

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Spirit Takes Us from Sin to Righteousness

Scripture: Romans 8:1–11

Code: 45-57

INTRODUCTION

Romans 8 brings the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers into clear focus. Prior to this chapter, the Holy Spirit is mentioned only one other time in the entire epistle (Rom. 5:5). But here He is referred to nearly twenty times.

A. The Treasure of Romans

I cannot find words to express all the riches contained in this chapter. As I studied each verse I felt like I was on an ascending path culminating in a paean of praise. Romans 8 will sweep you off your feet and carry you into the presence of God Himself. When you read such a monumental chapter with an open heart and mind, I guarantee you will be enriched. It would be impossible not to be changed after internalizing the truths contained in this life-changing chapter.

B. The Theme of Romans

Paul has one major theme in Romans: justification by grace through faith based on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is God's plan of salvation. Paul outlines that plan throughout the book of Romans.

In Romans 8:1 Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." We will never be condemned; we will never experience judgment for our sin because we are made righteous in Jesus Christ. That is a marvelous reality, but we will appreciate it only when understanding what it means to be condemned. It's being delivered from the horrors of God's judgment reserved for those who reject Him. As American Puritan Jonathan Edwards alluded to in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," the wrath of God upon the wicked is as intense as His love is to the saints.

The great declaration of no condemnation is so fantastic that Paul used the rest of the chapter to explain it. In verse 34 he asks the rhetorical question, "Who is he that condemneth?" The obvious answer: No one. The highest court--that of God through Christ--does not condemn us. Therefore, no one else can rightly condemn us.

Many of the Jews who listened to Paul would have had a hard time accepting that salvation is by grace through faith alone and not by works. They saw God as a God of wrath. They couldn't see how a person could receive freedom from condemnation without good works. Paul wrote Romans 8 to address that issue. There is no condemnation for those in Christ because of what the Holy Spirit does on behalf of believers.

Romans 8 is not an isolated chapter about the Holy Spirit; everything fits within the flow of the book of Romans. Chapters 3-7 detail how Christ frees people from condemnation, and chapter 8 proves how the Holy Spirit confirms the fact that believers face no condemnation.

LESSON

The Holy Spirit does several things to confirm that we, as believers, are not condemned: He frees us from sin and death, He enables us to fulfill the law, He changes our nature, He empowers us for victory, He confirms our adoption, and He guarantees our glory. The result of the Holy Spirit's ministry is mentioned in the climactic ending of Romans 8. We can praise God and glory in that tremendous benediction because of what the Spirit does to confirm our no-condemnation status before God.

I. HE FREES US FROM SIN AND DEATH (vv. 2-3)

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

What is "the law of the Spirit of life"? The gospel, which is a law because it demands our obedience (cf. Acts 17:30). The law of the gospel of life in Christ came to us through the Spirit and made us free from the law of sin and death. We will never be condemned because we have been set free from the law and its just punishment, which is death (Rom. 6:23). Because of our faith in Christ, the regenerating work of the Spirit has set us free from sin's power and penalty. We will never experience the punishment of sin. What a marvelous truth!

The Holy Spirit is the agent of our salvation. He delivers us out of the dominion of sin, unlocks the chains of transgression, and makes the way of freedom. The Holy Spirit frees us not only from the consequence of our sin, but also from its power so that we need not succumb to it.

II. HE ENABLES US TO FULFILL GOD'S LAW (v. 4)

"The righteousness of the law [is] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

When a person is saved, he is freed from sin's mastery but not from sin's presence. He will still battle with sin, but it will no longer dominate him because he has the ability to forsake it.

Because a Christian walks "after the Spirit," he is able to fulfill the righteousness of the law. Saint Augustine said, "Grace was given, in order that the law might be fulfilled" (Anti-Pelagian Writings,

"On the Spirit and the Letter," chap. 34). When God regenerates a soul, He produces within the person the ability to fulfill God's holy law.

A Christian does not fulfill the law by producing external behavior based on a code of ethics. Holiness, righteousness, and obedience are not external; they are internal. They are the product of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within the believer's heart. When a person becomes a believer, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in him, and begins to produce a life of holiness. If a Christian is disobedient, he is fighting against himself and thwarting the Spirit of God. Being a disobedient Christian is like holding your breath--it's easier to do what the Spirit of God generates. The disobedient Christian is actually fighting against the new nature within him.

God not only redeemed us transactionally (by imparting Christ's righteousness to us) and forensically (by judicially declaring us righteous), but also planted His Spirit within us to produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). That results in actions pleasing to God. Because Christ has given us His Spirit, we can fulfill God's law.

A. As Depicted in the New Testament

1. Ephesians 2:10--"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." The purpose of redemption is to do good works--to live a holy life.

2. Titus 2:14--Christ "gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people of his own, zealous of good works."

3. Hebrews 5:8-9--"Though [Christ] were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Those who are saved reflect the obedience and righteousness of the One who saved them.

Justification and sanctification are inseparable truths. If you have been redeemed, you will manifest that reality in your life. You won't be perfect; that won't happen until you are glorified in heaven (1 John 3:2-3). But the Holy Spirit, who resides in your heart, will produce evidence of a righteousness that fulfills the law.

B. As Depicted in the Old Testament

1. Ezekiel 11:19-20--God gave this promise to the Israelites for the future: "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within [them]; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them." One day God would give His people the Holy Spirit, and His indwelling would enable them to obey His Word.

2. Ezekiel 36:26-27--"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them."

III. HE CHANGES OUR NATURE (vv. 5-11)

A. The Differences Between Our Old and New Natures (vv. 5-6)

1. Different patterns (v. 5)

"They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who follow after the flesh and those who follow after the Spirit. God never divides people by sex, culture, race, class, or education. His concern is whether they follow Him or not.

There are degrees within each category, however. Some Christians don't mind the things of the Spirit as well as they ought to. Some who mind the things of the flesh actually behave better than some Christians. Yet despite the degrees within each category, the categories themselves are absolute. David Brown, commenting on this verse, said, "Men must be under the predominating influence of one or other of these two principles, and, according as the one or the other has the mastery, will be the complexion of their life, the character of their actions" (A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments, Robert Jamieson and A.R. Fausset, coauthors [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945], vol. 2, p. 240). Then quoting commentator Charles Hodge, he continued, "The bent of the thoughts, affections, and pursuits, is the only decisive test of character" (p. 241).

People who walk after the Spirit do so because they think about the things of the Spirit and live their lives according to the Spirit. Those who walk in the flesh have their minds on the things of the flesh because they live according to the flesh. Romans 8:8-9 indicates that those who are after the flesh are in the flesh. Their fleshly nature causes them to have fleshly thinking patterns (or a fleshly disposition), which becomes manifest in their behavior. A Christian is able to fulfill God's law because he has proper thinking patterns, which come from his new nature. From the moment of his conversion, a Christian's disposition is changed toward the things of the Spirit.

a) Those who are dominated by the flesh

The phrase "they that are after the flesh" (v. 5) in the Greek text literally says "the ones being according to the flesh." An unsaved person is dominated by his depraved, unredeemed flesh. To be "after the flesh" is the same as being "in the flesh" (v. 8). "After the flesh" emphasizes the determining pattern; and "in the flesh" emphasizes the conditioning sphere. Both phrases refer to people dominated by human corruption.

When a person is "after the flesh," he will "mind the things of the flesh" (v. 5). The common Greek word translated "mind" (nous) refers to the brain and its function, but here Paul used phroneo, which means "disposition" or "bent." It is derived from the root word phren, which refers to the seat of all mental affections and faculties. Unbelieving people are disposed toward the things of the flesh. First John 2:15-16 says that if a person has a love or bent toward the world, he is not of God. Phroneo is also used in Philippians 2:5, which says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Our Lord was bent toward humbly submitting to God, and we are to follow His example.

Those who mind the things of the flesh are bent toward depravity. Their minds are not set on God but on all that's temporal and corrupt in this world (e.g., Rom. 1:28-31; Gal. 5:19-21). Fleshly things have no connection with the eternal kingdom of God.

All unredeemed people are in the flesh. Since they are fleshly by nature, they are bent toward the things of the flesh.

b) Those dominated by the Spirit

In contrast Romans 8:5 speaks of "they that are after the Spirit, [who mind] the things of the Spirit." Since the Holy Spirit dwells in those who are redeemed, they are bent toward the things of the Spirit. They walk in the Spirit and pursue what is precious to Him. That's why Paul said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). Now what are the things of the Spirit? First Corinthians 2:10 says, "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." That encompasses the very mind and will of God.

The phrases "mind the things of the flesh" and "[mind] the things of the Spirit" in Romans 8:5 are genitives of possession. An unregenerate person's mind is possessed by the flesh and a regenerate person's mind is controlled by the Spirit. We who have been redeemed have been given a new nature. We are no longer walking after the things of the flesh; we are now walking in the direction of God's Spirit.

2. Different parallels (v. 6)

"To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Verse 6 gives us a deeper distinction between those who are after the flesh and those who are after the Spirit. Notice it doesn't say that to be fleshly minded leads to death or to be spiritually minded leads to life. Rather, to be fleshly minded is death and to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Those are equations, not consequences.

a) Death for the carnal

The person who does not know God and is bent toward the flesh is in fact dead. Ephesians 2:1 says, "You hath he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." First Timothy 5:6 says, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." A carnally minded person is spiritually dead--the life of God is absent in his soul. He lives physically, but not spiritually.

Romans 7:5 says, "When we were in the flesh, the sinful impulses, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Sin is so dominant in unregenerate people that all it produces is death. Men and women without the Lord live in a state of death.

b) Life and peace for the spiritual

"To be spiritually minded is life and peace," however (Rom. 8:6). When God's Spirit changes a person's nature, He makes him alive to God and spiritual truth. First Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." However, the Holy Spirit enables a redeemed person to understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:15-16).

When we were redeemed, we were given new life. Romans 6:4 says that since we died with Christ, we will also rise with Him. If we were buried with Him in His death, we will rise with Him in His resurrection, and walk in newness of life. The Spirit of God has made us alive to God. Because we have new life we who are redeemed can feel God's love, sense His power, and understand His Word and work in our lives.

A person who is spiritually minded also has peace with God. Before a person is saved, he is at war with God. But after redemption, God becomes his constant companion.

We who are redeemed have life. In that life we have sweet communion with God. His grace is bestowed upon us and His love is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We have joy forever and are at peace with Him for eternity.

Why Do Believers Still Sin After They Are Saved?

Even though we are redeemed, we don't always pursue the things of the Spirit. However, before we were redeemed, we never pursued them. Galatians 5:17 says, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Even though we were given new life when we were redeemed, sin is still in us, though it doesn't dominate us anymore (Rom. 7:17-18). When we are glorified we will no longer be in the flesh, but for now we have to battle against it.

An unsaved person doesn't battle against sin because he is disposed toward it and dominated by it. A Christian has to battle against it because he is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and the flesh strives against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Galatians 5:16 tells us how to win the battle: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." We have to respond to the Spirit and not to the flesh. The latter produces the sins mentioned in verses 19-21, and the Spirit produces the virtues listed in verses 22-23. Verse 25 concludes, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." The Spirit-filled life is a step-by-step journey. Those of us who are redeemed will always struggle with our humanness until the time God perfects us.

B. The Confines of Our Old Nature (vv. 7-8)

1. Its inability to submit to God (v. 7)

"The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be."

a) In unbelievers

A depraved person cannot subject himself to the law of God. That's because he is at war with God and dead spiritually, for he is cut off from God, who is the source of life. However, a person who minds the things of the Spirit is able to have victory over his sins through the Spirit's power. The Greek word translated "mind" in verse 7 is also *phroneo*, so the text literally says, "The fleshly mind is bent against God." That's why an unbeliever doesn't obey the law of God. His bent against God is seated deeper than mere disobedience: an unbeliever's acts of disobedience are just the external manifestations of the mind's disposition. Sin is not only outward rebellion, but also an inward attitude. There is no way that the flesh can be subject to the law of God.

b) In believers

You might ask, "Since I have been redeemed, is my flesh now subject to the law of God?" No, because your flesh has not yet been redeemed. If it had been when you were saved, you would be perfect. But you are not because you still have unredeemed flesh to contend with. That's why salvation has a future aspect. Romans 8:23 says, "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body."

Since our humanness cannot fulfill the law of God, it has to be eliminated. But that won't happen until we receive our glorified bodies in heaven.

When you are redeemed, you become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). But you are still in your mortal body, which cannot be redeemed in this life. That's why Paul called it "the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24).

2. Its inability to satisfy God (v. 8)

"So, then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Depraved people cannot please God because they cannot obey Him. That's tragic because God created mankind to please Him. The summum bonum of all creation is to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:12). Those who don't please God have forfeited their reason for existence.

C. The Implications of Our New Nature (vv. 9-11)

1. The Spirit's presence proves our salvation (v. 9)

"Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

In verses 5-8 Paul refers to "they," here in verse 9 he says "ye" because he is speaking to believers only. As believers we are neither in the flesh nor bent toward it. Far from being opposed to God, we are able to fulfill His law and please Him. We are in the Spirit, who has given us a new nature. John 3:6 says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A Christian is born of the Spirit and is no longer in the flesh. Although the flesh is still in him, it isn't controlling his life.

If the Spirit dwells in you, then you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. Being in the Spirit is not a matter of professing Christ, looking holy, or attending church, but of being indwelt by the Spirit. The Greek word translated "dwell" (oikeo) indicates that the Spirit makes His home in you. He lives in every believer. However, he who doesn't have the Holy Spirit residing within him doesn't belong to Christ.

People need to be warned about that. If your life isn't showing evidence of the power and presence of God's Spirit, then you don't belong to Christ. If you aren't fulfilling God's righteous law, desiring to walk in the way of the Spirit, and seeking with your heart the things of the Spirit, then He is not in you. No matter what you claim, you don't belong to Christ.

We are all called to examine ourselves. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith." Look for manifestations of the Holy Spirit in your life: Have you experienced a divine sense of love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23)? Do you see the fruit of righteousness in your life? Do you long to commune with the living God? Have you ever had a love for God's Word? Does your heart praise God? If you have experienced those things in your life, know that they were produced by the Spirit. Even though you may behave in a fleshly way occasionally, if those things have generally characterized your life, the Spirit of God obviously dwells within you.

All Christians struggle with sin. Paul said that sin dwelt within him (Rom. 7:17, 20). However, it's comforting to know that the Spirit also dwells within us!

The Perfect Trinitarian Balance

Romans 8:9 refers to the Holy Spirit as both "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." The Holy

Spirit sustains the same relationship with the Father that He has with the Son. There is a perfect trinitarian balance. The Holy Spirit stands alone as the Third Person of the Trinity: He is the Spirit of God, who is the First Person of the Trinity, and the Spirit of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

2. The Spirit's presence guarantees our spiritual regeneration (v. 10)

"If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."

When a person receives the indwelling Christ, his body remains dead because the flesh doesn't get redeemed in this life. That's why Christians still have to face death. The body must be eliminated because it can't go to heaven. What about those who will be raptured before the Lord's return (1 Thess. 4:13-17)? Will their bodies go to heaven? No, they will be changed on the way. God will not let any unredeemed bodies into heaven. The body of death will die--it is stained with Adam's sin. It will suffer from disease, sickness, and trials. Eventually it will weaken and die.

But "the Spirit"--the Holy Spirit and your human spirit with its new nature--will live because of Christ's righteousness. Bodily death is the result of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12). Like the rest of humanity, you entered the world as a sinner. But because Christ now lives within you, death will merely usher you into eternity. And we won't take the bodies we have up into heaven; we'll get new bodies (1 Cor. 15:44-53)! In Philippians 3:8-9 Paul joyfully says, "I count all things but loss ... that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness ... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

3. The Spirit's presence guarantees our physical regeneration (v. 11)

"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also give life to your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

If the Holy Spirit dwells in you, you have the assurance that the Father will raise you from the dead just as certainly as He raised Christ. God promises you a glorified body. If you were regenerated spiritually, you will be regenerated physically as well.

What does the Holy Spirit do for us? Take us from sin to righteousness by freeing us from sin and death, enabling us to fulfill God's law, and changing our nature that we become new inside and out.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the major theme of the book of Romans?
2. What is "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2)? Explain. Why can we never be condemned?
3. Explain a saved person's relationship to sin.

4. How does a believer fulfill God's law? What is a believer doing when he is disobedient?
5. What is the relationship between justification and sanctification?
6. What are the only two kinds of people in the world from God's perspective?
7. In Romans 8:5 what do the phrases "after the flesh," "in the flesh," and "mind the things of the flesh" refer to?
8. What are the things of the flesh?
9. What is true about a carnally minded person? What do spiritually minded people have (Rom. 8:6)?
10. Why do Christians have to battle with sin? Do non-Christians person have to battle against sin? Explain.
11. How can we win our battle against sin (Gal. 5:16)?
12. Can the fleshly mind submit to God Rom. 8:7)? Explain.
13. Why are we not perfect at the moment of salvation?
14. Why is it tragic that unredeemed people cannot please God?
15. How will the Holy Spirit be manifested in a believer's life?
16. Why do Christians have to die? What will keep our spirits alive for eternity (Rom. 8:10)?
17. What great promise is made in Romans 8:11?

Pondering the Principles

1. In Romans 8:1 Paul says, "There is ... no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Sometimes it's easy for believers to overlook the fact that God will not punish them for their sins. Read the following verses and describe what it would be like to be subject to God's wrath: Matthew 13:40-42, Romans 2:5-9, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, Revelation 6:15-17, and 20:11-15. How would you feel if you knew you had to endure endless years of torment and darkness? Thank God for sparing you from His wrath as a result of the righteousness that Christ provided for you.
2. When you were saved, the Holy Spirit freed you from the law of sin and death. Read Romans 6. Before you became a Christian, what were you a servant to (vv. 17-22)? As a Christian, what is your current relationship to sin (vv. 1-2, 6-7, 11-15)? How then should you live your life (vv. 4, 11-13, 18-19, 22)? Those verses all indicate that you do not need to succumb to sin because the Holy Spirit

has enabled you to live righteously. Prayerfully examine yourself now to make sure that your desire to live righteously for God is stronger than your desire to give in to sin.

3. Romans 8:8 says that those who "are in the flesh cannot please God." However, if you are a Christian, one of the goals in your life should be to please God. Read Romans 12:1-2, 14:17-18, 2 Corinthians 5:9, Ephesians 5:5-10, and 1 Thessalonians 4:1. What is associated with pleasing God? Do you make a conscious effort to please God in all that you do? Make a list of the things you are doing now that please God. Are there other things you could or should do to please Him? Add those things onto your list and begin to do them this week.

4. Romans 8:11 says that if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, the Father will give life to your mortal body. One of the greatest promises that God has given in Scripture is that someday we will receive new, glorified bodies. Read 1 Corinthians 15:49-53, Philippians 3:20-21, and 1 John 3:2-3. What do those verses say about our future bodily resurrection? It is easy for us to be distracted by the routines and problems of everyday life, and forget the wonderful things that God has promised for our future. Thank God for His promise to regenerate your physical body.

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