

Christ within

By [James Sledge](#)

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I think it is easy for modern people to read Paul and surmise that he wishes we did not have to deal with physical bodies. To those of us used to thinking of the spirit/soul and the body as totally separate thing, Paul's "spirit" - "flesh" contrast can sound like "spirit good, body bad." But I don't think Paul shares our spirit-body duality. After all, he insists that resurrection is a bodily thing, and in today's reading he speaks of the Spirit giving "life to (our) mortal bodies."

Paul seems to use "flesh" as a kind of shorthand for life that is animated by sin. Certain sorts of bodily cravings may be a part of this, but the body itself is not the problem. That is why those who are "in Christ Jesus" can still live a normal, bodily existence but be not be captive to sin. As Paul writes to very fleshy humans, "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you."

The change Paul is talking about isn't something apart from our bodily lives. Rather it is an inward transformation that reorients our lives, including our day-to-day, fleshy ones, so that they in tune with God.

I think that the true goal of spirituality - and religion when properly understood - is to become aware of and attentive to this inward presence of Jesus, the Spirit dwelling in us. That is why spirituality must first go inward. Yet true spirituality cannot simply stay there. A life animated by the Spirit, that is "in Christ," issues forth in a life pleasing to God, a life that is modeled after Jesus. Surely Jesus is the most deeply spiritual person ever to walk this earth, yet his life was one of vital action on God's and humanity's behalf. Surely Jesus is the ideal embodiment of what Paul is talking about: bodily life that is "in the Spirit."

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