
THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

Session III: The Mind of the Flesh, Part I

- I. The Mind of the Flesh
 - A. Romans 8:5-8 (NIV) *“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”*
 - B. Paul’s use of the word “flesh”
 1. The word flesh (savr̥x) in this passage is not saying that the body is evil. Instead, it’s referring to the evil passions that rage in an unsaved person.
 2. The word also presents the idea of human weakness, frailty, or the lostness of the human race.
 3. These passions wage war against a person’s thinking, so that they overtake any attempt to control oneself with purely human effort.
- II. The Fight Against the Flesh
 - A. Romans 7:18 (NRSV) *“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.”*
 - B. Interpretations of the speaker of Romans 7
 1. The Christian life
 - a) This was a common view in the Middle Ages.
 - b) The thought is that Paul contrasts the struggle between a Christian’s spirit and sinful nature.
 - c) This view doesn’t match Paul’s other descriptions of the Christian life.
 - (1) Romans 8:2 (NIV) *“because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”*
 - (2) Romans 8:37 (NIV) *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*
 - d) “Nowhere does Paul describe Christian life, life in the Spirit, as one of constant struggle with the flesh.”—Gordon Fee
 2. Autobiography of Paul’s life
 - a) There are elements of the description that may apply to Paul’s life before following Jesus.
 - b) It is likely, based on the overall argument in Romans, that this passage is not primarily about Paul’s life.
 - c) The “I” in Romans 7 is a rhetorical device used by Paul to bring emphasis to the argument, not to describe his own life.

3. Adam
 - a) Some scholars have understood Paul to refer to Adam in this discussion.
 - b) Despite some strong arguments this view does not seem to present a strong enough connection between Paul's statements and Adam.
4. Israel
 - a) The nation of Israel was aware of God's commandments but had failed to keep the law.
 - b) Beginning in Romans 2, Paul has been using a rhetorical device in this letter that imagines a conversation between himself and a Jewish teacher.
 - c) The "I" in Romans 7 is consistent with some Old Testament passages that personifies the nation of Israel.
 - (1) Psalms 129:1 (NIV) *"They have greatly oppressed me from my youth, let Israel say;"*
 - (2) Jeremiah 4:31 (NIV) *"I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child—the cry of Daughter Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, 'Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers.'"*
 - d) Paul refers in Philippians to those who demand circumcision, a work of the law, as those who put their faith in the flesh as opposed to God's Spirit.
 - (1) Philippians 3:2-3 (NIV) *"Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh"*
 - (2) The observance of the Jewish Law is the source of "fleshly" confidence which is not compatible with an overcoming Spirit-filled life.
 - e) "The use of "I" and the present tense of the verbs only heighten the intensity of his feelings toward the utter helplessness of the law to do anything about the real problem of sin."—Gordon Fee
5. The one thing we can be certain of is that Paul is not describing someone who is a follower of Jesus. This is not a description of a life lived in faith, but a life devoid of God's saving power.

III. Application

- A. The Christian life should not be a life of defeat by sin.
- B. Even though we may struggle with temptations or even at times give in, we do not have to submit to sin as our boss.
- C. It is only through God's Spirit that we can find victory.