

Who's In Control? (Part 3)

Romans 8:5-8

Thought for the Day: As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are either living according to (under the control of) our old sinful nature or we are living according to (under the control of) the Holy Spirit. It's all a question of mindset.

In Romans 8:1-17 the Apostle Paul is challenging us to reflect on a very important question: Who's in control of your life? As believers, we are either being controlled, empowered and led by God the Holy Spirit or we are being controlled and empowered by our own sinful nature.

"[A] correct understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is basic to right Christian living. It is axiomatic that one must believe right in order to behave right... It is almost trite to say that the church is beset by problems, and the chief reason for the problems is the fact that the individual Christian has problems. You see, the church is people... and the people who make up the church have problems. I am convinced that the solution to these problems [in the church and in the people of the church] is found, not in a doctrine, but in a Person, and that Person is the Holy Spirit. I am not overstating it when I tell you that no subject in the matter of religion should engage our powers more than the subject [of being filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit]. (Dr. Lehman Strauss, Preface, *Be Filled with the Spirit*)

- Romans 8:5-11 is a difficult passage. There are two different viewpoints:
 - 1) Those who say that Paul is contrasting believers with unbelievers; and
 - 2) Those who say that Paul is continuing to describe the conflict that takes place within the believer, between his old sinful nature and his new righteous nature indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- I see a combination of both of these points of view:
 - 1) *Kata* = "according to".
 - 2) *En* = "in".
- Paul is making two contrasts in these verses:
 - 1) Those who are living "according to" the flesh (the sinful nature) and those who live "according to" the Holy Spirit.
 - 2) Those who are "in the flesh" (the sinful nature) and those who are "in the Spirit."
 - Concerning the Second Contrast (believers vs. unbelievers): Those who are "in the flesh" are unbelievers, those who are "in the Spirit" are believers. "In" = the realm or sphere of existence.
 - Concerning the First Contrast (among believers): Those who live "according to the flesh (sinful nature)" and those who live "according to the Holy Spirit".

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires;

- As believers, as those who have both the old sinful nature and a new righteous nature indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are entirely capable of living according to the flesh (the sinful nature) and having our mind set on what that nature desires.

- To live according to our sinful nature is to be guided and controlled by the thoughts and desires of that nature.
 - “The mind” = our entire being / personality – mind, heart (desires & affections) and will; this includes our assumptions, values and purposes. (*NKJV Study Bible, p. 1891*)
 - “To set the mind on the flesh means to think continually about and constantly desire the things characteristic of fallen, sinful human nature, that is, to think just the way the unbelieving world thinks, emphasizing what it thinks important, pursuing what it pursues, in disregard of God’s will.” (*ESV Study Bible, p. 2170*)
 - To have our minds set on what our sinful nature desires means that our entire life is governed, directed and controlled by the desires of our sinful nature. The result will be a Christian who is living just like an unbeliever.

but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

- Setting our hearts to study and practice God’s Word is parallel to having our minds set on what the Spirit desires. To be filled with and controlled by the Word of God is to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25; Ezra 7:10; Ephesians 5:18; Col.3:16)
- Each of us decides and chooses what we will set our heart and mind on, what we will make the central focus of our life. What we set our heart and mind on is what will guide and control us: our sinful nature or the Spirit of God. (Colossians 3:1-3; Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; 3:17-21; Proverbs 4:23).

6 The mind of sinful man [i.e. the mind set on the flesh] is death,

- This death is “the spiritual separation from God that comes as the result of sin” (*Life Application Commentary*).
- When we live according to our sinful nature and have our minds set on what that nature desires, we are operating in the realm of spiritual death. We are living in separation from God and we become increasingly insensitive and unresponsive to Him. (Genesis 2:17; James 1:13-15)

but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

- When we submit to the control of the Holy Spirit, we experience the life and peace that Jesus came to give His followers. (John 10:10; Romans 5:1)

7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.

- James 4:4.

8 Those controlled by the sinful nature (those who are in the flesh) cannot please God.

- “Being *in the flesh* is different from ‘walking according to the flesh.’ Being *in the flesh* means being unregenerate or sinful. People in that state cannot please God.” (*New King James Study Bible, p. 1892*)
- As believers, we can live according to the sinful nature, but it is not natural for us to do so because now we are living in the realm and in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are living in the sphere in which the Holy Spirit is in control and that should be our normal experience.