



HEART HOMEWORK:

## FLESH VS. SPIRIT (STUDY ON ROMANS 7-8)

By Matthew Black

*Instructions: Study Romans 7:21-25 and all of Romans 8 and then read the following article and answer the questions that follow.*

**T**he clearest understanding of our deliverance from the old life is found in Romans 6 through 8. In Romans 6, we learn that Christ defeated our old life when we died with him and were “raised to walk in newness of life” (see Rom 6:1-3). We are now to be “instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom 6:13).

The end of Romans 7 tells us about our relationship with our old life. When we read “law” do not think of the torah or the Bible, but a law like a sign that commands you to obey, like an impulse. So where you see “law”, read “impulse”.

*Romans 7:21-25* | So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,<sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

We are told here, regarding the old life (that is, the fleshly rebellious nature), that Jesus has destroyed it, killed it, put it to death. **All that remains now is a “body” or corpse “of death”** (vs 24). We are wretched when we carry that rotting corpse around, or when we crawl back to the coffin of our sin and lay down with our old dead life. It stinks of death and is filled with maggots. Don’t let the maggots of your old life crawl on you. So that’s the flesh—nothing good can come of it. It’s the old defeated rebellious part of you, and it can only serve the impulse of sin. But your mind, or the inner part of you, the part of you that is born again by the Spirit, can only serve the law and impulse of God. This is a reference to Ezekiel 36:27, that the Spirit will “cause you to walk in his statutes and keep his judgments.” **The Spirit will accomplish the righteousness that is promised in the new birth.**

To those of us who have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, grace saves us, and grace enables us to grow and be transformed. You can’t grow by trying to merely get rid of your idols or by throwing your idols away. You have to look at Christ. It’s not enough to say, “I’ll no longer be angry or anxious. I’ll no longer despair or allow lust or this world to enslave me.” That’s not enough. **You can’t fix yourself.** You have to turn and rest in Christ by faith. How do we do rest in Christ and live life in the Spirit?

Romans 8 gives us four ways we can walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16): sonship, suffering, sanctification, and the sweet love of God.

*The first way to walk in God’s blessing is sonship.* Read **Romans 8:1-17**. These verses tell us about sonship, that is, you are a child of God with all the benefits and rights of a true Son. God treats you as if you were Jesus. You must remember you are God’s child, and it is therefore impossible that he would ever forsake you.

*The second mindset of God’s blessing is suffering.* Read **Romans 8:18-27**. Paul says that God uses suffering to build character in us. He names various types of suffering later (“tribulation, or distress, or

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword,” vs 35), but here he says it causes us to groan and long for the new creation at Christ’s coming. Embrace suffering if you would walk in the Spirit. Suffering keeps you from falling in love with this world. It wakes you up to the brutal cruelty of the self-life and this present darkness and rebellion against God.

*The third worldview for God’s blessing is sanctification.* Read **Romans 8:28-30**. This is the mindset that everything in life is directed by God’s glorious providence for your good and his glory. Nothing that is happening is actually hurting you. Even death has lost its power over you. No type of suffering should discourage you because God is fulfilling his purpose of Christlikeness in you.

*The final way of God’s blessing is knowing the sweet love of God.* Read **Romans 8:31-39**. Nothing can separate you from his love! Think of the worst betrayal or the worst health problem or the worst loss you’ve suffered. God has never stopped loving you. None of these things, not even your own sin, can separate you from the love of God in Christ.

## LIFE IN THE FLESH

In Romans 7:23, Paul describes a Christian as carrying around a dead corpse of his old life if he listens to or adopts the thinking of the fleshly mindset.

### *Questions about the Flesh*

1. How is the meaning of “law” in Romans 7:21-25 like an impulse to obey?
2. Since Christ has defeated the old self, Paul describes the old self as a “body of death” or literally a rotting corpse (vs 23). How are the sinful choice in your life like crawling into a coffin with a dead corpse?

## LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

In Romans 8, Paul gives four mindsets to adopt in order to live life in the Spirit (sonship, suffering, sanctification, and the sweet love of God).

### *Questions about Sonship (Being a Child of God)*

3. What does it mean that there is now “no condemnation” for God’s children (Rom 8:1)?
4. In Romans 8:3-4, how did Jesus defeat the old life of sin and rebellion for his children?
5. In Romans 8:5-8, the child of God has two choices: living according to the flesh or living according to the Spirit.
  - a. What does it look like in your life to live according to live according to the flesh?
  - b. What does it look like in your life to live according to the Spirit?
6. In Romans 8:5-8, what are ways as God’s child that you might “set your mind” on things of the flesh? And what are some ways that you might “set your mind” on things of the Spirit? Hint: we

cannot trust our flesh (rebellious nature and selfish tendencies—we must only trust the word of God.

7. In Romans 8:9-11, we find two concepts about your mortal body as God’s child. Paul says the body can be “dead because of sin” (vs 10), but he also says if God’s Spirit lives within you, then God “will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (vs. 11). Dead people don’t have power or life. When we choose to sin, we are like a dead person and have no power to live for God. We are not acting like God’s dear children.
  - a. With this in mind, in what specific ways in your life does your sin and sinful tendencies make you “dead because of sin”?
  - b. In what specific ways in your life does the Spirit of God “give life to your mortal body” when you surrender to him each moment in faith?
8. In Romans 8:12-13, Paul gives a rule that “if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (vs 13). “Flesh” sums up what we often call “the world”: all that is characteristic of this life in its rebellion against God. As children of God, we know that living in the worldly flesh mindset (such as sinful anger, anxiety, despair, or enslaving desires) is a life of death and rottenness. What kinds of fleshly mindset are you most tempted by, and as God’s child, what have you done so far to defeat these things?
9. List out all the benefits of being a child of God in Romans 8:14-17.
10. In defeating the flesh life, how can you practically remember that you are a child of God in your temptations? Example: *“I know I am not condemned because I am a child of God (Romans 8:1).”*

#### *Questions about Suffering*

11. In what ways can you testify with Paul that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (vs 18)?
12. How does suffering make us prize and treasure the life to come and count the deceptive promises of this world and the flesh as worthless?
13. In Romans 8:18-25, we read that God’s children “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (vs 23). This is referring to the time of adoption when we receive our full inheritance as God’s children, with new bodies in a new creation when Jesus comes again at the second coming. Right now we are under the bondage of suffering in this broken world, but one day “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the

freedom of the glory of the children of God” (vs 21). How has God drawn you much nearer to himself in your suffering and groaning than in your times of ease?

14. In Romans 8:26-27, the Bible says the Spirit increases our prayer life during our suffering and groaning. What is the Spirit’s special ministry to you when you are suffering?
15. In what ways can you testify with Paul that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (vs 18)?

*Questions about Sanctification*

16. In Romans 8:28-30, we are told that there is a mindset of the Spirit that helps us endure the temptations and sufferings of this life: that God’s purpose for all things is to “conform us to the image of his Son” (vs 29). How can God say that “all things work together for good”? What is the good that he’s talking about?
17. Describe a difficult trial in your life where God helped conform your heart and character to be more like Christ’s.

*Questions about the Sweet Love of God*

18. In Romans 8:31-39, does our suffering and failures and sins mean that we are in any way separated from the love of God?
19. What is it that tends to beat you up and harass you in your doubts about God’s love?
20. How can we be “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (vs 37)? In other words, how do you keep the attacks and lies that creep into our minds that God somehow doesn’t love us and is punishing us in our suffering?
21. As God’s children can anything in all God’s creation make God to stop loving us (vs 39)?
22. Think about a strategy to walk in the Spirit walking in your sonship, trusting God in suffering, being transformed in sanctification, and resting in the sweet love of God. What would that look like for you? (*The key is not focusing primarily on your sin or sinful tendencies, but focusing on Christ and who you are in him instead*).