

Contrast Between Flesh and Spirit

Romans 8:1 (Revised Translation) Therefore there is now no punishment (divine discipline) for those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

It has been emphasized previously that the long version of this verse is the preferred text. This is due to textual evidence plus internal evidence based upon context. Romans 6-8 concerns the believer's spiritual life. Also noted is that the Greek word for "condemnation" often used in translations of Romans 8:1 is actually referring to the result of judgment. Hence, the preferred translation based upon lexicons¹ is "punishment." In the context of verse 1 and in our theology, we call this divine discipline.

The thrust of this verse is to introduce us to the positive side of the spiritual life. The negative side is the avoidance of sin. We have to realize when we are in sin and identify it or acknowledge it. Sin and dealing with it is the negative. The spiritual life begins when we walk according to the Spirit. That is the positive.

Paul is talking about believers because he says "for those who are in Christ Jesus." Paul told us in chapter 6 that believers receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit which places them positionally in Christ. As such believers have a multitude of blessings and assets with which to live the Christian life.

¹ F Wilbur Gingrich and Bauer, W. (1957). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p413

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So, Paul is telling us that we do not suffer divine discipline, or punishment, while we are walking, or ordering our lives, by the Holy Spirit.

1. Paul has identified the context as dealing with believers in Christ. He can say “in Christ Jesus” because he already defined that in chapter 6.
2. Paul contrasts the flesh, or sin nature, against the Spirit. These are the two “power houses” of the believer. The flesh powers our sin production as well as human good production. Sin is against God. David told us that (Psalm 51:4). Sin is punishable in divine discipline in order to get our attention so that we return to walking by faith (Hebrews 12:4-12). Human good, while it may be considered good in society, is abhorrent to God in the spiritual realm (Isaiah 64:6). The Spirit produces divine good and keeps us out of the production of sin. The issue then is choice. Which path will you choose? What follows are contrasts between the sin nature/flesh and the Holy Spirit. Again, it becomes a choice.

Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Paul explained both the perfection of the Mosaic Law as well as its weakness in chapter 7. There is nothing wrong with the perfect standards required by the Mosaic Law. The essence of this law is a requirement for the believer, love. But the Law’s weakness is that there is no method provided by the Mosaic Law for its fulfillment. It is only by means of the Spirit that its requirements can be attained. So Paul has contrasted the Mosaic Law that was dealt with extensively in chapter 7 with the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” He has not used this term previously in this book. However, a similar phrase already appeared in a previous book.

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**Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and
thereby fulfill the law of Christ.**

In Galatians, which was written at the end of Paul's first missionary journey, uses a shorter version of the phrase, "the law of Christ." Romans was written on Paul's third missionary journey.²

1 Corinthians 9:19 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

1 Corinthians 9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

1 Corinthians 9:21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

Gotquestions.org suggests an answer to the question, what is the Law of Christ?

"Galatians 6:2 states, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the *law of Christ*" (emphasis added). What exactly is the law of Christ, and how is it fulfilled by carrying each other's burdens? While the law of Christ is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:21, the Bible nowhere specifically defines what precisely is the law of Christ. However, most Bible teachers understand the law of Christ to be what Christ stated were the greatest commandments in Mark 12:28–31, "Which commandment is

² Dates are taken from DeanBible.org. Different authors have different timelines for Paul's writings.

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the most important of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’³””

We understand “love” to be the Christian’s code of conduct. It can only be achieved, as Paul says, by those who walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

1 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith*; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

We continue with the contrasts.

Romans 8:3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned (punished) sin in the flesh,

Paul reiterates and contrasts the weakness of the Law which is the flesh or sin nature and what God did.

God did. The “did” is in italics. There is no verb “did” here in this verse. There are two other verbs: sending and condemned (punished).

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/law-of-Christ.html>

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Sending. This is an aorist participle. The action of the aorist participle comes before the action of the main verb. A translation closer to the Greek might read, “God having sent His Son in likeness of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh,…”

Condemned. While the word is derived from the same word used in verse 1, the context is different. In verse 1 Paul is dealing with divine discipline in time against the believer out of fellowship. Here Paul is dealing with the eternal punishment for sin. This is not just the declaration of judgment but the result of that judgment: punishment. As a result of this context in which Jesus was judged for all sins, then the punishment the believer suffers in time is not for eternal punishment but only temporal punishment. The goal is to get the believer back in fellowship by walking in faith dependence on the Spirit. Paul completes this thought in verse 4.

Romans 8:4 so that (purpose) the (righteous) requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Requirement. As previously noted, the Greek word translated “requirement” by the NASB 1995 is derived from “right” or “righteousness.” According to one lexicon, this is translated in Romans 5:18 as “righteous act.” So, the requirement here in this context of the Law is a righteous or right requirement. Translators attempt to use a single word to translate a Greek word. In this case, as in some other cases, a two word translation might give a better emphasis to the background of this word: “righteous requirement.”

Fulfilled in us. This word is used for prophetic fulfillments accomplished by Jesus in the book of Matthew. I think another English word could be used in this context: accomplished. It is God’s accomplishment through us.

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Paul at this point in his letter has already dealt with the sin nature, death and the Law. In these verses, he takes the foundation he laid in chapters 6 & 7 and contrasts the failures of the sin nature and the weakness of the Law against the provision of God to the believer: the Holy Spirit.

The result in verse 4 is that spiritually God fulfills/accomplishes the righteous requirement of the Law in the believer.

Listen to Kenneth Wuest's translation of verses 3-4:

Romans 8:3-4 (Wuest) "For that which is an impossibility for the law, because it was weak through the flesh, God having sent His Son in likeness of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law may be brought to completion in us who, not as dominated by the flesh are ordering our behavior, but as dominated by the Spirit."

Romans 8:5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Set their minds. This is the center of sin and spirituality. The issue here is who controls your mind, your thinking. The flesh is the sin nature. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. In the Greek, this is one word in present active indicative. It is a verb for thinking. It is present tense meaning it is a continuous action. You allow the flesh to control your thinking and you are in continuous sin and human righteousness. You allow the Spirit to control

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your thinking and you are accomplishing continuous righteousness. The issue as always is choice.

Here is a useful paragraph from Biblehub.com:

“Strong’s Greek 5426, appearing in varied forms twenty-six times, describes an interior posture that guides outward behavior. More than mere cognition, it involves the settled disposition of the will—what one “sets the heart on.” In Scripture the verb often answers the question, “Where is your mind anchored?” and so serves as a diagnostic of spiritual health.⁴”

Thinking. Our thoughts are guided by what we depend on or rely on. Remember, both of those words are synonyms of trust and faith. Faith is the key to our salvation. Faith is the key to our Christian lives. Faith.

But faith must have an object. The Bible provides the promises, doctrines and rationales that we rely on.

Note all through these verses there is a stark contrast between two items: flesh and Spirit. There is no middle ground. God’s world is one of absolutes.

Romans 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

Paul reiterates this thought later on in the book of Romans.

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/5426.htm>

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Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith*; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

In the Romans 14 passage, our behavior depends upon our faith. Is it OK to eat all food. In Romans 14 Paul deals with those who are vegetarians and those who are meat eaters. A similar passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 deals with meat sacrificed to idols. We will deal with this in more detail when we get to Romans chapter 14. The point here is we walk by faith. That includes eating by faith. We give thanks to God to whatever food is presented. Faith.

There is a contemporary issue for some people. Can a Christian eat “halal” meat sold in local grocery stores? Halal is a Muslim practice. For meat :

“This method of slaughtering animals consists of using a sharp knife to make an incision that cuts the front of the throat, oesophagus and jugular veins but not the spinal cord. The head of an animal that is slaughtered using halal methods should be aligned with the *qiblah* (the direction a Muslim faces when praying). In addition to the direction, permitted animals should be slaughtered upon utterance of the Islamic prayer "Bismillah, Allahu Akbar" (In the name of God, God is greatest).⁵”

Some meat, especially lamb, may be found in local grocery stores marked as halal certified. I have seen that especially on lamb that is imported. Just because a Muslim prayed a prayer over the animal as it was being killed does not make it unfit to be eaten. Prayers said by a rabbi over an animal being killed in a kosher manner do not make the meat unfit to be eaten.

The same guidelines Paul gave Christians in his day in Romans 14 apply today to Christians. It is OK to eat halal meat or kosher meat as long as that does not cause a weak or new Christian to stumble in their faith.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halal>

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The writer of Hebrews confirms this principle. If you do something, do it in faith.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

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Paul's Contrasts in Romans 8:1-8			
Verse	Negative (Flesh/Sin Nature)	Positive (Holy Spirit)	Keywords
1	Flesh	Spirit	<u>Walking</u> by Spirit: No Punishment
2	(Flesh)	Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus	<u>Freedom</u> from Law of sin & death
3 & 4	Law & Sin	God punished sin in the flesh	Positive Purpose: Righteous Requirement fulfilled
5	Flesh	Spirit	Thinking: Flesh → Flesh Spirit → Spirit
6	Flesh	Spirit	Flesh → death Spirit → life & peace
7&8	Flesh		Negative Conclusion: (Warning): Not able to please God by flesh

I may expand this table in the future.

Romans 8:7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,

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Here we now have a conclusion based upon the contrasts Paul just made. He could make the contrasts because of the groundwork he set up in chapters 6 and 7.

Hostile. When operating under the dominion of the sin nature (flesh), the believer is hostile toward God. Biblehub.com:

“The term denotes personal hostility or deep-seated opposition, whether between human parties or toward God Himself. In the Septuagint it frequently translates Hebrew nouns for “hatred” or “enmity” (for example Genesis 3:15; Numbers 35:21), thus carrying forward the biblical theme of relational rupture introduced at the Fall and threaded through redemption history.⁶”

Does not subject itself. Obedient, subservient.

This conclusion is a negative. It is a warning.

Romans 8:8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Please God. From Paul’s argument, it is obvious that pleasing God is an important duty of the believer. It is simple: rely (i.e. faith) on the Holy Spirit. But what does “please” mean? Here is a short paragraph from Biblehub.com:

“The verb expresses the idea of gaining approval, satisfying expectations, or acting in a manner agreeable to another. In the New Testament the object of this “pleasing” is either God or human beings, and the spiritual health of the action is determined by that object. Pleasing God is presented as a mark of true discipleship, whereas seeking to please people at the expense of truth is condemned.”

⁶ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2189.htm>

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Here is a quote from L. S. Chafer's book *He that is Spiritual*.

"Because thus far this discussion has dealt primarily with the theory, or doctrine of the spiritual life, the addition of a few practical suggestions may not be amiss.

Since a life in the power of the Spirit depends upon a continuous attitude of reckoning and appropriation, it is important for most Christians to have a time of definite dealing with God in which they examine their hearts in the matter of sin and their yieldedness, and in which they acknowledge both their insufficiency and His sufficiency by the Spirit. There, at that time, they may claim His power and strength to supplant their weakness. The Bible makes no rules as to time or conditions. It is the individual child, in all the latitude of his own personality, dealing with his Father.

Spirituality is not a future ideal: it is to be experienced now. The vital question is, "Am I walking in the Spirit now?" Answer to this question should not depend on the presence or absence of some unusual manifestation of the supernatural. Much of life will be lived in the uneventful commonplace; but, even there, we should have the conviction that we are right with God and in His unbroken fellowship. "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21). Likewise, we should not mistake worn nerves, physical weakness or depression for unspirituality. Many times sleep is more needed than prayer, and physical recreation than heart searching.

Be it remembered, too, that His provisions are always perfect; but our entrance into these provisions is often imperfect. There is doubtless a too general reference to human attitudes and actions in relation to God as being "absolute": such as "absolute surrender," "absolute consecration," and "absolute devotion." If there are well-defined conditions upon which we may be spiritual, let us remember that, from the standpoint of the Infinite God, our compliance with those conditions is often imperfect. What He

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provides and bestows is in the fullest divine perfection; but our adjustment is human and therefore is usually subject to improvement. The fact of our possible deliverance, which depends upon Him alone, does not change. We shall have as much at any time as we make it possible for Him to bestow.”