

## Romans 8 (12-14) – Where the Spirit Leads You

Let's talk for a moment about how salvation comes about in your life, and the difference between justification and regeneration. God causes you to be raised from the spiritually dead to be spiritually alive. You are given faith, by which you repent toward God and believe in Jesus Christ. And a great exchange takes place. Jesus takes the punishment for your sin, and gives you the benefit of his righteousness. Based on that, you are justified, in other words, declared righteous by God. You've been forgiven of your sins, and saved by God's grace. And you have been born again, or regenerated, which means you have been given a new nature, a new heart, with new desires.

So, justification is when you are declared righteous in Christ and given a new standing before God. This changes your identity. But it does not change your daily life. However, regeneration does. Being born again, regenerated, affects the way you live your life and who you are on the inside. And Romans 8:12-14 declare that with the new birth comes a new pursuit of holiness.

Vs.12 begins with the words "*So then.*" Paul is applying what he said in vs.9-11. Romans 8:9-11 is talking about the changes that take place when someone is regenerated, or "born again." And these changes are all described as indicative statements of fact. You have passed from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the Spirit (vs.9). And your body, infected by sin, is going to die (vs.10). But the Spirit has given you eternal life (vs.10). And now, the Spirit enables you to live a godly life (vs.11). And when Jesus returns, you will receive a new body, free from sin and death (vs.11). As Philippians 3:20-21 says – *...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

In the meantime, you are to fight your bodily passions by means of the Spirit. It isn't that your physical body is "all bad." Rather, it is that your natural appetites stand in the way of spiritual growth. As Paul said in Romans 7:18 – *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the*

*desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* But now, in Romans 8:9-11, there has been a change. And those changes are the reason you can be obedient and pursue God and grow in your knowledge of him in the way he wants you to. And Paul describes the process in vs.12-13.

*So then, brothers, we are debtors – We all have a debt, we are all under an obligation, we all owe something. And to that extent, we are all owned by something. We are all slaves. You see, every person is a slave, either to themselves, or to God. Before you are saved, you are a slave to your sinful nature. You live according to your natural, human desires. Ephesians 2:1-3 says – And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But when you are saved, you have been liberated. Ephesians 2:4-5 says – But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.*

In other words, when you are born again, you have moved out of the realm of the flesh. And Paul declares *we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.* In other words, you are no longer constrained to live like a slave to your sinful nature. And now, you can live according to the divine nature, to do God's will, by the power of God's Spirit.

Vs.13 starts with, "*For if.*" What follows this "if" is indicative of what will happen as you obey or disobey the call to holy living. The *if you live according to the flesh you will die* refers to a declining knowledge of God in your experience, the failure to earn rewards in eternity, and a decreasing witness for Christ. The *if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live* means that you will gain a greater experiential knowledge of God, you will earn greater rewards in eternity, and your life will become a greater witness to the power and worth of Christ. You will be fulfilling one or the other "if" in your life and experience. Life or death; which do you want?

This *you will die* is referring in general to eternal death, not physical death. And so, this is speaking of an unbeliever. Those who have not been born again by the Spirit of God are still in the realm of the flesh. They are slaves to their sinful nature. And they are headed to hell. But those who have been born again, are now in the realm of the Spirit. They are no longer obliged to obey their old sinful nature. And they are headed to heaven.

However, this indicative has an application to your life right now. This “if” describes not only how unsaved people are headed for eternal death. But also, how saved people can live a life which denies the spiritual power in it. Now, of course, no believer will continue to live according to the desires of their flesh as the main emphasis of their Christian life. Because they are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. And as vs.14 says, “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*” In this context, being led by the Spirit is not some mystical movement, it is being led to *put to death the deeds of the body*.

This is not to say that we do not sin anymore. But we are no longer living in that realm. We are citizens in a different kingdom. Therefore, we no longer live according to our flesh, but according to the Spirit. We will still stumble and fall, we may be stubborn and rebellious at times, but it is not the main characteristic of our life. A continuous defiance is not led by the Spirit.

This *you will live* is the contrast to the first part of vs.13. And it refers to eternal life in the presence of God. This is a statement of fact that believers are being led by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body. The phrase “*the deeds of the body*” refers to our unredeemed body and its fleshly appetites. The Spirit of God leads the believer to put to death the deeds of the flesh. But it is a constant battle, like the weeds keep trying to grow back, but we must continue to pluck them from our life.

Vs.13 is pointing out the connection between sinful living and death, and the mortification of sin and life. Living according to the old nature is in the direction of eternal death. Living according to the new nature is in the direction of eternal life. In his classic work, “*The Mortification of Sin,*” the

Puritan John Owen said, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” Growing in grace by putting to death the deeds of the body will produce an assurance of your salvation. A right direction leads to rightly produced assurance.

God saves us from the flesh, and he wars against that flesh in us. And so, Paul tells us first in verse 12, we ought to grow in grace because we are under obligation, and then in verse 13, we ought to grow in grace because sin kills and putting sin to death brings life. So, he’s giving you a second reason for growing in grace, and a second way of being assured of your salvation.

Now, since we have seen that it is *by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body*, let me apply what we have learned so far in terms of being filled with the Spirit. You are being filled with God’s Spirit as you are being filled with God’s word. *To be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18) is the same as *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly* (Colossians 3:16). In Ephesians 5:18, your Bible version may say filled *with* the Spirit, or filled *by* the Spirit. So, you may question whether the Spirit is the agent who fills us (by the Spirit), or the content of that filling (with the Spirit). I would suggest that it is both.

And the results of being filled are the same. The result of *be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18) is *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Ephesians 5:19-20). The result of *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly* (Colossians 3:16) is *admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (Colossians 3:16-17).

If you want to gain a rock-solid assurance of your salvation, a deep experiential knowledge of God, earn greater rewards in eternity, and become a powerful witness for Christ, you need to put to death the deeds of the body. Which means you need to be filled with God’s Spirit. Which means you need to be filled with God’s word. That’s where the Spirit of God is leading you.