

10

Who We Are and What We Do

In the last chapter we saw how the world attempts to press us into its shape and act the way it wants, contrary to Christ's Word. This pressure is the backdrop to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5—7). His words are directed to disciples (5:1–2) and are specifically formulated to give us understanding of who we are and how that affects what we do.

In the first part of the Sermon (Mt 5:3–12), Jesus describes different kinds of people who receive appropriate blessings when the rule of God comes to them. They are the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who are peacemakers, and so on. Jesus also identifies here the godly longings which are satisfied when God's grace comes to an individual. God knows each one whom He calls. The grace of the kingdom always satisfies the deepest desires which God has planted in us (Jn 3:21).

In Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus goes on to instruct the disciples—those who have received God's favour—about who they are and what their relation to the world is to be. He uses the pictures of salt and light.

Becoming God's child is His gift, and once received this gift calls the disciples of Jesus to be salt and light to the world. They are not instructed to try to be salt and light by their own efforts; they already *are* salt and light, because God has made them so. It is His gift, a miracle of His Word. Their ability to preserve the world for God and to be a light to it is something for which they are supernaturally endowed. (In the next chapter we will see a similar emphasis in Paul's thinking about the fruit of the Spirit.) They cannot be these things through their own action. God simply announces: you *are* salt and light.

Yet they must act as the salt and light God has made them to be. They activate their 'saltiness' and 'lightness' in practice by believing what God has said about them and acting on it. Once again, we are called here to respond to God's Word by faith. We are to trust that what He says about us is true and act accordingly. The gift provides the basis for the task.

ACTION

1 You may have to come to grips with your past attitudes here, particularly your past failures. When we fail to act on the basis of what God says about us, the Enemy delights to tell us we are not what God says we are because we have not acted like it. This is a lie.

You may have listened to this accusation and accepted it; if so, you are guilty of unbelief in what God says about you. Repent of this, ask His forgiveness specifically and turn from it. (We will consider this deception further in the next chapter.)

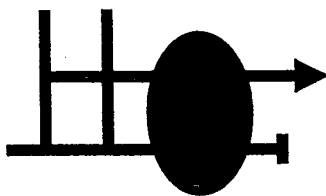
2 Now reread the section above and embrace with joy the truth that you are salt and light because God says you are. This is His gift to you—receive it with open hands.

At the very moment Jesus announces this gift (and thus instructs the disciples about their being), He also commands them to 'let it be so': 'Let your light shine before men...' (Mt

5:16). He also speaks of the possibility of the salt losing its saltiness and the light being covered up. This is startling; He seems to think the practical outworking of the gift is not automatic. Why? Is it because He has no confidence in His own gift? No. It has to do with the tension in which He has called us to operate the gift.

Jesus' underlying idea is that there is something constantly working against the practical expression of the gift in everyday life. He warns us not to stop the saltiness coming out or the light shining. This hindering factor is connected with the fact that we live 'in' the world. The world, part and parcel of the age which is passing away, is hostile and alien to God's children. Moreover, the hindrance is not only external to us; we are also internally compromised in our bodily existence (Paul calls this the 'flesh'—an idea we will return to in a moment.)

The need to command something which is automatic to come forth (such as light from a light and saltiness from salt) seems peculiar, except against this background of the tension of living in two ages at once.



Jesus' warning to let our light shine and take care of our salty flavour is an exhortation regarding what our basic mentality should be. Although the gift is granted, we should understand that the environment it must be exercised in is hostile. There is a war on. As soldiers we are well supplied, but we must be

careful not to hinder the gift being expressed through practical work.

ACTION

Have this relation between gift and task clear in your mind. Failure to understand it brings many Christians heartbreak, because it makes Christian living look impossible in practice. It is not—but it *is* a warfare which must be realistically understood.

This emphasis on gift and task, found throughout the New Testament, arises out of the historical position in which the King has found us and called us to live. It is the basic insight necessary for living at Point 5, in the tension of the old and new ages. Most of the New Testament comes alive when we comprehend this reality. It oscillates between telling us who we are in Christ, and exhorting us to live it in practice. We are to walk consistently with who we are—that is, ‘worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called’ (Eph 4:1, RSV; 5:2).

The idea of living in tension is not a fatalistic acceptance of difficulty and pressure, but a realistic understanding of both our gift and the hostility of the world. This helps us grapple better. Jesus emphasizes that the world is a hard place to live (Jn 16:33), yet He never instructs us to drop our bundle and take things lying down. Our peculiar temptations as Christians come at both ends of the spectrum: we either drop our guard and give in to the world’s pressure, or we are quite unrealistic about the world and believe it to be a harmless place in which we can live a carefree life.

The New Testament exhorts us to do neither. It insists we understand the Christian life as a very tough and constant fight because it takes place in an arena where great cosmic powers engage.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your

stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10–12).

GIFT: WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE

The dual emphasis on gift and task also appears in Paul's writings. On the one hand, he tells us who we are 'in Christ'; on the other, he strongly exhorts us to perform it.

In Chapter 7 we explored his idea of the two representative men, Adam and Christ (Rom 5:12–21). Both men and their actions affected the future of 'many'. Through them, two reigns exercise sovereignty over Man: the reign of sin expressed by its fruit of death, and the reign of grace which rules through righteousness to eternal life.

The letter to the Hebrews picks up the same theme. There the devil is portrayed as ruling over men through the power of death. All through their lives, men are in bondage because of their great fear of death. But Jesus has destroyed the devil's power through His own death and resurrection (Heb 2:14–15).

In Romans 6, Paul pursues the idea of us being caught up into Christ, our representative Man. This constitutes God's 'gift' of who we are 'in Christ'.

Fundamentally, to be 'in Christ' means to have died to sin's rule over us. Christ has died, and we participate in His death through baptism. Because we have died with Him, we have died to sin (v 2). 'Sin' here (as throughout Romans 5–8) is understood as an active power trying to control us, even though we have been liberated in Christ. But we are so identified with Christ that Paul can speak of us being 'buried' and 'raised' as He was—raised to walk in newness of life (v 4).

If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For

we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:5–11).

To have died to sin means we are no longer under its power to enslave us by its threat of death and condemnation. We are ‘freed from sin’ (Rom 6:7). We have died through our representative Man and, in that death, the sinful body has undergone the full penalty of condemnation. How? We understand that Jesus, sent in the likeness of sinful man (Rom 8:3), underwent the condemnation and death penalty which sin brings. So when Paul says *we* die to sin, he means that sin’s power, seen in the full penalty of death, has been exacted on Jesus, and therefore on us who are ‘in Him’.

But we are not only united with Christ in His death; we are also united with Him in His resurrection (Rom 6:5). Our Man died once only. Now, being raised, it is plain death no longer has dominion over Him. By rising again He has burst death’s bonds. Through embracing death for us He has defeated it for us. Now, in His resurrection life, He has ceased to be occupied with engaging death and has turned His attention to God: ‘the life he lives, he lives to God.’

TASK: OUR RESPONSE TO WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE

So we have both died and been raised ‘in Christ’. This is God’s gift. Now, in the light of this gift, Paul calls us to ‘walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:4, rsv). First came the gift of death

and resurrection; now comes the task of living that gift out moment-by-moment.

'Count yourselves dead to sin' (Rom 6:11). If Jesus now 'lives to God', what does this mean for those who are in Him? Nothing less than that they should count themselves also dead to sin—that is, think of themselves as acquitted, justified, and no longer under sin's rule. They have been transferred from one kingdom to another (Col 1:13); the slaves have been set free from the old master and are now to live 'to' a new Master. They are to consider themselves 'alive' to God in Christ Jesus.

What does this mean in practice? Having stated what God has already done, Paul exhorts us to the positive action of believing it. Again, we see that the Christian life is a life of faith, a constant exercise of trust in what God has accomplished. This 'counting' is simply a resolute moment-by-moment decision to believe ourselves to be what God has said we are. We will find our death and resurrection in Christ to be our present experience to the extent that we believe it.

Now we come to what, for our purposes, is the decisive verse: Romans 6:12.

'Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body.' Just as Jesus instructs us to let our light shine, so Paul tells us *not* to let sin rule us. The obvious implication is this: although we are free from sin's ability to enslave us by its threat of death and condemnation, it is still an active power which will rule us in practice unless we take action to stop it.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin

shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Rom 6:12-14).

The present place where sin may reign is in our 'mortal bodies'. This introduces us to an important distinction: the distinction between 'you' and your 'body'.

As far as being rescued and acquitted is concerned, we are to think of 'you': the person. 'You' are redeemed. As far as the present tension of living in the fallen world is concerned, we are to consider that 'you' live in a body, because it is the body which still carries the mark of the Fall, and it is the body which 'you' are to control, not allowing sin to rule 'you' through it. The day-by-day living of the Christian life comes to this: how do 'you', as a redeemed person, live in a body which is not yet redeemed?

This distinction is emphasized and clarified by the oscillation between 'your parts' and 'yourselves' in Romans 6:13. Paul makes use here of an insight common in our experience: the idea that in some circumstances we can say a man 'is' a body, whereas in others we can say a man 'has' a body.

Consider a man I once sat opposite in hospital. He was surrounded by teddy bears he was making with the aid of a pretty occupational therapist. His right leg was suspended above the bed, encased in plaster. His eyes were fixed on a television (when they were not watching the passing nurses). He usually had a glass of ale in one hand and his sewing needle in the other.

One day a friend from out of town walked into the ward and asked how he was doing. 'Oh, I'm great,' he replied, 'but my leg's no good.'

The man in the bed exuded health and vitality. He maintained a sharp distinction between his person and his ailing body, and his lifestyle left me in no doubt that the distinction was absolutely real. He knew that he himself was distinct from his leg. He 'had' a body and 'it' had a temporary problem; but 'he' was enjoying life to the full.

The contrast to this adaptive soul lay opposite him. This was an older man, enmeshed in a sheath of canvas suspended above his bed. He was very depressed, in constant pain and adversely affected by the smell of his own body. The same enquiry to him would always bring the answer, 'I am sick.' For this man, he *was* his body.

This identification of the person and his body is also true in suicide. No man decides to kill his body; he kills himself. In suicide there is no real distinction between me and my body; at that point I *am* my body.

Paul has chosen this distinction to express the personal tension of living in the two ages running concurrently at Point 5. The Christian life is a constant battle to live as people who have died to sin and are now called to oppose its reign in their body's 'members'. In this way, Paul locates the tension deep within the 'person-members' interplay of everyday life.

'I' AND 'MY MEMBERS'

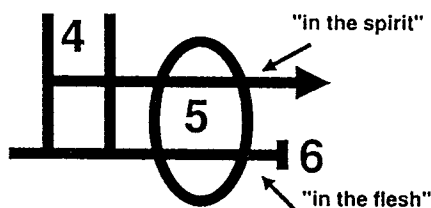
Our present life, then, is lived in a hostile environment where the personal battle involves not yielding to sin but offering ourselves to God (Rom 6:13). This is a military analogy. It pictures the warrior coming before the Lord he serves and presenting arms—that is, making his weapons (the 'parts of his body') available as instruments to serve his Master. The instruction to 'not offer the parts of your body to sin' indicates there is a rival master we can still serve if we choose. As long as we are at Point 5, constant vigilance is necessary.

Paul's expression for this personal hostile environment is 'the flesh'. The living which typifies the old age (the 'world' in John's language) is living 'in the flesh' (Rom 7:5, NIV margin). In contrast, the Christian lives not by the flesh but 'by the Spirit' (Rom 8:9).

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and

death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you (Rom 8:1–11, RSV).



In sending His Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (that is, in the likeness of men who are rebels and slaves to the hostile environment which ends in condemnation and death), God

actually condemned sin in the flesh (v 3). Jesus came right to where sin holds full sway and condemned it there. It is in the midst of the hostile rebellion that the Saviour has won the battle.

God has done this so that the just requirement of the Law (that is, the condemnation arising from God's wrath) might be fulfilled in us (v 6). This is what we saw in Romans 6 was involved in being caught up in the death and resurrection of Christ. This requirement is fulfilled in those 'who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'. Notice that this is a description of us on the basis of Christ's finished work; it does not mean that *we* fulfil the Law by our walking in the Spirit now. (The Greek grammar does not allow that interpretation any more than Paul's understanding does.) On the basis of Christ's work, we are those who live in the new age of the Spirit and refuse to conform to the lifestyle of the old rebellious age.

Life in the new age is presented by Paul as a series of great contrasts. The two opposing ages involve two opposing mind-sets—two different ways to think about yourself and to decide how to live moment-by-moment.

- Rebels, who live according to the flesh (self-centredly), set their minds on (that is, decide to think about) the things of the flesh (cf 1 Jn 2:15–17). On the other hand, God's children, who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5).
- These two different mind-sets lead to quite different results: one to death, the other to life and peace (Rom 8:6).
- The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's Law because it has no power of itself to do so. As a result it cannot please God (Rom 8:7–9).

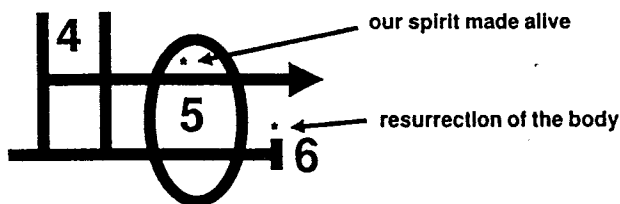
In contrast, we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. This means that the Spirit of God dwells in us (Rom 8:9). What is at issue here is whether we belong to Christ or not. The

coming and receiving of the Spirit is not something which happens to a rebel once he has become God's child. It is the thing which decides whether he *is* God's child or not.

Now we come to an important verse: Romans 8:10. It tells us our bodies are dead but our spirits are alive. Here our 'body/person' distinction helps our understanding.

First, our 'bodies are dead because of sin'—that is, they have no life in themselves. In fact, they are of the earth. As God said to Adam, 'dust you are, and to dust you will return' (Gen 3:19).

On the other hand, our 'spirits are alive because of righteousness'. Here it is vital to understand that it is 'you' who are alive to God now (Rom 6:11), not your body. It is 'you'—or 'your spirit' as Paul puts it here—who have been raised with Christ, not your body. Your body will not be raised until Point 6 (Rom 8:18–23). Then you will have a new spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44); but here and now, the 'newness of life' which Christ brings must be lived in a physical, unraised body.



It is no wonder, then, that we find living at Point 5 a tension. This is because it is living in a body which has not yet been raised. It is not yet redeemed. Here, at Point 5, we constantly groan inwardly as we await 'the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8:23).

Yet God dwells in us. Up to now, being 'in the Spirit' has meant being children of God, as distinct from children of

Satan, who are 'in the flesh'. Now being 'in the Spirit' focuses on God's indwelling us. And the moment we think of God being in us, we are faced with an astounding claim. Paul's mighty conclusion in Romans 8:11 is this: if God has come into your mortal body, then He can give it life through His Spirit which dwells in you—even though it is not yet redeemed!

Paul has now laid the basis for life at Point 5. It consists of 'putting to death the deeds of the body', something which is done 'by the Spirit' (Rom 8:13). This is what it means to 'live'.

This is how it is possible to live as 'sons of God' at Point 5, for that is who we truly are (Rom 8:14). We have not received a spirit of slavery which leads to fear, but a spirit of sonship (Rom 8:15). When we cry to God '*Abba!*' ('Daddy!'), we are experiencing that close relationship with the Father. And we are encouraged, because we understand this to be the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:10, 16).

This life in the Spirit is set in the tension of 'the now' but 'not yet' (Rom 8:17). We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ—that is our status now. We will be glorified at the redemption of our bodies—that is our future.

This glorification depends on what at first sight seems a strange condition: that we 'share his sufferings'. What does this mean?

This suffering is connected with what John calls the 'tribulation' we have 'in the world'. It is suffering 'with Christ' because what the world did to Jesus—hated Him—it does to us. Throughout the New Testament, suffering and tribulation are seen as constant expressions of being Christ's in this last age (Rom 8:18–21; 1 Cor 1:3–7; 2 Thess 1:3–12; 1 Pet 1:3–9).

Jesus Himself spoke of disciples being prepared to 'take up their cross'. Whenever a man in first-century Roman Palestine took up his cross and walked away, everyone understood he was not coming back. This powerful image indicates that the disciple of Christ is someone who has dealt himself a death

blow. He has decided to 'lose his life' for Christ's and the gospel's sake. This is just as true about putting the flesh to death as it is about living a self-denying lifestyle and even martyrdom.

Suffering is neither more nor less than 'normal' life for those called to live faithfully at Point 5. We do not suffer in order to be accepted by God; suffering does not establish any merit in us. It is ordinary life in the hostile world/flesh for those who have aligned themselves with the Victor.

On the other side of suffering, however, is glory. As Paul contemplates the future redemption of the body, it is small wonder that he concludes 'our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' on the day when we enter into our full liberty as God's sons and heirs.

ACTION

1 The rather theoretical material we have covered in this chapter is very important. Do not despise it. If we are to walk carefully and stand faithfully on our Master's victory, we need to be clear about what He declares is already ours in Christ and to trust Him for it.

2 Work through this section again so that you understand it fully. Embrace the truths for yourself; tell God you accept them, and give Him thanks.

Before the next chapter: Read Romans 7—8.