

Introduction

This is the second sermon in a sermon series from Romans 8. It's titled *The Helper* and is about the Holy Spirit and how He helps disciples and friends of Jesus. Last week, I preached about one way that He helps them. He frees them from the guilt they feel that isn't real. Today, I'm preaching about a second way that He helps them.

Years ago, I was the friend of a young attorney named Daniel, who was a typical secular person. I asked him two questions one day. First, how many times during the course of a typical day do you think about God? Second, how many times during the course of a typical day do you think about what God says in the Bible? His candid answers were, to the first, **"Once or twice,"** and to the second, **"almost never."**

It's clear that the Holy Spirit isn't Daniel's Helper. You can see why I say that in Romans 8:5-11.

According to the Flesh – Minds on the Things of the Flesh

This text identifies two categories of people. The first, in verses 5, 8, and 9 are **"those who are according to ('in') the flesh."** That designates people who aren't disciples or friends of Jesus and the condition or state they're in because they aren't. They are "according to" or "in" the flesh.

"Flesh" is synonymous with "sin." It refers to the disposition with which each of us is born. It's the overriding inclination to think, feel, and act in practice as if we're God. Apart from Jesus, we have three primary goals in life. The first is security, getting our needs met. The second is satisfaction, getting our wants met. And the third is status, being respected. Each of us is born with a systematic readiness to think, feel, and act in whatever ways achieve those goals for us. That readiness is the "flesh" or the "sin" Paul mentions here.

Notice what he declares in that regard. Those apart from Jesus are "according to" or "in" the flesh. That means that sin is an independent

power in them that they can't stand beyond. They can't get beyond its reach. It inhabits and taints every dimension of them.

Paul focuses on one of those dimensions in verses 5, 6, and 7, the mind. According to him, those who are "in" the flesh "set their minds on the things of the flesh." "Things of the flesh" are what I mentioned before: security, satisfaction, and status – and all that goes along with them. They are what those who are "in" the flesh take into account in perceiving, interpreting and thinking about things. What they don't take into account are God and His word, the Bible. They have secular minds.

The answers of my friend Daniel illustrate that for us. He rarely thinks about God or His word. He perceives, interprets, and thinks about the things that make up his life without considering God or His word at all. I asked him, for instance, "**How does God fit into the fees you charge your clients?**" His honest answer was, "**He doesn't.**" It never even crossed his mind to relate God to that. He sets his mind on the things of the flesh, getting security and satisfaction by making as much money as he can. He does not set it on God or His word.

He's typical of people apart from Jesus. They exclude God and His word from their perceiving, interpreting, and thinking about the things that make up lives – raising children, working, playing, voting, and so on.

According to the Spirit – Minds on the Things of the Spirit

Verses 5 and identify a second category of people, "**those who are according to ('in') the Spirit.**" That designates people who are disciples or friends of Jesus and the condition or state they're in because they are. They are "according to" the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11 explains what that means. The Holy Spirit dwells in them. Thus, they have two independent powers in them – sin and the Holy Spirit. Paul makes clear though that the Holy Spirit's power is infinitely greater than sin's. He writes that it's the same power that did raise Jesus from the dead and will raise His followers when He comes again. But according to verse 10, what the Holy Spirit will do to their bodies

then, He does do to their spirits now – makes them alive. He enlivens and morphs every dimension of theirs. That in turn enables them to stand beyond sin's power, to get beyond its reach, in those dimensions.

That includes the mind. We see that in verse 5. Those who are "according to" the Holy Spirit "set their minds on the things of the Spirit." "The things of the Spirit" are God and His word. They are what those who are in the Spirit take into account in perceiving, interpreting, and thinking about things, including security, satisfaction, and status. They have spiritual minds. They perceive interpret, and think about everything in terms of God and His word.

When I began practicing law years ago, I interpreted it as a kingdom ministry. The first issue I faced in that regard was the fees I'd charge. So I carefully considered if there were any Biblical principles that applied, which there were. I just as carefully considered how Jesus would charge if He were me. I finally concluded from doing so that I should charge clients on a sliding scale, based on what they could afford to pay me, up to the going rate of \$75 an hour. My point is this. My friend Daniel had a secular mind. He gave God and His word no thought at all in His legal practice. I had a spiritual mind. I gave God and His word constant thought in mine.

That's illustrates one of the most dramatic differences between those who are according to the flesh and those who are according to the Spirit. The former set their minds on the things of the flesh, the latter on the things of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's Help – Alters Our Consciousness

That difference reveals a second way that the Holy Spirit helps us. He "alters our consciousness." The "alteration of consciousness" is a psychological term. Generally, it refers to changing the way people perceive, interpret, and think about things. Well, that's exactly what the Holy Spirit does to disciples or friends of Jesus. He alters their consciousness, which is one of His most essential works.

Look at verse 9. Paul states that when we decide to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us. He fills us so that we have all of Him that we will ever have. According to the last line in the verse, there are no exceptions to that. If we decide to follow Jesus, then we are filled with the Holy Spirit, period. That doesn't mean though that we're simultaneously and completely changed.

In C.S. Lewis' fictional book *The Screwtape Letters*, a leader demon advises an underling demon about his "patient," who had just become a Christian. The leader demon holds out hope that he'll backslide and explains why: **"There is no need to despair: hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the enemy's (God's) camp and are now with us. All the habits of the patient, both mentally and bodily, are still in our favor."**

That's a critical insight and it's true. Before we decide to follow Jesus, we're in the grip of destructive habits, both mental and bodily, that direct our lives. Well, deciding to follow Jesus and being filled with the Spirit don't remove those habits. On the contrary, most remain.

But the Holy Spirit does address them. He gradually changes our minds and bodies so that new good habits replace old bad habits, one of which is setting our minds on the things of the flesh. Over time, the Holy Spirit removes that bad habit of ours and replaces it with a new one, setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. The result is that we find ourselves taking God and His word more and more into account in our perceiving, interpreting and thinking about things – and security, satisfaction, and status less and less into account.

I know that by experience. When I came here 22 years ago, for instance, I perceived, interpreted, and thought about our worship services primarily in terms of pleasing people. Will they like the song? Will they think the sermon is a good one, and so on. But now, I perceive, interpret, and think about our worship services primarily in terms of pleasing God. Will He enjoy the song? Will He think the sermon is a good one and so on. I take God and His word into account in my

perceiving, interpreting, and thinking far more now than I did 22 years ago. That is an alteration of consciousness and the Holy Spirit did it.

Our Part in the Holy Spirit's Help

Now that we know the second way that the Holy Spirit helps us, let's figure out what our part in that help is. Verse 7 tells us. We must "subject" our minds to "the law of God," that is, to God and His word. That's our call and we answer it by doing two things.

First, know more. I've talked today about the activities of our minds. They perceive, interpret, and think about things. Knowledge is one of the three underpinnings of those activities. What we know conditions or even determines how we perceive, interpret, and think about things. The more we know, therefore, the better we are at perceiving, interpreting, and thinking about them. What we need to know most of course are the facts about God and His word. So, we do that. We know more and more of those facts.

You need to have an inch-by-inch approach to this. Don't look at all the facts there are to know about God and His word and be overwhelmed. Resolve in your mind that you will learn them little by little, one by one, instead and develop strategies for doing so.

One of those strategies can be to study Sunday morning sermons. My goal in every sermon is to give you the best information about the most important matters in human life, God and His word. I want to make your personal "knowing more" easier and put a tremendous amount of time and effort in sermons that they will do that. So study and remember them.

A few months ago, for instance, I preached a sermon about criticism from Proverbs titled *Be Big*. I shared some vital insights in it. Criticism is normal and valuable. We should respond to it by being big not small. To be big means to love the critic, to learn from his criticism, and to correct our faults. Most people hear a sermon like that and forget about it. But study and remember it and all sermons as well. It's just

one of the strategies you can use to know more.

We subject our minds to God and His word by doing a second thing. Take what we know into account as we perceive, interpret, and think about things. This is something we must purpose to do. The mind is the place of our widest and most basic freedom. We can place it on whatever we choose to. So, we choose to constantly place it on what we know about God and His word as we perceive, interpret and think about things.

Let's go back to criticism again. When most people are criticized, they habitually set their minds on the things of the flesh, which are the "nerve" of the critic and the blow it is to their egos. But we purposely set our minds on the things of the Spirit instead. We take those things we learned from Proverbs into account as we perceive, interpret, and think about the critic and his criticism. We see the critic as helpful not hurtful, for instance, and the criticism as normal and valuable. That's what I do. The moment I'm criticized, I recount the things I preached in the sermon and apply them to the critic and his criticism of me.

Those then are the two things we do to subject our minds to God and His word. First, little by little, know more about them. And second, purposely take what we know into account as we perceive, interpret, and think about things.

Conclusion

Doing those two things give the Holy Spirit something to work with. And that's exactly what He does. He works with it. As we place our minds on the things of the Spirit, He responds to that. He slowly but surely changes our mental habits until we naturally, even automatically, perceive, interpret, and think about all things in terms of God and His word. The wonderful result, according to verse 6, is life and peace. We experience the goodness, joy, and rest of God's kingdom in all things. So, experience that. Let the Holy Spirit do what He wants to do to you – alter your consciousness.