

# Romans 8:5-9a

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 September 2017

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning.

In the iconic cult classic movie, *The Princess Bride*, the swashbuckler Inigo Montoya says this, say it with me, hello, my name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die.

All right? When you meet someone for 10 minutes, maybe 15, you've got to get beyond the, oh, who are you, where are you from, what do you do, that kind of thing.

When you start actually talking with people, one of the most interesting things is to find out what their controlling passions are in life. For Inigo Montoya, his life was driven by revenge.

He was looking for the six-fingered man who had murdered his father so that he could take revenge on him, and it has driven his whole life. There are many other people that you could think of that you would, you'd not have to even think for a minute to know what is the controlling passion of their lives.

[ 1 : 25 ] Marie Curie, or Lance Armstrong, Billy Graham, or Bono, and many, many others. When you think of these people, they just, you know what they're about.

You know what drives them. You know what controls their mind and their passions. And this morning, as we look, continue in our series in Romans chapter 8, we're going to think a little bit together about the controlling passions of our own mind, of our own heart, of our own lives, and how that shapes and informs our spiritual life.

If you want to turn with me to page 944 in the Pew Bible, or any Bible you brought, Romans chapter 8, we're going to be looking at specifically verses 5 through 8 today, but I'm going to be reading the first 12 verses, first 11 verses, I'm sorry, just to give it some context, because we're kind of in the middle.

This passage is in the middle of a section, and so we're going to look at it together. So let's read God's Word together. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

[ 2 : 54 ] By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemns sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him, but if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness, 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. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we come before your word this morning.

[ 4 : 31 ] Lord, humbled because we read of these words and we hear them talk of things that we know so little of. Lord, I come this morning trembling before you, Lord, knowing my own inadequacies and my own weakness and yet asking, Lord, that you might in this moment, Lord, speak.

Lord, that your word would be clear. Lord, that you would help me to proclaim it as I ought, with clarity and with power. Lord, I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit among us, that you would be

turning our hearts towards you and that we would be knowing and experiencing the life that this passage refers to you.

Lord, help us to be, to have minds that are alert to listen for your word and hearts that are soft to receive your word and hands that are quick to respond to your word.

Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture, but it comes after Romans 1 through 7.

And as we launch into this morning, I wanted to spend just two minutes trying to get us aligned to what the argument of what the Apostle Paul has been doing from the very beginning. The very beginning of the letter, he declares in verses 16 and 17, for the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.

[ 6 : 12 ] He's saying that there is a gospel, there's a good news about what God has done for all people that has power to save us. And then he launches into, for the rest of chapter 1, all the way through the middle of chapter 3.

He launches into going deep into the problem that we have, that humanity is all under sin. Men and women from every tribe and nation, we do not worship God as we ought to.

We do not honor Him or obey Him or serve Him as we ought to, as our Creator. And that because of that, all of us, religious people, non-religious people, all people in their natural state apart from God's help are lost.

And not only are they lost, but they are under a right judgment. For as we turn away from the God who is all that is good in this world to something else, we turn to evil.

And God cannot allow evil to continue. And so we are all under God's judgment. And when we get to Romans 3, 20, we should all be despairing.

[ 7 : 25 ] What then can we do? How then can we live? Is there any hope for us? And Paul steps in and says, yes, of course there is. Now there is a righteousness from God that is revealed.

Now God has done something for you that you could not do for yourself. In Jesus Christ, He sent Him to be the perfect God-man, to live the life of perfect obedience and perfect honor and perfect worship of God that we could never do.

And then having that perfect life, He then offers Himself up and says, I will take a death that I don't deserve for you who do deserve it. I will step into your place and die for the sin, die the penalty of death that you deserve because of your sin, because of your rebellion and alienation from God.

And then He unpacks this and He talks about how glorious this is and how free this is, how it's something we could never do on our own, and so all we can do is receive it by faith. And then He gets to chapters 5 through 8, and He says, now that having been justified by God's grace, we now stand in this grace.

We have peace with God and have a grace in which we now stand that gives us a new relationship with God and a new opportunity to live out a new kind of life where we're no longer slaves to this power of sin that has controlled us and infected us our whole lives.

[ 8 : 58 ] But now there is a new life that we can have, a life toward God and unto God. And in this we find all the things that our hearts most deeply desire.

Most of all, we find our right place as being those who worship God. And in knowing Him, we follow Him. And so, this is Romans 1 through 7 in a nutshell that leads us up to Romans 8, where He comes back and He is in some ways placing a capstone on that by saying, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You are free from that penalty because of what God has done. And now there is a new life. If you were here last week, you remember Greg helped us see very helpfully that chapter 4, that God did all this in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled.

That is, that we are now able for the first time because of what God has done, to actually serve God, to actually please Him, to actually do the things that He told us to, which is actually how God defines the good life for us, right?

Following the law, the righteous requirements of the law is not meant to be seen as a burden or a duty, but instead it is a path of wisdom for those of you who are this summer, the path of rightness, how we live rightly under the God who created us and made us.

[ 10 : 33 ] And so this is the good life that God has created for us as long as we continue to walk in the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

And that's how He ends verse 4, and this is what launches us into this middle section of this argument, verses 5 through 8, where He talks about the dichotomy of the flesh and the Spirit and the significance of setting our minds on things.

So look with me again at verses 5 through 8. I just want you to see how often this idea, I gave an introduction where I talked about the controlling passions of our mind, that's trying to give new language to what Paul says here when he says, set your minds on, okay?

And we see it in all four verses, right? Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

For to set the minds on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life. For the mind that is set, in verse 7. And then verse 8, he summarizes it.

[11:43] He doesn't use the same word, but he says, for those who are in the flesh. So this is the idea Paul wants us to see, is that setting our mind is a critical part of understanding what it is that God has done for us.

And he says three things about it. He says the things that we set our mind on reveal our true nature. The things that we set our mind on determine our ultimate destiny. And the things that we set our mind on reveal our ultimate attitude towards God.

So our nature, our destiny, and our attitude towards God. And that's what we're going to look at for a few minutes this morning as we continue. So first, look at verse 5 with me again, right?

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Now this flesh-spirit language is not brand new.

We've seen it even in 8, 1 through 4, but we've also seen it in the argumentation that's come back. You see, particularly, let me read, or let me define it for you and then read two verses to help you see it a little more clearly.

[12:50] The flesh is not just our physical nature. It's not because we have skin and bone. Lots of translations, if you have the NIV translation with you today, it will say this as the sinful nature.

Paul uses the word flesh not simply to talk about our physicality, but to talk about our part of a creation that is in rebellion against God.

And it is about our fundamental nature that, if you go back to Romans 5, ever since Adam has been against God and not for him. So our flesh is shorthand for Paul to talk about all of our impulses to refuse, reject, ignore, and be opposed to God.

This is what the flesh is, right? And he juxtaposes that with the Spirit. He says, what is the Spirit? The Spirit is the Spirit of God. You see what he said in verse 2?

The Spirit is the Spirit of life that God has given us. It is, in fact, the promise that God himself, in a mysterious and wonderful way, actually comes to dwell in those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

[14:02] God hasn't just saved us and then said, hey, I hope it goes well. You know, good luck with that. He's actually given us not just even power, like use the force, Luke, but he's given us himself to dwell inside of us.

That is, the new way that we are able to live. So Romans 7, 5 and 6 say this. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

Verse 6. It's always hard to read Romans because there's so much complexity of argumentation that's going on in the background.

But what I want you to see is really clear. He's saying there was an old way in the flesh and it led to death and it was in rebellion against God. But God has given us a new way in the Spirit with God present with us that we are now able to live differently.

And so then, what Paul says in verse 5 is, if you live according to the flesh, that's what your controlling passions will be consumed by.

[15:29] They will be consumed by the things that are against God. If you live according to the Spirit, your mind will be consumed with the things of God.

John Stott expands on how we're to understand this mindset. He says, it is a question of what preoccupies us. The ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us.

Of how we spend our time and our energies. What we concentrate on and give ourselves up to. All of this is determined by who we are.

Whether we are still, quote, in the flesh. Or are now by new birth, quote, in the Spirit. Here's the thing that bugs us about this.

At least it bugs me when I read this. Right? Because I really, really want to believe the army. That I can be all that I can be. And that I can remake my world. And if I choose the right things.

[16:34] If I can set my mind on the right things. Then I'm going to be able to make myself whatever I want to be. And I want you to see what Paul has done here.

Because he's actually reversed the order. He has said, because of who you are. That is what you will set your mind on. Do you see that?

Some of you maybe watch television. Maybe some of you don't. There's a great insurance ad on right now. If you're a fisherman, you tell tales.

If you're a couple, you fight over directions. If you're a parrot, you repeat things. If you're Peter Pan, you stay young forever. And if you want to save 15% or more on your car insurance.

Yes? Geico? You're there? Okay. So. On a much more profound level. This is what Paul is saying about us. Right?

[17:36] That it is in fact our true nature. That determines how we set our mind on things. It means that our controlling passions are not actually under our control.

And we don't like that, do we? We'll come back to this. There's more. But Paul is trying to say. Remember the context. He's encouraging believers. You have been given the spirit. The if in verse 4 is not a conditional. Like, well, if you do this right, then you'll be okay. He's saying, assuming or based on the fact that I believe you are already in the spirit.

But he's laying these things out and he's saying there's an old way and a new way. And it's going to, and the things that we set our mind on then reveal our true nature.

And friends, this is when it comes home, doesn't it? Someone looked at your Facebook account. Or your text messages throughout the day. Or the things on your bedside table.

[18:49] Or if they met you in conversation for half an hour. What would they know about your controlling passions? Who would they say you are and what you're all about?

What does that reveal about your true nature? Paul's not giving an exhortation here. He's simply explaining spiritual dynamics.

But it's worth asking that question. Having laid then that foundation, he moves on to the next verse. Verse 6. He says, for to set the mind on the flesh is death. To set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.

And here he's explaining, not verse 5, but he's going back to what he said in verses 1 through 4. And he's explaining this is the reason why there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because in Christ Jesus you've been given the spirit. And because you have the spirit, which is the life-giving power, you are able to fulfill the righteous law. But if you don't have that, then you are still in the flesh.

[19:52] And you are still trying to keep a law in your own power to make yourself pleasing to God. Paul says, no, don't you see?

There are these two ways to live. And if you are living according, the mind that is set on the flesh is leading to death. This life and death theme is a powerful one.

You go back and read Romans 5 through 8. You'll see Paul is constantly saying, here's a way of life. Here's a way of death. Here's a way of, by faith, God's work. And here's a way of, by your own energy, trying to please God by keeping the law.

And back and forth and back and forth and saying, there is a way of life and there is a way of death. And by that, he doesn't simply mean your physical life. In fact, he primarily means your spiritual life. Are you alive to God? Do you love him? Do you believe in him? Do you know that he is there? Have you experienced his reality and his power in your life?

[21:00] And by death, he means, are you dead to God? Are you cold? Are you indifferent? Are you dismissive of God?

It is a deadness that Paul talks about in other places where we are unable to rouse ourselves from. It is a deadness that comes with it judgment and condemnation from God because of our alienation from him.

And Paul says that if you live, if you want to try to live on your own apart from God, you will live in the river of death. And you will feel the currents of death in your life, in your relationships, in your hopes and dreams.

And eventually that will fall over the waterfall into the eternal pool of destruction. And this passive death leads to a place that is darker than the darkest of nights, to a destruction that is greater than the worst and most powerful storm, to a place of despair that is deeper than anything experienced here.

The death that ultimately the life of the flesh leads to is a terrible, terrible place. Do not fool yourself, friends, of thinking you can dabble in the life of the flesh and kind of swim in half in one and half in the other.

[ 22 : 36 ] Paul is very clear here. There are two ways and there is not a middle ground. And the mind that is set on the flesh is death. The mind that is set on the spirit is life and peace.

And friends, this is what breaks into our lives when, by faith in Christ, we experience and enjoy the forgiveness that God has given us in Christ.

We experience this renewal of our spiritual lives and suddenly the world becomes a rich place. It's like in the Chronicles of Narnia when the winter that was never Christmas, but always winter, finally ended.

And the snow began to melt and drip. And life began to burst forth through the remaining snowdrifts. This is the spiritual life that we then have, where we care about God.

We care about what God is doing in the world. We care about who He is. And we begin to change our lives because God has done these great things for us. This is the life that we experience.

[ 23 : 46 ] And it flows from this fundamental thing where God has, you saw it in the passage at the very end, God actually brings to us a new birth and a new spiritual life that we cannot have apart from Him.

And He gives us His Spirit as the seal and the sign and as His presence with us that we have this life with Him that will now live forever. It's a beautiful thing.

Paul is saying that there is one road, flesh, you do not want to go down because the end is darker than the worst that you can imagine. But there is another way, the way of the Spirit which leads to life.

Friends, I wonder if you see how dire this is. I wonder if you believe that this is true, that there is a path of life and a path of death.

I wonder if you see how terrible sin is. I wonder if you see how destructive it is in your life now and how it is, how even more terrible the eternity will be.

[ 25 : 08 ] But I wonder if you see as well how good it is to know God and to have His Spirit dwelling in you, to have your mind set on Him so that all of your thoughts and all of your ambitions and all of your goals, all of your interactions are shaped by this great desire that God would be magnified and glorified and worshipped in our lives.

What a beautiful thing it is. And so, we recognize that that leads us to an eternal destiny with God where we have only begun to taste the goodness that God has for those who are in Him.

Right? So, even the best pleasures of this world and the best pleasures of this life are only a foretaste of what God has for us in heaven when life with Him is unfettered and unstained and unstruggled.

So, we've seen that the controlling passions of the mind reveal our true nature. They determine our eternal destiny.

And then finally, verses 7 and 8, the controlling passions reveal our fundamental attitude towards God. Look with me at 7 and 8. Paul does not pull any punches.

[ 26 : 35 ] He focuses in on the mind that is set on the flesh, right? The mind that is set on the flesh. And he says just a few things about them.

The first one is they are hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law. In fact, not only does it not, but it cannot. And then verse 8.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Paul talks about this in terms of a sense of slavery. In chapter 6, he talks about how when we are apart from God, when we are on our own, we are actually enslaved to sin. That is, it has a controlling power on our lives that we are unable to break. And that this is, for those who are in the flesh, this is our nature. This is who we are. I remember once. It's an odd memory, but I remember as a little kid, going with my mom because I was sick one

day.

[ 27 : 45 ] And I had to go with her because she had a meeting at someone else's house. And they had a German shepherd. And this German shepherd, by all accounts, was a very friendly German shepherd. But this German shepherd, for whatever reason, didn't think that I belonged.

In his nature, he did not want me there. When we showed up at the door, he bristled and barked. The dog got put away. I got put in a separate room because I don't even know what meeting my mom had.

I was just sort of given a book and a chair and said, stay here. And halfway through, this dog came, somehow was released from where he was being kept and came rushing around the corner. It's traumatic for me. You can tell having this German shepherd, you know, six inches from me, barking and growling at me.

The dog was hostile towards me. And when God looks at us in our sin, in our flesh, that's what he sees.

He sees us as those who are opposed to him. We bristle at this.

[ 28 : 53 ] We don't really want to believe that this is true. We live in a tolerant society. Can't we all get along? If it doesn't hurt someone else, how bad could it be? Romans 8 pushes us to think through a different grid.

What God sees in us as he sees us in the flesh is someone who is antagonistic towards him. Someone who is a rebel, who will not bow his knee to the rightful king. He sees someone who chooses their own independence, their own self-determined freedom, rather than submission to God.

It is a terrible place to be. Because you see here, as Paul plays this out, this hostility is something that is expressed, and it's not something we're actually able to do anything about.

If we are on our own trying to worship God the best that we can without submitting to him, without honoring him, without throwing ourselves on the salvation that he has given us in Christ, and wanting to do it on our own, Paul does not pull punches.

[ 30 : 27 ] He says you cannot do it. You cannot submit to God's law, and you cannot please him. Now let me clarify one thing here just so that we may get this right.

There are ways in which any human being is able to reflect the created goodness, the common grace goodness of what God has done in creating us.

And so we know that there are people who do good things in the world, right? We know that there are people who don't know God who still do good things in the world. And we need to be sure that we do not denigrate that unnecessarily.

But here what we see is we cannot please God in the fundamental way that would cause him to deliver us and save us from our sin.

We have no ability to do that on our own. And this message of divine inability as God's enemy again, grates against our human spirit, doesn't it?

[ 31 : 40 ] Because we want to believe we can do this. And the whole message of Romans here is that we can't. We cannot do it.

And it leaves us in a terrible place in the flesh. One Bible commentator says it this way, because God values his own glory as that which is supreme in the universe, he cannot dismiss as trivial those whose mindset is directed against the things of God.

Because they are his enemies, he punished them with eschatological, that is, eternal judgments.

So, friends, we can look at the passions of our lives as maybe litmus test, as an indicator, what's really going on, who is our true, what is our true identity, what do we really think of God?

God might be sobering to do that. But I want you to see that Paul's saying here, the passions of the flesh are disastrous.

They lead to death. They reveal our sin and our hostility to God. And they show us to be those who are enslaved to this spirit of rebellion against him. But, look at verse nine with me.

[ 33 : 07 ] Paul's not done. Paul has written this as a description primarily of the spiritual dynamics of the human heart. His exhortation is in verse nine.

But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. If, and again, if means in this context, assuming.

I'm calling you to assume because I'm writing, he's writing this to the church. In Rome. And he's saying, I'm assuming that you have the Holy Spirit. Saying there is something.

You are not of the flesh with all of its terrible consequences and all of its enslavement. You now have, in fact, something else because of what God has done for you.

Not because you determined it. Not because you strove to get it. Not because you ran after it. I often describe my own conversion as I ran after God until he caught me.

[ 34 : 07 ] Right? It wasn't me that got myself there. It was God who got me there. And even my running after him was his work in my heart. And what Paul wants to do is to end this with an encouragement.

You, as the people of God, now have the spirit of God dwelling within you so that you can be the people who can fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. You can actually live a life that is pleasing to God.

A life of worship. A life of service. A life of sacrifice. A life with eternal perspective. A life of dying to self and living to Christ. This is what God has given us.

And it is a great and a wonderful gift. You can now do what you could not do before. You can please your creator and you're God. And if you remember, you can please this one who has loved you so much that he pursued you in Jesus.

He came for you and for me. He came for us to rescue us from the flesh and to give us his spirit so that we might experience this new and eternal life with him.

[ 35 : 23 ] And what a glorious thing it is that now we have all that Christ has accomplished for us. All that he has earned for us by his life and death and resurrection is now ours.

And by taking on this new life that he has given us in the spirit, we then can allow that spirit to control our passions and to shape our lives for God's glory.

I've gone long, so let's cut to the chase. What do we do about this? First, if you are here today and you have tasted this freedom, if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, if you know that Christ died for your sin and that's the only hope that you have for salvation, then brothers, sisters, be of good cheer, be encouraged.

God has given you his spirit. You now are able to live in the patterns that live to life. You are now able to live out what Paul talks about in Galatians 5.

No longer enslaved to sin, now you can live with love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control because God has given you the spirit of God to do this.

[ 36 : 51 ] He has unseated yourself and he's put himself in the center of your spiritual life and your salvation. So now you can live unselfishly, sacrificially, giving to others for God's sake.

If you feel defeated, if you feel like, I feel like I'm trying and I don't know how, the answer is not try harder to do better, it's go back and remind yourselves of these things.

Go back and look at the cross and remember what it means that there is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus. Remember that you are now in the spirit and plead with God to revive your soul so that what is true of you, that the spirit dwells within you, would actually have the effect that it should have.

And he will help you put off the old patterns of life and to put on the new life in the spirit. If you're here this morning, maybe this is a kind of Christianity you've never heard of.

Maybe this is something new and different. Maybe you're figuring this out or exploring it. Maybe you feel the enslavement to sin in your own life.

[ 38 : 11 ] Feel like, I can never do better. Well, Paul wants you to hear this. There's another way. Start with Romans 1, not with Romans 8.

Go back to the beginning of this book. Read it. Hear what God has done for you in Christ. receive receive by faith what you cannot do for yourself.

Believe that there is a God who has loved you and died for you. And as you take hold of him by faith and as you trust in him for your salvation, know that God will bring his Holy Spirit to live in you.

He will come and dwell with you and bring this new life. what a glorious thing it will be. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you this morning.

Lord, thank you for the great work that you have done in Jesus. Thank you for the hope that it is to those of us who struggle.

[ 39 : 20 ] Thank you for the hope that it is to those of us who are lost. Lord, we pray and ask for your gracious work in each of our hearts this morning.

Lord, that the truths of this word and this passage would sink into our lives. Lord, that you will bring to us life, life in the Spirit, life that glorifies and honors you and pleases you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.