

Romans: Verse by Verse

Romans 8:5-8A

Student Notes:

Introduction: Paul uses verses 5-8 to begin showing us how the indwelling presence of God practically affects our lives and attitude towards the Moral Law.

- **An Overview of Verses 5-8:**

1. **There are two categories of people** -- the unregenerate who are 'in the flesh' and the regenerate who are 'in the Spirit'. See verse 5

2. **The two categories of people have two perspectives or mindsets** – “the mind of the flesh” and “the mind of the Spirit”. See verse 6

3. **The two categories of people have two patterns of conduct:** Living according to the flesh or the Spirit. That conduct affects their final destiny

- **An Antithesis of Experience and Outcome:**

1. The requirements of the Mosaic Code and Moral Code cannot be met by those who live according to the “flesh”, but it can be kept by those who walk according to the “spirit” or “pneuma”.

2. Those who follow the promptings of the flesh cannot find victory over sin, self, and death. Those who surrender to the control of the Spirit can do this.

3. Ultimately, the only way a believer can keep the “spirit” of the Law is to walk “according to the Spirit”.

- **A Review of Important Definitions:**

- **The Flesh (Sarx)**

Paul uses the Greek word "sarx" to mean the totality of our bodily instincts and appetites. John Stott: "It's a way of saying "the whole of our humanness".

- **The Spirit: (Pneuma)**

New Testament Greek word "pneuma" can either refer to the inner person of humans or the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8 Paul is primarily referring to the third person of the Godhead – the Holy Spirit. While in verse 16 Paul will write, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children", in verses 5-8 he is pointing to the Holy Spirit who both regenerates us and indwells us.

- **A repeated theme:** "Flesh" and "Spirit" – "Sarx" and "Pneuma". Paul consistently applies this antithesis throughout his epistles. Example: Galatians 5:

"Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."

Throughout Romans 8 the flesh and the Spirit are placed in terms of irreconcilable conflict: You can choose one of them – but not both.

- **A Matter Of "Mindset":**

Verse 5: *"Those who live according to 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 NIV uses the phrase "minds set on". It could just as easily be said, "mindset".

The first real antithesis of the two people Paul is describing – who either are minding the flesh/sarx or Spirit/pneuma. John Stott: "... Our mindset expresses our basic nature as Christians or non-Christians."

One group lives "according to the sinful nature." They have a "sarx" mindset; they are focused on what their fleshly desire desires.

1 John 2:16: “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

The second group: “... *Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*”

Questions: 1. “What does the Holy Spirit desire?” 2. “If the Holy Spirit had his way, what would he want?”

Reversing Paul's statement: “Those who have their minds set on what the Spirit desires ... live in accordance with the Spirit.”

The larger point: Are we living in the Spirit because we think like this, or do we think like this because we are living in the Spirit?

For Paul, in both cases – the *sarx* and the *pneuma* – it's our spiritual nature that determines our mindset:

1. Fleshly people (people who are directed by their twisted human nature) quite naturally supply that nature whatever it craves. 2. Spiritual people focus on the desires of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' statement: The Holy Spirit's role in this world is to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...” – John 16:8

Paul says all of this is a matter of mindset. As one scholar put it, “To ‘set the mind (*phroneo*) on the desires of *sarx* or *pneuma* is to make them the ‘absorbing objects of thought, interest, affection and purpose.’” -- Murray, vol. I, p. 285. (See Psalm 42:1 and 63:1)

John Stott: “It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and give ourselves up to. All this is determined by who we are, whether we are still in the flesh or are now in the new birth in the Spirit.”

Our mindset, then, determines our desires. **Next time:** How our mindset has eternal consequences.