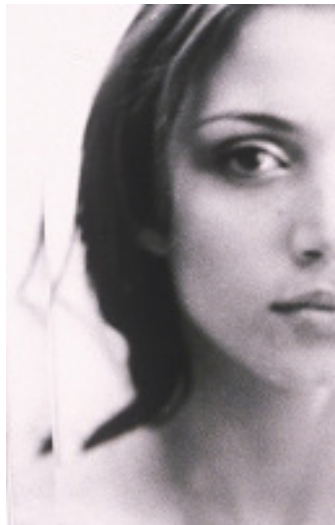


# ROMANS Part 63

Chapter 8:5-9

## The pervasive stare of God

**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. 6 For the disposition of the flesh is death, yet the disposition of the spirit is life and peace, 7 because the disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able. 8 Now those who are in flesh are not able to please God. 9 Yet you are not in flesh, but in spirit, if so be that God's spirit is making its home in you. Now if anyone has not Christ's spirit, this one is not His.**



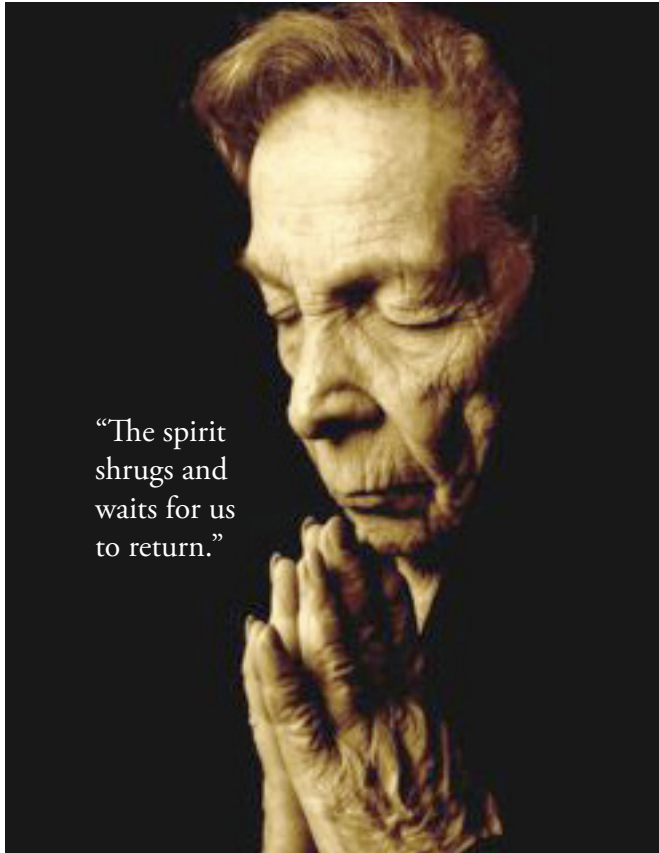
**W**hen a Christian points the finger at someone and says, "You're a fleshly person!" we expect to look into the eyes of sex (Maybelline lash enhancer?) drugs (a Camel cigarette?) and rock and roll (Steve Miller hits from the '70s?) When

Paul in Romans chapter 8 points the finger at someone, however, and says, "You're a fleshly person!" we look into the eyes of church ("See you next Sunday!"), law ("Behave yourself for God!"), and emotional splash posing as spirituality ("Sway, cry, raise your hands for Jesus!")

### LAS VEGAS AND THE BIBLE BELT

In Romans chapter 8, we are considering an entirely new category of flesh. Here is flesh as God and Christ see it. It's not the flesh of the prostitute, but of the preacher. Forget Las Vegas; we're driving into the Bible Belt now. Those who are in accord with flesh in Romans chapter 8 are disposed to the many ways flesh imagines that it might please God. Yet those who are in accord with spirit sit very still to look hard into what God and Christ have accomplished for their sakes, at the cross. It is a disposition of "I need more revelation, please," rather than, "I need more time and opportunity to work." Revelation thrills the inner man. It is a deep satisfaction that would bore a Trinity Broadcasting Network audience half to death.

Flesh gravitates toward death (according to Paul), although the flesh doesn't always recognize death because many deathly things in this world pose as life. It would seem that striving to save one's soul would indeed save it, but such an activity only loses it. (Good guess though, flesh.) The disciples raved over the temple's stateliness, but they placed their bets on a destruction-doomed building. (Strike two, flesh.) How can life and peace live in a building? (Strike three.) Life and peace are inward entities; you just can't hang a sconce on an inward entity. Ceremonies send life and peace packing; there are so many ways to screw up a ceremony—you can arrive late, for instance. You can repeat the wrong words. You can fall down. (I love watching You-Tube videos of weddings gone wrong; I have this "I-hate-ceremonies" thing, sorry. I like it



“The spirit shrugs and waits for us to return.”

when people trip on the white silk runner; when cakes collapse, or when the ring bearer poops his pants. Just get on with being married, people.) The disposition of the spirit is life and peace. The spirit within us seeks these things. If we were to mistake death and disquietude for life and peace, the spirit would shrug and wait for us to return from our little escapade. Off we would go into the attractive but deceiving (and stressful) side-track. (The spirit would head to bed for awhile.) I know of a guy who this happened to.

#### WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF FRAUD

This guy I’m talking about prayed to God for a revelation, and God sent him into the Worldwide Church of God for ten years, which is not God’s church at all, but rather a cult that asks for a lot of money and then sends you off to observe the feasts of Israel in many exotic locations. I think I might have mentioned this guy before; his is a dependable go-to story for me. When the guy first heard about the Worldwide Church of Fraud—I mean, God—from a friend, his flesh started quivering like a Dixie banjo (he was from the South.) Finally he could be who God wanted Him to be! Finally he could follow

God’s laws! The spirit within the guy shrugged and said, “WTF, why are we going to the Poconos to worship the Father?” and gave up and went to bed. God would rouse this same spirit again later after the lesson was learned.

The lesson learned was that many things posing as life and peace in this world are actually death and disquietude. Sometimes it takes ten years to discover this, sometimes ten minutes, sometimes a lifetime.

Eventually the revelation of true life and peace hit the guy I’ve been telling you about, and he realized that while in the Worldwide Church of Fraud, he never could get all the leaven out of his car on Friday night (Subway buns), he sometimes needed to carry stuff on the Sabbath (grudges, firewood), his spiritual life—especially his patience—never improved (“*When, God, will you fix my patience?!*”), his kids hated not listening to their iPods on Saturdays (God hates rock music, but especially on Saturdays), and all his money was gone. So one day he said, “I’m dying and disquieted here. What happened?” God had led him into the cult, is what happened. Why would God do that? Because now the guy could appreciate the difference between death posing as life, and real life. The spirit said, “About frickin’ time,” and the guy has been cruising into what the cross of Christ has accomplished ever since. His car has been a haven for Subway crumbs, but this is such a small price for spiritual freedom.

#### AIMING TO PLEASE

**“The disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able. Now those who are in flesh are not able to please God” (Romans 8:7-9).**

Flesh cannot be subject to the law of God. Therefore, God cannot be pleased when flesh *tries* to subject itself to His law. Have so many people missed the newsflash? Yep. They change channels whenever the truth comes on, or they stop up their ears and hum really loudly. They like working too much. They don’t want to hear that they’ve been wasting their time.

Why would God create something (the flesh) that He knew couldn’t please Him? He wants flesh to come to the revelation of its inability to please Him. Flesh can’t come to a revelation like this unless it has something to come to a revelation *from*.

“Enmity to God,” is a verb phrase corresponding to the noun phrase, “enemies of God.” What, or who, do you think of when you hear the phrase, “enemies of God”? I



think of militant Muslims who think they're serving God by burning people alive and crucifying children (is it something in the water?), but who are in fact serving a false deity and distancing themselves from the One and Only. But if there is one thing we are learning in Romans chapter 8 it is that we must expand our understanding of what creates such one-sided distance between seekers and God. We must expand our understanding of flesh. Certainly burning people alive and crucifying children are great misadventures of flesh, but these are merely the obvious ones. Other flesh-works of a more subtle variety operate beneath the same banner of "Certainly we are pleasing God."

The same flesh offering hate and violence as gifts to the Deity attempts similar grandstanding with personal sacrifice and asceticism. I am thinking now of the Buddhists who sit in prayer poses for hours and sometimes days until their butt muscles crack. They're not killing others, but

**“The only thing now that displeases God is the all-out effort to please Him.”**

themselves—especially their butt muscles. I am thinking of Filipinos who shred their own backs with whips and nail themselves to crosses. I am thinking of a woman I know named Rosemary Tai who attends Mass not just on Sundays but seven (yes, seven!) days a week. She loves the ringing of the altar bells and how her knees feel after ten minutes on a kneeler. She loves how she thinks God feels about her. I am thinking of my friend David Roy sitting in a corner of his bedroom praying three times a day—6,

noon and 6—hoping for God to notice his consistency. He wonders why others can't get into the habit. "Other people are too lazy," he tells me.

Do you see what's happening? How did we go from crucifying children in Baghdad to observing prayer sessions in Boston? Nailing teenagers to a cross is but the opening line in a long category of works undertaken by human flesh hoping to please God. This same God, however, could never be more pleased than He already is with His Son, Jesus Christ. The only thing now that displeases God is the all-out effort to please Him.

#### GOD'S PRIVATE LOVEFEST

If I may congratulate myself here, this is a great point. God is staring at Christ. It is a pervasive stare. God is infatuated with His Son. Who did more to please Him—us or Jesus? (Hm. Let me draw up our respective deeds on a graph and get back with you.) Jesus Christ obeyed His Father's will to the bitter end against ridiculous opposition. He could have sinned a thousand times, but didn't do it once. Satan tempted Him with fleshly commodities and earthly kingdoms, yet Jesus turned up His nose at all of it, saying that He preferred every Word emerging from the mouth of God; *that* moved the heart of the Father. Then came the Garden of Gethsemane—here was a rock, blood, tears, desperate pleas, and one last opportunity to escape The Plan. Jesus Christ set forth His case, but He "unfortunately" ended everything with, "Not my will, but Yours be done"—and that was the ballgame. He went forward with the nightmare because it was what God wanted. (God knew that the ends would justify the means.) Then came the cross,

which was the worst thing that anyone has ever endured because not only was Jesus Christ nailed to a post naked having been scourged with bone-tipped whips, but His sacrificial Self was mocked by the church leaders while Satan celebrated his “triumph.” As if these things were not enough, the sins of the universe pushed Him so deep into the stake that He was forced to cry in despair, thinking that His own Father had abandoned Him. All He had to do was come off the cross and kill everyone, but instead He drank the vinegar they offered Him and declared, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

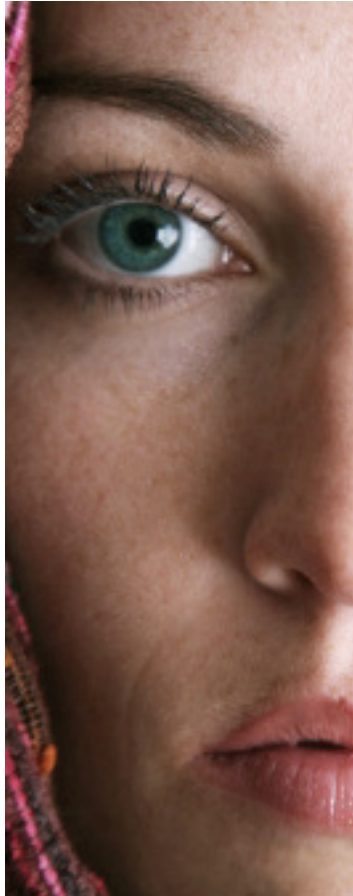
Do we wonder now why God stares at His Son lovingly? Do we wonder how God is able to restrain His enthusiasm for our little juggling acts and sword-swallowing routines? Jesus Christ went to the cross, and we’re juggling oranges. Wow. We’re praying three times a day, backs against our beds, with dinner cooking downstairs. Wow. Why isn’t God staring at *us*?

The news that “those who are in flesh are not able to please God,” ought to be celebrated, not shunned. Should anyone be disappointed in such a gospel, perhaps he or she should face a mirror three times a day—at 6, noon and 6—and say, “Just who the hell do I think I am?”

#### “PRAYING DAVE” IS NOT HAPPY

Now Dave will say, “Wait a minute, if I’m not able to please God, then what is the use of the good things I try to do?”

I want to say, “Exactly, Dave!” but I get Dave’s lament. It’s the same lament as those who say, “Since you’re telling me that I can just go out and murder people and still be saved, then what’s the use of my not murdering people?”



I had no idea how hard it was for some people to not kill fellow human beings, or impress God with their orange-juggling. The common denominator in this department of complaint is the misapprehension that God stares at us instead of at Christ. It all comes down to that. Complainers like the ones I have just described think that God is living and dying on hourly newsbreaks of their behavior. They think that their daily activity shows up in God’s computer on a Dow Jones Industrial-like graph that rises and falls with the success or failure of their acts. The graph dips and spikes—look at that! God can’t take His eyes off it! God either bangs His head against His desk in utter disappointment, or He fist-pumps an angel that Dave has kept his prayer promise.

We ought to get over it. God is staring at Jesus Christ’s stock graph, not ours.

#### GOOD BEHAVIOR

So why do killjoys like the apostle Paul exhort us to good behavior? Paul’s plea for good behavior seeks another source of inspiration besides, “I’ve got to please God.” The inspiration now, subsequent to Calvary, is a thankfulness toward God for being so pleased with Christ. Some of us had earthly fathers whom it was impossible to please. This poor experience infects its unhappy victims with the thought that God must be the same. He’s not. God has accepted us, flaws and all, through Christ. The joy of this realization is what now inspires us to ideal acts. It is no longer a matter of “do this or else,” but of “do this out of a spirit of appreciation that you’re no longer required to do it.”

Is it reverse psychology? Oh, sure. God is the One Who invented the way humans think. Threaten a man, and he rebels. Love him, and he serves. God has so thoroughly loved us through Christ that the possibility of failing Him no longer exists. Knowing this, we walk with confidence—some of us even dance—down the long, winding roads of life. And what do you know: we become better people. God *will* take His eyes from Christ to see such happy displays.

Besides Christ, nothing pleases God more than thankful hearts. —MZ