

Secured by the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] to keep the book of Romans in front of you to chapter 8 and as you know over this six weeks we're going to spend time just working our way working through this marvelous chapter well let's pray again to God and ask for his help father we ask again for your spirit especially to be working in our hearts pray that as we listen to your spirit inspired words that you would take those words and you would allow it to do something to us to help us to see that who we really are in Christ so we just ask again that you be at work this morning all this we pray in the name of Jesus amen now the very first play by Shakespeare I read was Hamlet it's actually not quite as intimidating a read as you might think and I'm sure that many of you already know its most famous line to be or not to be that is the question but there's another line in Hamlet which is not quite as famous but wouldn't sound out of place in the 21st century and it is this line this above all to thine own self be true this above all to thine own self be true in other words be true to yourself that sounds very contemporary doesn't it and actually if you're a believer in Christ this morning that's also the message of today's passage be true to yourself now that might come as a surprise to you after all doesn't Jesus call us to deny ourselves well it all depends on what we mean by that slogan doesn't it earlier this year I read an insightful book called you guessed it be true to yourself and in the opening chapter of that book the author shows that when someone says be true to yourself they could mean up to five different things but to simplify his categories I think they fall into one of just two meanings in the end either you mean it in a subjective sense or you mean it in an objective sense and so if someone means it subjectively they are saying hey man don't conform to society's expectations of you look inside yourself find the real you what do you most value who do you most identify with or ask who feels most authentic to you what resonates most with you oh once you discover what that is just live according to that and ignore what everyone else says don't do something just because society dictates it haters are gonna hate anyway so just listen to your heart and that's how it's normally put be true to yourself according to your own internal subjective criteria what about the objective sense well the author of this book gives us an example he tells us about a member of an international cycling team this team ended up in scandal but not him as he was the only person on the team who didn't do drugs and cheat why didn't he give in to the peer pressure well his basic answer was i was brought up to be a person of integrity so what he was saying was that he actually stuck to his principles he was being true to himself but actually he isn't quite saying the same thing as the people earlier he's not just referring to his own internal subjective criteria rather he's saying that he believes

that there is really such a thing as honesty and integrity and moral standards that all people should conform to including the standard of don't do drugs and cheat and he didn't look inside himself to find the real him and live according to his own rules rather he looked outside himself to locate his true identity its objectives and this morning romans 8 will say be true to yourself but not be true to yourself in the subjective sense not be true to yourself according to how you feel not be true to yourself by looking inside and trying to find meaning and authenticity there romans 8 will say be true to yourself by looking outside yourself be true to who god says you now are be true to the you that is in christ you see last week we saw that in christ we are no longer condemned god holds absolutely nothing against us and that is amazing news this is who we are we are completely totally utterly forgiven and so on sunday you know we felt so encouraged so positive so optimistic as we heard that we've been liberated but then on monday all that went up in smoke when we got resentful at work again we said a few careless and bitter words again we decided not to extend the helping hand to someone in need which we later regretted again over and over again we keep messing up and so the thought keeps popping in our head you know am i really liberated am i really a proper christian since i keep on sinning who am i really for as we look inside ourselves we find

that we are so unstable so malleable so fickle one moment we have good intentions another moment we have dark desires and we don't always understand why it's hard to be true to yourself when we when you don't really know yourself but when we look outside ourselves to god's unchanging word instead to tell us who we are we'll be secure we'll be ready to go and that's what romans 8 verse 5 to 11 is going to do for us today is a word that describes and defines us rather than a word that knacks and needles at us and so if you're christian today get excited and make sure that romans 8 is open in front of you because you're going to discover who you are but the way paul is going to do it is by first helping us to see who we no longer are in this section paul mentions two kinds of people there are those in the flesh and those who are in the spirit and over and over again he keeps contrasting them and so verse 5 there are those who live according to the flesh but and notice the but there are those who live according to the spirit or verse 6 the mind governed by the flesh is death but notice the but again the mind governed by the spirit is life and peace there's a direct contrast these are mutually exclusive categories you cannot be in one or the other at the same time and so who is paul talking about well verse 9 makes it clear those in the spirit have the spirit of god in them which means they belong to christ in other words they're christians and those in the flesh do not have the spirit of god in them which means they don't belong to christ in other words they're not christians and so the contrast here is simply between those who trust in christ and those who don't and paul says if you trust in christ you're no longer in the flesh that's who you no longer are you're no longer in its realm you're no longer under its authority you've transferred out of its domain a long long time ago i was a student at lodge i had to wear the uniform i had to listen to the teachers and obey the rules regarding the wearing of badges and the cleaning rosters and so on but i'm not a present student of lodge anymore i don't sit under the headmaster's control it's no longer who i am and in christ you are no longer in the flesh the word flesh here isn't talking so much about our physical selves or our bodies or anything like that but refers to our human nature in its rebellious state that's probably why those of you with older nivs will have the phrase sinful nature in your bible instead for notice what are those in the flesh like verse 5 gives us the character of those in the flesh those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires in other words they don't want god and remember this is who you no longer are you see look at these people what are they like the mind comes into focus throughout verses 5 to 7 and what is their mind like now usually we associate the mind with mental capacity but this isn't quite what we're talking about here because think about what you are doing when you set your mind on something it has your complete attention you're preoccupied with it you're totally immersed in it you're devoted to it fervent about it zealous for it and those words that i've just used attention preoccupation immersion devotion fervent zeal they're not just intellectual words are they it's the language of desire and dedication of emotion and commitment so just imagine if you have your mind set on going to japan for a holiday you will devote yourself to checking the air asia or the mass pages for the best deals you'll be preoccupied with finding recommendations of hotels to stay and places to visit you will be excitedly chatting to your friends about your upcoming dream vacation you have your mind set on it or just imagine if you have your mind set on cooking the best italian meal ever for your father's birthday you'll spend hours making sure to record and watch the right cooking shows you join the right facebook group and ask for tips there you would sacrifice your afternoon to make sure that what you cook up for your dad is way better than what they serve at medica palace and so to set your mind on something in the way pole means here is more than just intellectual sure your mindset is involved but more than that so are your emotions and your will it's really to throw your heart into it and what the heart likes best the mind studies most and what do those in the flesh have their minds set on well verse 5 tells us their minds are set on what the flesh desires and according to verse 7 the flesh desires what is hostile to god that's what they're throwing their hearts into whatever is hostile to god that is sin now this might sound strange to us if we define sin wrongly if we think of sin only as bad behavior like murdering someone or stealing from someone or using bad language then we would be very puzzled indeed because we would have to admit that we know plenty of non-believers who don't fit this description they don't steal they don't swear they don't engage in scandalous conduct but that's because we haven't really understood the essence of sin sin isn't really about stealing swearing or scandalous behavior rather when it comes down to it sin is about self it's about enthroning the self the great christian reformer martin luther describes sin this way sin he says is in curvatus in se that's latin for curve in on oneself and that's basically what sin is about putting myself first not god we are so curved in on ourselves that everything we do is

about me me me so even though we try to think of others we discover that everything eventually comes back to being about us even when we don't realize it and so a parent might want her child to succeed academically that's not a bad thing in itself but actually it's so that she can save face in front of her peers in front of her peers a monk might remain celibate pray long prayers be very pious but still actually be doing those practices not for the sake of god but for himself as a monk luther certainly understood that and so you can be a very nice person a very pleasant and respectable person and still be in the flesh

i'm sure many of you when you weren't a christian were perfectly nice pleasant and respectable people so what's the difference between your pre-christian self and your christian self your present self well when you weren't a christian god wasn't on your mind you weren't preoccupied with his priorities or his kingdom and if you're in the flesh and let's say you're reading the bible well you might come across some of jesus's words and say oh i like that i agree with that you know i like it when jesus attacks hypocrisy and greed but then you would also inevitably read some of jesus's words and realize that you and jesus are at opposite ends maybe it's when jesus talks about putting him first before family or money and so when you come across words like that what do you do you would say sorry jesus if it's a choice between your way and my way well of course i'm choosing my way i follow me i set my mind on what my flesh desires it's not even up for debate i don't even feel bad about it it doesn't matter what jesus thinks and that's where one is exposed for who they really are but if you're a christian today remember this is who you no longer are this is who you once were but this is not you anymore why not because look again at those in the flesh this fundamental self-centeredness is characteristic of them because that is their very nature look at verses 7 and 8 the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to god it does not submit to god's law nor can it do so those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please god by definition a christian is someone who realizes that god now runs their lives not them but look at the person in the flesh there's no sense of wanting to submit to god if anything this person wants god to submit to his will there isn't room for two on the throne and the person in the flesh isn't about to let god have it and they don't because they can't you can see it there in at the end of verse 8 and scripture is clear throughout in testifying to the all-pervasive power of sin i think of the time of noah on the screen the lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time genesis 6 5 think of the prophet jeremiah telling us that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure who can understand it and so in light of sin's devastating impact theologians became accustomed to talking about the doctrine of total depravity that doesn't mean that human beings are incapable of doing good things rather it is an affirmation of how our entire being has been touched by sin

[20 : 29] as one theologian put it there is no cavern in our mind no recess of our soul and no room of our heart that is not infected with the deadly virus of sin and so if this is our character and this is our nature then there is only one direction that we can go in verse 6 the mind governed by the flesh is death that is the logical outcome after all if we keep saying to god leave me alone i don't want you butting in then one day god will say okay if you say so he leaves us alone and we reap the consequences but paul's point is if you are in christ this is not you how can it be you are under no condemnation this is not who you are and that's what paul is ultimately getting at look at how he begins verse 9 he personalizes it you however are not in the realm of the flesh brothers and sisters in christ if you are really resting on christ alone for your salvation this is not your nature this is not your character this is certainly not the direction of your life if you are really resting on christ alone you might wrestle with sin but you're no longer defined by it you don't have to be true to who you no longer are you only have to be true to who you are in christ you don't have to be true to who you no longer are you only have to be true to who you are in christ you see how in the world did we end up escaping the realm of the flesh how in the world did our nature change from one who doesn't and cannot submit to god's law and who have no inclination whatsoever to please god the typical answer is to give more law if we only tell people oh keep these rules avoid those things then we can get to a point where we can please god isn't that what religion is all about but as we saw last week the law is powerless it cannot transform you and me instead let me show you the answer romans 8 verse 5 to 11 gives by way of a story i once heard there was once a person who absolutely hated walking to school he lived close enough that it was within walking distance but he didn't enjoy it and even though his mom tried to either pooch him or else punish him to stop him grumbling he still would do so only grudgingly but one year there was a sudden change not only did he stop dragging his feet about walking to school he suddenly began enjoying it even when his mom offered to drop

him off he would turn it down he said no no i want to walk why the sudden change well you see on his way to school now he would routinely

bump into another person who was going the same way or should i say he would routinely bump into this particular girl i think you can see where this is going but do you see what changed his entire walk so to speak it wasn't some exhortation from his mother trying to puke him or to punish him it was someone who came into his life and moved his very heart they got married in the end by the way and romans 8 tells us that there is now someone who has come into our lives who can move our hearts and transform our walk the spirit of god who is he well one of the things he clearly is is holy that's how the bible calls him the holy spirit what does that mean well again we often define holiness in terms of moral purity or in terms of separation from what's impure that's not wrong but it doesn't go deep enough holiness is really about total devotion the spirit is completely devoted to the glory of god the father and god the son and so holiness is not ultimately about something negative but about something positive and by the way that's also how we're meant to see christ holy utterly devoted to god's glory we saw that last week when jesus was carefully described as being only in the likeness of sinful flesh not being sinful flesh itself and together both christ and the spirit want to achieve the same thing in us to make us like them holy devoted and that's why the spirit is also described as the spirit of christ in verse 9 not so much because the holy spirit and christ are the same person to say so is to fall into an ancient heresy called modalism but because their aims are so similar to make sure that we enter into the fullness of our salvation they want us to become holy totally devoted to god and the spirit does that by coming to live inside us just imagine that the third person of the trinity is taking residence inside of you how can that not change the very nature of who we are the spirit of god assures us that we belong to god by applying the effects of christ's perfect sin offering to us but he also moves us to become devoted to god that's what the holy spirit does to us from start to finish from inside to outside from top to bottom the spirit is there to dedicate us to god sometimes the theological word used is sanctify and the bible makes clear that this is always the work of the spirit here are just two examples on the screen to christians who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of god the father through the sanctifying work of the spirit to be obedient to jesus christ and sprinkled with his blood that's from one peter and then next from two thessalonians because god chose you as first fruits to be saved notice again through the sanctifying work of the spirit and through belief in the truth and this change of nature this transfer this transfer to the spirit's realm this work of sanctification is no less a gift of the gospel the spirit has already set us aside and cleansed us for his use this is who we are we are in christ so we now have the spirit so we now have the spirit in us and so we are in the spirit and if we have the spirit in us we will walk according to his nature our mind is governed by the spirit and if this is who we are well be true to yourself be true to who you are in christ what would the character of someone in the spirit be like verse 5 tells us he will be someone who sets his mind on what the spirit desires he's zealous to know god he's devoted to following god's agenda he's preoccupied with god's name being lifted high if you call yourself a christian today isn't that what happened to you you used to care about your own image above all nowadays you're more concerned about god's image you used to yearn for what your friend has now you're working on cultivating contentment for what you have you used to spend saturday afternoons doing your own thing now you're ready to use that time preparing bible studies for the youth group or lessons for the sunday school or slides for the sunday service if that's what it takes to help people grow you never used to care if people didn't know jesus now you ask god for courage and opportunity to invite your neighbor to christianity explored this is who you are now and though it often doesn't feel like it because you are aware of your own weaknesses and failures you have set your mind on what the spirit desires even that very awareness of your remaining sin is an indication that your nature has changed your old self wouldn't even bother to dig into the words of jesus and follow the way of jesus now you grieve when you sense that you have ignored or heard jesus and you lament when you feel that your desire for god is not there that is a gift you are being true to who you are in christ but there is a challenge implied in this as well for as you've listened to what i've just described and it just sounds utterly completely foreign to your experience if you find yourself with no longing for jesus or not even a longing to long for jesus then you need to ask yourself is my mind actually governed by the spirit

or did my earlier description sound more familiar to you about how when your way and jesus's way clashes you simply go your way and it's not even up for debate verse 9 says if anyone does not

have the spirit of christ they do not belong to christ and so verse 9 compels me to ask you bluntly who are you where is your mindset on what does your heart indicate look it really doesn't matter how many years you've been in church i don't care if your parents or grandparents and your extended family and your entire tribe are christians you could have been baptized and have a certificate to prove it you could even have been led to say a memorized prayer at a rally and try to keep the ten commandments but if jesus is not in your life first as the perfect sin offering whom you rely upon and then as the one whom your heart desires to follow you are not a christian i'm sorry to say it so bluntly but it must be said because remember verse 6 tells us there are high stakes involved if you don't belong to christ you are on a one-way trip to eternal death and if you come to that recognition today then call to god now our very nature means that we cannot save ourselves only he can ask him to transform your nature to help you put your faith in jesus be like that man who cried out to jesus i believe help my unbelief for if you are in christ and so receive the spirit then verse 6 tells us what direction your life goes in it is life and peace in other words the end of hostilities with god and the beginning of life everlasting with him but that can still raise a question how can i be certain of this because in the present you know it sure can feel sometimes like i'm being pulled in different directions it can feel sometimes like i have a split personality with part of me wanting to go god's way and the other going my own way but paul was just says that's not surprising in verse 10 he tells us that our bodies are still subject to death because of sin in other words we're still going to die physically because christian or not we still live in the old creation we're still living in a time where sin might no longer play governor but it is still hanging around still trying to exercise its influence and so it's no surprise that our bodies still sometimes behave in the old ways it's conditioned to do so but once again paul says be true to yourself in christ because what is your true self it is a self that will one day no longer have those old bodies and those old patterns of sinful living that's the guarantee just look at verse 11

and if the spirit of him who raised jesus from the dead is living in you he who raised christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you sometimes christians might think of this world as still being locked in a battle between good and evil where both have a 50 50 chance of winning but that's not accurate the battle is already won jesus has risen and the spirit has raised him we're simply waiting for the victory party but here is the logic of verse 11 the spirit who raised jesus is now living in you and if he did that for christ and you are in christ what makes you think that he won't do that for you who are you who are you you are someone who is buried with christ and raised with christ and so here's the message of today's passage be true to yourself be true to who you are in christ don't be true to who you no longer are you are no longer a person who cannot please god you are someone who has the spirit of christ in you remember paul is not contrasting two different kinds of christians as some people have wrongly thought he is contrasting the christian with the non-christian and so what we've just said is true of all christians everywhere not just some special class of christians this is who you are my friends the world says be true to yourself we have a better message we can say your true self is in christ and by the spirit you can really be true to who you are let's pray just give us a few seconds again to digest what we've just heard father the first word that we want to come to you with is the word of praise father thank you so much that even though we were once in the realm of the flesh where we had no hope of pleasing you we had no hope of following you and yet by your spirit you have resurrected us and brought us into the realm of the spirit through your son jesus christ the world of the spirit of christ and we thank you that this is a realm characterized by life by peace by a desire to please you and so father will you help us to live up to who we really are remind us again that we are people who are buried with christ and raised with christ and that indeed if that is who we are that we would set our hearts and minds on you and your kingdom

[40 : 42] for those of us who have been feeling discouraged battling our own sin our own wrong desires i pray that this will be an encouragement to them to keep persevering to know that this is their true identity for those of us who might not actually be in the spirit but have not realized it before i pray now that you will open their eyes that you will help people to see that they need to turn to you and you alone to have life so father be at work this morning by your spirit we pray and we trust that your word will do what you have sent it for all this we pray in the name of jesus christ amen you