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The Mind, the Flesh and the Spirit

Romans 8.5-6

Series: The Pure Gospel

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I. Introduction

A. Emily Dickinson

1. The Brain – is wider than the Sky –
 - a. For – put them side by side –
 - b. The one the other will contain
 - c. With ease – and You – beside –
2. The Brain is deeper than the sea –
 - a. For – hold them – Blue to Blue –
 - b. The one the other will absorb –
 - c. As Sponges – Buckets – do –
3. The Brain is just the weight of God –
 - a. For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –
 - b. And they will differ – if they do –
 - c. As Syllable from Sound –
4. (Emily Dickinson)

B. Poets have often mused about the power and significance of the mind

1. In this poem, Emily Dickinson uses the concrete, physical brain to represent the more abstract mind
 - a. And in doing so reminds us how expansive the human imagination can be
 - b. And how the power of imagination is capable of carrying us humans beyond the immediate and tangible
 - c. Into the world of understanding and possibility

C. Theologians as well have viewed the mind as central to who we are as humans

1. In Genesis we learn that, of all aspects of creation, including the animal kingdom, what differentiates human beings is being made in the image of God
 - a. And of all the salient characteristics of the human creature it is clear that it is the mind that so distinguishes humans from even the most intelligent animals
2. Animals such as dolphins and pigs (believe it or not) are ranked among the most intelligent of all animals
 - a. Pigs can even play simple video games
 - b. (I don't know what that says about humans who so occupy their time with video games...)

3. But the chasm between human intelligence is vast
 - a. There are no libraries cataloguing the linguistic histories of dolphin civilizations
 - b. There are no museums displaying the artistic expressions of Chimpanzees – at least none that the chimps have created themselves
4. The complex linguistic capacities of humans so distinguish us from the rest of the animal kingdom that, while we may be amazed at what some animals are capable of doing
 - a. Nothing compares with human civilization
- D. Gary Larson made a cartoonist career out of using human attributes personified by animals
 1. But of course, the reason why the Far Side comic strips are funny is that the portrayal of other animals as human is absurd
- E. But it's not just poets and theologians (or even cartoonists) who are captivated by the power of the mind
 1. The Bible places the mind as preeminent among human attributes
 2. Even the book of Romans mentions the significance of the mind or thinking 15 times
 - a. And in doing so, he's not restricting the use of the mind to some kind of intellectual elite
 - b. The mind is central to the humanity of the auto mechanic as well as the scholar
 - c. And as central to the humanity of the barber as well as to the philosopher whose hair he cuts
 - d. (That is, if the philosopher has the good sense to get his hair cut in the first place!)
- F. Now Christianity is most importantly about the spirit
 1. Our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship
 - a. A relationship in which "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (**Romans 8.16**)
 2. But that relationship never takes place without the mind
 - a. The mind is the mediator of our relationship with God
 3. Edwards: All truth is given by revelation, either general or special, and it must be received by reason. Reason is the God-given means for discovering the truth that God discloses, whether in his world or his Word. **While God wants to reach the heart with truth, he does not bypass the mind.**
- G. As we continue our exploration of Romans we are struck with how central is the mind
 1. The very beginning of Romans – that part that catalogues the sinful inclinations of humanity in rebellion against Almighty God – showcases the fall in terms of its effect on the mind
 2. **Romans 1:20–22** (ESV) —

- a. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly **perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
- b. 21 For although they **knew** God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their **thinking**, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools...
- 3. **Romans 1:28** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 And since they did not **see fit to acknowledge** God, God gave them up to a debased **mind** to do what ought not to be done.
- 4. It is clear that the human mind, which was created with such glorious capacity for relating to and understanding God and His world, has been distorted and corrupted
 - a. And while human intellectual capacities continue to be remarkable, and always speak to the amazing exceptionalism of humanity vis a vis the rest of creation
 - b. Nevertheless, human thinking misses the mark, misunderstands the world God has created
 - c. And misconstrues the significance of humanity’s responsibilities before our Creator
 - d. It’s as if we continue to use the mind to see the world God has created, but we are looking at it upside down and backwards
- 5. So much of the fallenness of the human mind is evident today when the President of the IOC states that sex can no longer be determined by chromosomes
 - a. And in making such statements, he justifies the intrusion of men into women’s sports
- 6. The corruption on the mind is similarly on display in our medical field which seeks to call evil good, by falsely calling the medical and surgical castration of perfectly healthy children “gender-affirming care”
 - a. When in reality it’s another name for a medically and legally sanctioned child abuse
- 7. The human mind, with elite intellectual pretension, has never stooped so low
- H. And yet, the redemption of the mind is in fact what the Gospel proclaims!
 - 1. Paul assumes the redemption of the mind in Romans 7
 - a. **Romans 7:22–23** (ESV) —
 - b. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,
 - c. 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.
 - 2. In the believer, the mind is, in fact, redeemed
 - a. And is at war with the remnants of sin that remains
 - 3. **Romans 7:25** (ESV) —

- a. 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
 - b. So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.
- I. So the redeemed mind of the believer finds itself on the front lines of the war within
 - 1. And the mind becomes the central mediator of our sanctification
- J. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
 - 1. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- K. An when we come to our text this morning, once again the mind is central to the issue
- L. **Romans 8:5–6** (ESV) —
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. 6 For to set the **mind** on the flesh is death, but to set the **mind** on the Spirit is life and peace.

II. **The Gospel**

- A. Romans is about the Gospel
 - 1. That is, God, through His Son Jesus Christ, is reconciling the world to Himself
 - a. Not counting men’s sins against them (**2 Corinthians 5.19**)
- B. Paul begins Romans by describing the innate rebellion of humanity against God
 - 1. How human beings, in unrighteousness, suppress the truth about God (**Romans 1.18-19**)
 - 2. And how God, in judgment of rebellious humanity, has given human beings up to a downward spiral of sinful acts and dispositions
 - a. Allowing human beings to do what is in their hearts to do in selfishness and foolishness
 - b. Receiving in their persons and in their communities the due penalty for their rebellion
- C. Paul’s indictment of humanity of universal and pervasive
 - 1. **Romans 3:10–11** (ESV) — 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.”
 - 2. **Romans 3:23** (ESV) — 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...
- D. And yet, against that bad news comes the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - 1. **Romans 3:21–22** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 - b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. ...

2. And that those who believe ...
 3. **Romans 3:24** (ESV) — 24 ... are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...
- E. Paul goes on to illustrate this Gospel
1. Demonstrating that it is not, in fact, a New Testament doctrine
 - a. But that its roots are deep in the OT narrative
 2. And both Abraham and David are used as examples of how by faith in God's promised redemption in Messiah Jesus, they, like us, are declared righteous through the righteousness of another
 - a. Through the righteousness of Jesus Christ
- F. Paul then gloriously details the benefits of this Gospel for all who believe
1. That having been justified by faith we have peace with God (**Romans 5.1**)
 - a. No longer enemies of God, but friends
 2. That we have access into His grace (**Romans 5.2**)
 3. And that we rejoice in our hope of the glory of God
 4. More than that, having been justified by His grace, we are saved from the wrath of God
 - a. The very same wrath that Paul describes back in Chapter 1 which applies to all humans who reject the right of God to reign and rule in their lives
 - b. And who suppress the truth about God, which is plain in the created world, in unrighteousness
- G. All of that is the gospel of Jesus Christ

III. **The Objections**

- A. But then, there are objections to this gospel
1. And Paul anticipates them
- B. Both **antinomianism and legalism** present themselves as the objections
1. If the Gospel is true, and we are saved apart from the Law by grace through faith
 - a. Why not sin so grace may abound?
 2. And if the we cannot be saved by the Law and only by His grace, what is the purpose of the Law?
 - a. Surely the Law must have some purpose?
- C. Those are the objections Paul raises in Chapters 6 and 7

IV. **The Answer**

- A. But the answer, which we've explored in detail in our study of Romans, can be boiled down to this
1. If you indeed believe in Jesus for your salvation
 - a. And believe in Him alone for your salvation
 - b. Trusting not in Him plus anything in yourself or in anything else
 2. Then you are changed
 - a. You have been born again
 - b. You are a new creature in Christ, and you will never be the same!

- B. **Romans 6:2** (ESV) —
 - 1. 2 ... How can we who died to sin still live in it?
- C. **Romans 6:3–4** (ESV) —
 - 1. 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
 - 2. 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
- D. **Romans 6:6–7** (ESV) —
 - 1. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
 - 2. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.
- E. You are a different person than you were
 - 1. Even your mind has been changed
 - a. You have begun to see things from God’s perspective
- F. And as we enter Romans 8 we begin to see that glorious gospel truth worked out in reality
- G. **Romans 8:1–2** (ESV) —
 - 1. 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 - 2. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

V. **The Work of Christ**

- A. All of this happens because of, and by, the work of Christ
 - 1. Which is looming large over Romans 8
- B. **His Incarnation**
 - 1. **Romans 8:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.
 - b. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh ...
 - 2. The only way this Gospel happens is by the incarnation of Jesus Christ
 - a. Only God can save human beings
 - b. But only a human being can satisfy divine justice, by living an altogether righteous life
 - 3. And Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, has done exactly that
- C. **His Sacrifice**
 - 1. **Romans 8:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.
 - b. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh
 - c. and for sin...
 - 2. “And for sin” – refers to Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf
 - a. His propitiation – His wrath-removing sacrifice

3. **Isaiah 53:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
 - b. he was crushed for our iniquities;
 - c. upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
 - d. and with his wounds we are healed.
- D. **His Justification**
1. And through His incarnation and His sacrifice, we are justified
 2. **Romans 8:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.
 - b. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh
 - c. and for sin,
 - d. he condemned sin in the flesh...
 3. “He condemned sin in the flesh” – that is, we are declared righteous in the sight of God because of the righteousness of Jesus
- E. **His Purpose**
1. And all of this is rooted in the purpose of God
 2. **Romans 8:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us,
 - b. who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
 3. Once again we see that the Gospel is not just something to agree to intellectually
 - a. But the Gospel of Jesus is transformative
 - b. It’s purpose is so the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us!
 4. That as new creatures in Christ, we would live out a life that reflect our redeemed relationship with God
- F. And it is this purpose which leads us into our text
1. **Romans 8:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
 2. That those who are believers in Jesus are those in whom the righteousness of Christ is manifested
 - a. And all because we walk not according to the flesh – that is our sinful natures, our selfish desires, our evil inclinations
 - b. But because we walk according to the Spirit
 - c. According to the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of holiness
 - d. The Spirit of Christ Himself, who dwells within us
- G. **Romans 8:5–6** (ESV) —
1. 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.

2. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

VI. **Two Kinds of People**

- A. First of all, this text identifies two kinds of people
 1. And only two kinds of people
 - a. Those who live according to the flesh
 - b. And those who live according to the Spirit
- B. **According to the Flesh**
 1. Those who live according to the flesh are those who are not believers in Jesus
 - a. They are human beings who continue to be in rebellion against Almighty God
 - b. They continue to suppress the truth in unrighteousness
 - c. They are those whose thinking continues to be futile
 - d. And they are those whose foolish hearts continue to be darkened
 2. It's possible that those who live according to the flesh have never yet heard the Gospel
 - a. Never even heard the name of Jesus
 - b. But yet, they are still without excuse (**Romans 1.20**)
 - c. For "what can be known about God is plain to them..."
 - d. And "his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ... in the things that have been made."
 3. They still have a mind
 - a. And that mind still has enough epistemic function (technical term for knowledge-producing function) to know something about God from mere observation of the created world
 4. So, even if they have never heard of Jesus, they are still without excuse
 - a. That's why we send missionaries to unreached peoples!
 - b. That's why this congregation has generously committed itself to our core value of fulfilling the Great Commission
 - c. Making disciples of all nations
 5. But it's also possible that many of those who live according to the flesh have heard about Jesus
 - a. They may have heard about Him because they grew up in church
 - b. Or they have been witnessed to by friends or family
 - c. Or they watch on channel 13 our services in which Jesus Christ is proclaimed
 - d. Or they even come and sit and participate with us
 6. But for whatever reason – pride, a sense of self-sufficiency, a presumed righteousness, or just sheer stubbornness
 - a. They refuse to bow the knee to Jesus
 - b. They refuse to submit to Him as Lord
 - c. They refused to believe that God loves them so much that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish

7. So whether those who live according to the flesh have never heard of Jesus
 - a. Or whether they refuse to submit to the only One who can save them from their sin
 - b. They continue to remain under the wrath of God (**Romans 1.18, 5.9**)

C. **According to the Spirit**

1. But then there are those who live according to the Spirit
 - a. These are those who believe in Jesus Christ
2. Who have been confronted first with the truth about God
 - a. Who is altogether holy and righteous
 - b. And who alone reigns and rules over the creation that He has made
3. Who have been confronted with the truth about themselves
 - a. That apart from the grace of God in Christ, we are lost
 - b. That we lack any righteousness of our own
 - c. That we could never measure up against the Law of God
 - d. Indeed, against any law – even one of our own making
4. Who have come to the end of ourselves
 - a. How we don't even have it in us even to believe unless God did something in us and for us
5. And who, having discovered that in Christ is our only hope in life and death
 - a. That Jesus' loving sacrifice for our sin is sufficient for us
 - b. That the Spirit of Jesus beckons us to Himself
 - c. That God does in fact love us so much that He gave us His Son
6. And who, having heard the Gospel invitation – Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden
 - a. Have responded by faith in Jesus
 - b. Trusting in Jesus alone for our salvation

D. You are either in one or the other of these categories

1. Either a believer – who lives according to the Spirit
 - a. Or an unbeliever – who lives according to the flesh
2. You can't be a fence sitter
 - a. You can't be of two minds about this
3. Do you trust Jesus alone for your salvation or don't you?

E. Now I can hear someone objecting

1. Wait just a minute – I do believe in Jesus for my salvation
 - a. But I still struggle with the flesh
2. Of course you do – that's what Paul was dealing with in Chapter 7
 - a. The believer is a new person in Christ
 - b. The believer's mind is transformed
 - c. The believer's will has turned from sin and self to God and Christ
 - d. But the remnants of our flesh, our sinful nature, are still present
 - e. And operates in our bodies
3. But something has still changed
 - a. We are different people

- b. We have a new self – a new “man”
- F. Most of us have computers
 - 1. Even if you don't a computer, you probably have a cell phone
 - a. And today's cell phones are more of a computer than the computers that were used in the Apollo space program!
 - 2. And of course, I have a computer
 - a. And my computer has what are called default settings
 - b. That unless something is done to change them, the computer acts and responds in certain ways in which its programmed
 - 3. Now I can change the default settings when I want to do something different
 - a. But when I'm finished, it reverts back to its default setting
- G. That's they way it is with believers
 - 1. We are new creatures in Christ
 - a. And we have a whole new set of default settings
 - 2. Our dispositions are to turn to Jesus
 - a. Our inclinations are to follow Jesus
 - b. Our affections are to love Jesus
 - 3. Do we sometimes change our default settings as believers?
 - a. Yes, unfortunately we do
 - 4. But ultimately our default settings will prevail
- H. If you living according to the flesh, your default settings are to live for self and for sin
 - 1. It's possible that, if under the influence of others, of friends and family, of cultural pressures – you might do some things that seem to correspond to things of God
 - a. But ultimately, you revert to your default settings too – to live for sin and self
- I. But if you live according to the Spirit, your default position is to follow Jesus
 - 1. That your will is inclined to follow Christ's commands
 - 2. That your affections are inclined to love Jesus
 - 3. That's your default setting
 - a. You follow Jesus
 - b. Not perfectly
 - c. But substantially
 - d. You haven't reached your destination, but you're on the path
 - e. It's an issue of direction, not perfection

VII. **The Centrality of the Mind**

- A. But in our text we discover the centrality of the mind in how we navigate and function in our world, either as unbelievers or as believers
- B. **The Mind Set on the Flesh**
 - 1. **Romans 8:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...

2. If you are an unbeliever, your minds are occupied, not with God, and with His will
 - a. Your minds are occupied with the things of the flesh
 3. We've talked about the things of the flesh before
 - a. The NT includes lists of such things
 4. **Romans 1:28–31** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.
 - b. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.
 - c. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.
 - d. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,
 - e. 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
 5. We tend to think of the flesh as being about some of the baser kinds of sins, like those which involve lust and sexual transgressions
 - a. But as this list indicates, there are a full range of transgressions
 - b. Involving the mind, the will, the emotions
 - c. Involving relationship issues
 - d. And pride, and deceit, and slander of others
 - e. And those are just examples – it's not a comprehensive list
 6. But that's the default position of the mind of the unbeliever
 - a. Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh
- C. **The Mind Set on the Spirit**
1. But for the believer, the default position is different
 - a. The believer sets their mind on the things of God, on the things of the Spirit
 - b. The believer's mind is occupied with thoughts of God and His will
 - c. The believer's heart is occupied with affection for Jesus
 - d. By the way, the Bible often speak of the mind and the heart interchangeably!
 2. **Romans 8:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,
 - b. but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
 3. If you are a believer, a day doesn't go by when you don't think about God
 - a. A day doesn't go by when you don't think about pleasing God
 - b. In fact, on those occasions when your thoughts stray into sinful territory, your thoughts soon return to thoughts of God – in sorrow for sin, in a heart of contrition, and ultimately in repentance
 4. And ultimately, for the believer, whose mind is set on the things of the Spirit

- a. The mind becomes occupied with genuine pleasure and delight in God and in His Son Jesus Christ
- 5. Edwards: God's purpose for my life was that I have a passion for God's glory and that I have a passion for my joy in that glory, and that these two are one passion.

VIII. Life or Death

- A. Now what is the significance in such mindedness?
 - 1. Either the mind set on the flesh or the mind set on the Spirit?
 - 2. Are we just playing mind games?
 - 3. Are these merely academic exercises?
- B. No!
 - 1. It's a matter of life and death, which you are!
- C. **Romans 8:6** (ESV) —
 - 1. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death,
 - 2. but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
- D. For the unbeliever, life is a literal dead end
 - 1. It is a veritable cul-de-sac, a road to nowhere
 - 2. For to set the mind on the flesh in death
- E. Spiritual death to be sure
 - 1. Which is the human condition apart from the intervention of God
 - a. Which continues in refusing to gracious and loving beckoning of Jesus
 - 2. And ultimately physical death
 - 3. But more than that – eternal death
 - a. Not just an annihilation of your person
 - b. But an eternity of agonizing destruction
 - 4. For as we've seen in our study of Romans – the wages of sin is death
- F. But there is an alternative
 - 1. A glorious alternative!
 - 2. To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace
 - 3. Life and peace!
 - 4. Life – eternal life; an eternal kind of life
 - a. A life of joy in the presence of God
 - b. A life of pleasure, knowing that your true, redeemed person will ultimately be remade into the image of the Son of God
 - 5. Peace – no longer an enemy of God
 - a. But His friend
 - b. Indeed – a member of His family; you're His child
 - 6. Peace – more than that, a supreme sense of well-being and satisfaction
 - a. The true meaning of shalom

IX. Conclusion

- A. So which will it be this morning?
 - 1. Continuing to live according to the flesh?

B. Or will it be a transformed life, living according to the Spirit?