



Life in the Spirit

Kicking It Off

What's a board game or card game that you absolutely refuse to play anymore because it ruins friendships, and why?

Read

Romans 8:1-17

Summary

Life sometimes feels like a complicated board game where nobody really knows all the rules. Some people are super intense about following every rule perfectly, while others just wing it and hope for the best. Here's the thing, though: neither approach actually works when it comes to living the way God intended. If even the tiniest flaw in us got multiplied forever into eternity, it would create endless problems. That's why God has such high standards, not because He's mean, but because He's offering something that lasts forever. It's like He's saying, "I can't let imperfection into eternity because it would ruin everything."

Jesus came and played the game of life perfectly, never making a wrong move. And now, because of what He did, we get to be on His team. It's like having the world's best chess player whispering the perfect move in your ear, except instead of chess, it's life, and instead of a chess master, it's God's Spirit.

The crazy part is, even when we ignore that guidance and make our own moves anyway, God is so good that He can still work with our mistakes. But why would we want to ignore perfect advice? It's like telling a master chef you know better how to cook, it just doesn't make sense.

Being a Christian isn't about trying harder to follow rules. It's about being part of God's family, where He's constantly saying "I want you" no matter how many times we mess up. We're like His bride to be, and the wedding hasn't happened yet, but we're already loved and accepted. Stop trying to win life on your own. You've got access to perfect guidance through God's Spirit. Actually listen to it. That's where real freedom and joy come from.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. What's a recent decision where you struggled between following what you felt God wanted versus what you wanted?
3. God's love remains constant regardless of our performance or failures. How does truly believing this change the way you approach your relationship with Him?
4. Sometimes following God's guidance means sacrificing something important to us for a greater purpose. What "queen" in your life might God be asking you to let go of?
5. Life isn't meant to be lived alone but with the Holy Spirit's guidance and wisdom. In what area of your life do you find it hardest to pause and ask for God's direction before acting?
6. God can work through our mistakes and wrong choices to still accomplish His purposes. How have you seen God redeem a poor decision you've made in the past?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Sin is having access to the Spirit and still making the move you want to. Sin is God saying through the Spirit, 'Move your pawn. Move your pawn one space forward.' And sin is where we're like, 'Hey, I know you're telling me to move my pawn forward, but I like the knight jumping right here. And I enjoy it. It makes me happy. I want to do this.'"

"Jesus found the loophole. The loophole is that he is allowed to bring in his spouse. He's allowed to bring his spouse into eternity with him. And this is the beauty of it: Jesus won the match, and so he's allowed to bring his church to receive the glory."

"The beauty of the gospel, the beauty of the love of God is that he will never say, 'We're done.' He is always saying, 'I want you. I want you. I want you.' The question is, do you want him even when the world is falling apart?"

Sermon Notes*Romans 8:1-17*

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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.

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.

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. 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!" 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.

Outline

1. Freedom From (vv. 1-4)

- a. Freedom from condemnation
 - i. No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (v. 1)
 - ii. Law of Spirit of life sets free from law of sin and death (v. 2)
 - iii. God did what the law couldn't do by sending His Son (v. 3)
- b. The problem with the law
 - i. Both rule-followers and rule-breakers fall short of God's standard
 - ii. Sin multiplied by eternity creates eternal brokenness
 - iii. God's judgment isn't harsh but necessary for eternal holiness
- c. Jesus as the perfect player
 - i. Fulfilled law through Father's will and Spirit's power
 - ii. Played the perfect game with no errors
 - iii. His sacrifice allows us access to the Spirit's guidance

2. Freedom For (vv. 5-11)

- a. New life in the Spirit
 - i. Mind set on flesh leads to death; mind on Spirit leads to life and peace (vv. 5-6)
 - ii. Those in flesh cannot please God (vv. 7-8)
 - iii. Spirit dwells in believers, giving life to mortal bodies (vv. 9-11)
- b. Following the Spirit's guidance
 - i. Sin is having Spirit's guidance but choosing our own way
 - ii. God can work even with our wrong moves
 - iii. Learning to ask "Lord, what should I do?" before acting
- c. Discernment and transformation
 - i. Recognizing God's voice: kind, patient, gentle, exhibiting fruit of the Spirit
 - ii. Not conforming to world but being transformed (Rom. 12:2)
 - iii. Understanding God makes the right move every time

3. Freedom With (vv. 12-17)

- a. Family relationship
 - i. Not debtors to flesh but children of God (vv. 12-14)
 - ii. Spirit of adoption, not slavery; we cry "Abba, Father" (v. 15)
 - iii. Heirs with Christ, sharing in sufferings and glory (vv. 16-17)
- b. The bride of Christ
 - i. Jesus won and brings His spouse into eternity
 - ii. Salvation through relationship, not performance
 - iii. Wedding hasn't happened yet; we're engaged
- c. Living in community
 - i. Freedom from legalism and comparisons

- ii. Encouraging one another to follow the Spirit
- iii. Church's goal: glorify God and invite others to life with Christ

Notes

Life often feels like a complex game where we're all trying to figure out the rules and how to win. Think about those modern board games with their lengthy instruction manuals, where everyone sits around the table just reading and reading, trying to understand all the various conditions and rules before anyone can actually start playing. It's fascinating how seriously people take games, especially when some get so invested that they're ready to flip the table over a loss at Monopoly, straining relationships over what should be entertainment.

This brings us to something much more significant: the game of life itself. We're all trying to figure out how to win, how to be successful, how to live a good life in the best way possible. Some people approach this with intense seriousness, believing they need to do everything perfectly to succeed. Others take a more relaxed approach, wondering what the big deal is about following all these rules when we're all just living on this rock together. You see this dynamic everywhere, perhaps most clearly in the divide between people who must be on time and those who have no concept of time whatsoever.

What's interesting is that God actually does want us to understand there is a right and wrong way to live. When we examine the law, particularly as formulated in the Old Testament, God is explaining to His people how they should live. These aren't arbitrary rules; they're the instructions for how life works best. God desires humanity, all of His creation, to live in order, in perfection, in what we call holiness where everything is as it's meant to be and everything done is done correctly. We know what happens when things don't work correctly: disorder, chaos, brokenness. God doesn't want us to experience brokenness; He wants us to experience wholeness.

So we end up with two camps. On one side, people are adamant about following all the rules, insisting that any breach means failure. On the other side, people reject the rules entirely, wanting to live life their own way. The sad reality is that neither approach can actually create a perfect society. Neither can live up to God's ideal standard. Both have fallen short.

It's not that meeting God's standard is impossible for humans to achieve in theory. The issue is that we cannot have not already fallen short. The punishment for not winning this game, for not living this life of perfection, is death. People argue about whether these are really the rules, but regardless of our arguments, these are the rules. The Creator has the rights, because He made us, to set the standards.

Here's where it gets uncomfortable: whether you're the most punctual, moral, rule-following person or someone living without any rules at all, both have fallen short of God's standard. The outcome is the same: you lose. There's no passing go, no collecting \$200. You lose.

We desperately hope God grades on a curve. We hope that when judgment comes and God reviews our whole life, He'll see that we have fewer deductions than our neighbors, that we're in the upper quartile, and He'll let us in. But that's not how it works. God isn't grading on a curve. The rules are simple and clear: love God and love others. Even if someone doesn't believe in God, the rule to love others stands. This goes across cultures and faith backgrounds, we all know we're supposed to live in community and love one another. If you break this rule, you lose.

Instead of accepting our fate, we love to claim the rules are wrong, the law is wrong, the game is unfair and impossible to win. Sometimes we maintain that life is about loving others but then compare ourselves to see if we love better than others do. Churches can become places where people compete over who loves better, thinking they'll advance further in some tournament bracket system of salvation. The problem is, this isn't a tournament bracket. God isn't letting people into heaven just because they tried really hard.

The nature of this game is that God is granting eternity, forever and ever, to the winner, to the one able to follow the law. Only those are qualified to live forever. Why? Because if you have even a tiny bit of sin, even the smallest imperfection, and you multiply that by infinity, by eternity, you multiply sin forever and ever. The problems don't disappear; you have brokenness for eternity.

There's logic in understanding that God's judgment isn't because He dislikes or hates us or because He's harsh and difficult. It's because He's multiplying by infinity. If there's any imperfection, selfishness, greed, malice, bitterness, or hatred in us, even an ounce, God wouldn't be good if He multiplied that by infinity. If He granted that eternality, heaven itself would be tainted. So it's right for God to maintain the law as the standard.

The beginning of the gospel is saying, "Lord, I'm not worthy." None of us are worthy to be granted eternality or to be multiplied by infinity because we have our brokenness, faults, fears, and issues. The gospel begins in this place of confession, of repentance, of saying, "I'm not the winner. I'm not any better than those around me." When you multiply by infinity, it doesn't matter how much sin you have compared to your neighbor; both, when multiplied by infinity, are infinitely bad. In conversation with an eternal God, even your smallest sin needs to be dealt with.

The flesh needs to die, our selfishness, pride, and self-inward turning need to die. Not to lose our personality or individualism, but because God is the only one who can redeem it. When He redeems it, He redeems it into perfection.

Romans 8 explains this beautifully: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ

Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

This is Paul's way of explaining how it all works. The law was there as a boundary God created to explain His righteousness. There was no way for humans to accomplish this law apart from the Spirit. God never intended the game to be played by yourself alone. The game is meant to be played with the Spirit.

What Jesus did as an example in the form of sinful flesh, what Jesus did in perfection, was constantly rely on the Spirit. As the second person of the Trinity, He relied on the third person of the Trinity and listened to the first person of the Trinity, His Father. Jesus fulfilled the law not only by His own power but by the will of the Father through the power of the Spirit. The reason this was possible isn't because Jesus was only God and not man. Jesus was fully man as well as fully God, showing us the example of how we are to live.

Think of it like chess. If you knew you were in a chess tournament where the punishment for losing was death, and you weren't very good at chess, you'd be stressed. But if the rules allowed you to have Magnus Carlsen or a powerful computer engine giving you advice, you'd be foolish not to take that help. If someone could tell you exactly what move to make, you'd be smart to ask for guidance and follow it.

This is what God is pointing to with life in the Spirit. Jesus opens a doorway for us with His sacrifice. He allows the Spirit to be in you, to be with you. You're still in this match where, based on your life, if God finds sin in you at the end, you'll face correction for it. But God makes it fair, even more than fair, by adding grace. He's saying you can't do it by yourself, but it was never intended for you to do it alone. It was intended that you follow the Spirit.

Sin, then, is having access to the Spirit and still making the move you want to make. It's God saying, "Move your pawn forward," and you responding, "I know you're telling me to move my pawn, but I like moving my knight here. It makes me happy." The beauty of our Lord is that when you move the wrong piece despite His guidance, God is so good He says, "Well, I can make that work too." You're still saved. You still have a chance because He's so good at your life, so good at the game you're playing. There is no condemnation now in Christ Jesus. You could make every single wrong move, and God is so wise and powerful that no matter what moves you play, He can make it a winning position.

But here's the real issue: you don't actually believe Him, that He has the ability to make the right move. Every time He says to move the pawn and you say you have a

better idea, it's like telling a world champion chess player that you like their ideas but you're going to play it your way. There's a point where you have to ask yourself if you're being incredibly arrogant and prideful to live life your own way.

Life in the Spirit means freedom from the death match, freedom from playing life as if it's a matter of life and death. No matter what you do, have done, or will do, God is sufficient, wise, good, and powerful enough to ensure you're saved, that you can win, that you can live a life worthy of His calling. Why? Because you're covered by the blood of His Son. Jesus is the true winner who made no errors, whose gameplay was perfect, who put every piece where it was supposed to be. He played the perfect game, and we are winners because we follow in Jesus's line. You're free from the death match and eternal consequences.

The joy of the Christian walk is learning to die to yourself, learning it's not about what piece you want to move and how. The joy is taking a moment before you move and asking, "Lord, can I do this? Should I do this?" Often God responds, "Yeah, what a great move," especially when it involves loving someone else, forgiving someone, showing undeserved kindness, or being generous. And we're amazed that God thinks our ideas to love and serve are great.

But then there are times when we think we've got it figured out, that doing good things is simple. We decide to make major life decisions, thinking our last move was good so this one must be great. And God often says, "No, no, no, that move's terrible." Life is complicated, more complicated than chess. Being a Christian is learning that while you might make the right moves occasionally, God makes the right move every single time.

Colossians 2 tells us that we who were dead in our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. The core of the gospel is that all the mistakes you've made on your board can be fixed because Jesus died on the cross.

It's a beautiful system God created. He knew you would make mistakes and understood that the only way to solve all the wrong moves of humanity, all the moves of hatred, evil, selfishness, pride, greed, malice, and bitterness, was to send His Son to die on a cross. His Son would play every right move, do everything as it should be done. How then do we receive this salvation? We step away from our boards and ask, "Lord, what do I do?"

People who go to church and have been in religion often talk extensively about salvation, about being saved. Absolutely, no matter what wrong moves you make, Jesus has fixed them. But that's like the first half of being a Christian. The next half is asking

whether you want to play, whether you want to enjoy life and the existence God has for you. How should you then play?

We need to recognize we must play differently. Some people want to play exactly the same way they did when Jesus saved them because they'll win no matter what. That's a slap in God's face because He wants to teach us how to live properly.

Romans 8 continues: "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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

You've been granted freedom by Christ for this life. The flesh, the brokenness, the sinful vessel you're in, your selfishness, pride, greed, malice, the things you know at your core aren't good, we let those die and now have freedom for new life. This is why testimonies are so powerful. A good testimony isn't one that starts with making all the wrong moves and then figuring out how to make all the right moves. A good testimony is recognizing you made all the wrong moves, stepped away from the board, realized you were in deep trouble and needed someone to save you. That's when you had Jesus, when the Holy Spirit whispered that He loves you, cares for you, and will save you. And you trusted Him.

The climax of a testimony isn't the outcome of success and amazing things happening. The climax is that moment when someone realizes they will always fail, but God will always succeed, so they choose to give Him control. The outcome is already known when you make the transition to say, "No longer my will, but Your will be done." You're going to win.

Being freed into this new life will look crazy to the world. In chess, there are times when you sacrifice a piece, even your queen, the most important piece. You put it out there, acting distressed about losing it, waiting for your opponent to take it because it leads to a trap that results in checkmate. Sometimes following the Spirit means God asks you to sacrifice your queen, that piece of your life you've deemed so important. The world thinks you're crazy, but God says to trust Him. After the sacrifice, He guides your next moves to victory.

The world wants you to conform, to live life never sacrificing anything because that's how you lose. As Christians following the Spirit, you've been freed from the death match into new life. The new life is about submission to God, following Him. You're learning what the right moves are, not what protects you, but what He's asking you to do.

Discernment is understanding whether something follows God's character. Is it loving, kind, generous, peaceful, joyful? Learn to hear the soft voice of the Spirit. If the

voice in your head is angry, frustrated, and demanding, that's not God. That's how the world talks, how your selfishness sounds. The voice speaking to you should be kind, patient, gentle, exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.

Romans tells us we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to it. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You didn't receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father."

Jesus's death and resurrection is an invitation asking if you want to be part of God's family, the bride of Christ. Jesus is the winner of this game of life, the only one who made every right move without a single flaw. He's the only one who can win this death match. Jesus found the loophole: he's allowed to bring his spouse into eternity with him. Jesus won and can bring his bride to receive the glory with him.

The church enters salvation not by how well we've played the game. We enter by saying, "That's my spouse. He's the one I'm attached to." There's security and freedom in this because it's by Christ's work, not yours. His work is already established, so there's no need for legalism or trying to prove your worth. What makes you worthy is that the bridegroom laid His life down for you. He chose you and invited you into relationship with Him. Our connection to Christ is by His love, and all we need to do is love Him back.

Your Christian walk isn't meant to be robotic. Jesus has already won the death match. When you ask what to do now, Jesus says to have fun, enjoy this, play knowing there's no death match, play knowing you have the Spirit with you. Try living with your brothers and sisters in this family where you no longer make decisions based on your wisdom but choose God's wisdom instead.

The beauty of John's explanation of the end is that right now the church and Jesus haven't had our grand meeting, our wedding. We're saved and will be saved, but the wedding hasn't culminated. We're engaged, and the grand wedding in Revelation includes wars breaking out and family members fighting. But we're so in love with Christ that the calamity doesn't matter. We're called by Him, living with the Spirit, led to live in submission to the Lord.

The process of getting married to Christ is filled with suffering. Jesus constantly asks whether you want Him or just the things He can offer without Him. The world yells that if you want peace, security, success, or wisdom, you should build it yourself. When you say you want those things but through Christ, through relationship with Him, Jesus says that's exactly what you're supposed to do. You understand that if you want good things, you love the One who can give them.

Young couples today want healthy, successful marriages and relationships, but the world gives terrible advice on fostering these. The world says you need financial stability and compatibility, suggesting that if you're broke or fight, the relationship should end. But healthy marriages aren't healthy because they lack problems or conflict. What makes a relationship healthy is that it's covered in sacrificial love. What kills relationships isn't fighting or struggling but lacking love.

With Jesus, when we think we're not getting enough from Christianity, the world teaches us to be done when we're not getting what we want. But the beauty of God's love is that He will never say, "We're done." He's always saying, "I want you." The question is whether you want Him even when the world is falling apart. Of course we should want Him when things go wrong because He's the only one who can make it right.

People going through the worst tragedies remain faithful because they understand that when life is in shambles, leaving God makes no sense. He's the one who will help, guide, and save them. The world thinks this is crazy, superstitious, backwards thinking. But as we sit in our ashes and mourn and cry to our God, He says, "You sacrificed your queen, but I have a better plan."

Your work is worship, giving glory to God, doing things in line with the Spirit not for selfish reasons but to tell God you love Him. And God says back that He loves you. That's all you need in life. The world wants to confuse you into thinking you need more than understanding that your Father's love is sufficient.

As a church following the Holy Spirit, we must understand we're free from this death match, free from the squabbling of legalism, free from arguing between those who follow the law well and those who don't. We're done with comparisons and judgments. But we should encourage one another to follow the Spirit. When we see people making wrong moves that we know are wrong because they're selfish, angry, or bitter, we should ask what God has to say and how He leads in these decisions. Are they generous, kind, and good?

The goal is to glorify God. The more we give God glory, the more our neighbors will hear the song we sing, the life we're living, not because we're trying to elevate ourselves but so they'll also hear the invitation of a life well lived with Christ. That's the win. We're no longer playing the game; we're watching Jesus play and cheering Him on, saying, "That's my Jesus. All praise and honor and glory to Him. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come."

Blog

Picture yourself playing a board game where losing means death. Not metaphorical death, actual death. Every move carries ultimate weight. Every decision could be your last. The rules are perfect and unchangeable. The judge never makes mistakes. And you've already broken the rules.

This isn't a game anymore. It's survival. And you're losing.

Welcome to the human condition apart from Christ. We're playing a cosmic game where God's perfect holiness sets the standard, and anything less than perfection deserves judgment. The stakes are real. The penalty is death. And every single one of us has already disqualified ourselves.

But Romans 8 opens with eight words that change everything: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

How can this be? How can a perfectly holy God look at rule breakers like us and declare "no condemnation"? The answer changes not just our eternal destiny but our daily existence. Paul shows us that life in the Spirit means freedom from condemnation, power over sin, and intimate relationship with God as Father.

The passage begins with "therefore," pointing back to everything Paul has argued since Romans 5. He's been building a case. Humanity stands guilty before God. The law reveals our sin but can't fix it. Even our best efforts fall short. Chapter 7 ends with Paul's anguished cry: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Chapter 8 is the answer. And it starts with the verdict that matters most: no condemnation. The Greek word Paul uses, *katakrima*, isn't just about feeling guilty. It's a legal term. It means the final sentence has been pronounced. The judge has spoken. The verdict is in. And for those in Christ Jesus, that verdict is "not guilty." Not because we're innocent, but because someone else took our sentence. This changes how we approach God. We don't come crawling, hoping He's in a good mood. We don't come performing, trying to tip the scales. We come confident, knowing the verdict is already decided. The gavel has fallen. The case is closed.

But Paul doesn't stop with our legal status. He explains how this freedom became possible. "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." Notice Paul's wordplay here. He uses "law" (*nomos*) in two different ways. There's the law of sin and death, that downward pull we all feel, that gravitational force toward selfishness and rebellion. It's as consistent as gravity. Drop a ball, it falls. Give humans a choice, we choose sin. But there's another law at work now. The law of the Spirit of life. This isn't about trying harder or being more religious. It's about a new power source. Like switching from rowing a boat to turning on the motor. The motor doesn't make rowing illegal. It makes it unnecessary. Paul explains why this new approach was

needed: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do." The law was never the problem. We were. It's like having perfect instructions for building a house but no strength to lift the hammer. The blueprint is flawless. We're too weak to follow it.

So God did something radical. He sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin." Jesus became truly human. He entered our game, played by our rules, faced our temptations. And He never made a wrong move. Not once. Then comes the exchange that changes everything. God "condemned sin in the flesh." Whose flesh? Christ's flesh. Jesus absorbed the condemnation we deserved. He took our losing scorecard and gave us His perfect record.

Why did God do this? "In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." God didn't lower His standards. He didn't change the rules. He fulfilled them in us through Christ.

This leads to Paul's next major point. There are only two ways to live: according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. There's no middle ground. No neutral territory. You're either operating by one system or the other. "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." The phrase "set their minds" (*phroneō* in Greek) means more than just thinking certain thoughts. It's about your whole life orientation. What drives you? What shapes your decisions? What occupies your mental real estate?

Think of it like the algorithm that runs your social media feed. Every click trains it. Every pause teaches it what you want to see. Soon it's showing you more of what you've already chosen. The flesh minded person clicks on self, success, security. The Spirit minded person clicks on God, His kingdom, His purposes. Paul doesn't sugarcoat the consequences. "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Not will be death. Is death. Present tense. The flesh minded person is already experiencing death, separation from God, even while their heart still beats.

Why such stark consequences? "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." The flesh minded person isn't just struggling to obey God. They're actively opposed to Him. It's not a power problem. It's a position problem. They're on the wrong team. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Cannot. Not "find it difficult." Not "struggle to." Cannot. It's like trying to swim while refusing to get in the water. Impossible by definition. But then comes one of the most important verses in the passage: "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you."

Paul shifts from third person to second person. From "those" to "you." He's making it personal. And he gives us the definitive test. How do you know if you're in the Spirit? The Spirit of God dwells in you. This isn't about feelings. It's not about spiritual

experiences. It's about possession. Either the Spirit lives in you or He doesn't. And Paul makes it crystal clear: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." No Spirit, no salvation. It's that simple. But if you do have the Spirit, everything changes. "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." We still live in bodies marked by sin. We still get sick. We still die. But something else is alive in us. The Spirit brings life because of righteousness, not our righteousness but Christ's righteousness credited to us. And this life isn't just for now. "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." The same power that brought Jesus out of the tomb lives in you. Think about that. The force that reversed death itself, that conquered humanity's oldest enemy, that turned the ultimate defeat into ultimate victory, that power has taken up residence in your mortal body.

This is why Paul can say we're no longer debtors to the flesh. We don't owe it anything. It promised us freedom and gave us slavery. It promised satisfaction and gave us emptiness. It promised life and gave us death. We owe it nothing. Instead, we have a new obligation. "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." Notice Paul doesn't say "let go and let God." He says "you put to death." There's action required. But it's "by the Spirit." We act, but we act in His power. It's like performing surgery with the world's best surgeon guiding your hands. You're holding the scalpel, but His expertise makes the healing possible.

This leads to one of the most beautiful transitions in Scripture. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Being led by the Spirit isn't about mystical experiences or hearing voices. It's about the ongoing pattern of your life. Are you responding to the Spirit's promptings? Are you following His guidance through Scripture? Are you putting to death the deeds of the body? Then you're being led by the Spirit. And if you're being led by the Spirit, you're a son or daughter of God. "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!'" Paul contrasts two spirits here. The spirit of slavery keeps you performing, striving, fearing. Always wondering if you've done enough. Always looking over your shoulder. Always afraid of punishment. But we've received something different. The Spirit of adoption. In Roman culture, adoption was serious business. An adopted child had all the rights of a natural born child. They couldn't be disowned. They inherited equally. Their past debts were cancelled. They got a new name, a new identity, a new future.

And the proof of this adoption? We cry "Abba! Father!" This Aramaic word that Jesus used in His most intimate prayer moments. Not formal. Not distant. Abba. It's

what a Jewish child called their dad. The fact that Paul preserves this Aramaic word in a Greek letter to Roman readers tells us something. This was how the early Christians prayed. They used Jesus' own word for Father. They had learned to approach God with the same intimacy Jesus showed. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Two witnesses agreeing. The Holy Spirit testifying to our spirit. Not just telling us we're loved. Convincing us. Creating deep, unshakeable awareness that we belong to God. And if we're children, then we're heirs. "Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." Everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to us. His righteousness. His standing with the Father. His inheritance. His glory. But Paul adds something crucial: "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Following Jesus includes a cross. Not to earn our salvation but as evidence of it. The family resemblance includes suffering. But it's suffering with purpose, suffering with hope, suffering that leads to glory.

We started with an unwinnable game. Perfect standards we couldn't meet. A holy God we couldn't please. Condemnation we couldn't escape.

But the gospel changes everything. Not by changing the rules but by giving us Christ's perfect score. Not by lowering the standards but by giving us the Spirit's power to begin living by them. Not by making us better slaves but by making us beloved children.

This is life in the Spirit. We're free from condemnation because Christ took it for us. We're free for a new way of thinking and living because the Spirit empowers us. We're free with a new relationship to God because we're His adopted children. The game is still real. God's holiness still matters. Right and wrong haven't changed. But everything about our position has changed. We're not playing to earn God's love. We're playing from God's love. We're not performing for acceptance. We're living from acceptance. And that changes everything about tomorrow morning. You'll still wake up in a body marked by sin. You'll still face temptations. You'll still struggle. But you'll face it all as God's child, led by His Spirit, free from condemnation, destined for glory. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. The God who demands perfection has declared you righteous in Christ. The Father who could condemn now calls you His child.

This is the gospel. This is your reality. This is life in the Spirit.