

**Reconnecting to the Triune God as Transformer
Romans 8:1-16**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, it's the September long-weekend, and that officially signifies that we are in a period of transition and change where we are shifting out of vacation and holiday mode and getting back into our normal routines of school and work.

And as much as we enjoy our summer break and the change of pace it provides us most people I know secretly look forward to getting back into the everyday routine at the beginning of September.

Because there is a familiarity and security in the normal everyday routines of life that helps keep us on track and keeps us focused on what we are supposed to be doing.

The truth is friends, it doesn't take very long when the everyday routines of life are relaxed for our character flaws, bad habits and indulgences start to showing up.

Sure it's nice to have your family all the time for the first week, but by the third week they become irritating and you find yourself snapping at them.

Sure it's nice to relax for a couple days but then begin to get used to staying up late and sleeping in because there is nothing going on and you get lazy.

Sure it's a good break not to have all those deadline and to do lists, but when you have too much time on your hands... as the saying goes "idle hands are the devil's tools" so maybe you start to get into things or situations that you know you shouldn't – or wouldn't when you have your regular routine in place.

So brothers and sisters, by the end of summer vacation we are feeling like we need to get back into our normal routine of work and school and church, because it helps us be the kind of person we want to be – the kind of person we like to be, the kind of person we believe it is good to be.

And to be sure – there is a God-ordained created wisdom and goodness in all of this. That’s actually the point of that famous passage in Ecclesiastes 3 which talks about a time and a season for everything.

Routine and regular context can certainly help us be happy, healthy and well.

But friends - maybe during this summer it started to bother you that you needed that routine and regular context in order to be happy, healthy and well and keep those character flaws, and bad habits at bay. Do you know what I’m talking about?

Or maybe you’ve noticed that in spite of the familiarity of an everyday routine your sinful nature is flaring up on a regular basis, and even more so when that regular routine is unexpectedly interrupted.

So brothers and sisters, as we transition back into the regular routine, and we are getting back into attending weekly worship, prayer group or Christ-care, etc... we may be more

aware this time around that we are seeking to re-connect to the Triune God because He is the God that can transform us.

Because for one reason or another, we have come to the point where we realize our need for transformation.

Now friends, the good news is that by His very nature as a Triune God, He is a God of transformation. Let me explain that a bit.

The scriptures reveal God to us as Creator, Savior and Transformer. Each person of the Trinity has a distinct person and work they do, but they are never separated from each other – they are always one God.

And understanding God as a Trinity in this way is to understand the story in the scriptures and how God relates to us.

It begins with God as Creator, but still three in one as the Word and the Spirit play supporting roles to the Creator's act of creating.

The scriptures continue on to tell the story of a rebellion which was instigated in Creator God's good creation and His response was to reveal Himself as a Saving God, in which God's Word was given in promise, as law and finally as flesh – when The Father, sent Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, to save humanity and the creation in his person and work. To this end the scriptures are God's saving Word.

Then Jesus Christ returned to the Father in heaven, in order that He might send us the Holy Spirit – so that what was accomplished in His very person, in His redeemed, renewed humanity might be applied to our persons and transform us so fully and completely that when our Lord returns we will be transformed physically as well. (Phil 3:21)

And to make it a bit easier to summarize these aspects of God's Trinitarian revelation and relationship with us and work

with them and learn from them, we talk about Green Spirituality for God as Creator, Red Spirituality for God as Savior, and Blue Spirituality for God as Transformer.

And as we look to reconnect with God this September, we want to connect with the fullness of who God is as the Three-in-one, One-in-three God.

So this morning that means listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in Romans 8 about the transformation He desires to work in us – and focusing on being Blue for a bit.

Now the first thing that we need to know is that the Holy Spirit's transformational work in our lives is secured in unconditional acceptance that is book-ended by Christ's forgiveness and our actual legal status with God as our Father.

Romans 8:1 starts out *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* and our reading finishes on vs. 15- 16 *"The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to*

sonship. And by Him we cry 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children"

This is important friends because true transformation and change in who we are cannot take place outside of that secure unconditional acceptance where you know, at rock-bottom, there is nothing you can do or have done that would cause God to reject you, or that He will love you more than He already does once you are changed.

Otherwise any transformation we seek or participate in, or experience will only end up reinforcing the lie that we earn God's favor and grace and acceptance.

So with that rock solid foundation of unconditional acceptance in place we can start to face the truth about why we need transformation and vs. 2, 3, and 5 start to indicate that to us.

We hear about sin and death, and how God's good law is made powerless by "the flesh." We hear that the flesh is sinful, and that God has condemned sin in the flesh, and we

discover that "the flesh" can control our mind with its desires, and that we can live according to "the flesh."

So when we experience our bad habits, our character flaws, our willful rebellious nature surfacing, lashing out and getting the better of us friends – what we are experiencing is "the flesh."

Now, the question is brothers and sisters – how well do we know our own flesh?

And if we are seeking transformation, is it a total transformation, partial transformation, or just a selective transformation.

How well we know our own flesh will determine if are simply being reactive to the consequences of our flesh, the misdeeds of the body (vs. 13) which are unpleasant.

This is seeking transformation – because we got caught so to speak.

How well we understand what our flesh will determine if we are seeking a partial transformation where we mistakenly think that the Holy Spirit is not interested in our physicality but only in our spirituality.

That is seeking transformation – but we don't really understand what needs to be transformed.

So – how well do we understand our flesh? And do we understand it well enough, accurately enough and honestly enough so that we realize that we don't truly know the depths of the total transformation that we need.

Don't misunderstand me here friends – this is not a denigration of the full scope of who we are as humans. After all we are made – male and female, in the image of God. But it's an acknowledgment that the flesh, our sinful nature, parasitically runs through every aspect of our humanness so that it needs transformation in its entirety.

In other words brothers and sisters there are areas where we need transformation that we are not even aware of yet.

To be sure those bad habits and character flaws which we have become aware of are a good place to start, but as Paul says in vs. 12 *"we have an obligation"* a debt, in that we owe the Holy Spirit our co-operation in His work of transformation in us.

And what that means is working to further understand and become aware of the depths of our flesh, so that we know what the Holy Spirit wants to work on next in transforming us.

So let's look at vs. 6 and 7 for a moment because they have some specifications that will help us better identify and understand our flesh, vs. 6 reads; *"The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."* So, those are some helpful distinctions there.

When our thoughts and feelings, our understanding, our wisdom, our opinions, our perspectives - all these things are

what Paul means by our mind – when these bring about or focus on death and destruction either literally, or figuratively, biologically or psychologically or relationally or emotionally – that is our flesh and we are living by our flesh. Does that makes sense?

And when all of these things are focus on bringing about life and peace then that is an indicator we are living in accordance with the Holy Spirit's work of transformation.

And so these initial distinctions of life vs. death are fairly easy to work with and identify in our everyday lives and routines.

That constant bickering and yelling and fighting and arguing in your relationships will kill them – that's death, that's living and having your mind controlled by your flesh.

Our over-eating, smoking, getting drunk, drug abuse and addictions, work-a-holism – these things do not contribute to our health and vitality, and indulging in them is an example of living according to your flesh.

So we can fairly easily identify some things and areas where the Holy Spirit wants to bring about transformation in us.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, we also need to realize that our flesh is far more subtle and deceptive than a simplistic distinction between death and life that we can discern in our heart.

After all Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "*the heart is deceitful above all things*" and Proverbs 14:12 says "*there is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*"

So we need something that can help us discern the more subtle and nuanced instances of when we are still living by our flesh, and so in vs. 7 we learn that the fleshly mind is hostile to God, and it does not, it cannot, submit to God's Law.

So, for example, there may be a time when you are called to sacrifice something as a follower of Jesus Christ and doing so may look and feel like, or may actually lead to death.

In those cases your flesh will be hostile to what God is calling you to sacrifice and will attempt to deceive you saying that this is not God calling you to do such a thing because it looks and feels like or leads to death...

But look carefully friends and you will see the flesh's hostility to God in this reasoning – and then you know this is your flesh talking – not the Spirit of God. We must remember what Jesus said about this in Luke 9:24 *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”*

And let us also remember that Jesus said *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* (Matt 5:17) Thus we can see that Jesus was not controlled by the flesh, but by the Holy Spirit – because He submitted to God's Law as it was given to Moses.

Now we have looked at the whole issue of what it means to have Christ fulfill this Law and what that means for how it

does or doesn't apply to us as Christians in the sermon series the Christ of the Covenants.

But, brothers and sisters in Christ – regardless of what is or is not still applicable to us from the Law of Moses, or any other commandments which God gave when He established prior Covenant administrations – they can be very useful to us in revealing our fleshly mind.

Because as vs 7 reveals the fleshly mind cannot submit to God's law.

So, it is a very good exercise to read through the scripture – and read the commands of God from the different Covenant administrations, especially the Covenant of Law because it is so broad and detailed and specific - and take note of how you react to God's Law.

What you will find is that your flesh will react against it – some parts especially more than others.

Maybe it will be God's laws about tithing 10% that bring about that reaction, maybe it will be the laws about acceptable sexual practices and relationships, maybe it will be the laws about caring for the poor and needy, or maybe it will be laws about what you may or may not eat, or the laws which require justice and the punishment of wrong-doing be enacted, or the laws specific to being men or women

Now, this really has nothing to do with whether or not these particular laws are applicable to us today or not but it's how they reveal a part of you where your flesh still reacts against something that is from God because its hostile to God and won't submit to it.

By such a reaction you will know just how deep your flesh goes and more importantly where the Holy Spirit wants to bring about transformation in you.

But... what can we learn about how the Holy Spirit brings about transformation in those areas?

Well – that's what we always want to get to isn't it? The "How" – so that we can figure it out and do it.

But before we look at that – let me just draw your attention friends to vs. 11 because just as we need to set the whole issue of being transformed in the context of God's unconditional love in Christ's work and the Holy Spirit's work of making us God's children - we need to balance out the "how" with the promise of completed transformation.

So vs. 11 promises us that *"if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you!"*

This is why Paul also writes in his letter to the Philippians *"that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Phil 1:6)

So, brothers and sisters it's really not about the how – but more about the fact that the Holy Spirit will transform us, and the “how” is through His power.

Now, don't think that this is an excuse for us to be passive and just sit back and wait for the Holy Spirit's power to zap us – and if you in a place where you are seeking transformation and wanting to be changed – here is how we co-operate with the Holy Spirit.

First – we go back to last week's message on prayer and how it is through intentional, kingdom-focused, specific prayer in Jesus name that we access God's power.

So if we are seeking transformation – then we can specifically be praying for the release of more of the Holy Spirit's power in our person to transform whatever area we have become aware of our flesh in. That is so very much in accordance with praying in Jesus name and praying in the Spirit.

Secondly – in vs. 12 we read that our responsibility, our obligation is to utilize the power of the Holy Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Very interesting here that Paul uses a different word than flesh. We might expect him to say that we are to put our flesh to death, right?? But instead he specifies it's the misdeeds of the body that must die. Why? And what's the difference?

Well brothers and sisters - look at it this way. In vs. 3 Paul admits that God's Law was powerless to achieve its purpose because it was weakened by the flesh. So if God's law was powerless against the flesh – how do we stand a chance in attempting to fight against it? We can't.

This is what made the incarnation of the Word becoming flesh necessary so that God himself can condemn sin in the flesh and redeem it. (vs. 3)

So... ironically if we try to fight our flesh, we end up denying the truth of what is needed and necessary and the means by

which God has already fought our flesh – condemned the sin in it and raised Jesus to life from death. Does that make sense?

You and I cannot fight our flesh, that must be done by the power and work of the Holy Spirit – we can pray for it, but it is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our person that defeats the flesh.

But, as the Holy Spirit begins to govern more and more of our mind – which includes thoughts, feelings, opinions, perspectives, our knowledge and understanding and so on... We are able to respond to that, and co-operate with that by putting an end to our actions, our habits, our reactions – what we do with our body - that used to come out of our flesh.

The Holy Spirit is defeating the power of the flesh behind them, and when we co-operate in obedience and put an end to them – we are participating in the Holy Spirit's work of transforming our lives.

If we do not participate and we do not put those deeds to death – our disobedience allows our flesh to remain and it will be a source of death in our lives in some way shape and form.

Thus it is very important to remember the promise in vs 10 where Paul says that *“even though our body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness”*

Friends, we may slow down and impede our sanctification process – but God will never give up on us.

So brothers and sisters, if you are seeking transformation this morning and you want to know how to be transformed, what you can do in order to change things in your life... then be obedient in this – put to death the misdeeds of the body, do not attempt to overcome your flesh in its hostility and rebellion against God, but be persistent in your prayer for more and more of the Holy Spirit's power to be released in you to fight your flesh.

And don't be discouraged if you appear to be going backwards in your transformation process either - because that is simply the Holy Spirit revealing to you just how much we all need a total transformation of our entire person.

But there is one last thing that we need to know about being obedient to the Holy Spirit's work of transformation in our lives – the Apostle's Creed calls it "the communion of the saints" or the real connection that exists among people who are being made holy – transformed.

God's transformation is not private and individualistic brothers and sisters. The Holy Spirit's transformation work happens in relationship and in community.

Thus in the closing verses of our scripture passage Paul talks about how the Holy Spirit makes us a part of the family of God, we are children of God – plural. (vs. 16)

This passage is all about living by the Holy Spirit, having our minds governed by the Holy Spirit, being given life by the Holy

Spirit – so we must also be in the fellowship that is created by the Holy Spirit in the Church and among fellow believers.

If you are seeking to know how to co-operate and work with the transformation of the Holy Spirit in your life and not impede it, but allow Him to work all He wants to do in you, then you need be a part of a Christian group where you can share about that transformation with fellow believers and give them permission to hold you accountable to what the Holy Spirit is working in your life.

So friends – it's not just the long week-end in September that tells us we are in a time of transition and change, it is the age in which we live as we await the return of our Lord.

The Holy Spirit has been sent, poured out upon God's people to bring about transformation.

What does the Holy Spirit want to transform in you this September as you reconnect to God as Creator, Savior and Transformer? Amen.