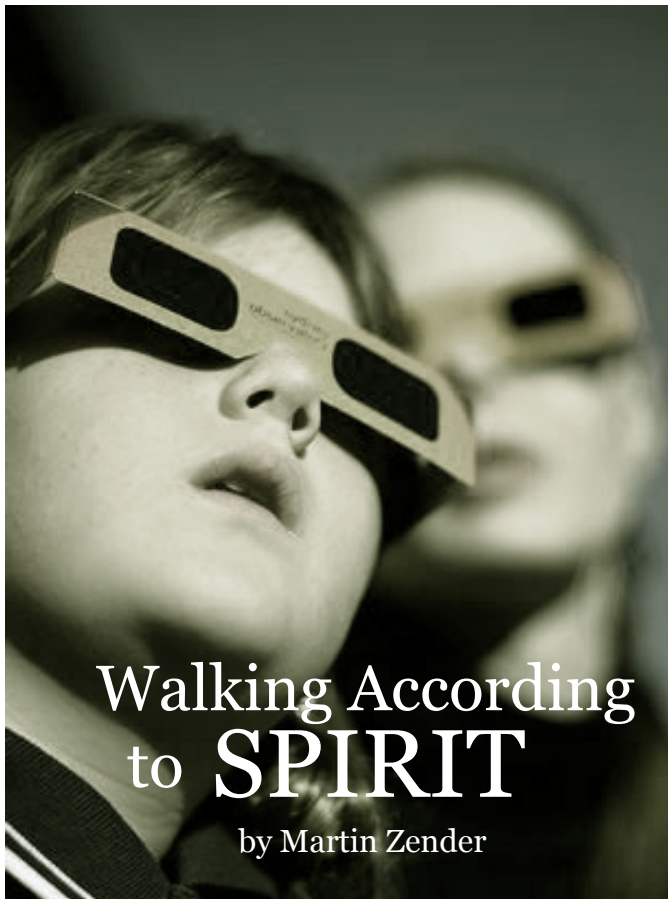


ROMANS Part 60

Chapter 8:1-2



Walking According to SPIRIT

by Martin Zender

Nothing, consequently, is now condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Not according to flesh are they walking, but according to spirit, 2 for the spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus frees you from the law of sin and death.

The word “consequently” is consequential here. What Paul is about to say concerning there being no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus stands on the shoulders of everything he has already stated: “Nothing *consequently* is condemnation ...” I am tempted to say that “everything he has already said” starts all the way back in Romans 3:21 when he began announcing the evangel and includes everything up until the last verse of chapter 7. Rather than repeat the last five chapters, I will quote the last two lines (verses 24 and 25) of chapter 7—

A wretched man am I! What will rescue me out of this body of death? Grace! I thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Consequently, then, I myself, with the mind, indeed, am slaving for God's law, yet with the flesh for Sin's law.

Paul's sin brought on the wretchedness, but this is a misery he denied most of his life. It was too enjoyable for him to bask in his self-righteous attainments. Whenever Paul felt the misery coming, he pressed a “Get Out Of Misery Free” button, stared at his theology degree, and the troubling feeling went away. It was pure denial. Jesus Christ brought the misery home to him on the Damascus road; *then* his whole life flashed before him. Paul wouldn't have minded staying on the ground for a couple of days just to drive that instant replay from his mind, but there would be no such luxury. Jesus told him to rise and painted for him a tough yet glorious future. For Paul, Sin would be a thing of the past—his obsession with it, that is. Paul needed rescued from the war with his flesh, and this was it. The war was over. Every shackle fell away. Now it was just pure freedom, sunshine, rocks, whips, jails, and indignant Jews. Grace gave Paul this deliverance. For the rest of his life he would try to convince others how

great it was to consider their old selves dead but to still be alive in the freedom of the new humanity. It was kind of like Tom Sawyer attending his own funeral service.

THE GRACE IS ON

Grace is, “favor granted to those deserving the opposite.” As soon as anyone starts deserving grace, Grace packs up its toys and walks home, dejected. It’s dejected when it’s no longer needed. This is no joke. For grace to be happy, there must be sinning little Munchkins (it’s not a redundancy) to lavish acceptance upon. Grace likes moral car accidents. Sin is to grace what sick children are to mothers stirring pots of chicken noodle soup. We don’t try to be sinning little Munchkins, but it just sort of happens. Sometimes we make it happen. You would think that Grace would ball its fists at such *intentional* sin, scold and look to kill, but it doesn’t. In fact, it only gets happier. Grace is weird. You just have to stop and stare at it when it does this. It’s like stepping into a sideshow tent at the circus. You can’t stop staring at something that smiles at how much you’re sinning. It’s a freak. When we’re survey-

ing a moral car accident with “body parts” strewn every which way at a scene where none would assume anything but death—and *then* we see grace grinning with its big white teeth and slapping its knee and doing a jig—then we know we’re up against something very strange that, really, we’ve never seen before.

Before it was invented, nothing like Grace had ever been invented. God mixed up some foreign yet warm elements from His heart and out came a ribbon of pure comfort shot into the mud. It is the most stubborn thing, Grace. It’s nuclear unmerited favor. It “beats all.” No sin ever tops it. Saul tried, but not even he could do it—and he didn’t even know what it was. As I said, more sin only makes Grace laugh its stupid head off and feel needed. If it were a human, we would have to put Grace in jail for its own protection.

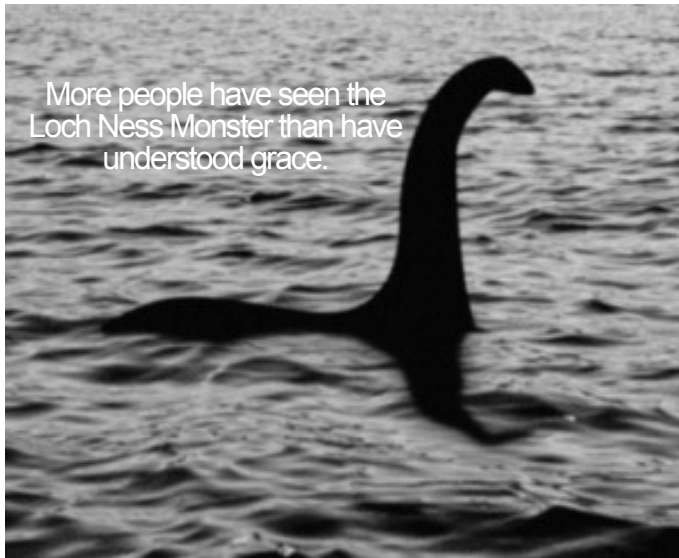
Grace is socially unacceptable. But it will rise to any and every occasion of the flesh until the sinning little Munchkins exercising that flesh finally get tired of sinning and decide to lie down. Grace will eventually wear out every sinner. This is what it does. It’s the ultimate marathon runner, Grace is. The sinners become exhausted, one by one, and then learn to relax in Grace’s motherly arms and suck its delicious soup. The result is always an improved moral walk—eventually. Yes, Grace has power for this. Grace could go on all day like this. When a sinner experiences this strange thing, that is the day that the sinner finally realizes what grace is. I believe that only about five-hundred people alive today have truly understood Grace. Everyone else attends church. More people have seen the Loch Ness Monster than have understood grace.

“KILL THE GRACE PERSON”

Consequential to all the fun Romans facts gone before, there is now therefore no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. How can there be condemnation upon the heads of people saved by grace? “*Grace saved this person; let’s kill ‘im.*” That doesn’t make sense, does it? “*Hey, let’s condemn this person who cannot possibly do anything that isn’t instantly cured by joy and happiness and the ribbon of pure comfort shot into the mud from God’s heart.*” It doesn’t work like that; it can’t work like that.

People hate this truth. The people who think they are the greatest champions of grace are the most flabbergasted when some spiritual giant and genius such as myself inadvertently lays on them the definition. When someone says, “Are you telling me, Zender, that I can just go out and kill people and do whatever I want and I’m still saved?” I light





up like a sparkler and say, “I’ll be darned. You finally understand grace.” But of course there is no such understanding. It’s all a front. The people just stand there. Some of them develop a drool string that reaches to the floor from the bottom of their chins. Their eyes glaze like donuts.

DOES PAUL PULL OUT THE RUG?

“Not according to flesh are they walking, but according to spirit.”

This verse is more misunderstood than a Dali painting. When religious people get to this verse they go brain-dead and forget everything else they’ve read in Romans, if they *have* read anything else in Romans. They haven’t even absorbed the previous verse, verse one: “Nothing, consequently, is now condemnation.” They think that this verse is canceled out by the next verse (verse two) that talks about not walking according to flesh. As if Paul had turned to his scribe Tertius and said, “Well, Tertius, we’ve got the sinning little Munchkins riding high and mighty on their little grace trains with this ‘no condemnation’ business—it does sound good, doesn’t it?—ha, but of course we know that it’s *too* good, so now we’re going to whack the little people back to reality by telling them that this lack of condemnation only works if they behave themselves. *That’ll* keep them scratching their beanie-capped little noggins.”

After having taught on justification by faith, on the death of the old humanity, on the fact that where sin increases grace superexceeds, and that only grace can save—and knowing that grace is favor shown to people who deserve the opposite—could it possibly be true that these blessings are now blasted to death in the same letter by the

same author who now says that none of it works unless we behave ourselves? Are we going to say that grace is favor granted to those who don’t deserve it—as long as they deserve it? Will we stand in our own drool puddle and insist that faith is the opposite of works and that one is saved by faith—as long as one works? There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus—*unless you do something to really anger Christ Jesus*. And the one thing that Christ Jesus *really* hates is, “walking according to flesh.” Is that how it’s going to work?

JUMP AS YOU ARE

Do you remember me telling you about how a slave of sin is just as much someone who fights sin as indulges it? Do you remember me mentioning during my soliloquy in Romans chapter 6 about “presenting your members as implements of righteousness” (Romans 6:13)? I gave you the analogy of a river, writing that presenting your members was not the thought of suddenly *doing* righteousness, but of throwing your nasty little self into the river of righteousness, of which Christ is the King. You align yourself with Him, you think of Him, you tend to Him, you throw yourself into Him, all the while boldly forgetting yourself. You may still be a limping, lusting son of Adam, but the river of righteousness will change you. Just let it. But first you must present yourself to it, that is, jump in. Jump in as you are. Don’t think, just jump. You jump in as a wretch and let the river do its thing. The river of righteousness is “Christ And His Opinion of You.” How different this river is from the old one you used to paddle in and struggle against, namely, “The River of Me Being a Despicable Person and a Constant Disappointment to God and to Everyone Around Me, Including Myself.”

It’s the same here. The happy existence of nothing being condemnation can only be apprehended by those walking “according to spirit,” that is, those who have stopped listening to and looking at their flesh and begun listening to what the spirit has to say concerning them. I am proposing to you that our walk with Christ is dependent upon what we think. Brains have legs. Or should I say, legs emerge from brains. For instance, a person who thinks “grace” concerning himself is not going to hate himself and then by extension hate others. The walk lines up with the vision. A person who thinks “law,” on the other hand, will become an uptight, religious zealot who cannot help but condemn others. Show me a man’s walk, and I’ll show you his mental disposition.



Our walk is what we do, but it depends upon what we think. This is where *according to* comes in. This is where the mental part happens. When can only walk the way we think, so this word “according to” must be apprehended. It’s the Greek connective *kata*, which means “down.” This literally means that you are “*down* with spirit.” This isn’t down as in thumbs down, but rather down as the Hippie culture defined it, “Hey man, I’m down with that.” It means that you are hip to it *mentally*, cool with it *mentally*, in accord with it *mentally*. You agree with it. This is an action of the mind. Here are the top definitions from urbandictionary.com of “down,” and examples of how it’s used. Quoting here under the entry “down” from the urban dictionary:

“YEAH, I’M DOWN”

1. To be ‘With It or in ‘the know how’, knowledgeable about something, or to give respect/recognition to something.
2. To be keen for something.
3. To be friends with someone or to spend time with them.
4. To have something ‘Down Pat’ or well perfected.
5. To be in agreement with someone or something.
 - a. “Oh yeah...I’m down with what yo talking.”
 - b. “I’m down for some Redman.”
 - c. “Are you down to get a feed?”
 - d. “I’m pretty down with her.”
 - e. “I was ‘gettin’ down’ with her the other night.”
 - f. “You gotta have your kickflips ‘down pat’.”
 - g. “Wanna go for a skate?” “Yeah, I’m down.”

I don’t even understand half of this, but that’s okay. Note definition #1: “know how”; “knowledgeable”; “to give recognition to something.” Even the urban dictionary recognizes this as mental apprehension.

I once heard Jim Coram of the *Concordant Publishing Concern* describe *kata* as, “what it comes *down* to.”

SIT AND LISTEN

In the context of Romans 8:1, what this comes down to is that you are “down” with what the spirit of God says concerning you, and this informs your walk. The realization comes first, then your walk. You are “with it” on grace, you are “knowledgeable” concerning justification, you “give respect/recognition to” the fact that grace overwhelms all your sins—you know exactly what all this is and means because it is assumed by Paul that you have gotten to this part of his letter by reading the previous parts that he and Tertius labored over, and Paul is right about you; this letter was probably read to the assembly at one sitting. (What a revelation, right there. The Romans to whom ‘Romans’ came were sitting down, listening to the letter being read, their only righteous acts being pricking up their ears and paying attention to the teaching and trying to apply it to themselves, which is the most righteous act of all as long as it’s the right teaching.). I am assuming that the reading of Romans to the Romans was accompanied by large pots of coffee and a brief intermission right around chapter 7.)

But back to Paul’s assumption. Paul assumes that you’ve come through the entire letter, have digested it, and haven’t bumped your head on a pipe between 7:25 and 8:1 or, stupider yet, between 8:1 and 8:2. Everything Paul has told you so far about your standing in Christ is



spiritual revelation that is supposed to stick not only to your ribs but to your cerebral cortex. You are “walking in accord with” this spirit when you are “keen” for that which Christ and Paul say of you through the agency of this spirit; you are “in agreement” with it. This is mental assent to a teaching—

- a. “Oh yeah...I’m down with what yo talking.”
- b. “I’m down for some Romans.”
- c. “Are you down to get grace?”
- d. “I’m pretty down with Paul.”
- e. “I was ‘gettin’ down’ with my own justification the other night.”
- f. “You gotta have your apprehension of grace ‘down pat’.”
- g. “Wanna realize you’re a new creation?” “Yeah, I’m down.”

WALKING ACCORDING TO FLESH

The opposite of all this wonderment is to “walk according to flesh.” Naturally, the religious mind assumes that this means you are sinning. Yes and no. It’s not the sinning that such a mind thinks it is. The religious mind can only think of sin in terms of breaking commandments. They have been wrong about this for about two-thousand years. The real sin here is considering oneself in accord with flesh. This classic misunderstanding is why Christians contradict themselves so often: “Where Sin abounds grace superexceeds; we’re saved by grace;

there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus—unless, of course, we walk according to flesh, and by this we mean breaking commandments; it’s not sin as Zender defines it, which to him in this context means *fighting* Sin on Sin’s battleground.”

Why are they always talking about me? Referencing me?

THE IDOL CALLED “FLESH”

The opposite of “walking in accord with spirit” is “walking accord with flesh.” This walking in accord with flesh is, once again, a mental disposition, being “down” with what the flesh says. “My flesh says I’m a mess, so I’m a mess. I’m down with that.” Stop being down with that—if you are. It only starts a downward spiral of bad acts. Look what it did to Saul. His mental apprehension fueled his hate. You’re supposed to ignore what your flesh is telling you. Your flesh was crucified with Christ so it doesn’t deserve a voice; it doesn’t get to vote. But if you’re a religious person and your flesh is all you think about, then you are the one “walking according to flesh,” even though you are at the same time

“Your flesh was crucified with Christ; it doesn’t deserve a voice; it doesn’t get to vote.”

warning others not to walk according to flesh. You are so obsessed with flesh that you are blinded to the fact of Christ having already judged your flesh, as described in this book of Romans. It’s hard to see Christ when you build an idol and set it before Christ, the idol being your flesh. This homemade Idol to Self is bigger than the image Nebuchadnezzar erected in the plain of Dura.

To adherents of man-made faith, flesh is this amazingly powerful thing that can undo the death of Christ for the sins of the world. Did you know that the flesh was that powerful? Just go to church and you will find out; it’s all they talk about—the power of the flesh. Everyone there is sinning like crazy while discussing how free from Sin they are. I would run from the building in under a minute. Imagine me, a guy whose old self was crucified with Christ 2,000 years ago, sitting there listening to people badgering me to dig up my already-crucified self and fix it or else be damned. I went back to my old grade school a few years ago and tried to manipulate myself into a first-grade desks. It hurt. Church

would be a similar contortion for me. How come people never upgrade their desks? It's because of the place and the power and the importance given to the flesh. They are walking in accord with flesh, and that's where they stay. They're "down" with the lie of flesh, that it can undo grace and Christ's intentions on the cross.

Of course this is what flesh wants people to think. Flesh is run by Satan, and Satan is a liar. The only people committing this sin are those in the self-appointed business of stopping sin. The irony here is so fat that it uses Google Earth to take a selfie. It's not that one can screw up the no-condemnation thing; it can't be screwed up. What one *can* screw up is the apprehension and perception of the no-condemnation thing: one is so busy contemplating the danger of flesh that one's vision of Christ gets lost. The mind set on flesh cannot see the One Who destroyed it. The idol is in the way. It's so big and tall, this idol, that it obscures the sun/Son. A Flesh Worshipper can be "praising Jesus" while at the same time never recognizing Him.



Such individuals are buffalooing themselves and then never shooting dead any of the buffaloes because they can't spiritually perceive the beasts of religious flesh-worship running amok through the sanctuary.

If you think I'm crazy in my interpretation of this verse, then I will skip ahead to verse 5 to prove to you that if I'm crazy, then so is Paul:

“For those who are in accord with flesh are disposed to that which is of the flesh, yet those who are in accord with spirit to that which is of the spirit.”

Paul defines verse 1 for us in verse 5. He doesn't say that those who are in accord with flesh are sinning like little Munchkins. He says that they are "disposed to that which is of the flesh." Disposition? There's the mental thing again. Sin is of the flesh. Failure is of the flesh. Self-criticism is of the flesh. Trying to "be good for Jesus" is of the flesh. Couple this with the definition of "disposed" in the *Concordant Dictionary*, which is "having a bent, bias, or inclination," and you are off to the races of revelation. The body follows whatever the mind disposes itself to. Walking in accord with flesh means an inclination toward everything your stupid flesh tells you rather than what the spirit of God tells you. This is the same as the "jump in the river" analogy.

But again, the buffalo people see the word "walk" as in "walk according to spirit," and they can't help but associate "walk" with "what we are *doing* with Jesus and for Jesus," and they divorce it from any kind of vision, disposition, or "according to." They're "according to" nothing. They are fueled by fear of failure. They just don't want to go to hell. Their minds are a wasteland. Here is how they greet one another:

Jim: "How is your walk with the Lord, Bill?"

Bill: "Sterling, Jim, sterling."

What Jim means is, "Are you behaving yourself for Jesus?" and what Bill means is, "No."

This is *not* what Paul means. When Paul asks, "How is your walk?" what he is really getting at is: Are you mentally disposed to what your flesh has to do for Jesus, or are you mentally disposed to Jesus? Are you disposed to the imaginary capabilities of the flesh to please God, or are you disposed to the accomplishment of Jesus Christ on the cross, *through* God?" No one uses the word "realization" more than Paul. Paul never considered a walk without first considering a teaching. What is one hearing? That's the way it is in Romans. Paul doesn't even talk about behavior until chapter 12, *after* he has loaded up the reader with teaching. Not a word about behavior until chapter 12. It's always Paul's method. How can you behave if you have no vision? How can you behave if you're disposed to what your flesh tells you rather than the spirit? Behavior is based and built upon revelation.

Paul's first mention of this principle in this book occurs in 1:28-29—

And according as they do not test God, to have Him in recognition, God gives them over to a disqualified mind, to do that which is not befitting, filled with all injustice, wickedness, evil, greed, distended with envy, murder, strife, guile, depravity, whisperers.

There it is in a nutshell. The physical walk accords with the mental walk. God gives people over to a disqualified *mind*, and this leads to them *doing* that which is not befitting. In this case, “they do not test God, *to have Him in recognition.*” Recognition is a mental activity. The injustice, wickedness, evil, greed and so forth that follows is a result of the misguided or absent recognition of God. The opposite is just as true, that a good and worthy walk can only follow a proper recognition of God and Christ.



“You can only become as great as the recognition of your God.”

You can only become as great as the recognition of your God. This is why people who believe in eternal torment are so hateful. Romans 6:20-21—

For when you were slaves of Sin, you were free as to Righteousness. What fruit, then, had you then?—of which you are now ashamed, for, indeed, the consummation of those things is death.

It is easy to assume that slaves of Sin, by definition, produce bad fruit. This is not the *definition* of a slave of Sin, however, because Paul subsequently asks, “What fruit, then, had you then?” The fruit is a separate issue. The fruit is the walk. The question ought to be, “When you were slaves of Sin, what kind of walk did *that* pro-

duce?” I conclude that slavery to Sin is not the walk, but rather the mental apprehension; what *follows* that is bad fruit. Ephesians 5:9 is also instructive here:

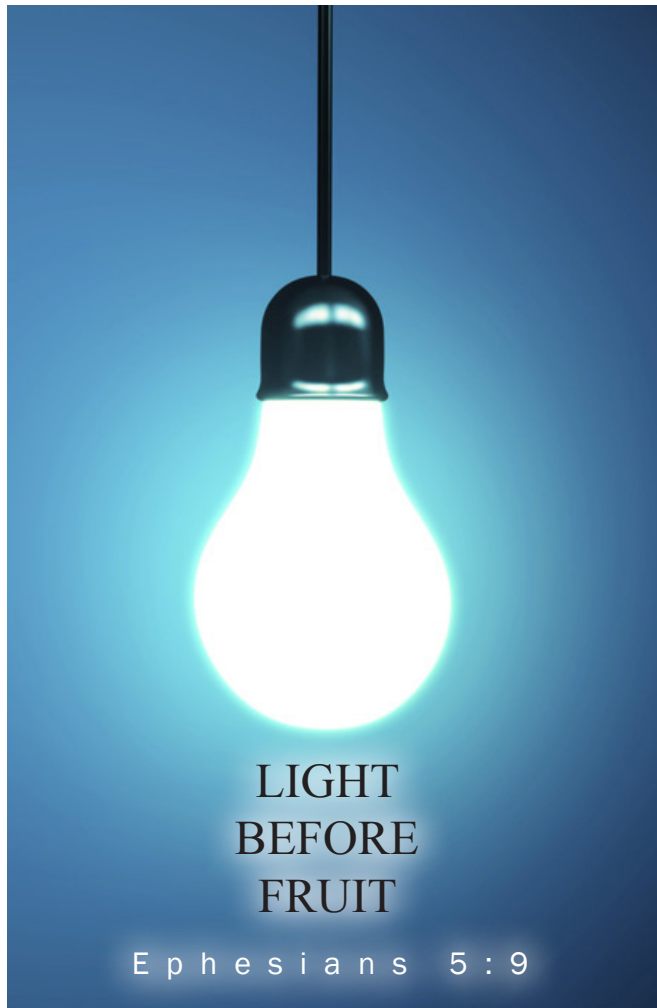
As children of light be walking, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

Here, walking according to the light is a mental activity; a recognition; a realization. It is *followed by* fruit. The good fruit is a result of thinking according to light or, as this passage puts it, walking in accord with the light. The walking is what you *do* in response to the light, which is what you *apprehend*. Children of light walk one way, children of darkness another. What is the “light” and the “darkness” here except either sound, Scriptural teaching and thoughts, or the erroneous thoughts of religious tradition?

“For the spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus frees you from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

If you need any more convincing that the common Christian interpretation of Romans 8:1 is flawed, then here it is. Walking “in accord with” spirit, is being “down” (I’m “keen” with this: I’m “in the know how”) with the law of life in Christ Jesus that frees you from the law of sin and death. How can monitoring your flesh all day long or trying to be like Jesus night and day *ever* be construed as being freed from anything? It’s pure bondage. Guaranteed grief. Look at these two words: “life” and “frees.” If this sounds like a romp through the meadow, it is. It’s the lilies of the field dancing in the sun without condemnation. It’s the sparrow flitting about in the blue sky, being cared for by God. This is precisely as good as it sounds. It’s actually better than it sounds. It will always be better than it sounds, never worse, because no one has yet plumbed the pure depths of grace, not even us. We understand it, but haven’t plumbed it to completion. Paul came the closest when he was Saul. You’re plumbing it now, maybe. Good. Keep plumbing. Don’t caulk too much. Let the good times roll.





The opposite of “walking in accord” with life and freedom is “walking in accord” with sin and death. Walking in accord with flesh means being bound to the law of sin and death. All these churches, then, that nail the Ten Commandments to the wall are “walking according to the flesh,” which the apostle himself defines as walking in accord with “the law of sin and death.” Don’t they know that the law was a dispensation of death (2 Corinthians 3:7)? No, they missed that memo. So it’s another great irony. There is no ironing board big enough to lay that irony on.

Look at the inspired structure:

**Not according to flesh are they walking,
| but according to spirit,
| FOR (BECAUSE)
| the spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus frees you
from the law of sin and death.**

Walking according to flesh aligns with paying attention to the law, which leads to death (Christians, you didn’t know that by trying to perfect your flesh, you’re doing the very thing you’re preaching against, namely, walking in accord with flesh) and walking according to spirit means feeling free and alive in Christ Jesus. The *only* way we can feel alive and free in Christ Jesus is to stop considering ourselves according to the flesh. 2 Corinthians 5:15-17—

And He died for the sake of all that those who are living should by no means still be living to themselves, but to the One dying and being roused for their sakes. So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer. So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new!

Appreciate the parallel between Romans 8:2 and this verse—

**“Walking according to flesh” =
Being acquainted with ourselves according to flesh.
“Walking according to spirit” =
Apprehending ourselves as a new creation**

We who have appreciated the death of Christ for our sakes will not insult that very Christ by “living to [ourselves],” that is, continuing to fuss with and worry about our flesh even after Christ went to so much trouble to nail it to the cross. What an insult to Christ. “Thanks for delivering me from flesh, Jesus. Now I’m going to work on my flesh.”

Not only are we no longer acquainted with Christ according to flesh, we are no longer acquainted with ourselves in this capacity. It’s over, people. The war is over.

Stop fighting and enjoy the spoils. In other words, walk according to spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18—

Now the Lord is the spirit; yet where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Now we all, with uncovered face, mirroring the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the spirit.

—MZ