror. For we have heard words like these from 1John 3:1 “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

And there is yet more joy here in Romans 8:16-17, “16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Children are heirs of their parents. Therefore, Jesus is the heir of Yahweh’s Kingdom. And if we are in Jesus and He is in us, then we are fellow heirs with Jesus of that glorious Kingdom. All the glory of righteousness that Yahweh has will be ours forever in Messiah Jesus. This is the great promise.

But there was a dark note in verse 17. It continues in Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Suffering. There are two types that Christians experience. There is the general suffering suffered by all humanity on account of Adam’s fall into sin. Christians are not exempt from it. But there is a special type of suffering that Christians must endure. This is suffering for the Name of Jesus.

Jesus Himself suffered at the hands of His own people and the Gentiles. He suffered because all children of the devil hate the children of God. So, anyone attached to Jesus will be hated by those attached to the devil. As it was with Jesus, so it has been and will be for those attached to Jesus unto the end of this world. Indeed, Paul himself suffered greatly on account of preaching Jesus.

At this point, Paul does not deal any further with the special kind of suffering. Instead, he presses on concerning the general suffering. So, we read in Romans 8:19-22, “19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

How powerful was our ancestor Adam over Yahweh's creation? He was powerful enough so that when he sinned, all of the creation fell into futility on account of his sin. It's the futility of decay and corruption. When you take a walk through a beautiful forest, you're actually looking at a lot of futility. Observe all the dead leaves laying on the ground rotting back into soil. On the forest floor, the ants and other scavengers are busily at work devouring dead things of all kinds. The pesty mosquitoes that bite you do so only to make more mosquitoes to bite others. And as we're experiencing right now, fire can easily destroy the whole forest again and again. That smoke in the air? It once was living things. That's futility.

On the other hand, let's ask, how powerful is Jesus over the creation? Of course, He's God. But how powerful is His human nature over the creation? His perfect human nature is powerful enough to bring us all to resurrection. And with His people resurrected in perfect righteousness, the creation itself will be restored to the glory it had before Adam sinned.

Romans 8:23-25, "23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

With these words Paul again directs our attention to the dichotomy we live under. Our spirits may enjoy the resurrected new birth in Jesus and life in the Spirit that directs us toward righteousness. But our physical bodies are still subject to sin and death. Physical death haunts every living human being. And there's a deep groan within because of death.

However, with Jesus there is total hope. As it says in Psalm 16, death could not hold Him in its grasp. And for this very reason, death cannot indefinitely hold the bodies of those redeemed by His blood. Revelation 21 tells us that the children of God will live in perfect bodies on a perfectly redesigned earth under perfect heavens. This is the marvelous future that the redeemed of the Lord wait for with patience. Patience is necessary because as we said at the beginning, there is a sequence for our redemption. We rejoice that our spirits have been given new life in Jesus. We groan because of the delay for our bodies.

Romans 8:26-27, "26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

As we humans groan on account of the fallen world we live in and because of the physical death we face, so the Spirit groans along with us — only He groans before the Father in perfect prayer for us. It is most comforting for the Christian to know that we have this tremendous ally as we continue to do battle in this fallen human flesh. Come Holy Spirit and give us the faith to believe this revelation about You. From within the Godhead and to the Godhead, You, Lord Holy Spirit pray for us according to the perfect will of the Godhead. This is a great mystery to us. But, we bless you and praise you for doing so. For, Spirit, by Your most gracious and magnificent work in us we can not only endure but overcome what this world hurls at us. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.