

Comfort with Desires of the Flesh Results in Habitual Submission to the Flesh; but with the Desires of the Spirit, Habitual Submission to the Spirit, Rom 8:5

Romans 8:5 - [NASB] 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.

1. This verse presents a conflict of thought patterns: (1) status quo carnality and (2) status quo spirituality.
2. The verse begins with the accusative preposition **κατά, kata**. It is used metaphorically to express the relationship one thing has toward another.
3. In this context there are two relationships both of which express a sense of comfort and agreement. The first expresses comfort with the things of the flesh – **σάρξ, sarx** – while the second expresses comfort with the things of the Spirit – **πνεῦμα, pneuma**.
4. The idea being expressed in each case may be translated as follows:

Romans 8:5 - For those who are comfortable [κατά, kata] about submitting to the flesh [σάρξ, sarx: the sinful nature] set their minds [φρονέω, phroneō] on the things of the flesh ...

5. The phrase “set their minds” is one word in the Greek, the present active indicative of the verb, **φρονέω, phroneō**: “to have a mindset, a disposition, or an attitude that is focused on one thing.”
- present: Customary; denotes that which habitually occurs, or may be reasonably expected to occur. The believer can be focused on the things of the flesh – the sinful nature – or the things of the Holy Spirit. Either way, the person’s decision making is habitual and the resultant behavior may be reasonably expected to occur.
- active: The believer produces the action either from a mindset focused on the things of the flesh or on the things of the Holy Spirit.
- indicative: Declarative; a statement of doctrinal reality.
6. The verse continues by observing the second mindset which results in the believer being habitually focused on the things of the Holy Spirit.
7. The lesson we learn from this is that those who are focused on the things of the flesh are going to be led by the desires, trends, and lust patterns of the sinful nature.
8. Some will express these tendencies by various categories of sin, ascetic or licentious, while others move into human good and evil.
9. When these kind of people, whether believer or unbeliever, acquire power, they become extremely dangerous. They have a mindset that is focused on things they believe to be right.

10. If inversion of thought with reference to traditional standards is the result, then tradition in their view becomes evil while their progressive ideas become sacrosanct and habitual.
11. The alternative to this mindset is to focus on the “things of the Spirit” which produce decisions reached through the guidance of the Holy Spirit producing divine good that result in blessings.
12. All believers must do battle with these conflicting thought patterns and in order to counterbalance the influence of the sinful nature’s lust patterns, God has provided a way to recover status quo spirituality: confession alone to Him alone.

Romans 8:5 - For those who are comfortable about submitting to the desires of the flesh [σάρξ, *sark*: the sinful nature & its lust patterns] have a mindset [φρονέω, *phroneō*: disposition or attitude] habitually focused on the things of the flesh; but those who are comfortable about submitting to the desires of the Holy Spirit [πνεῦμα, *pneuma*] have a mindset habitually focused on the things of the Spirit.

13. This verse emphasizes the fact that a believer can become habitually ensconced in either carnality or spirituality. What is of utmost importance to understand is that he can’t be both at the same time.
14. To amplify this I went back to my response to a question posed by Berachah Church in the pneumatology section of its Doctrinal Questionnaire. This document contains questions that are to be answered in written form by pastoral candidates for ordination.

Griffin, Joe. *Berachah Church Doctrinal Questionnaire*. (Houston: unpublished manuscript, 23 March 1977), 29:

Q: 35. Can a Christian be partially spiritual and partially sinful at the same time? Explain.

A: It is not possible for the Christian to be partially spiritual and partially sinful at the same time. Spirituality and sinfulness are both absolutes. Neither is a condition of degree but is one of status. The Christian is either filled with the Holy Spirit and in the bottom circle, or he is controlled by the old sin nature and out of the bottom circle. There cannot be a simultaneous rulership here. Either the Holy Spirit has total control of the believer’s life, or the old sin nature does.

The correct approach is to confess your sins to God and move on, leaving your mistakes behind and advancing onward and upward to the high ground of maturity through the power of the Holy Spirit in the status of spirituality.

15. Absent this approach, the believer is unwittingly trapped in a status quo in which he believes he is in fellowship regardless of his sins.
16. This is justified by several rationales: (1) the opinion that one’s ideas are good and moral; (2) the assertion that one’s good works far outnumber his bad deeds, or (3) the delusion that a desire to do the right thing is what it’s all about.
17. The problem with the first rationale is the source of the person’s standards for what is “good” “right,” and “moral.” Among human cultures, societies, and civilizations such standards vary and often contradict each other. The ultimate source for what is “good,” “right,” and “moral” must be the Word of God.

18. The second rationale is often flawed by the idea that salvation is determined by such an imbalance. If saved, then the assumption is that fellowship and spirituality are determined by the assumed favorable imbalance.
19. The final idea defines those who subscribe to Progressive ideology and liberal theology: the outcome is not as important as feeling good about trying.
20. Flawed thinking results in wrong action. In matters of one's temporal and eternal futures the result is devastating.
21. A flawed or fuzzy gospel sends many to eternal judgment while a flawed or fuzzy approach to one's spiritual life leads one into discipline and loss of rewards.
22. The next verse addresses these issues by stating the results of conflicting thought patterns.

Romans 8:6 - [NASB] For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.