

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

The Spirit of Jesus and God's New Humanity: Indwelt by the Spirit *Romans 8:5 – 11*

The Contrast in Minds

⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,
but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death,
but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

The Contrast in Relationships

⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God;
for it does not subject itself to the law of God,
for it is not even able to do so,
⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,
if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Life by the Spirit

¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,
yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

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

Introduction: Donating My Kidney

We're continuing tonight how God is making a new humanity, even here at BC. Specifically, we're going to explore who the Spirit of God is, and how having the Spirit of God inside us is essential to being God's new humanity. I want to answer three major questions during our time: 1) Who is the Spirit of God? 2) What difference does the Spirit make in our lives? 3) How do we experience the Spirit?

Let me tell you a story to begin. Over two years ago, I gave a gift to my wife's brother: one of my kidneys. Paul, my brother-in-law, was at a crossroads. Healthy kidneys normally filter out toxins from your bloodstream. Those toxins make your urine yellow. They need to leave your body. But Paul's kidneys weren't filtering those toxins out. So his skin had an unhealthy yellow tinge to it. Being Chinese, he looked especially weird. The lactic acid that your muscles give off when you're sore after a workout was not leaving his body, so he felt tired and sore. Potassium, which we need in small quantities, was building up in his bloodstream, and unfortunately potassium is what is injected into death sentence prisoners in large quantities to send their hearts into cardiac arrest. Paul was in danger of heart failure at age 33. Although dialysis was an option, it wasn't a good one in his case. His dad wasn't eligible because he had had heart surgery before. My wife Ming was an option but she had already delivered each of our two children by C-section, and I felt like that was enough for her. I was the best option. I was 34, so relatively young. And male kidneys are bigger and could filter more blood. So we went to the hospital. I had never had surgery before, so I was nervous. The surgeon had told me what would happen. I would become unconscious. They would turn me on my side. He would make an incision right above my belly button, through my abdominal muscles, or what little I have left after my swimming days. They would put two catheters into my side which had small scissors at the ends. When the surgeon put his hand into my gut, the catheters would snip my left kidney loose, and it would roll right into the surgeon's hand. Then they would stitch me up and put the kidney in Paul's right side, under his own kidney. So, as they sedated me, I thought about all that, and I wondered, 'Am I going to die?!?' I prayed, 'Lord...' and then passed out. Meanwhile they did all that. As soon as the surgeon put the kidney into Paul, it began to filter out the poisons. He peed yellow, as he should. Within 48 hours, his creatinine levels dropped from 13 to 2, and 1.6 is normal. So when I got up and saw Paul, he looked great. His skin color was already looking normal.

They didn't cut through much muscle for him, so there wasn't that much incisional pain. It was like getting a new oil filter in your car. He was feeling better than he had felt in many months. But I felt awful. I said, 'Stop the morphine. Give me that vicodin!' I think that's a good parallel because all of us have a disease called evil or self-centeredness or sin, in us. We need healing from it. And the Spirit is what Jesus gives us to make us new.

Context:

We are in Paul's letter to the Romans, as we've been journeying through it all year. We started in the fall with hearing how God has great news for humanity, because humanity has been sick. But even while we refused the treatment of the God who loves and heals us, God started a new humanity in Jesus and places the new life of Jesus in us by His Spirit.

I. Who is the Spirit? Just so that we are sure who the Spirit is, let's look ahead to v.9 – 10. In these verses, we are going to see that the Spirit is One with God the Father and Jesus Christ. 'However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [notice how God and Christ are One], he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you [notice how the Spirit in you is the same as Christ in you], though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.' So, if God is Christ, and Christ is the Spirit, then the Spirit is God Himself. Here, clearly implied if not stated, is the unfathomable Being we know as the Trinity.

II. So what difference does the Holy Spirit make in our lives? Let me say again that if you are used to thinking about Jesus in legal terms, then the Holy Spirit probably doesn't make much sense to you, fundamentally. Look at this chart.

	WESTERN	EARLY CHURCH
Framework:	Legal (judicial)	Ontological (being)
Sin is...	Wrong actions	Wrong condition
Jesus took our...	Punishment	Sinful nature
Jesus is the...	Victim	Victor
God changes...	His mind about us	Jesus' humanity, then ours
God gives us...	Forgiveness	New humanity, by the Spirit

You see, if you think in a legal framework common to both Catholics and Protestants, then you think that sin is fundamentally wrong actions; Jesus died to take our punishment; so Jesus is just the innocent victim; God changes His mind about us, by giving us forgiveness while leaving you the same sinful person as before. Not only do you probably feel more guilty than before, but that model makes the Holy Spirit unnecessary. Why do you need the Spirit, really? But if you think in an ontological framework common to the early church and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, where sin is a wrong condition, where our humanity has become partially corrupted, then the only true answer to that is that we need a new humanity. So Jesus took our sinful nature, was victorious over the evil that he was tempted to do. God changed Jesus' humanity into a new kind of humanity, and then gives us his new humanity by his Spirit. The reason why God became a human being named Jesus was to ACQUIRE our disease. Second, it was to have a human body in which to DEVELOP THE ANTIDOTE to the disease. JESUS CLEANSED HIS HUMANITY OF HUMAN SELF-CENTEREDNESS through his moment by moment choice to never sin, as he drew upon the power of the Holy Spirit living in him. He even put the disease to death by dying on a cross. But then God raised Jesus as a fresh, new humanity – a God-drenched humanity – perfectly fused with the love of God. And God made Jesus into a spiritual organ donor. Now, by inviting us to Jesus, God can now give us a gift: the Spirit of a fresh new humanity that is just like Jesus because it actually comes from him. God's way of healing humanity is by the Spirit of Jesus. Why do we reach out to people here at BC and beyond? It's because this is God's mission: to place his Spirit in as many people as possible.

I just have to tell you explicitly that the Spirit is the key to living as a Christian. When I was younger, I thought all this talk about the Holy Spirit was just psychological mumbo-jumbo designed to get me to do more things. But then I thought about it. If Jesus was only our example, and he was something we had to live up to on our own, then we'd be under a whole new Law, more terrifying and more impossible than before, because who can duplicate the life of Jesus??? Christianity would be lifeless with Christ outside of us. But he is not outside of us. He is IN US. This is what makes Jesus different from everyone else. Everyone else in your life will stand at a distance from you and demand things. Only Jesus comes right here [in the heart]. He says, 'Let me live my life out through you.' The only way life with Jesus can be hopeful, restful, or joyful, is if the Spirit of Jesus is real and settles in us.

Difference #1: Alone or With the Spirit: v.5

(SLIDE 5) Now in verses 5, Paul explains how this practically works out. He begins with a contrast between life without the Spirit and life with the Spirit. Look at the way he phrases it: 'For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.' I've got to be honest. The first time I looked at this, I asked, 'WHAT IS PAUL TALKING ABOUT?' Let's first figure out who Paul is comparing. Is Paul contrasting super-Christians with Christians who are mediocre or half way down the road to backsliding? NO. This is a comparison between the new humanity and the old humanity, between those who have the Spirit of Jesus, and those who do not. We just read v.9, where Paul defines what it means to be in the flesh and in the Spirit. 'However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of Christ dwells in you.' That is the definition of a Christian: One who has the Spirit is by definition 'in the Spirit.' One who does not have the Spirit is by definition 'in the flesh' or 'according to the flesh.' This is a definitional comparison between the old humanity and the new humanity.

So look at the difference between the Spirit makes. The first difference is in your mind. Now this does not mean that the Christian life is just rational, and non-emotional. But it is in your mind that you recognize if you are alone or if you have Someone Else's help. The mind is essential in relationship. Those who are 'according to the flesh' – meaning just living in their ordinary humanity – just think of themselves and their own interests. If you're like this, you think you're basically alone. And since you don't recognize any power or help outside of yourself, you rely on yourself, so you try to fill yourself with things from somewhere else.

Illus: For example, some people try to fill themselves with alcohol because that is what helps them relate to people. They have some kind of insecurity, and being filled with alcohol actually helps them feel empowered in a different way than they usually are.

Illus: Or, some people try to fill themselves with a sense of self-esteem that comes from wealth and power. I read a NY Times newspaper article from a few weeks ago. It's about a support group for women who were or are dating guys who are bankers, who are of course having a hard time nowadays. It says: 'They shared their sad stories the other night at an informal gathering of Dating a Banker Anonymous, a support group founded in November to help women cope with the inevitable relationship fallout from, say, the collapse of Lehman Brothers or the Dow's shedding 777 points in a single day, as it did on Sept. 29. Some women in the group said the men in their lives had gone from being aloof and unattainable to unattractively needy and clinging. Others complained of being ignored — one, who called herself A.P., wrote on the blog that three weeks had passed without her boyfriend "asking a single question" about her life. Another wrote, fearfully, that her beau had told her to make a list of their favorite New York restaurants before the bad market forced a move to the Midwest. For Christine Cameron, the recession became real when the financial analyst she had been dating for about a year would get drunk and disappear while they were out together, then accuse her the next day of being the one who had absconded. "Next time you are stressing over some finance guy, remember that he is just a math-club nerd," one woman wrote after recounting a breakup. Another, though, seemed chagrined, after her boyfriend told her to "grow up" and stop "complaining about vacations and dinner" since he had to "fire 20 people by the end of the week." Despite the seemingly endless stream of disparaging remarks and shaking heads, some of the appeal of dating a banker remains. "It's not even about a \$200 dinner," Ms. Petrus said. "It's that he's an alpha male, he's aggressive, he's a go-getter, he doesn't take no for an answer, he's confident, people respect him and that creates the whole mystique of who he is." What were they wanting to be filled with? Wealth, power, prestige, or the love of someone wealthy, powerful, or prestigious? What do you fill yourself with, really?

For others of us, we don't know how to fill ourselves. It's clear when you say things like, 'I have no strength left to care about that person' or 'that issue.' If you're in the flesh, you cannot ask for help outside of yourself because by definition you are alone, apart from God. So you think about yourSELF: the limits of yourself, how to empower yourself, how to motivate yourself, and anything line of thinking that assumes that the self is all we've got. So in our mind we are either alone, or we are helped by God.

Difference #2: Death vs. Life: v.6

The Spirit also makes the difference between death and life, spiritually speaking. Look at this in verse 6: 'For the mind set on the flesh is death [that is, spiritual death which leads to other kinds of death¹], but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.'

Illus: Let me share with you how I tasted death before I asked Jesus to live in me by his Spirit. I noticed that I could get a lot of admiration being a good student and good athlete. So I threw myself into being a 4.0 student with morning and evening swimming workouts of 2 hours each. I was getting up at 4:30 in the morning to go to practice, outdoors in the winter time. It was painful, but when I'd win these races, my name would get announced over the PA during homeroom. God was not in the picture, so all that was left was me and other people. And I could feel those other people looking at me, and it felt good. It made me feel alive. But then the moment faded. And I found out something sad. The very people I wanted to be friends with, I had no time for, because I was so busy trying to earn their respect, I was performance oriented, and I had very little room for real friendship. And the more I thought about myself, the more I found other people annoying, I was becoming more sarcastic, and I was even becoming cruel in my thoughts towards other people. I was dying, spiritually and emotionally.

Maybe the death is different for you. Maybe you feel like you're dying because you feel defined by your parents' divorce or some other bad family relationship, and you feel trapped within yourself. Who can change you? Maybe you feel like you're dying because you think like my friend, seeing how limited human love is, even your own love, yet you long for so much more. Are you trapped within yourself?

Illus: After World War I, the Humanist Community signed the Humanist Manifesto which said that because man is basically good, all wars previous were caused by religion, and we would have no more wars because religion is on its way out. Humanity was now changed; that was their great hope. But then World War II came, which had nothing to do with religion yet caused more devastation than any other war, and they had to edit that out of their Manifesto. Their hope was shattered because humanity had not changed. In fact, the 20th century was the bloodiest century in history, and religion had nothing to do with it. Again, what does this mean? The humanists who excluded God from their thinking may want to have genuine hope that one day human selfishness will be overcome, but THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FOR IT, AND NO REASON WHY THIS HOPE SHOULD EXIST WITHIN HUMANITY. If we are limited to what we ourselves can do, if there is no one that can come in from outside and change us, then there is no rational reason for hope. We will always have the same problems: war, poverty, racism, and sexism. Will anything ever really be solved? Does hope live or die apart from God? The mind set on the flesh – the self – is death. But the mind that acknowledges the Spirit is life.

In all these cases where we feel like we're dying, trapped within ourselves, we need help from outside ourselves. We need the Spirit of Jesus!!! Our perspective will change. We will see reality in a new way, thus Paul says that we will think about 'the things of the Spirit.' The Spirit that was concentrated in Jesus will now flow through us. And Jesus gives us his Spirit to fill us with his life and love.

Illus: When I gave my life to Jesus, and Jesus gave his life to me by the Spirit, I didn't feel anything special. There were no fireworks, or visions before my eyes. Maybe my heart beat a little faster for a little while, but that was it. But when I would read about Jesus in the New Testament, I felt like something was happening. I felt a sense of conviction. That is one of the things the Spirit does. The Spirit connects us to Jesus and makes us aware of the places Jesus wants us to work in us. He grows our small hearts into bigger hearts. For me, that especially happened whenever I read about Jesus calling us to care for the poor. I felt like the rich man to whom Jesus said, 'Sell what you have, then come follow me.' Then the Spirit gave me a picture of myself as a river bed, and the water of the Spirit of God was trying to flow through me, but there were all these branches and rocks and other obstructions, and those things were being untangled and swept away so that the water could flow more freely. A year after I graduated from college, I moved into East Palo Alto, CA, which in 1992 had the highest capita murder rate out of any city in

¹ Remember how Paul uses the word death. It first means Spiritual Death, which is a separation from God our life source, then Character Death because we become Self-Centered rather than God-centered, then Relational Death because if you're Self-Centered, relationship ultimately means nothing and will become less. Emotional death follows, which is loneliness, bitterness, cutting yourself off from intimacy because you're afraid of getting hurt. Down the line are Physical Death and finally Eternal Death. They are all bound together; but the most important, in terms of what Paul is saying now, are the Deaths that we experience here and now, in this life.

the nation. I moved into EPA in 1995. I was being mentored by Jose and Jennifer Espinosa, and met a lot of people they knew and served. I moved into the most dilapidated apartment complex I had ever seen. Cockroaches were on the ground. Kids played near these huge dumpsters. Drug dealers could make quick drop-offs and getaways because it was near a freeway. During my first night there, I slept on the floor with my sleeping bag because I didn't have a bed yet. I woke up a couple of times because I felt a cockroach touch my hands. I had a hard time falling asleep because my I could feel my heart beating so strongly. But it wasn't because I was afraid. It was because I felt more alive than I ever did in my life before or since. I was living the life that Jesus desired for me. That is life. That is what it is like to live by the Spirit – it is to be ever growing in sensitivity to the nudges and the leading and the conviction of the Spirit living in you to pour the life of Jesus through you to bless others.

What is striking is that Paul adds the word 'peace' to the contrast being drawn. Why does he add 'peace?' I think it is because running throughout this letter is the idea of Jew and Gentile – former enemies – coming together in Christ and becoming one community in peace. There is peace with God that begins when the Spirit of Jesus enters into us. And that peace extends through us to others.

Illus: How many of you have been in a love triangle situation? One summer night, one of my guy friends and I discovered that we both were interested in the same girl. Now I hope that you never get into a love triangle, but if you do, pray!! We were both shocked. Neither of us knew what to do. And let me tell you, we both had all these fears flash before us, like gossip, backstabbing, other people taking sides. It would have been really easy at that time to feel trapped by our own feelings, or trapped by our limited ability to respect each other, or trapped by our limited ability to forgive each other. But both of us looked beyond just ourselves, to Jesus Christ who lived in us. He allowed us to say, 'Why don't we both keep getting to know her and accept the uncertainties. Whatever we do, we will respect each other as friends. If anyone has to get hurt, it will not be for reasons of gossip or anything else. It'll just be that a relationship didn't work out.' That situation lasted for 5 months. Even though it was a struggle for both of us, Jesus was in us by his Spirit helping us. At least for me, the Spirit gave me love from Jesus to help me not feel insecure all the time, and patience to endure suffering. He kept us mature and there were NO bad moves. My friend later stepped back when he thought he wasn't a good match with her. Then when she and I got together, my friend was the first person I told. He was the first to congratulate us. We are better friends than we were before. And the best part is that two non-Christian friend of ours, who knew about this almost from the start, said, 'We're amazed that you and he handled it so well throughout the whole thing. How did you do that?' I turned to him and said, 'Well, we're Christians. Which means not just that we wanted the best for each other, but that we had power from God to not gossip, fall into accusing thoughts, and so on.' One of my friends who so shaken in his agnosticism that he read through the Bible in a year!

Now how do we apply this life and peace to ourselves? I know that you have some difficult relationships in your lives. You might feel limited to what you think you can or can't do to resolve things in those relationships. But take your focus off yourself and your own limits. Focus on the Spirit in you pouring the life and love of Jesus through you. He has the strength. And he is ready, eager, and willing to help.

Difference #3: Old vs. New Identity: v.7 – 8

(SLIDE 6) The third major difference the Spirit makes is in our identity. In v.7, Paul says, 'because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God. For it [the mind] does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so.' Now again, on the surface we might ask, 'What's so hard about not murdering, not stealing? Actually, many people agree with ethics like that.' But that is not the Law at its deepest level. The Law calls us to put God first and love others as yourself. You can't do that if you're self-centered, and if you have the limited resources of only yourself. Look at that tiny phrase, 'for it is not even able to do so.' We can read over that quickly and not think about it, but that phrase contains galaxies of implications. That's why Christians need to be very careful about trying to impose a distinctly Christian morality through government. I don't think that works, on the basis of this verse.

Perhaps the saddest part is v.8, Paul's final note of how God views the unbeliever. 'Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.' God is saddened by anyone who doesn't come to Jesus because He is creating a brand new humanity, by His Spirit. He's not interested in just making incremental improvements to the old humanity, any more than you'd want to attempt incremental improvements to an old, air-polluting car, or an old human organ that's going to give way. He wants to put Himself right into us and totally change things around! Whether it be hours of meditation, dozens of children tutored, or thousands of dollars given away to charities, if you are ignoring the new humanity God is creating, you're not dealing with the root of the human problem. And God is not interested in superficial bandaid solutions.

(SLIDE 7) In verse 9, we come back to the definitional statement of what a Christian is: ‘However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of Christ dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.’ Nowhere else in the Scriptures is there a more clear, concise definition of what a Christian is. In v.5-6, we saw how the Spirit is the key to the practical outworking of a Christian’s life. Now in v.9, we find that the Spirit defines a Christian. What makes you a Christian? You are not a Christian if you grew up in a Christian home. You are not a Christian if you go to church every Sunday, or try to do ‘Christian things.’ You are a Christian if and only if the Spirit of Christ dwells in you. Being indwelt by the Spirit is the necessary and sufficiency condition for being a Christian. That is the full and complete definition. If a friend asks you the question, ‘What is a Christian?’ you can cut through a lot of garbage by answering with this verse. A Christian is a person in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells and is alive. Our identity is different because we belong to Jesus. We don’t belong to our parents, fundamentally. We don’t belong to ourselves or to BC or just to our culture. We belong to Jesus.

Illus: (SLIDE 8) In urban communities like the one I live in, we see billboard signs that say, ‘We Buy Ugly Houses.Com.’ This is an agency that is looking to take advantage of poor people who want to sell their homes so they can fix up the homes and sell them to someone else who can pay a lot more money. But what if there were someone who came to buy houses so they could move in with the current tenants? It’s like, ‘Hey, can I move in? I’ll make your life a lot more exciting! I’ll fix up your house so it’s a lot more inviting, a lot more warm, a lot cleaner, a nicer place for people to be...’ Jesus is like that. He buys ugly houses: us. But he doesn’t swoop in to make a profit. He comes in by his Spirit to live in us, to make us more inviting, more warm, more clean, more nice for people to be. That’s what it means to belong to him.

(SLIDE 9) Now the last two verses clarify for us how we can experience the Spirit. Paul says in v.10 – 11, ‘And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness.’ This simply means that the body is destined to grow old and fall apart one day. It’s been exposed to sin, and everything sin touches dies. But while the Spirit lives in us, God can and will make use of our body. Verse 11: ‘But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells in you.’ Basically, that is a restatement of 6:13, ‘Present yourselves...and your members [your hands, arms, feet, legs, tongue, mind]...to God,’ and 6:19, ‘present your members as bondslaves to righteousness.’ It’s just another way to say it in light of the indwelling Spirit. Let’s give ourselves and our hands, feet, eyes, voice, and everything to the Spirit so he can use us!

III. Finally, how do we experience the Spirit? (SLIDE 10) Now the word for Spirit in Hebrew is *ruach* for wind or breath. In Greek it’s *pneuma*, where we get the word ‘pneumonia’ and it fundamentally means ‘breath.’ The Spirit is the breath of God. In creation, God took Adam’s earthenware body and breathed life into it. The same thing happens in the new creation, with the new humanity. Jesus breathes life into us by his Spirit, the Spirit which is concentrated *in* his very self. So first and foremost, whenever we read about Jesus in the New Testament, something is happening in the spiritual realm because the same Spirit who lived in Jesus now lives in us. And we have a connection to him. The more we breathe him in, the more his Spirit can shape us. This etymology gives us a clue to answering the most personal question related to the Spirit: How do we know when the Spirit is leading us? Sometimes when the Spirit leads you, you feel something in your physical body. A few people last year felt like the Spirit of Jesus lifted burdens from their shoulders or heads, or felt like the Spirit warmed their hearts, or even that the Spirit touched their bodies somehow. But the fact that the Spirit means ‘breath’ suggests that over time, the Spirit will lead us in a way that feels like breathing. It will feel natural, like the way we think about oxygen being in our body – we don’t think about it, and that’s exactly the point. Over time, I believe we won’t always be able to tell if it’s us or if it’s the Spirit. If it is true that Jesus became one with us that we might become one with him by his Spirit, then it makes sense that over time, Jesus by his Spirit shapes our hearts so that they way we feel is guided by him but it feels like us feeling. He will shape our minds so that they way we think is guided by him but it feels like us thinking. God created us in His image. Although we sinned and tarnished that image, Jesus through his Spirit is restoring that image in us. So the longer we walk and talk with Jesus and love Jesus, the more we become like him by his Spirit. God has always wanted to relate to us this way, where it’s actually unclear when He’s leading us and when it’s just us. He said in Psalm 32, ‘Don’t be like the horse or mule, which need a bit or bridle, some physical external thing to lead them.’ God always wanted to lead and guide us from within, by his Spirit.

Now there are two special challenges that Core and Staff wanted to make with you. Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday, which means that 40 days from tomorrow is Easter, the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection as God’s first new human

being. That 40 day period is called in the Christian community, Lent. The Christian humanitarian organization World Vision has written a prayer guide called 40 Days Towards Justice