

Life in the Spirit

Romans 8

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Last Sunday, Ben shared with us how the Law of Moses served its purpose to show humanity our need for a Savior but that being under grace is a system upgrade. Today, we are going to look at Romans Chapter 8 which describes our system upgrade made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Jesus promised all who love Him the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room just before He went to the cross:

John 14:16-17 – I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

We know that this indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit began at Pentecost, 50 days following the resurrection of Jesus. The presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is unique to the church. Those faithful to God under the old operating system prior to the cross could experience the presence of the Holy Spirit but He wasn't guaranteed to be in them forever like Jesus promised the church. That is what caused King David to pray:

Psalm 51:11 – do not take Your Holy Spirit from me
There is no need for Christians to pray that prayer today. I'm sure King David witnessed what happened to King Saul when the Holy Spirit left him and he didn't want that to happen to himself.

Romans Chapter 8 also has a number of wonderful promises that helps us deal with the trials and difficulties of life. Ben actually covered the first 4 verses of chapter 8 last week, but let start with Romans 8:4 which sets the theme for this chapter:

Romans 8:4 – do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

So, what is the flesh that we shouldn't follow? The "flesh" refers to the physical, bodily aspects of a person. One of the ways we are in the image of God is that as the God-head is a tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all people are a triunity of body, soul and human spirit:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 – may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

Our bodies are that physical part of us that is in the world. But we have an immaterial part known as the soul and spirit. People often use these two terms interchangeably but the Bible makes a distinction:

Hebrews 4:12 – the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart

I take it our soul is our personality, our intellect, the seat of our emotions. Our human spirit is that part of us that has the capacity to commune with God. When we didn't personally know Jesus as our Savior, our human spirits were dead to God. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they disobeyed God; their human spirits died immediately. When we begin trusting Jesus as our Savior, it is our human spirit that is born again, or born from above as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3. And that is what makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and speak to us through our human spirit.

I had a college student once who described this dynamic of the Holy Spirit guiding us through our human spirit as a super-conscience. Even unbelievers have a conscience... Romans 2:14 tells us that God has written His law on our hearts; so everyone has a basic sense of right and wrong. But only those who trust in Jesus have a super-conscience.

The internal struggle all Christians have is between our old sin nature, which is still present in our soul, and with our new nature in Christ present in our spirit. The Apostle Paul described that struggle:

Galatians 5:17 – the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish

We can associate the term "flesh" with our soul because while our spirit was resurrected when we were born again, our body and soul await a future resurrection.

Ephesians 1:13-14 – *When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (NIV)*

Our born-again human spirit is like the earnest money guaranteeing our ultimate body and soul resurrection.

Dealing with the struggle between our flesh, or soul, and our spirit is what Romans 8 addresses. Alright, with that background, let's take a closer look at Romans 8...

Romans 8:5-8 describes the futility of trying to please God in the flesh...

Romans 8:5-8 – *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Whether to set our minds on the flesh or the Spirit is our decision. It is what we chose to think about. Paul equates setting your mind on the flesh with being *carnally minded*. And that is what unbelievers do all day every day. But as believers in Jesus Christ, we have a choice and we can be spiritually minded as an act of the will.

Paul also said that to be carnally minded is deadly. Persisting in our own brilliant thoughts apart from God is actually sin. And sin always has consequences. As believers, we don't have to worry about the ultimate spiritual death that unbelievers will have in the lake of fire. But as a minimum in the here and now, our sin will cause us to suffer loss of fellowship with both the Lord and others, and in eternity there will be loss of reward.

Paul goes on to say that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*. Sin makes us an enemy of God. Genesis 39 describes Joseph rejecting an invitation by his boss's wife to join her in adultery. While adultery would have been a sin against his master Potiphar, Joseph referred to it as a sin against God because his loyalty to the Lord and His laws was higher than to Potiphar.

Paul also said that in the flesh we cannot please God. Even if you do great things in Jesus' name, it has no eternal value if our motivation is worldly.

Matthew 6:1-2 – *Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

If you do things to be seen by others as a great Christian, Jesus said that your only reward will be just that... people may consider you to be a great Christian; but that is not what makes for treasure in heaven.

Alright, Romans 8:9-11 explains how Christians are empowered to live in the Spirit...

Romans 8:9-11 – *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

How do we know if the Holy Spirit indeed dwells in us? This is easy, if you are truly trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have the presence of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:15 – *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God*

Here is a quick check on whether you have the presence of the Holy Spirit: Ask yourself these questions:

- Has the Spirit led you to Jesus?
- Has the Spirit put in you the desire to honor Jesus?
- Is the Spirit at work in your heart, leading you to be more like Jesus?

Romans 8:12-13 explains that our debt is to the Spirit, not to the flesh...

Romans 8:12-13 – *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Notice it says here that *if you live according to the flesh you will die*. Living according to the flesh is putting yourself ahead of all others and especially God. If you live according to the flesh, you will do this in all matters and especially the most important: your eternal salvation. And that is salvation-by-works... the idea that we can earn God's favor for salvation through good works.

The problem with a salvation-by-works mentality is that you never know if you've been good enough. There will never be eternal security if you think your eternal destiny is subject to your own performance.

While the matter of eternal destiny is settled for the Christian, we still have that sin nature we struggle with so we need to work on suppressing our natural tendency to be selfish. As Paul said here, we need to *put to death the deeds of the body*. How do we do that? We should practice catching ourselves when we find ourselves drifting to carnal mindedness and instead...

Colossians 3:2 – *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

It was trendy at one time for Christians to wear WWJD bracelets... it was a reminder to ask yourself What Would Jesus Do. That is good advice when you find your mind drifting away from the Lord... ask yourself what would Jesus have to say about your brilliant idea? Does your thought glorify Him or just yourself. How can you better glorify Him rather than yourself?

Romans 8:14-15 describes how living in the Spirit means living as a child of God....

Romans 8:14-15 – *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

So, who are the children of God? They are those who are *led by the Spirit of God*. If you are a child of God, you will be *led by the Spirit of God*. However, we should not think that being *led by the Spirit* is a pre-condition to being a child of God. Instead, we become His children first and then the Spirit of God leads us. We are justified on the basis of Jesus paying our sin-penalty on the cross and that happened in the past. Being *led by the Spirit* is what we practice in the here and now, our sanctification.

So, where is it the Holy Spirit leads us?

- He leads us to *repentance* from sin.
- He leads us to think *less of self* and *more of Jesus*.
- He leads us to *truth, holiness, and being useful* to God.

And He produces fruit in our lives:

Galatians 5:22-23 – *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

Living with the system upgrade of having the Holy Spirit was superior to living under the Law because that former operating system had been misinterpreted as salvation-by-works. And that caused there to be a spirit of bondage due to fear. The fear came from that nagging feeling: am I good enough? The Pharisees sought to redeem themselves before God by keeping the Letter of the Law while totally missing the Spirit of the Law. Anyone under the Law who was honest with themselves should have concluded they were incapable of perfectly keeping the Law. So, if they were to be saved, it would only be by God's grace through faith in Him.

Instead of a spirit of bondage, the presence of the Holy Spirit gives us a spirit of adoption. Our eternal destiny is not a function of our performance, it is based on God's actions on our behalf, and He chose us. That is why we can think of God as, "*Abba, Father.*" In our language, it is like referring to Him as Dad... a much more personal term.

Romans 8:16 speaks to the evidence we are children of God...

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

How does the Spirit bear witness to our human spirit that we are children of God? He reminds us of God's promises like John 3:16...

John 3:16 – *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*

So, we have both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God bearing witness to us. A principle of Scripture requires at least two witnesses to establish the truth per Deuteronomy 17:6.

God wants us to know our status before Him. He doesn't want us to wonder if we are going to heaven or not. He wants us to be certain we are. This is called the doctrine of eternal security. Once Saved, Always Saved is a true teaching. We are saved by God, not our works. You cannot be un-born-again. If you think your performance can cause you to lose your salvation, you have a salvation-by-works mentality.

Romans 8:17 describes the benefits and responsibilities of being God's children...

Romans 8:17 – *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

Being a child of God also means having an inheritance. In Luke 18:18 the rich young ruler asked Jesus, “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” But the rich young ruler missed the point because he assumed that inheritance was something he had to earn. Eternal inheritance is not a matter of doing, it is a matter of being – of being in the right family.

How are we joint heirs with Christ? We will receive eternal, resurrected bodies like what Jesus has as the first-fruits of the resurrection. Our destiny is to be glorified with Him. That glorification is a reference to our yet future resurrection. Titus 2:13 refers to this as our *blessed hope*. We also call this the rapture of the church where all believers living and dead will receive our glorified, resurrected bodies in-mass when our Bridegroom Jesus comes for us as His bride, the church.

Paul also said here that the joint heirs with Christ will suffer with Him. That is what Jesus told His disciples:

John 15:20 – *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*

As the Lord’s representatives, we can expect rejection just as He was rejected. But persecution only serves to remind us that we are God’s children.

In Romans 8:18, Paul compares our suffering to our future glory...

Romans 8:18 – *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Why must there be suffering? It is part of the human condition that all people experience in this fallen world. But the suffering we have as mortals will be insignificant in the light of eternity. And it also serves a purpose in our lives today:

Romans 5:3-4 – *we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope*

While none of us like character-building experiences, it does grow our hope God’s promises.

Alright, let's move on to Romans 8:19-22 which makes it clear that it is not just us humans anticipating our future glorification... I should point out that Teresa and I have lost beloved pets that we've buried and read this passage as a memorial to them...

Romans 8:19-22 – *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

When will the children of God be revealed? Revelation 19 describes Jesus’ return to earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom. And we will be with Him. All creation looks forward to this because much of the curse will be lifted when Jesus reigns on the earth:

Isaiah 11:6-9 – *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

Many people associate this lifting of the with the Eternal State but a parallel passage in Isaiah 65 makes it clear that there will still be mortal people on earth who die if they don't come to accept Jesus as their Savior after 100 years. The Millennial Kingdom foreshadows the Eternal State when death will be over completely.

So, the future Millennial Kingdom will be yet another system upgrade to use Ben's analogy. When Jesus reigns on earth, it will be the true utopia people long for. Mortal humans will have essentially no external factors distracting them from a relationship with the Lord... even Satan and his minions will be out of the picture locked up in the abyss.

Paul said that creation was subjected to the curse in hope. And that hope has always been in God’s Savior, the Messiah who we know to be Jesus Christ.

By the way, this passage convinces me that Christians who've lost pets who were a beloved member of their family will see them again...

Revelation 21:5 – *He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”*

Our departed pets are part of all things God will make new. And we also have this promise:

Psalm 36:6 – *O Lord, You preserve man and beast.*

Romans 8:23-25 explains that, along with creation, we also groan and wait with perseverance for our future glory...

Romans 8:23-25 – Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

I mentioned previously how our born-again human spirit is like the earnest money guaranteeing our ultimate body and soul resurrection. And this passage reinforces that idea referring to the presence of the Holy Spirit with our born-again human spirit as the first-fruits of the Spirit. This means in our human spirit we have a foretaste of the resurrected glory to come.

It says here we should wait for the future redemption of our bodies with *perseverance*. This is not a word we use much today but it means persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. I read earlier in Romans 5 how our difficulties give us an opportunity to exercise *perseverance* which builds our character and hope. Persisting in the Lord through the tribulations of this life helps us lay-up treasure in heaven.

One thing about *perseverance* is that we don't have to persevere alone; Romans 8:26-27 reminds us that God's help through the Spirit is available to us now:

Romans 8:26-27 – Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Have you had a need that you couldn't put into words? That you didn't quite know what to pray? Well, the Holy Spirit helps us with that conforming what we are praying for to the will of God. Even when we think we know what we should pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us to pass on to the Father what we really should be asking for.

Romans 8:28-30 is a wonderful promise that helps us deal with all our various difficulties...

Romans 8:28-30 – And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

God is able to bring good into our lives even when bad things happen. That is how powerful our Almighty Creator-God is. Often, we cannot see what good could possibly come from a tragedy, such as the death of a child. But we can be confident that God can use anything for our benefit. Because of our relationship to the Lord, we know that a lost child is not really lost. King David certainly knew that would be the case in the death of his and Bathsheba's son:

2 Samuel 12:23 – I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

It is easy to see how God can bring good from bad things in eternity. But can that also be applied in the here and now? Absolutely... As a bare minimum, such circumstances present an opportunity to have the fruit of the Spirit. If we allow the Holy Spirit to influence us, we can have peace and even joy in the midst of unhappy circumstances. This not only benefits us but God can use it to help others grow closer to Him. It attracts people to the Lord when they see His children responding to difficulties with joy... everyone wants that super-power.

God foreknew us and predestined us *to be conformed to the image of His Son*. So, what does it mean to be conformed to the image of Jesus? All people are in the image of God, but only God's children are being conformed to the image of Christ. As Christians, we are working with the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ but we will not be fully conformed to His likeness until our resurrection when we receive an eternal, glorified body like His. And our soul will also be resurrected so that we'll no longer have that pesky selfish sin nature.

Verse 30 says that God's children were predestined, called, justified, and glorified. It's interesting that glorified is in past tense since our glorification is in the future from our perspective. God is outside the confines of time, so from His perspective, our future glorification is a done-deal. It is so certain that it is as if it already happened.

We were called when the Holy Spirit convicted us of our need for Jesus Christ. And we were justified when we came to believe in Jesus, trusting that His death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin debt.

But being predestined brings up another issue... Is the salvation system rigged? Is there really no free will when it comes to embracing God's provision for eternal life? Some extreme Calvinists would have you think so. But having a free will is one of the ways we're created in the image of God. So, how can we be predestined if we have a free will? This is one of the mysteries of God but the Bible makes it clear that both predestination and free will are true.

I've heard it explained this way... I think it was David Jeremiah who said it is like a billboard above the gate of heaven which says, "whosoever will may come" and once we're in heaven, we look at the back of the billboard which says, "chosen before the foundation of the earth."

Romans 8:31 begins the conclusion of this section reminding us of the triumphant victory of the life in the Spirit...

Romans 8:31 – If God be for us, who can be against us? What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Despite the suffering Christians face in this mortal life, if God is for us, what does it matter if others are against us? One person plus God makes an unconquerable majority.

We certainly can be deceived into thinking that God is for us when He actually is not. I guarantee you that every war has someone on both sides thinking God is on their side. Yet it cannot be denied that for those who are in Jesus Christ, God is for them!

What is the evidence that God is for us? Romans 8:32 gives us this beautiful promise...

Romans 8:32 – He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

If the Father already gave His ultimate gift of Jesus Christ, how can we think that He won't bless us in many other ways?

At this point in Romans Chapter 8, there should be no doubt about the eternal destiny of the child of God. But the conclusion of the chapter emphasizes that the security of the believer is in God's love for us...

Romans 8:33-39 – Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Since the child of God is God's elect, no one can bring a charge against us because Jesus Christ has purchased us with His blood and serves as our advocate at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is our defense attorney and He never loses a case.

No matter what happens in this world, there is nothing that can diminish God's love for us. Despite the difficulties of life as a mortal and the persecutions that come as a child of God, our relationship with the Lord makes us more than conquerors. Our destiny is with Jesus Christ and He is the ultimate conqueror.

Among the things Paul lists that cannot separate us from the love of God is *any other created thing*. This is kind of a catch-all. Everything in the universe is a created thing. And we ourselves are created things... so there is nothing even we can do to separate ourselves from the love of God. We can do things to cause us to lose fellowship with Him but even then, He still loves us. And His love for us is the basis for our eternal security.

I hope our look at Romans Chapter 8 has helped you to better appreciate the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Life is just better when we walk in the Spirit, following His lead.

Let's pray...