



## *When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do*

### *"Recalculating Route"*

Romans 8:5-8

You know I love tech-stuff but I must admit I've had my fair share of problems with GPS.

Now GPS is really important for me because I tend to get lost pretty easily. Not really 'lost' so much as I don't know exactly how to get where I'm going even though I've been there before and am in the vicinity.

Not long ago Geno and I were coming back pretty late at night from attending a board meeting for Calvary Chapel of the Antelope Valley. After the meeting we stopped by to visit with Pastor Mike Morris and his wife, Mary. His house was out of the way and I couldn't get back to where we had started so we consulted my Garmin GPS.

All I needed to do was find Hwy 14 towards Mojave. Instead the GPS voice kept directing us to a back road, Tehachapi Willow Springs Road. That route would get me to Tehachapi and then I'd pick-up the 58 toward home.

We thought it was directing us to be axe-murdered! Man, is it dark and weird out there!

We stopped and told the GPS we just wanted to get back to an address in Lancaster. From there we found the 14 & headed home along the more familiar route.

Our destination was being dictated by the set-points we gave. We would ultimately get to our final destination but the route could be very different depending on what we were set upon.

Our text in Romans eight tells us that we can “set [our] minds” (v5). Where we set them dictates our route as we journey homeward toward the mansions Jesus is finishing construction on for each of us in the heavenly city, New Jerusalem.

Romans 8:5 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, the things of the Spirit.

There is disagreement among commentators over whether Paul was contrasting nonbelievers with believers or if he was contrasting two different ways of a believer setting his or her mind.

Paul has been talking about our struggle as believers with the flesh - that inclination, that influence we all have residing within us to indulge our appetites in sinful ways. I think he is describing the sad possibility that even as believers we can still “set [our] minds on the things of the flesh.”

New Testament scholar Gordon Fee gives this definition for “according to the flesh.” In the flesh is the condition of humanity “before and outside of Christ.” To walk in the flesh is to walk on our own, outside of Christ’s redemptive work, outside of the power of the Holy Spirit. Whether we do seemingly noble things or incredibly wicked things, if they are done without the Spirit of God, they are done in the flesh.

Perhaps this clarification will help. We tend to think of “the things of the flesh” as blatant sins. Setting our mind on the flesh can mean that we give priority to the material realm over things that are spiritual. While we might not be committing heinous sins, when we give the material world priority we are living just like we did before we were saved only cleaner.

I’m suggesting that, as a believer in Jesus Christ, we can set our minds on the material world and find ourselves on a route that will still get us home but not be the way that promotes spiritual growth.

Or we can “live according to the Spirit” and set our minds “on the things of the Spirit.”

Notice Paul didn't just say, "set your mind on spiritual things." No, he first said, "live according to the Spirit." He was reminding us that the Holy Spirit of God, the third Person of the trinity, now resides within us. Since He is a Person and not just a force or an influence we can listen to Him and "live according to" the comfort, the counsel, the conviction that He gives.

Then, after hearing from Him, we can choose to set our minds "on the things of the Spirit."

Let's say you are the passenger in a vehicle and you know exactly where you are going and how to get there. But the driver has consulted some other source and is going out of the way. He keeps missing key intersections and freeway transitions.

You will eventually get to where you are going... But he should have listened to you. You might say he should have 'minded' you, obeyed you, or set his mind by your directions.

I remember the first two times we went to the coast from here. If I had asked, rather than just looked at a glovebox map, I would NEVER have taken Hwy 198 to the 101! Nor would I have stayed on Hwy 41 all the way to Morro Rock! No, I would have done what any normal person does - take the 41 to the 46 to the 101.

Think of the Holy Spirit as the God Positioning Spirit - a heavenly GPS directing you along your route.

I don't say that in any way to detract from the Holy Spirit, but only to emphasize in an everyday illustration that we sometimes ignore Him along the royal route to Heaven when, really, He knows the way we ought to be traveling.

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

When you set your mind on the flesh you are "carnally minded." It's another way of saying the same thing. In fact, "flesh" and "carnal" are the same Greek word.

When facing a problem, we have a tendency to put our best intellectual or physical effort into motion. We draw on the best in our “flesh” to get the job done.

If you set your mind on the flesh and are carnally minded “it is death.” That doesn’t mean you’re not saved or you are living in habitual sin. It means your efforts and activities are all being done in a physical energy that lacks the life of the Spirit of God.

You can compare it to a person on life support. Their own life is gone and machines are keeping systems working. In our case the things keeping us ‘alive’ are all works of the flesh. If I removed them, if I pulled the plug, I would see that my efforts have no life, no leading, from the Holy Spirit.

Francis Chan wrote,

We are not all we were made to be when everything in our lives and churches can be explained apart from the work and presence of the Spirit of God.

Outwardly there may be little difference between the activities, even the seeming successes, of the carnally minded and the spiritually minded man. Or, to put it another way, I can be carnally minded but appear to be accomplishing much of a spiritual nature.

The example I always like to use is one we experienced together as a congregation. Some of you remember the Sunday I had to announce that we were not going to be able to afford to build on our 5 acre parcel. There just wasn’t enough money.

We felt our only options would have been, for us at that time, carnal. Fund raisers and appeals and the issuing of bonds and those kinds of things just did not seem to be the way of the Spirit. How can you get up and give the glory to God when in reality it was because of a slick campaign that the funds were raised?

So we just put the brakes on the new building. And immediately God opened the door for us to purchase this building at a fraction of the cost of building from scratch.

One test that your setting is spiritual rather than carnal is the presence of “life and peace.”

- “Life” describes the outward effect you are having on others. They are feeling grace and not condemnation from you.
- “Peace” describes what you feel in your own heart. You’re not agitated, trying to make or force something to happen.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

“Enmity” means *hostility* or *opposition*. When I set my mind on worldly, material priorities I am opposing the things God wants for me. I can even be hostile to obeying the Lord.

- I don’t choose to forgive, or forebear, or be patient, or show longsuffering.
- I do choose to manipulate or intimidate.
- I do want to receive recognition for serving the Lord.

The carnal mind “is not subject to the law of God.” It is not subordinate to the spiritual intent of God’s Law. I may be keeping the letter of the law but I am failing to keep its spirit.

I can be angry, bitter, resentful, rude, etc., all the while thinking I am walking with God and that my reactions are justified.

It’s great that we don’t commit the really big sins, but aren’t you always surprised in those New Testament lists of sins when something we consider less ‘sinful’ appears alongside them? Earlier in Romans, in chapter one, Paul listed “backbiters” and those who were “disobedient to parents” along with fornication and murder.

We should be growing more sensitive to sin itself, not just our sins. It’s relatively easy to keep from murdering someone. Not so easy to keep from backbiting them or gossiping about them.

The carnal mind cannot become subject to the law of God. It will always be at odds with God until I am out of this body and with the Lord.

Romans 8:8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

To the extent my priorities are worldly and material I cannot please God. Period. End of discussion.

Other people, other believers, can look at me and envy me for my seeming success and spirituality. But if my methods are carnal then it is all an outward hypocrisy.

How does this work out in practical, everyday living? Let's use marriage as our example. When a couple is experiencing problems often their first solution is to do something in the realm of the material. They move to a new house or city; they establish a date night.

Nothing is automatically wrong with those things. But they are not in and of themselves spiritual.

Usually the real problem in the marriage is an underlying spiritual issue. There is resentment... bitterness... unforgiveness. The mind of one or both spouses is "set" on things like that, things that are carnal and of the flesh.

Those things must be dealt with spiritually. A new house or a dinner date won't overcome them. One or both spouses must be broken and reset their mind(s) on the things of the Spirit.

Those of you who use GPS in your car have heard the voice say, "recalculating route." It's usually when you miss a suggested turn or direction.

Christians and even entire churches sometimes need to recalculate their route because they have been set on the flesh rather than on the things of the Spirit of God.

I operate from the assumption that we all want God's best for ourselves. In this case, it is to "live according to the Spirit."

Since we want God's best, to "live according to the Spirit," here is what we ought to do:

1. Take an honest appraisal of your recent decisions or current trials and ask yourself if you are putting your best flesh forward or relying on the Holy Spirit's love and leading.
2. Ask God the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sense of His indwelling presence. After all, He is a Person and He lives in you!
3. Then "mind" any leading you get from Him. Recalculate a route in your marriage or ministry with Him definitely leading.