

Living in Defeat or Victory?

Romans 8:9

by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Turn to the verse we studied two weeks ago, Romans 8:8. It runs like this “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” cannot. We’ve been talking for a number of weeks about being in the flesh and being in the Spirit and that all of us here are either living in the flesh or in the Spirit. It’s really not a great mystery loved ones so don’t back off of it and say that sounds like mystical stuff; it’s no great mystery.

Say you come into depression; you wake up in the morning and that depression is just lying on you. Or you get home from work at night and the depression hits you. There are two ways to deal with it; you can deal with it from the outside by trying to effect your emotions through your body -- that way you take a tranquilizer or you take a pill that would give you some kind of uplift, or you take a shot of whiskey, or you take some kind of drug that would stimulate your body to stimulate your emotions to try and lift them out of the depression. Now that’s one way of tackling the depression.

Or you could turn to the truth that is expressed in 1Peter 5:7; “Cast all your anxieties upon him, for he cares about you.” You could just stop and say “God, the maker of this universe, knows what I’m in the middle of this moment and he loves me. I can’t see my way through this stuff but I know he loves me and I know he’s already working on the job. So Lord I can’t do anything about it except use up adrenaline so I’m giving it to you.” You can tackle depression one way or the other. Tackling it by alcohol, drugs, and pills, or whistling a little tune, or turning on the T.V., or going out to the movies is living in the flesh; that’s trying to fill your needs from the outside through the activity of your own body, or your own flesh, or from the world or other people.

Looking up to your Creator and remembering that he is faithful, and that he said “cast your anxieties upon me for I care for you” is living in the Spirit. That’s looking up to God to fulfill the need -- that’s the difference. It’s not a mystery; living in the Spirit is looking to God; living in the flesh is trying to find an answer to it by your own methods -- some way that is independent of God.

Your roommate -- it might be your roommate at college or maybe it’s your husband or wife -- is perpetually late -- perpetually late. They always drag their feet when it comes to any appointment. So that’s your problem: you can either tackle it by living in the flesh or living in the Spirit. Living in the flesh you do it this way: “Remember John, you’re always late; let’s not be late for this one, okay?” Or “Are you coming John? Are you coming John?” Or more subtly, “I’ve got your books and your coat is sitting on the table.” We think that’s more subtle. Whatever way we express it, our approach is -- let’s just lean on him a little. That’s the only way to beat this fellow or beat this girl and this problem, so let’s just lean on them a little and push them a wee bit in the right direction -- just manipulate a little. Really all it does is frustrate you and it makes them utterly dependent upon you, because they depend upon that kind of nagging to go on all the time, and of course it brings continual strain into your attitude towards them. It’s almost impossible to be other than critical of them. Now that’s doing it in the flesh.

Or you can look up to God and say “Lord I thank you that you know where we are at this moment. I

thank you that you are in charge of this situation. Lord I put into your hands my reputation, if it's lost by us being late. Anyway Father it's not going to destroy me for the rest of my life if we missed 10 minutes of this thing so Father I trust you with this. Lord, I just let your love and peace go out to my roommate, my husband or my wife. Holy Spirit you correct them, because when you correct them, you do a thorough job that lasts. All I'm going to be doing is putting Band-Aids on them for yet another day. So Lord I just rest back and love them and accept them as they are and let's just take it as it comes."

So loved ones you can either live in the Spirit or live in the flesh. It's the same with every situation -- in a time of recession like this you have the same choice; you can either trust God to supply all the food, shelter and clothing that you need, or you can trust your job. You can either look at it that it's God who has created the whole economy, it's God who has allowed it to come into this present chaos, and it's God who really supplies all your food and shelter and you really do believe him when he said in Phil 4:19 "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." And in Matthew 6:28, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And God says "I'm going to look after you the same way." Now you both trust him and believe that whatever job you had for those previous years of your life, it is God that's been supplying the food, shelter and clothing. The only reason you've been doing the job is to obey his commandment in Genesis that you were to "earn your bread by the sweat of your brow."

You can take that attitude, or you live in the flesh about this thing and you can say "That's okay Pastor, but let's face it; it's the job that brings the money in. I depend on my job for my food, shelter and clothing. I believe I deserve this food, shelter and clothing because of the useful job that I do for society."

Loved ones, if you trust your job, then when your job goes -- you're finished; you will worry incessantly about getting another job to supply you with the food, shelter and clothing. So really, you can either trust your job as a primary source of all your needs or you can treat your job as an optional method; as God's choice to give you what you need, but that he's going to give it to you anyway. So you can either walk in the Spirit or walk in the flesh regarding your job in times like we're in today.

That's the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit; walking in the Spirit is vertical; trusting God for the things deep down in your heart-- no bluff, no pretending -- you really trust God. Whether it comes through your mother's hand, whether it comes through the unemployment people, whether it comes through your employer or whether it comes by a gift through the mail; it's a vertical trust. Or you can trust horizontally, in which case you're always involved in trying to manipulate; trying to get the thing going in the way you need it to go. It's either trusting the outside, or trusting that it comes from the inside. It's either trusting the arm of the flesh, or trusting the life of God's Spirit. It is either trusting one or the other, and that is the difference of living in the Spirit or living in the flesh.

Now Paul says we're not in the flesh, but are in the Spirit; you are in the Spirit, you're not in the flesh. Then you say, "That's right, we're not in the flesh, we're in the Spirit, that's right." I know half of you are saying, "Wait a minute; if those illustrations of yours are right -- we're in the flesh a bit, I'm afraid. We're not in the Spirit -- at least not all the time." Loved ones, if you're not living in the Spirit then the Spirit of God does not dwell in you. If the Spirit of God does not dwell in you, then you do not belong to Christ. Then we all say "No -- I didn't mean that -- that's going too far. I mean, I don't act the way you outlined exactly, but I certainly belong to

Christ -- I know that I'm a Christian. I may not live that way that you just illustrated, but I know I'm a Christian. Anyway where does it say all that other stuff?"

Let's look at it in Romans 8:9. Paul is no fool, and he often preached to people like us and the Father can use his words to expose things to our eyes: "But you are not in the flesh. You are in the spirit." He is saying to the Romans. "if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Paul is telling it right through from the beginning to the end. But some of you might say, "Oh that's alright -- don't worry about that verse; you see what Paul is saying is 'Now of course all you people in Rome; you are all not in the flesh you're in the Spirit, we all know that. You're all Christians if the Spirit of God dwells in you. Of course the Spirit of God obviously does dwell in all of you. Now any of those other poor souls who don't have the Spirit of Christ -- they don't belong to him.'" Many of us can't even interpret it that way; we say "Paul's kind of reassuring them; it's all the old boys getting together and building each other up and saying they're okay and that those other poor souls that don't have the Spirit of Christ like we do don't belong to him, but we're alright."

Well loved ones that would be possible except one miserable little word that God has insured that is in this sentence; that's the word "really." You see -- you can't misinterpret the verse that other way when that word "really" is there because what Paul is doing is putting it positively. He's saying "but you are not in the flesh you are in the Spirit." Then he points out "if the Spirit of God really dwells in you." So what he's saying is, "Yet you all here are not of the flesh you're in the Spirit that is -- if the Spirit of God really dwells in you -- then you're in the Spirit. Now if the Spirit of God really doesn't dwell in you -- then you're not in the Spirit.

Then he goes on to say, "Don't start making subtle distinctions about the difference between having the Spirit and dwelling in the Spirit. Let's face it; anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." So he's really saying you can't be half a Christian; you can't be in the Spirit and in the flesh. You're either in one or the other so don't start making all kinds of complicated distinctions that enable you to live on drugs and tranquilizers and alcohol every day of your life, and distinctions that enable you to manipulate and pressure until you become an absolute nag to your roommate, and then start saying you belong to Christ. He says no; if the Spirit of God really dwells in you, then you will not live this way -- you'll live that way.

Loved ones you may sit there and ask "Is there no out for me? Is there no possibility -- because what you're saying is that maybe half of us here that think we're Christians aren't Christians?" I think there are two possibilities: it is possible that the Spirit of God really does dwell in you, but that you've never seen it this way before. That's possible. I think someone here this morning could really have the Spirit of Jesus living in them, but they just have never seen this before so clearly. Using tranquilizers or pep pills, or using movies or T.V. to get their depression out of their hearts is living in the flesh, so it may be new light to you. In which case you're in the position of 1 John 1:7, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

So it seems to me that there could be many of us here this morning that have the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in us, but we've never seen that those things are living in the flesh. Now we see it and we rise to it. We could be in the position where you've never seen before that leaning on the roommate and trying to manipulate them into the kind of character that you want them to be is actually living in the flesh. So it could be a question of light, then obviously you are a Christian and you'll just walk into the light.

Now some of you may wonder how you tell if that's the issue with you. How do you tell that you have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you, but this is just new light? If it's just new light, your whole spirit will rise to it. The Spirit of Jesus inside you will rise to even those illustrations that we looked at. You'll say, "That's the way I'm going to go; I'm not going to manipulate my wife or husband anymore. I'm not going to lean on this roommate anymore to try and make him the kind of character I want him to be. Lord Jesus, I'm going to live your way."

Or your spirit would rise to the whole business of depression, and you would say "I see Lord that I've been stealing from you an opportunity to lift me out of depression by looking at the tranquilizers or the pep pills or the T.V or the movies. I've been living in a way that steals from you an opportunity for you to make yourself known to me. Lord from now on -- no more -- that's it."

Likewise with the job, "You can take it, Lord Jesus. I've never seen my job that way before; you can use this job I have now, or any job, to give me what I need. It's not my job that earns this money for me. I'm not a self made man or self made woman; this is just your way -- I'm doing the job because you told us all to do jobs to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow but it's you that gives us our bread. So Lord Jesus, from now on I'm going to take that opportunity." So loved ones if you find your spirit rising like that then the Spirit of Christ really dwells in you and this is just new light.

Now what if the spirit inside you says "Well it sounds like a nice way to live, and it would be good if everybody lived that way, but I don't think I could live that way. I don't think I want to live that way; I don't want to lose any opportunity to manipulate that wife or husband of mine; no, I depend on that to establish my own value to them. Once I stop doing that, they might be able to do without me. No, I'm going to hold to that. And yes, I see the business about the pep pills and tranquilizers and movies and T.V. and eating more to make myself feel better, but that's the way I'm going to do it. I'm sure there's a better way -- I'm sure the way he described is good, but me -- I'm going to go on this way. This is the way I'm used to. This is the way any half decent, sensible, red blooded American does it. I'm going to do it this way."

Now loved ones do you see if that's the response of your spirit, then it's possible you don't belong to Jesus? If there's antagonism inside you to living in the Spirit and to the kind of attitudes that result from living in the Spirit, it is possible that you need to deal more deeply with Jesus in some way. So it's good just to face it.

Now there are two possibilities, I'll only be able to deal with one today, but there are two possibilities. One is that you're just a natural man or natural woman. Not natural in a good sense of natural, but that you're not born of God; the Spirit of Jesus has not come into you. That's why you find that you admire those things while you really, inside, have an antagonism towards living that way yourself.

It could be that the Spirit of Jesus has never been sent to your spirit. It could be that you're just a plain, unspiritual, non-Christian, natural man or woman. That's really important to see if that's the case, really. You may say, "That's stupid; I've come here for 4 years and I enjoy coming here. I enjoy most of your sermons, I agree with most of what you say, I like the spirit of love and peace that there is in the auditorium. I really enjoy it, so that's stupid that you say I'm not a Christian; I like this -- I really do."

Now loved ones, do you see that the natural man can believe that God exists, can believe that Jesus

has died for everybody in the world, and can believe that God's way is the best way to go? He can believe all that and yet still remain a natural man. Remember in James it says "even the demons believe and shudder." It is possible to come to a place like this and to simply believe that it's nice coming here together every Sunday; it has a healthy effect on my emotional health each week -- it's just a good uplift.

A natural man or woman could remain a natural man or woman and still believe many of the things that we talk about and could just enjoy coming. It is possible to believe all those things, and still be a natural man or natural woman. The only way you know you're not a spiritual man or spiritual woman is when these things are described and, though you admire them, think they would be good for everybody else, yet you, yourself, are not prepared to change your life to come into that kind of life yourself. A natural man or natural woman has in them a kind of insecurity. I think often we feel they couldn't but really a person who isn't born of the spirit often has a insecurity because they don't really know themselves.

When they hear of the kind of surrender that is needed to enter into the life of the Spirit they say "Mañana, mañana; I'm going to make that decision one day. I am: I'm going to change. For the moment I'm going to depend on these other things for my lifts, but there will come a day when I'm going to make the change -- I'm going to change." They get great security from the fact that they think that they can change; they think it's just a matter of deciding and their will, will change. They don't see that subtly, deep down, the will of Satan is getting his way in their life because they keep on saying "Mañana -- tomorrow, I'll change tomorrow." Or "In a few years I'll change." Or "Later on I'll make the decision and I'll bring this into my practical life." They get security from the fact that they don't know how subtle and how deceptive their own will is.

There was a man in the 18th century in Oxford who knew of the way we subtle, so called "educated sophisticates" think. He says this; "But this ignorance never so strongly glares as in those who are termed men..." probably women's lib wasn't in then. "If a natural man be one of these, he can talk at large of his rational faculties, of the freedom of his will, and the absolute necessity of such freedom in order to constitute a man or moral agent. He reads and argues and proves to a demonstration that every man may do as he will, may dispose his own heart to evil or good as it seems best in his own eyes."

So, often we think -- someday we'll do it: someday we will change. Loved ones it's a sleep that the natural man or woman is in -- it's a sleep. They really are not aware of how dangerous their position is, because the longer they keep on living that way, the more difficult it becomes for them to realize you have to actually change your life to get into this kind of life. You have to change: it's no use listening to all this stuff Sunday after Sunday; it's no use agreeing with it all -- you actually have to apply it to your life on Monday morning. You have to do something.

Many of us think "If I were a natural man I wouldn't have any joy." Loved ones of course you would have joy -- the world is filled with people with all kinds of joy and happiness -- alright, maybe not the real deep joy that Jesus can bring, but the natural man can have a lot of joy. He can have real satisfaction if he's an artist -- a real sense of fulfillment in his art. If the woman is someone who enjoys baking, she can have a real sense of satisfaction in baking. If you're a carpenter you can have a real sense of fulfilling your faculties and your abilities in doing carpentry. There is a great deal of joy that can be had outside Jesus. So the natural man can often have a great happiness and a joy that looks like real joy -- the joy of living in the beautiful world we have, the joy of going out on a sunny morning and feeling the sun on your face.

There's plenty of happiness, happiness from things that happen. That always comes into trouble when things don't happen right, but there is a joy that the natural man can have.

I think some of us say he hasn't the freedom that we have, but often he does; often he thinks he walks in great liberty. Often he thinks "I'm glad I'm not tied as a slave to that person Jesus the way all those all other poor, narrow minded creatures are. I'm glad I haven't the bigotry and the superstitions that they have. I'm glad I'm a liberal, educated man who can think in all kinds of situations and that I can see everybody's point of view and I can get the benefit of them all." A natural man often imagines himself to walk in greater liberty than anybody else.

Loved ones do you see you can go very far in happiness and so called peace and still be a natural man or natural woman? Of course the mark of a natural man or natural woman is; they walk in the flesh day after day after day. They bounce from the tranquiller, to the aspirin, to the movie, to the T.V., to a new car, to a vacation, to a new book to read to give them a kind of lift. They live in the flesh day after day. Indeed they commit sin more or less continuously day by day without any worry or any sense of conviction about it. That's how you tell they are a natural man or natural woman; by the way they live day by day.

Loved ones that could be your situation, but there is a possibility that I would like to try to discuss next time, of how a person could be under the law instead of under the Spirit and they would have some of these marks.

Say you find yourself in that position today; say Jesus has spoken to your heart at this moment and has said "That's right -- you've been coming here for years but actually you haven't changed in your life. Some little things have changed; you've become a little mellow in some things, but you haven't really started to live fully in the Spirit." Loved ones if that's your situation be practical, plain, and commonsensical -- the way you are in the rest of your life. Just be plain, and use common sense. Say, to whomever you understand God to be, "I don't have your Spirit within me. I admire those things; I admire the way you describe the way in which you tackle life, but I myself don't want to do it that way. Father I admit your Spirit is not within me. Lord Jesus, I admit your Spirit is not within me. There's a different spirit that rises within me -- an antagonistic spirit to those things. Now Father I admit it."

Then loved ones ask Jesus what changes he would make in your life if he were going to come into it. That's it. It's just down to earth, practical stuff. Just admit it first and ask him "Lord, what changes would you make in my life if you had the running of it completely in your hands?" Then dear ones whatever he says submit to him on those things. Then just say to him "Lord Jesus, I don't see the sense of it, frankly, but I believe you; I believe you are the beginning and the end of all things. I believe you're infinite. I believe that you know best for me, so I don't understand it, but I submit on these points Lord. I'm willing for you to run it that way. "

Then loved ones the moment you have submitted -- that same moment God has sent the Spirit of his son into your heart. The Holy Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit of truth; he can see the imaginations and workings of your mind and spirit. The second you are willing to submit on everything that he has pointed out to you needs to be changed, that same second he sends the Spirit of his son into your heart. Then you can exercise faith that you have received the Spirit of Jesus.

That's what you need to do because faith, of course, is a natural confidence that God has already done what he said he would do. God has said he will send the Spirit of his son into any heart that

submits to him and obeys him. All you need to do is trust and obey that dear Spirit of Jesus day by day and nourish the Spirit of Jesus within you by praying and reading the Bible.

So loved ones could you decide in your own mind where you stand? I think there is a great danger of us all assuming we are all Christians here. That's what's so dangerous. Now those of you who are Christians don't get all shook and say "I'm not a Christian" but those of us who have any uncertainty about it -- act now, today -- and do those things. Admit "Lord Jesus, I don't have your Spirit. Your Spirit does not seem to rise to these things; I admire them, but don't want them for myself. Lord Jesus I admit your Spirit is not within me; now, what would you change in my life if you were to come within me?" Then if you submit on those things, if you say "Lord, I'm willing to change that way" then God sends the Spirit of his son in.

I think it's important to see the implications of Romans 8:9 and to stop this bluff where we say we're Christians but we don't live like Christians. If I have a broad southern accent, it's really difficult for me to persuade you that I was born in Ireland, because you would say "You look like an southern man and talk like a southern man." Well God says that. He says "My children live like my children." And you know it.

Loved ones if we have a time of quietness now, will you deal with God, if you need, to about it? Don't put it off -- don't say "Well I'm not there, but, there has to be some other way." No -- it's just a variation on "mañana." Shall we pray?

Dear Father, we would come to you as a family who love each other. Father, we tell you that we want no part of hypocrisy or pretending. Lord, we don't want to start dividing up your words so that somehow we can feel comfortable with it. Lord, we take that word to our hearts that comes to us where Paul says "but you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God really dwells in you."

Lord, if you see us not living in the Spirit but living in the flesh, will you show us whether the Spirit of God really dwells within us or not? Lord Jesus, if our hearts do not rise and want to enter into all these things, then we'll admit now that your Spirit doesn't dwell in us. We have accepted the ideology of Christians, we've accepted the ways and happiness of Christians, but we do not have the Spirit of a Christian living in us. Lord Jesus, what would you change in my life if you had the running of it completely in your hands?

Lord Jesus, I know that you will enter into my life immediately when I submit these things. Lord, if you see a readiness in me to live the way you're showing me that you want me to live, then I know you've already come into my heart and indeed it's you within me that is signifying a readiness to live according to your guidance and your rules and your laws. So Lord Jesus I thank you for coming in. Thank you Father for sending the Spirit of Jesus into my heart. Lord Jesus, I intend now to listen to you and to let you grow in me by praying to you each day and by studying your word until you have taken over all of me completely and used me for your glory. Amen.

