

Why not Live?

by Ray C. Stedman

We return now to Chapter 8 of Romans, the climax of this book, and to the key word in this epistle – the word *righteousness*. Basically, this is something that we all are looking for – whether we know it or not – for righteousness is really self-worth. It is knowing yourself to be of value, to be approved, to be desired; it is a feeling of self-respect, self-esteem.

Psychologists call this by various terms. It is the basis for confidence, courage in facing life, or a sense of security about yourself. We know from what psychologists tell us, and from experience, that this is an absolute essential to human life. Jesus said the same thing: When Martha had lost her confidence, her perspective, her focus on life, he said to her, “One thing is needful,” {Luke 10:42 KJV}. This is what he was referring to, this sense of being needed and wanted, of having security, self-respect, a basis for self-worth.

Now, the gift of righteousness is exactly that – a gift from God. Romans teaches that the theme of the good news is that righteousness, this essential quality of human living, comes only as a gift of God. There is no other way to get it. You can try to get self-worth from what other people think of you; but, as the Bible clearly helps us to see, and, as life will teach us, if we live long enough, that never really works. This way of finding self-worth is inadequate, a shot-in-the-arm that needs to be repeated again and again. It is very unrealistic, and it lets you down just when you need it the most. So, we are talking here about the gift of righteousness, which comes by faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, as applied to you personally, as a helpless human being in Adam, and, therefore, mastered by sin.

The gift of righteousness is used in two ways in the epistle to the Romans, and at this point we have

to make the distinction between them very clear. We have already seen righteousness is a gift that is instantly imparted to our human spirits when we believe in Jesus; and, from that vantage point within us, it is continually available to us. We can turn to it any time we feel pressure or insecurity or need. It is available continuously by faith. That is what the Bible calls “justification by faith.” It is our new identity which we have because we are in Christ – we are no longer in Adam.

But now a new form of righteousness comes before us. It is what we might call *righteousness displayed*. It is righteousness in the spirit that has worked its way out to visibility. That is, it is actually seen in our actions and deeds and words and thoughts. We are acting like Christ. As well as *being like him* in the spirit, we now begin to *act like him*. That is what is referred to in Romans 8, Verses 3-4:

For what the law was powerless to do [i.e., produce righteousness] in that it was weakened by our sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order [and here is the point] that the righteous requirements of the law [the right behavior which the Law insisted on] might be fully met in us, who do not live according to our sinful nature, but according to the Spirit. {Rom 8:3-4 NIV}

That is what the Bible calls *sanctification*, i.e., righteousness manifest. That is our new behavior. And it is ours, the apostle says, when we do not live according to our sinful nature, but according to the Spirit.

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Verses 5 through 13, which we are going to look at this morning, follow immediately and expound and explain those two possibilities for the Christian. Just being a Christian does not mean that automatically you begin to look and act and talk and think and react like Jesus Christ. You do not become Christ-like when you become a Christian. Your human spirit is, for it is linked with him, but you may not act that way for quite some time. It depends on whether you are walking (behaving) according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. Those two things are made crystal clear in the passage before us.

I am reading, as you know, from the New International Version of the Bible. Up to this point, it has been an excellent version; but now, for some reason, it confuses this issue a bit, and I will have to make some changes as we go along. This has to be done for every version in places. The Revised Standard and American Standard and King James versions are better translations of this passage than the New International.

Beginning with Verse 5, the apostle explains to us these two possibilities in our Christian life: Are we going to live according to the Spirit, or according to the flesh? Verse 5 describes these two alternatives for us so that we can identify them and recognize them in our lives:

Those who live according to their sinful nature [i.e., according to the flesh] 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. {Rom 8:5 NIV}

There is the difference. There are two possibilities before us, as Christians, that will determine whether or not we manifest the righteousness which the Law demands, depending on whether we walk according to the Spirit or according to the flesh. Notice that the difference is what you set your mind on, i.e., what you are thinking about all through the day, what is important to you, how you view life, what you think is important about the things that are happening to you from day to day. Is it the viewpoint of the flesh, which governs the thinking of the world? Or is it the viewpoint of the Spirit – God’s viewpoint – on life? That is the determining factor – what you do with your thinking. Where you set your mind is going to make the difference.

Now, what is the mind set of the person who lives according to the flesh, or, as this version puts it, those who have “their minds set on what that [sinful] nature desires”? You only have to look around to see what that is. You only have to listen to the television or radio, or read the newspapers, or observe people – even yourself – and you will see what this is. It is the natural viewpoint of life.

What do people want in life?

- Basically, they want to make money, because money provides comfort and conveniences and pleasures that we would like to have.
- People want to have fun. The world is committed almost entirely to that. In every way we are being approached to buy this or buy that in order that we might enjoy ourselves.
- People want pleasure. That is what life seems to be all about – the pursuit of pleasure. We want money, we want pleasure, and we want fame.
- People are always manipulating people and circumstances to acquire some degree of fame, to be seen and known. There is a passion in the human heart to be known. People will give their right arm to gain influence and standing and prestige and following.
- Finally, I think that people desire to fulfill themselves. They want to manifest every capability that is within them. They want, somehow, to feel fulfilled.

That is what the world lives for, isn’t it? And it wants it all now, not later. That is the natural point of view.

You say, “Well, what’s wrong with that?” There really is nothing wrong with that – unless that is all you want. If that is all you want, then it is very, very wrong. This is what the Scriptures help us to see – that there is another point of view, which is life viewed according to the Spirit.

“Ah,” you say, “I know what that means!” That means you have to forget about making money and having fun and fulfilling yourself. All you do is go around memorizing Scripture and thinking about God all day long. Whenever anyone

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asks you to do something, you're too busy thinking about God and too involved in spiritual things to get your hands dirty. So you become a religious recluse. You go around reciting Scripture verses and telling people what is wrong with their lives – and that is being spiritual!"

Unfortunately, a lot of people think that is what we are talking about when we say that we are to have our minds set on the things of the Spirit. But, of course, if you see people like that (or if you *are* somebody like that), you soon discover that kind of life does not produce the results this passage tells us should be there. That is really nothing but another form of being run by the flesh – it's a religious form of it, but it is actually the same thing.

What does it mean, then, to have your mind set on the Spirit? It means that, in the midst of making money and having fun and gaining fame and fulfilling yourself, you are primarily concerned with showing love, helping others, speaking truth, and, above all, loving God and seeking his glory. The only trouble with the world is that it is content with just making money, having fun, and fulfilling itself – that is all it wants. The end is man. But the mind set on the Spirit desires that God be glorified in all these things, which are proper and right. When your mind is set on the Spirit you look at the events of life from God's point of view, not from the world's. Your value system is changed and it touches everything you do. You no longer see that the important thing must be to make a lot of money. The important thing is that, in seeking to fulfill your needs, God be glorified. That is what makes the difference. That is the mind set on the Spirit. It does not remove you from life – it puts you right back into it. But it does it with a different point of view.

In Verse 6 the apostle describes the results you can expect from either of the two courses that he outlined in Verse 5. He says,

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, {Rom 8:6 NIV}

I am going to change this a bit to make it a little more accurate according to the original text:

The thinking of the flesh is death, but the thinking of the Spirit is life and peace, {Rom 8:6 RCS Version}

What happens when you, as a Christian, let yourself live just like the world does and never bring the perspective of God into what you do? Then you are living according to the flesh. And the thinking of the flesh is death, while that of the Spirit is life and peace. In other words, this describes the results that come right now in our experience. Death is not something waiting for you at the end of your life; it is something that you experience right now, whenever you live according to the flesh.

What is death? If you study through the Scriptures you will find that death, in this present experience, always comes down to four basic things: fear, guilt, hostility, and emptiness. Those are the forms of death, and they come when you have your mind set on those things – and only those things – that the flesh desires: making money, having fun, fulfilling yourself, and gaining fame. If that is all you want out of life, then you will also have with it fear, guilt, hostility, emptiness, in all their various forms:

- Fear can appear as worry, anxiety, dread, or timidity.
- Guilt can show up in your life as shame, self-hatred, self-righteousness, or perfectionism.
- Hostility will manifest itself as hate, resentment, bitterness, revenge, or cruelty.
- Emptiness can show up as loneliness, depression, discouragement, despair, meaninglessness.

These are all symptoms of death.

As if that were not enough, these symptoms of death not only have this immediate effect upon our feelings, but they actually go on to settle into the body and affect our physical functioning. As many of us, perhaps, have already found from our various experiences of death, we can develop nervous twitches, tics, rashes, eczema, ulcers, stuttering, heart attacks, cancer, and many other diseases. This, literally, is death. We are producing death in our experience if, as Christians, we continue to live and think and act like the world lives and thinks and acts. If, on Monday morning, we go right back to living just like everyone else does, and reacting

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like everyone else does, living for the very reasons they live for, death will be produced in our lives. You can see this in the world around. All around us we see testimony to the fact that fear, guilt, hostility, loneliness, and emptiness are the results of thinking like the world thinks.

What, then, is living with the mind set on the Spirit? It is facing all these things – seeking to make money, having fun, fulfilling yourself, even seeking a degree of fame – but nevertheless realizing that God is at work in this. He supplies the power to do these things. Expect him to be at work and to be glorified in all these things. What will be the result of this kind of living? According to this, it produces life and peace, two marvelous qualities.

What is life? Once again, if I may summarize all that the Scriptures say on this, life includes four basic things that are opposite qualities to death:

- If death is fear, then life is trust, hope, and confidence.
- If death is guilt, then life is a feeling of acceptance, security, and assurance.
- If death is hostility, then life is love, friendliness, kindness, and reaching out to others.
- If death is emptiness, then life is a sense of well-being, fulfillment, excitement, vitality, and fullness of life.

With life comes peace, which, of course, is an inner calm, a quiet spirit, a remarkable sense of being able to cope and to handle life. That is what comes when the mind is set on the Spirit.

But the apostle does not stop with that; he gives us the reasons why this is true. In Verse 7 he explains why the mind set on the flesh produces death:

because the sinful mind [or the thinking of the flesh] is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. {Rom 8:7 NIV}

That is what is wrong. The mind set on the flesh brings death because it is hostile to God and it can't obey the law of God. It opposes it, in other words. Anybody who thinks that life consists only of making money, pleasing himself, having fun, and

gaining a degree of notoriety is hostile to God. That thinking is against God. As James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble," {Jas 4:6 NIV}. It scares me to think that whenever I am trying to live for myself, for my own advancement, that God is lined up against me, he resists that kind of thinking. That is why James 3:16 can say that "where jealousy and selfish ambition is, every evil work is present," {cf, Jas 3:16 KJV}. God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble.

Although it is not stated here, the implication is clear. The mind that is set on the Spirit pleases God. That is what God wants; and God gives grace to that, he advances it and helps it. He works on behalf of one whose outlook on life is not that of proud confidence in self, but is one of humble trust in the living God who is ready to work with him and through him to do whatever needs to be done. That is the difference.

In Verses 8 and 9 there is a parenthesis which I think the apostle brings in because he wants to show us the difference between a Christian who lives "according to the flesh" and a non-Christian, who is "in the flesh." These terms are entirely different and need to be carefully recognized as such.

Those controlled by their sinful nature [literally, it is *those who are in the flesh*, who live in the flesh] **cannot please God.**

You, however, are controlled not by your sinful nature [i.e., *you are not in the flesh*] **but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. {Rom 8:8-9 NIV}**

That is as plain as you can make it. Nothing could be plainer than that. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. You see, you cannot tell if a person is a Christian by what he does at any given moment. He may do exactly the same thing as a non-Christian, and he may be very cruel, vindictive, natural, lustful, and sinful in every way when he does it. At that moment, you cannot tell any difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. But there is a difference, Paul says. One has the Spirit of Christ in him, the Holy Spirit, and eventually that will make a fantastic difference in his behavior. The other

does not, and he will continue in sin and even get worse and worse.

In fact, the apostle suggests by this that the actions of a non-Christian may actually be much better than those of a Christian. There are non-Christians who are kinder, more thoughtful, and more gracious than Christians. People say, "Look at them! If their lives are so nice and pleasant, surely they must be Christians." But it is not necessarily so. He that does not have the Spirit of Christ is none of his. The difference will show up in the ultimate tests of life. When the crunch comes, one will collapse and fall and the other will rise and, eventually, conquer. A Christian can live "according to the flesh" even though he is not "in the flesh." Those distinctions have to be made very clearly.

Verses 10-11 are the apostle's conclusion in this matter. This is what he is aiming at:

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. {Rom 8:10-11 NIV}

That is a great statement. Notice, first of all, the helpful teaching about the Spirit here. The term *Spirit* is used. He is called *the Spirit of God* and *the Spirit of Christ*. Then it is made clear that the Spirit actually is the means by which Jesus Christ himself is in us. All this refers to the work of the Holy Spirit. These terms all refer to the same thing. By means of the Spirit, Christ is in you. And if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin. You may not realize that, but it is true.

The problem is, our bodies are yet unredeemed. As a consequence, they are the seat of the sin that troubles us so. And the sin that is in us – still there in our bodies – affects the body. That is why the body lusts, the body loves comfort, and the body seeks after pleasure; that is why our minds and attitudes react with hate and bitterness and resentment and hostility. Sin finds its seat in the body. That is why our bodies keep growing old. They are dying, dead, because of sin.

I have been watching some of you through the years. Although I haven't noticed much change in myself, I have noticed that you seem to be deteriorating.

You are growing older and getting weaker. Your hair is turning gray, you groan and creak where once you leaped and ran. And if you don't believe that people get older, I invite you to come up here and take a look at what I'm looking at. Our bodies are dead because of sin. For one who is not a Christian, that is the whole story. The body is dead, and so is the spirit. It is falling apart, and will continue to do so.

But that is not the final answer for the Christian. The spirit in the Christian is alive because of the gift of righteousness. Christ has come in and we are linked with him. Paul puts it so beautifully in Second Corinthians 4:16: "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day," {2 Cor 4:16 NIV}. That is the joy of being a Christian. Though the body, with the sin that is within it, is giving us trouble and difficulty, tempting us, confounding us at times, nevertheless, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. Sin has its seat in the actual physical body, and it rises up (as Paul describes in Romans 7) like a powerful beast. Stimulated by the Law, it can rise up and attack us, overwhelm us, and conquer us. But we have an answer. It is put very beautifully in First John 4:4: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world," {1 Jn 4:4 NIV}. In other words, the Spirit of God within us is stronger than the sin that is in our bodies. Therefore we have strength to control the body. That is what Paul is saying in Verse 11:

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. {Rom 8:11 NIV}

Unfortunately, many of the commentators say that this verse refers to the promise of the resurrection at the end of life, when God is going to make our bodies alive. But that is not what Paul is saying. He is talking about the Spirit in us, giving life to our mortal bodies. Now, a mortal body is not yet dead. A mortal body is one that is subject to death. It is dying, but it is not yet dead. Therefore, this is not talking about the resurrection. Later on Paul will come to that, but in this chapter he is talking about what the Spirit does in us now. He says that though sin in our mortal bodies is going to tempt us severely, and at times rise up with great

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power (we have all felt the power of temptation in our lives, this urgent, almost irresistible desire to do something that we know is wrong), we must never forget that because our human spirit has been made alive in Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God himself dwells in us, we have the strength to say, “No!” to that expression of evil.

We cannot reverse the processes of death – no one can. Our bodies are going to die. But we can refuse to let the members of our bodies become the instruments of sin. We do not have to give in. We can refuse, by the power of the Spirit within, to let our members be used for that purpose:

- We don’t have to let our eyes look at wrong things. We can say, “No.”
- We don’t have to let our tongues say evil, hurtful, sarcastic, and vicious things; we don’t have to let them lie. We can say, “No,” to that.
- We don’t have to let our ears hear things that are hurtful.
- We don’t have to let our minds give way to thinking about things in a wrong and vicious fashion. We don’t have to!
- We don’t have to let our hands be used for wrong purposes.
- We don’t have to let our legs and feet lead us into places where we ought not to be.
- We don’t have to let our sexual organs be used for wrong purposes.
- We don’t have to let the members of our bodies be used wrongly.

That is what Paul said back in Chapter 6, Verse 12:

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have returned from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. {Rom 6:12-13 NIV}

That is as plain as can be. We don’t have to sin. By resurrection power, by the power of the one who raised Jesus from the dead and who lives in us, we can say, “No!” to these temptations and desires for evil that are expressed within us. That is why, in Chapter 12 of this letter, Paul says: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship,” {Rom 12:1 NIV}. And we can do that.

In Verses 12-13, Paul gives his conclusion. He tells us we have only one obligation:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to our sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die [literally, *you are about to die*; death becomes your experience in your present existence]; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. {Rom 8:12-13 NIV}

You will live, with all that means in terms of security and trust and fulfillment and vitality and joy and peace. Notice that Paul stresses that this must be done by the Spirit, that is, simply by believing what the Spirit of God has said. That is the way you act by the Spirit – by faith. When you believe that God has said that these sins in your body do not need to be there – that they can be controlled, they have been crucified with Christ, they are worthless, they cannot help you, nothing worthwhile can come from them – then you can say “No” to sin and you can live by the Spirit. Then you can make money, have fun, gain fame, and fulfill yourself. And through it all, God will be glorified. You will manifest, in your present experience, joy and love and peace and the grace of Jesus Christ. The very righteousness which the Law demands is fulfilled in those who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. That is beautiful, isn’t it?

At the close of World War II, a picture appeared in a magazine showing a soldier in conflict with a tank. I remember the picture vividly because it was in color and it showed a tremendously huge army tank bearing down on the tiny figure of the soldier, about to crush him. How frightened he was, as this massive tank was about to overwhelm him. The picture was designed to show the odds

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involved when a foot soldier with a rifle faced a tank. Then it showed what happened to that soldier's odds when the bazooka (a rocket launcher) was invented. It showed him standing with a bazooka in his hands. It was the same soldier, but he had a different weapon. The next picture showed the tank, shrunken in size, with the soldier at least equal in size, if not a little larger.

This is what Paul is saying to us. Without the power of God released in our lives, we are like an infantry soldier in the presence of a tank. We cannot do a thing. It is too much for us. But, by trust in the power of the living God at work in us, we can rise up in the face of temptation, and, armed with the bazooka of the Spirit, we can say, "No" –

and make it stick! We can turn and begin to live as God intended us to live.

The question this raises, then, is this:

Why not live?

Why spend most of your Christian life weak, and pitiful, and constantly experiencing guilt and fear and loneliness and depressions and discouragement?

Why not live?

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly," {cf, John 10:10 KJV}.

Paul is simply describing how we might, indeed, *live!*

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