

“The Law’s Just Demands, And Love’s Response (Where Soul Meets Body)”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 20, 2014
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Romans 8:1-11 (NRSV)

Life in the Spirit

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. **3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, **8** and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Romans 8:1-11 (The Message)

The Solution is Life on God’s Terms

1-2 With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ’s being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently

cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.

3-4 God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.

5-8 Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.

9-11 But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's!

Where Soul Meets Body

Dr. McCormick was on the faculty of the San Francisco
Theological Seminary

the day he found himself in a hurry to drive across the
city.

He knew that the shortest distance to traverse across San
Francisco

was by way of the city's curvy streets and steep hills.

As luck would have it he found himself driving right behind a
blessed soul

who slowed down to crawling speed

the closer he or she drew near to a green light,

for fear that it might turn red.

And guess what?

Without fail, when they arrived at the cross street the green
lights had turned red,

every single time.

McCormick said, "*When you are in a hurry to get across
town for an appointment,*

try that on your religion."

Being a spirit-filled soul in the world today is exceedingly
difficult.

No wonder we return regularly to worship for a prayer,

a pick-me-up sermon and pat on the back,

a praise for jobs well done,
a pause to reflect on the errors of our
ways,
a pardon for sins committed
and a partaking of the Bread and Cup
to empower us to go forth into the fray,
into God's world,
filled and anointed and blessed
body and soul.

Being a person of faith in 2014 is tough.

No wonder so many of our neighbors have packed it in,
throwing up their hands and saying, "Forget it!"

No wonder our neighbors and we ourselves get fed up
with church fights and splits and petty arguments,
with ecclesial divisive behavior and attitudes
that serve only

to break up and break down and break
apart the Body of Christ.

No wonder so many have chosen what feels easier, cheaper,
less taxing

by following their own whims and desires

rather than living into the spiritual disciplines,
disciplines which are more demanding of
energy yet also more rewarding.

Where body meets soul is a challenge in this day and age.

No wonder that last thing we want or need is for someone to tell us is how easy it is,

how since they can do it so well, then we should be able to as well.

A soul shared recently a story about an art teacher

who would fuss at and criticize her students, telling them

how miserably they had failed.

She would then describe how perfectly she had accomplished the same tasks.

No wonder congregations tune out and get turned off by preachers

who present themselves as super heroes,

as prime examples of spiritual perfection, precision and praxis.

We tossed that one out the window a long time ago.

Congregations figure out their pastor's weaknesses within the first two weeks.

First Christian Church of Decatur figured out my strengths and "growing edges"

so long ago and so well that I've had to work on

inventing new ones.

Seriously, living in the Spirit in the world today is difficult.

No one knows this better than those of us

who have wrestled and struggled where soul meets
body.

As a human seeking to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ

I've certainly fumbled the ball on the one yard line,

left undone those things that ought to be done,

and neglected the rejected, dejected and
subjected.

When God separates the sheep from the goats,

surely I'll be sent way over yonder. ("And stop calling
me Shirley!")

I now realize how true it is when Paul says we live in the
Spirit.

Without the Spirit dwelling within, I shudder to imagine
where I might be.

Life, in and of itself, is difficult.

The love of God in Christ empowers us to turn a personal
tragedy into a triumph.

Victor Frankl survived the Holocaust

and wrote a groundbreaking book called Man's Search
for Meaning.

On the question of suffering, Victor Frankl said:

“Even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation,

facing a fate he cannot change,

may rise above himself,

may grow beyond himself,

*and by doing so change
himself.” (p. 147)*

We are constantly surrounded and reminded of loss, of tragedies, of suffering.

At the same time we are witnesses of the beauty of the earth,

of acts of compassion and mercy, of the smiles and first steps of children,

and of souls embodying service above self.

So, let's not be so hard on one another.

Recognize and appreciate that we are all wrestling and struggling

with what being a Christian means

and how we are to live where soul meets body.

Extend grace and peace to each other.

In Christ “there is no condemnation.” (Romans 8: 1)

In Christ there is community.

Thank God we have this faith to sustain us and move us

forward,

together, filled with the grace of God.

Thank God we have before us a mighty and meaningful Word to enlighten our journey.

Where Soul Meets Body

We can surmise from Acts 19 that the Epistle to the Romans was most likely written during the later stages of Paul's life,

sometime between 55-64 AD,

which would mean he crafted it while travelling

through northern and southern Greece on his way to Jerusalem.

Today we find ourselves beginning to explore and exam the 8th Chapter of Romans.

Remember what we say here:

we may think we are examining the Bible

only to discern that the Word is examining us.

Here in Romans 8 we find before us one of the finest chapters in the Holy Scriptures.

Paul invited his listeners to hear the Word of God

in the form of a devotional, as a meditation, as a

spiritual tome,

rather than an analytical, hard-nosed
systematic theology.

Yet at the core of this Spirit-filled missive and meditation

is an outstanding systematic theology,

one that is so filled with the Holy Spirit

that it would impact the Church of Jesus
Christ

for generations and millennium
yet to be come.

Where Soul Meets Body

Here in the 8th Chapter of Romans

Paul speaks of the Christian life where soul meets
body.

Listen to some of the ways he paints a picture

of God's gifts to those

who choose to be a Christian in a material
world.

Choose to follow Christ, says Paul, and you shall receive:

(v. 2) A life of freedom from the law of sin and death

(v. 4) A harmonious walk in the Spirit of God

(v. 5) A mind centered on that which pleases God

- (v. 9) A life “in” the Spirit, with God as the atmosphere we breathe
- (v. 10) A home for the Spirit to dwell
- (v. 10-11) A life fully alive, in body and spirit
- (v. 13) A life as an adopted, chosen Child of God, as an heir, along with Christ
- (v. 17) A life that shares in Christ’s sufferings
- (v. 24-25) A life of hope
- (v. 26-27) A life of prayer
- (v. 28-30) A life of assurance
- (v. 31-39) A life of conquest over all trials and temptations and enemies of the Spirit[1]

In the 8th Chapter of Romans,

in Paul’s letter to the Christian churches in Rome,

he begins by making an argument to differentiate the spiritual impact of

through the Law of Moses as opposed to the Love of God.

Here he juxtaposes “the inability of the law to produce salvation on the one hand

and God’s achievement of salvation for humanity

by sending [Jesus Christ, the Son of God] on the other.”[2]

Paul would have been concerned with defining and contrasting Christianity

over and against Judaism and Greek and Roman philosophies.

When God sent the Son, Jesus Christ,

God accomplished what the law and philosophy could not.

By sending Jesus Christ to redeem us,

to show us the way to forgiveness and life everlasting,

in one fell swoop “God...defeated sin and freed humanity

to live freely ‘in the Spirit’

under the gracious leadership of the Spirit.”[\[3\]](#)

3-4 *God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son.*

[The Lord] didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant.

In Jesus [Christ], [God] personally took on the human condition,

entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity

in order to set it right once and for all.

The law code,

weakened as it always was by fractured human

nature,

could never have done that.

*The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin
instead of a deep healing of it.*

And now what the law code asked for

but we couldn't deliver

is accomplished

*as we, instead of redoubling our own
efforts,*

*simply embrace what the Spirit
is doing in us.*

Thanks be to God, through the saving power of Jesus Christ

we are free, free to be, free to live into God's forgiving
grace,

free to live into the Spirit

and with the Spirit

and to welcome in the Spirit of
God who dwells richly in us.

Here is the mystery of salvation:

not only are we called to be in the context of the Spirit,

the gracious gift of God is the Spirit that dwells
within us.

Dwell means to stay, to reside, to live as a permanent resident.

The Spirit of God dwells within, lives within,

resides permanently in the whole people of God.

The Spirit's stay is not a fleeting thing, just passing through,

merely a sideways glance, a casual drive by.

The Spirit of the Living Christ is here, within you, to stay.

Our joy and our responsibility,

should we choose to accept it,

is to grasp for the God of grace

who has already graciously grasped for us.[\[4\]](#)

Where Soul Meets Body

Do you think of yourself as an earthly body having a spiritual experience

or as a spiritual being having an earthly existence?

*9 ...You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,
since the Spirit of God dwells in you." (Romans 8: 9)*

9-11 But if God...has taken up residence in your life,

you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of [God].

...For you who welcome [God], in whom [God] dwells

—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—

you yourself experience life on God's terms.

*...With [God's] Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! **[5]***

Where Soul Meets Body

A little boy was admitted to the hospital to have his tonsils removed.

He was so nervous and frightened

that the operating doctor advised the child's parents
to not come hear him until afterward.

When they approached him after the operation,

they expected to find him upset and distressed.

To their amazement he was sitting up in bed,

eager and excited to tell them what had happened.

As they walked in the room he blurted out,

“God was there! I saw him and he talked to me!”

His mother said, *“Well, of course God was there, darling.*

But you did not see him and he did not speak to you.”

“He did, he did!” insisted the boy.

His father asked, *“Well, what did God look like?”*

“He was all dressed in green and I could only see his eyes.

He had a green dress and a green cap and a green thing over his mouth.”

“I see,” said his father, *“and how did you know that he was God?”*

At this point the child sat up even taller in the bed.

“Well you see, Daddy, there were these three angels all around me

dressed in white and two of them were girl angels and one was a man angel.

The man angel asked me to open my mouth.

He looked in and whatever he saw he called to the one in green,

and he said, ‘O God, come and look at these tonsils.’

So God came and looked in and said to me, ‘Don’t be

afraid. I won't hurt you.'

So I wasn't a bit afraid

because God was doing the job himself."

Do not be afraid.

God is on the job,

the Holy Spirit dwells in you,

and Jesus Christ is with you wherever soul
meets body.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*

Extra Material:

"Soul Meets Body"

(Written By: Benjamin Gibbard; Performed By: Death Cab
for Cutie)

I want to live where soul meets body

And let the sun wrap its arms around me
And bathe my skin in water cool and cleansing
And feel, feel what it's like to be new

Cause in my head there's a greyhound station
Where I send my thoughts to far off destinations
So they may have a chance of finding a place
where they're far more suited than here

And I cannot guess what we'll discover
When we turn the dirt with our palms cupped like shovels
But I know our filthy hands can wash one another's
And not one speck will remain

And I do believe it's true
That there are roads left in both of our shoes
But if the silence takes you
Then I hope it takes me too
So brown eyes I hold you near
Cause you're the only song I want to hear
A melody softly soaring through my atmosphere

Where soul meets body

[1] Litany found in Foreman's "The Layman's Bible Commentary, Vol. 21", P. 42)

[2] Soards, Dozeman, McCabe, "Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: After Pentecost 1, Year A" Page 78.

[3] Soards, et al. P. 78.

[4] Soards, et al. P. 79, adapted.

[5] Romans 8: 9-11, The Message.