

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 9,

Romans 8:5-26

6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, welcome to The Explainer. Today, we're jumping right into one of the most powerful chapters in the Bible, Romans 8, and we're going to unpack this timeless struggle between what the Apostle Paul calls living in the flesh versus living in the spirit, all through the lens of a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. So let's start with a feeling I think we all know.

That feeling of being completely stuck. You're fighting some battle, some habits, some way of thinking, and you just can't seem to break free on your own. Well, that exact internal struggle is what Paul is getting at here.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul basically lays out two totally different operating systems for life. On one side, you've got the mind of the flesh. That's where you're just grinding it out, relying completely on your own strength and willpower.

But on the other side, you have the mind of the spirit, a life that's plugged into God's power. And that, he says, leads to something entirely different. Now, when you read this, it sounds like two super stark black-and-white paths.

But here's the thing you have to understand. Paul is not saying your salvation is on some kind of yo-yo flickering on and off depending on how well you did that day. No, he's using a really smart teaching tool that was common in the ancient world.

This technique has a name. Scholars like Dr. Keener call them ideal types. It's a way of teaching where you present two pure, opposite categories.

The point isn't to box everybody in, but to make the fundamental choice crystal clear. It's about showing the two different power sources you can draw from in life. And this wasn't some brand new idea Paul came up with.

You see it all over the place in ancient writing. The Stoic philosophers did it, contrasting the wise sage with the fool. The book of Proverbs is just packed with these contrasts between the righteous and the wicked.

Paul is just taking this familiar method and applying it to this new reality of life in Christ. Okay, so this is the real game changer. Someone operating in the flesh is limited.

They've only got their own resources to work with, full stop. But someone in the spirit has tapped into a totally different dynamic, a new power source that's still there for them even when they mess up. And listen, this new dynamic isn't about some floaty mystical feeling or an emotional high.

Paul is really clear that this directly involves our minds, how we think, our entire perspective, the very framework we use to see the world. You know, Dr. Keener actually talks about his own experience with this. He says that early on, he kind of fell into this trap of thinking that faith meant shutting off his brain.

He thought, hey, I don't need to understand it. I just need to feel it in my spirit. But what he figured out is that the spirit doesn't want you to check your brain at the door.

The spirit works on the whole you. Yeah, the Spirit connects with our spirit, but it also gets right in there and starts reshaping our worldview, influencing our thoughts, and actually showing us the heart and mind of God. It's kind of like getting a trailer for a movie you know is going to be amazing.

The Spirit gives us a sneak peek, what Paul calls a down payment of what's to come. It lets us start seeing the world from an eternal perspective, with a kind of wisdom that just doesn't make sense from a worldly point of view. So you've got this new power source, this new way of thinking.

Where does that lead? Well, it leads to a complete overhaul of your identity and how you relate to God. It's a massive shift. Paul says that old way of doing things, you know, trying to earn it all on your own strength, is basically a form of slavery.

It's just a constant treadmill of trying and failing that keeps you in bondage. And what's the one thing that comes with that kind of slavery? Fear, all the time. The fear that you're not good enough, the fear that you'll mess up, the fear of being judged.

It is an absolutely exhausting way to live. But the spirit offers something so radically different. It's a spirit of adoption.

And in the Roman world, this was a huge deal. It wasn't just a nice feeling. It was a legal change of status.

It meant you were fully part of the family with all the rights of an heir. You were in. And that new status, that new secure relationship, gives us the confidence to cry out the simple but unbelievably powerful phrase.

Now, this word Abba is so important. It's Aramaic. It's this incredibly intimate term, kind of like saying Papa or Dad.

And get this, it's the same word Jesus used to talk to God. Paul is saying that through the Spirit, we get to have that same close, trusting, personal relationship. Okay, so this all sounds amazing, right? A new identity, a new relationship.

But what about the fact that life is still hard? Is the world still broken? Paul doesn't ignore that at all. In fact, he dives right in and reframes the whole thing. He talks about this deep groaning.

And first, he says all of creation is doing it. It's like the whole world is in labor pains, straining under this weight of brokenness, just longing to be renewed. And it's not just creation out there.

It's us too. We feel that ache, don't we? We live with this tension of having a new identity but still living in a world that hasn't been made new yet. We're longing for that completion.

And then comes the part that just blows my mind. We are not groaning alone. Paul says God's own Spirit groans inside of us, taking our deepest aches and longings, the ones we don't even have words for, and turning them into prayers.

So what do you do with that? All this pain and all this hope, all at the same time? Well, Paul wraps up this whole section with this incredible cosmic perspective shift. He basically asks you to imagine a giant scale. On one side, you put all your current struggles, everything you're going through.

And on the other, you put the future glory God has promised. And Paul's conclusion? It's not even a contest. The glory is so much heavier; it makes the suffering look tiny in comparison.

So what does that mean for our struggles right now? It means they are not pointless. They're not a sign that we've failed. He calls them birth pangs.

And think about that. Birth pangs are painful, for sure, but they are productive. They are always, always leading to the birth of something new and amazing.

And that really leaves us with a powerful question to chew on. If the tough stuff we're going through isn't the end of the story, but is actually part of the process of a glorious new beginning, how does that change how we face it today? It completely reframes it, doesn't it? It suggests our biggest heartaches are somehow connected to our deepest hopes, pointing us toward an inheritance far beyond anything we can currently imagine.