

Background Information for Romans 8



Paul, perhaps the greatest persecutor of Christians in his past life, became one himself after encountering Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul's letter to the Romans was written roughly two decades after that event. The letter is arguably the most influential piece of writing in all of Sacred Scripture outside of the gospels. There are many reasons for this, but it is in part because of the razor-sharp depiction of a life without God's grace and one with God's grace found in Romans 8.

In Romans 8:1-13 the reader finds a description of one who lives outside of God's grace in a "life according to the flesh." Paul's use of the word *flesh* is not meaning that our bodies are bad. It rather means that a person who lives as if he or she is only a body without a soul then he or she is living a life outside of Christ's grace. A person who lives according to the reality that he or she is a body and a soul then he or she lives in God's grace. Paul declares that these people have "life according to the Spirit." This "life according to the Spirit" is what we call grace. That is the theme of the text that you are about to read in Romans 8:14-39.

This life in the Spirit is nothing less than letting the Holy Spirit actually alive! You all have been baptized, and so you all have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you. Paul is just describing what life is like for those who choose to live according to that Spirit's grace. You may wonder why your life does not seem quite like what Paul is describing here (I know that is how I feel sometimes). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that God's grace does not work like magic. A person cannot expect to just be baptized and then life will be all good all of the time. Every person needs to **freely choose** the Spirit that is in them in order for it be "let out" if you will. If you do not choose it, then the grace of the Spirit will just sit there. Paul declares that we are all adopted as a child of God if we choose life in the Spirit. The way of the flesh is to choose the bondage of slavery, the way of the Spirit is to choose freedom as a son or daughter of God.