



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

### *"I'm Flesh Out"*

Romans 8:9-11

It has become popular to refer to believers as "Christ followers" rather than "Christians." It's the latest edgy thing to do. It's proponents think it is more real, more committed.

I guess I can see that. But it seems to put too much emphasis on me rather than on the Lord. "Christ follower" touts my decision to take discipleship to the next level and leave the average believer behind.

Christian, on the other hand, was a name given to believers by nonbelievers. They listened to what believers were saying, then watched their lives, and concluded they were like Christ. To me that indicates that Jesus was doing something in them and through them. The emphasis is on Him, not me.

Our passage tonight is all about God doing something in me and through me while others observe.

**Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**

We've seen in past studies that "the flesh" is that influence, that inclination, that we find at work in us to satisfy our physical appetites in sinful ways. We've said that as long as we remain in our current physical bodies we will struggle against "the flesh."

Context is also very important when you are seeking to understand the Bible. Here in verse nine Paul uses the familiar term, "the flesh," but the context is a little different than we're used to.

Let's start with Paul's observation, "if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you." He's addressing believers - all those who have been born-again.

We might therefore use the word "since" instead of "if." "Since indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you," then two things are true of you:

1. "You are not in the flesh," but
2. "[you are] in the Spirit."

After all this talk about our struggle with "the flesh" he says, "since you're a Christian you are not in the flesh." I guess that could mean you should not yield to the flesh; but that's not exactly what he said.

Since you are "in the Spirit" you are no longer "in the flesh" - even though you still struggle against "the flesh."  
Huh?

Perhaps an illustration will help. Think for a moment about the birth of a baby. For months he has been in the liquid environment of his mother's womb. Starting in the third trimester he makes the motions of breathing and in this way moves amniotic fluid in and out of his lungs. The flow of amniotic fluid into the lungs is believed to be important in lung development.

Before birth these breathing movements have nothing to do with getting oxygen. The baby gets his oxygen from his mother through the placenta and umbilical cord. True breathing begins just after birth

When delivered he is thrust into a whole new environment. It's an environment of air rather than liquid. He is fully equipped for his new environment and his lungs take over so he can live in the atmosphere of the earth.

Probably the most common description of getting saved is that we are born-again. Jesus used the term in His *Nic-at-night* talk with Nicodemus.

Nicodemus wondered if a person could go back to the womb and be born a second time. Jesus explained that He was talking about a spiritual birth using physical birth as an illustration.

In fact, Jesus mentioned that the first, physical birth involves liquid while the second birth involves the Spirit of God.

When a person is born-again he is (like a baby) delivered to a new way of living. We are given the Spirit of God and our own previously dead spirit is made alive. It's like taking our first real breath and entering a whole new atmosphere.

It is in that context that Paul said, “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” Just like you’d say to a person, “You can’t go back into the womb,” Paul was telling us that we have been delivered to an entirely new way of living.

Sure, believers can still sin. We always will struggle with “the flesh.” But here Paul was establishing that you have once and for all been born-again into a whole new way of living.

“Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” The “Spirit of Christ” is another name for God the Holy Spirit. It’s a name that reminds us of Jesus’ promise that after His death and resurrection He would send the Holy Spirit to live within us.

Among the many shades of meaning we could discuss, the one thing that strikes me about this last phrase is that the Holy Spirit living in me is what equips me to ‘breathe’ in this new atmosphere I’ve been born into.

It behooves us, then, to study the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And when we do, one of the first things we learn is that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a force, Who is God. Thus we need to get to know Him, to understand Who He is and how He speaks to us.

So I am no longer “in the flesh” but don’t I still contend with the flesh? Aren’t I still in my body? Yeah, but...

**Romans 8:10** And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

The reading again here is “since Christ is in you.” Paul is still talking to believers in these verses.

“The body is dead because of sin.” My body is “dead” in the way that God told Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would surely die.

Adam ate and he was dead. Not immediately, but ultimately.

So with me and you, our “bodies” are dead. Not immediately, but ultimately. Because of “sin,” my body is dead. It can’t pass into eternity.

But within this “dead” body of mine I now find “life” because I have been declared righteous by God.

I don’t know if this is a great illustration, but I was thinking about Jesus’ comment to the Pharisees that they were like white-washed tombs. They looked beautiful on the outside but inside they were full of dead, rotting flesh.

This comment of Paul’s is sort of just the opposite! Outside my body is dead. For me and you, outside we look like dead, rotting flesh.

But inside we have the Holy “Spirit” giving us “life” because we have been declared “righteous” by God. We are exactly the opposite of the self-righteous Pharisees.

Another illustration of this same idea is where you read that we, as Christians, have the treasure of the Gospel in earthen vessels. Outwardly we look plain and ordinary. But we contain the greatest treasure the world has ever known - the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Again it's "since," not "if." Paul is telling believers that "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you."

For sure I am looking forward to the resurrection from the dead. Even more so, I am looking forward to the rapture of the Church. But Paul was talking about life now, not in eternity.

My "body" may be "dead," but it is the only body I have until the resurrection or rapture! Thus God "give[s] life to your mortal bodies through His" indwelling Spirit.

We've been talking a lot in Romans about our bodies being influenced by the "flesh." It's that principle we find at work that seeks to influence and incite us to satisfy our normal physical appetites in sinful ways.

Our bodies can also be influenced by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Even though dead, we can live and offer spiritual life to others. I guess we are the walking dead - walking with the Lord in a newness of spiritual life while all the while dead and dying.

You know what all this means? God has chosen to reveal Himself to others through you.

Pastor and author Bob Deffinbaugh, graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, talks about Christians in terms of the incarnation of Jesus. He says,

In the incarnation of our Lord, God chose to manifest Himself in the human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. [There is also a principle of incarnation we often neglect]. The principle of incarnation is more general: God has chosen to manifest Himself through humanity.

There is a sense, then, a very limited sense, in which Jesus is incarnate through you. Here is an extended quote to clarify what Diffenbaugh means:

The Lord Jesus was God, and at His initiative He added humanity to His deity. We, on the other hand, have become one with God because He sought us out and gave us new birth through His Spirit. Secondly, in our Lord's incarnation perfect humanity was added to His undiminished deity. We are neither divine nor sinlessly human. We are sinful human beings who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and who have become one with God through new birth. We are not "gods;" rather God is in us and we in Him (cf. John 17:21-23). It is one thing to become "partakers of the divine nature" (Second Peter 1:4) and quite another to fully possess a divine nature (Hebrews 1:3). He is the Vine; we are the branches (John 15:5). He is the Son of God (Hebrews 1:8); we are sons of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14).

Keeping all that in mind, we are being reminded in these verses in Romans eight that God has both called us to live in a way that is consistent with His character and our calling, and He has also provided the miraculous power to do so in the Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I can, right now even in my "dead" body, reveal the life of Jesus Christ as I yield myself to the influence of God the Holy Spirit.

If you don't like the connotations of the word 'incarnation' when applied to Christians, author Jerry Cook uses the term, 'strategic placement.'

He writes,

You are called not so much to do great things, as to be a great person - and that person is Jesus Christ. The Church is the resident presence of Jesus in the world.

No matter how big church attendance is on Sunday, it will never penetrate the culture with Jesus. The reason is clear: The church on Sunday is experienced by the church community; it is only observed by the unbelieving community.

However, Monday through Saturday, the church operates in the experience of non-believers. It lives on their turf, moves in their society, and operates in their culture. On Monday Jesus becomes incarnate through you. And because He can be seen and touched, He can be received or rejected. True evangelism is possible.

This, I believe, was Paul's intent in these verses. God wants to make Himself known through you.