

## **“Flesh and Spirit”**

March 15, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Romans 8:6-11

For the last couple of weeks we have been focusing on some of the Lenten readings you have been doing in Romans. Two weeks ago it was the 4th chapter and we focused on being saved by grace through faith. In the story of God’s people, before there was ancestral inheritance, before there was circumcision or dietary laws or Sabbath rest; there was Abraham, the father of faith, who was made worthy of God by grace through faith. God chose him even though he had done nothing to deserve it – grace; and God saw him as worthy, simply because he believed God, not just with his mouth and mind, but with his present and future - faith. Paul invited his fellow Jewish Christians to see their point of entry into God’s family was by grace through faith, which is the exact same way the people with no Jewish background were entering into God’s family, by grace through faith. Common ground for Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians in the 1st century and with us today. Then last week we were in Romans 5 and dove into just how Jesus cleanses us from sin and makes us acceptable to God. Again, it is by grace through faith – God doing all the work (grace) and our not only believing God did it, but did it for us (faith).

This week we are in Romans 8 which moves us to the next step – identity. After all that God has done – choosing us, granting us unmerited favor we call grace, providing the sacrifice which pays for our sins and shortcomings, accepting the sacrifice and thereby accepting us – after all God has done, how does that affect us? It changes how God sees us, but do we change? Paul says, “Yes.” We change what voice we listen to.

The core of Paul’s revelation of how we become members of God’s family is a change from flesh to spirit. Before Jesus, people were a part of God’s family by the flesh, as in, your biological or fleshly blood line had to come from Abraham, and the way you lived it was through physical or fleshly obedience in circumcision, dietary and Sabbath law. But Jesus opened the door to being part of God’s family through a spiritual connection with a belief like Abraham. That is how we connect. Therefore, that is what changes. We are no longer defined by our flesh heritage but by our new spiritual heritage.

Let me bring it out of the language theory realm and into reality. There are parts of our natural wiring that do not please God. Many animals, whether you are talking about lions, wolves, swans, elephant seals or people, are social creatures. They live in groups. And the leadership of those groups is defined through physical confrontation. Usually the males beat the living tar out of each other to determine who is the strongest, and once dominance is determined, the lesser serve the greater. The dominant male lion does none of the hunting, but gets first pick of the

kill, of the girls, and of the shady spots. Humans naturally do the same thing, and God hates it. Verses 7, “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law... and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Our flesh heritage defines greatness by how many people you have working for you, to serve you and implement your desires. But what does the spirit say? In Mark 10 Jesus says, “You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” That is the opposite of what comes natural. The same with power. Power in flesh heritage is defined by how many people and things a person can control. Power is defined by imposing your will upon others. But power in spirit heritage is how many people can you lift up. Jesus lifted us all yet died penniless at the hands of His enemies. The voice of the spirit is different than the voice of this physical or flesh world. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” That would be the natural, physical, fleshly world’s way. “But I say to you (says Jesus): Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” (v. 43-45) Children of heaven as opposed to this world. As people, we are part of this world (flesh), but also created in the image of God (spirit). Romans is telling us you came to be part of God’s family not by flesh but by spirit, so stop listening to – finding your identity – in the flesh. Find it in the spirit. Think about your relationships. In those relationships, do you use your power to serve or to control? Do you expend your energy to lift-up those around you or try to lift yourself above them? Do you actively seek ways to show them love? Do you listen to the voices of this world, of the flesh? Or do you listen to the spirit?

Now don’t get me wrong. Christians are not anti-body people. Through Week of Compassion, United Ministries, Compassionate Care, our Blessing Box, and Community Dinners we spend valuable time and resources to help meet people’s physical needs. We work around the globe for justice when people are being enslaved, trafficked and abused. Our physicality is how we interact with each other and this world. But it is not the voice that defines us because the body is selfish for immediate gratification. We know this. For example, I really like to eat. I am a big fan of cookies and ice cream. And if you start putting cookie ingredients in ice cream, I just grab a carton and a spoon because it is silly to get a serving bowl dirty when I am going to eat the whole thing. I eat one bite, and my body wants more. And for some reason, my doctor told me by glucose and cholesterol levels were getting into the dangerous zone. My body’s desires were hurting my body. Getting what I wanted and filling my heart’s desire was killing me. My doctor told me the same thing Romans is, you cannot just listen to your body and let it define you. My body wants a half a carton of cookies and cream ice cream at lunch and half carton of moose tracks for supper. How you feel and what your body says it wants is not the voice to listen to. It will kill you.

And that is what Paul is telling us. Feelings are real. Desires are real. But they belong to the physical world, the world of the flesh, and do not define the person of faith. The voice we listen to, the voice that defines us is the spirit. And that spirit says you are loved, you are accepted, you are bigger than your body, for you are made for eternity. The same spirit also says greatness is about serving others, power is for lifting others up, and love is to be shared with those you like and those you don't. We are a people defined by the spirit. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people... Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10) Don't be who you were born to be. Be who you were reborn to be.

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