

Following the mind of the Spirit

We finished our study of Romans 7 last time. Chapter 7 was very dark. It described our own weakness and sinfulness that we could not attain God's righteousness no matter how hard we tried. This is the state of being bound by the law, customs, morals, and conventions, as exemplified by Mr. Law and Mr. Legalism, and wanting to prove ourselves right.

However, chapter 8 is about the bride who breaks with Mr. Law and marries Jesus Christ and receives the guidance of the Holy Spirit. 21 times in chapter 8, the word "spirit" is mentioned. The word "flesh," which is the opposite concept of "spirit," is also used to refer to the sinful nature. It refers to human nature, such as anger, violence, outbursts, jealousy, unforgiveness, and sexual promiscuity. These human natures, sins, are destroying the family and society, as well as our relationship with God. Chapter 8 teaches us how the Holy Spirit works in this battle against sin and the flesh. The Holy Spirit leads us to live holy lives as children of God. We will learn one by one how the Holy Spirit compensates for our weakness and sinfulness and leads us to live a life of faith that is pleasing to God.

See verse 1. **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" Romans 7 was the saddest and most hopeless chapter. Paul could not solve the problem of sin on his own, and he lamented what a miserable person he was. His screaming is the same to us. But those who believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ are **not condemned**. This is the main theme of the book of Romans, the grace of being justified. The Greek word for **'justified' is 'logizomai'**. Since we have been justified by Jesus Christ, we will be told that we are sinless and saved by believing in Him at the final judgment. There is no condemnation. However, we still sin as ever while we live in this sinful world, but thanks to the Holy Spirit, we are united with Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, like a bride.

See verse 2. **"Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."**

The law in 'the law of sin and death' refers to power and influence. There are many patterns of our sin. Sin has caused us to fall short of God's righteousness and has placed us under the dominion of sin. We humans have many symptoms of sin as a result of the destruction of our relationship with God. Anger, tantrums, bad habits like alcoholism, depression, narcissism, codependence, controlling people, etc. The tendency is different, but we are placed under the influence of sin. This influence eventually destroys our families and society, right? Eventually, as a result of our broken relationship with God, we have come to "death". This is the law of sin and death.

However, through Jesus Christ, we have been freed from the "law of sin and death" and

have come under the control of the law of the Spirit. **The law of the Spirit, which is the law of the Holy Spirit, restores our relationship with God and gives us life.** Life is all about reconciliation with God, hope for life, love, patience, respect, peace, restoration of relationships, and other things that enrich our lives.

Look at verse 3. **"For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so condemned sin in the flesh."**

Because of our flesh or sinful nature, human beings could not live the holy life required by the Law. The other day, in a message by Pastor Yoshiyuki, it was very easy to understand the explanation of original sin: We do not have sin because we are jealous, but we are jealous because we have sin. It is because of this **original sin** that we have the weakness to envy. Because we were born as sinners from the moment we were born, this original sin could never be solved by human beings. However, through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, God has solved the problem of our sin. Jesus Christ came into the world in the same form as sinful flesh, **100% human**, and bore our weaknesses. However, because Jesus Christ is **100% God** and totally sinless, He condemned sin in the flesh which is original sin. I want to learn the secret and love of **the incarnation of Jesus Christ** for all of my life.

Verse 4 is very important. **"in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."**

The righteous requirement of the law means to be justified. The law required us perfection, those who kept the law perfectly to be justified. However, those who followed "the flesh" could not fulfill the demands of the law and were doomed to be "guilty" at the final judgment. But for those of us who believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and walk according to the Holy Spirit, this "requirement of the law" has been met and we have been justified. This grace is a privilege and a blessing for those of us who live according to the Holy Spirit and not the flesh.

So, what does it mean to follow the spirit? It is believing in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **To believe in Jesus is to follow the spirit.** We are asked always whether we live in the flesh or in the spirit.

Verse 5, **"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."** **The Spirit desires** refers to **pleasing God**. According to the spirit desires mean that our thoughts and actions follow the Holy Spirit. Notice the word 'mind' means think and thought or thinking here.

Verse 6. **"The mind governed by the flesh is the death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."** The mind of the flesh is the opposite of the mind of the Holy Spirit.

They are mind, thinking that Satan gives. Satan tries his best to disturb even one person from being saved. That is why he makes us think the mind of the flesh. The mind of the flesh that Satan gives us hinder us from believing in Jesus. These "mind of the flesh" eventually leads people to death. On the contrary, the mind of the Spirit, or the thoughts of the Holy Spirit, bring us life and peace when we believe in Jesus.

Verse 7: "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Here 'God's law' means the law of the Holy Spirit. The attention here is that we are antagonizing God just by doing the thoughts of the flesh, even though you have done nothing wrong. Having the thoughts of flesh is first of all a hindrance to a correct understanding of Jesus Christ. It also misunderstands God and limits His power. These the mind of flesh will ultimately lead us to be hostile to God.

I want to tell you this verse for the point of today's message. John 6:63-64 "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus says, the flesh is useless. This is not to say that we can do our bodies a disservice. It is better to understand that the flesh is a concept that is not the Holy Spirit. By the flesh means obedience to the law of sin and death.

On the contrary, we know that the Holy Spirit gives life. The Holy Spirit makes us believe in Jesus. Everyone here comes to church by the invitation of the Holy Spirit. When Mr. Taka first came to Mennonite Japanese Church here, he said, "I came to this church just because it is close." When he found a good house near the church, he moved and came to the church, it was also the invitation of the Holy Spirit. I am sure that you have come to church for various reasons, but the Holy Spirit worked in you.

Jesus also taught that His Word is the Holy Spirit Himself and life itself. Belief in the Word of Jesus leads to life, and unbelief leads to death.

And, the emphasis in today's words is that we should live according to the mind of the spirit. The opposite of 'the mind of the spirit' is the mind of the flesh, which has to do with our fixed ideas. Our fixed idea can be confirmed by history. Before Copernicus proposed the heliocentric theory in 1543, people had believed in the geocentric theory. But this wrong belief changed to the right thinking with development of science.

Even more recently, in 2000, Softbank President Son announced in the media that he would create an era in which every Japanese citizen would have a cell phone. At that time, I and other people could not understand what President Son meant because we had little minds

about phones. Now, however, smart phones are widely used and have multiple functions such as phone functions, bank transactions, and immigration procedures. Our narrow imagination of the telephone had been broken in about 10 years.

By now we have learned how hard the Jews in the book of Romans had a hard time with stereotypes. They believed that only Jews who had the Law could be saved. Therefore, they did not accept that Gentiles could be saved. With the background of Judaism, even Jewish Christians who believed in Jesus Christ were obsessed with circumcision. And they thought that if they did not circumcise the Gentiles, they could not be saved even if they believed in Jesus. This fixed idea of salvation is referred to by Paul as the mind of flesh. However, the first generation of **Christians**, those who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection without being bound by this fixed idea, the law of the Jew, simply believed Jesus' words and followed the mind of the spirit bravely. As a result, they told the gospel not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Paul who a Jewish religious leader and the fixed idea of the law, had a dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ. And he lived according to the mind of the Holy Spirit, and actively dedicated to evangelism to the Gentiles in the world.

What happened as they lived with **the mind of the Holy Spirit**? History has proven this. About 2,000 years ago, when **Paul and the first Christians abandoned the mind of the flesh and followed the mind of the Spirit**, the gospel was preached even to us. It is because the first Christians followed the "mind of the Spirit" that we heard and believed the gospel in 2023, were saved, and are studying the Bible in this way. History has proven that the desire of the Spirit gave us life. At this time, the Jewish people are beginning to abandon the "thoughts of the flesh" like fixed idea and accept Jesus Christ. They are called Messianic Jews are being raised up recently. When Jesus Christ comes again, our Lord Jesus Christ will be praised and glorified by the whole world. With that hope, we should preach the gospel to all the people of the world. **Matthew 28:19, 20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** We thank God for the first Christians who followed the mind of the Spirit and were faithful to **the Great Commission of Jesus**, and for the missionaries who preached the Gospel to us.

So, what does it mean to follow **the "mind of the spirit" in our daily lives** of faith? In Mark 6, we find an incident in Nazareth, Jesus' birthplace. Jesus went with his disciples to his hometown and taught many people. But the people who knew Jesus said, "This man is a carpenter. Is he not the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Do not his sisters live here with us?" and they did not accept that Jesus was the Son of God. Because

of their fixed thinking, the mind of flesh, only a few sick people were healed and no other miracles took place even though Jesus, the Son of God, had visited his hometown. Even Jesus was surprised at the unbelief of the people.

Perhaps we, too, are caught up in the fixed idea in our lives of faith. When we read the Bible, we may only accept what we can understand and omit what we don't agree with. However, this is not the mind of the Holy Spirit. If there is something in the Bible that you cannot understand in your mind, you should pray humbly to God, asking Him to teach you, rather than denying that this is wrong or that it cannot be so.

The former president of JTJ Missionary Seminary, Pastor Yokoyama, gave his testimony about this fixed idea of faith. One day, a member of the church came to him at midnight and said, "Pastor! I'm in trouble." He said, "My friend's son is possessed by an evil spirit and is raging. Please come quickly and pray." He thought in his mind, 'I'm a pastor, but I'm not a healer. And I've never prayed for casting an evil spirit. I don't know what would happen if I prayed.' However, his church's member was so insistent that he reluctantly went with him and found that the situation was really bad. He felt that he could no longer continue to wait, so he prayed in a low voice, "In the name of Jesus Christ, let the evil go out of him!" Then, everyone was surprised, the son's seizure suddenly stopped as if it was a lie. Everyone there was astonished at this. But who was the most surprised? It was, of course, Pastor Yokoyama himself. He had not expected or believed that the evil spirits would leave by his prayer, so he was really surprised. After that, he testified that he began to believe everything written in the Bible. He said to us, "**We must not limit God.** If we limit God, we will know God to the extent that we limit Him. But if we believe in God without limitation, we can experience the omniscient and omnipotent God. He was not a Pentecostal background, nor was he a Methodist, similar to a Mennonite.

How about you? If we are stuck in our narrow thinking, we will not receive new blessings every day. The longer we live in faith, the more we are stuck in the mold. In the end, it tends to be a boring religious life. But we can pray for healing and ask for miracles when we are sick with the desire of the Holy Spirit. We can also prayerfully challenge what seems to be an impossible environment. 3 years of ZOOM services are also something we do our best with the thoughts of the Spirit. Our stereotypes of church are breaking down. We should always follow the thoughts that the Holy Spirit gives us.

Let's pray. Beloved Heavenly Father. Thank you for your Word today. It is easy for us to limit You with our own ideas. But from now on, we will live more in accordance with the thoughts of the Holy Spirit. Let us experience the Almighty God. The Holy Spirit, please teach us that God is still alive. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.