

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

Life in Jesus - and the Holy Spirit

(Romans 8:1-17, 26-27)

Study #13

Introduction: The victorious capstone of Romans...

Do you have a favorite ride at Fiesta Texas? Does your family have a favorite show when you go to Sea World? Do you have a favorite vacation spot?

Many of us enjoy outdoors activities. And for many of us who do, if there is time, there is one place we’ll go or one activity we’ll pursue above all others - be it fishing and hunting, hiking and backpacking, or something extreme like rock-climbing or hang gliding.

Scripture is God’s inspired Word. All of it from Genesis to Revelation. It is all profitable for us. All of it helps us to know God. All of it us helps us to grow in grace.

But many of us have favorite spots in the Bible, just like we may have favorite places to relax and unwind or to get an adrenaline rush.

For many people, the book of Romans is that sweet spot.

Paul had never visited the church at Rome, so when he sat down to write a letter to the Christians there, he didn’t know what they knew and what they didn’t know.

So what he wrote is about as close to an outline of his teaching about salvation and Christian growth as anything we find.

Bottom line? The book of Romans is central to understanding Christianity.

And among those who are willing to go out on a limb and express their “favorite” this or that, many will identify the 8th chapter of Romans. The thirty nine verses that make up this chapter are among the grandest, most inspiring in the Bible. So, today, welcome to Romans 8!

Here, Paul speaks to the nuts and bolts, the guts, of how the Christian life works. Here, he tells us of some of the wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit, points us to a hope beyond this life, and assures us of God’s “*Well that changes everything!*” love.

My plan is to take three Sundays to explore Romans 8 with you. And this morning we will be looking into some of what the Holy Spirit does to aid us in our journey with God.

Significantly, precious little has been said to this point in the book of Romans about the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.¹

He is mentioned only five times in the first seven chapters. Then, in the last eight chapters (9-16), the Holy Spirit is mentioned eight times.

But, here in chapter 8, the Holy Spirit is referred to no less than twenty one times. Given the flow of this letter, that’s significant.²

So here’s the flow:

- Chapters 1-5 - Paul lifts up the hood on the engine of salvation and lets us see how it all “works.”
- Chapters 6-7 - Paul urges us to lives of holiness, something that is only right considering the incredible grace and the salvation we have received.

¹ Please notice that throughout Romans 8 (and elsewhere) Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit with the personal pronoun, “Him.” The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or some impersonal force. He is a Person, just as fully personal as the other two members of the Trinity, the Father and the Son.

² Romans 8 is sometimes referred to as “the Holy Spirit chapter” of Romans.

Then we come to chapter 8 where he outlines the resources God has made available to us to lead those holy lives - and chief among those resources is the Holy Spirit, the Star of the show today.

The first verse is surely among the greatest announcements God has ever delivered.

Where YOU, a Believer in Jesus, Stand with God (vv. 1-4)

No Condemnation. Period. (v. 1)

[1] Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

You who have placed your faith in Jesus will never be condemned by God. So, just stop and let that sink in for a minute.

The idea of God's condemnation has been a pretty prominent theme in Romans. In the first three chapters, Paul showed the basis for condemnation before God, which is that we have all sinned. We fall short of God's glory.

But this (8:1) is the answer to the cry of Romans 7:24 (*"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"*). Being in Jesus frees us from bondage to sin, and from the threat of ever facing God's condemnation.

This is the shout of the triumph of God's amazing grace!

Your forgiveness is complete and absolute, eternal and unconditional - and it is all because of what Jesus did for you two thousand years ago when He died on the cross.

And this - No condemnation! - isn't the end. It is the beginning of the good news for us in Jesus.

What God Has Done for Us in Jesus (vv. 2-3)

[2] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

[3a] For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh [3b] God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh

Over the course of fifteen hundred years, the Law had proved itself incapable of accomplishing its stated objective.

The Law was to have condemned sin AND to have promoted obedience to God, faith in God, and love for God and others.

Well, it did the whole *condemn sin* thing just fine, but it never worked to promote holiness.³ So, what did God do in response to the Law's failure? He sent Jesus.

Jesus, God's Son, led a life of total obedience to His Father. Then He died on a Roman cross and broke sin's reign. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God accomplished all the things that the law was designed to do, but couldn't.

And why did God go to all of this trouble?

WHY God Did What He Did for Us (v. 4)

[4] so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

God has put a new "law" in effect for you who believe in Jesus. And this law has set you free from that old "*sin and death*" law.

The new law that supersedes the old law is called "*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*" (v. 2) It is a law that has the power to give you victory over sin and to transform you into someone who trusts, hopes, and loves.

How does this new law work? Well, think about gravity.

The law of gravity keeps objects earthbound.

³ Not due to an inadequacy of the Law, but to the sinfulness of the human heart.

But, (not that I'm trying to speak too technically ☺) airplanes can overcome the law of gravity. When a plane reaches a certain speed and the pilot tilts the plane's nose forward, the laws of aerodynamics take over and the plane is partially released from the law of gravity allowing it to soar.

In the same way, the old law, ***“the law of sin and death”*** keeps you from living the kind of life God wants you to live. It keeps you from soaring.

But, when you become a Christian, ***“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”*** kicks in and sets you free to live to the glory of God!

Sure, God saved you so that you would live with Him in Heaven forever. But there is much, much more to your salvation than that.

God saved you that you would glorify Him as you grow in grace and holiness. So, how, exactly, do we lead lives that bring Him glory? How do we get to that “grace and holiness”?

Well, here is one of those places where Paul shows his genius.

Rather than provide a step-by-step “how to” or a complicated formula for spiritual growth, he instead paints a picture of two lives.

There are, says Paul, two kinds of people in the world. There are “flesh” people and there are “Spirit” people.

Contrasting “flesh” People and “Spirit” People (vv. 5-11)

Flesh People (vv. 5a, 6a, 7-8, 9b)

The flesh orientation (vv. 5a, 6a)

[5a] For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...[6a] the mind set on the flesh is death.⁴

⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield believes that the distinction made between the two different types of people in verse 5 is soteriological (believer vs. unbeliever), while the distinction between the two types of people listed in verse 6 is that of a believer

The mind that is set on the flesh does not cause death or result in death. It IS death. And ***“the mind set on the flesh”*** is the mind that is set on the values and the resources that are opposed to God.

And there is more.

“Lowlights” of the mind set on the flesh. (vv. 7-8)

[7a] because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God

What do you think of when you hear the words, ***“hostile toward God”***? Maybe it is a flagrant curse or a bitter spirit, or some huge act of defiance against God. And, yes, those do speak of hostility toward God. But there is more to it than that.

Hostility toward God is seen in every move away from trust in God, in every show of apathy toward God, and in the absence of passionate love for God. We show hostility toward God by a proud commitment to independence.

All of this is at the core of what it means to have a mind set on the flesh.

Further, Paul tells us that the mind that is inclined toward the flesh ***[7b]...does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.*** And he ends with a crushing statement - ***[8] and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***

On the other hand, there are “Spirit people.”

Spirit People (vv. 5b, 6b, 9a, 10, 11)

[9] However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.⁵

fighting an internal struggle. (So also Bruce, Johnson). I am essentially in agreement, but am more of a mind that the lines need not be drawn so tight.

⁵ Note ***[9b]...But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*** A Christian has the Spirit of God. Someone who does not have the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. A Christian is anyone who believes for eternal life in the

And just as there were certain characteristics of those who are “*in the flesh*” so are there traits of those who are “*in the Spirit.*”

Characterizing Spirit people (vv. 5b, 6b, 10)

[5b]...those who are according to the Spirit, [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit [6b]...the mind set on the Spirit is LIFE and PEACE...

Life and peace are the identifying traits of the mind that is set on the Spirit.

- PEACE *with* God and the peace *of* God come to us as we set our minds “*on the Spirit.*”
- And LIFE - *forever* with God and *abundant* now - that is our lot when we set our minds “*on the Spirit.*”

Yes, we are still going to die (verse 10) because we are still “*in Adam.*” (see Romans 5) But for a believer in Jesus, death is not the end of the story. L-I-F-E is the end of the story!

And, the power of death which is at work in our bodies (I am more and more painfully aware of the decay of the body...) is overwhelmed by the life-giving power of God at work in our souls.

The future of those who adopt the Spirit mindset (v. 11)

[11] But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.⁶

So, one, our body is mortal because we are in Adam. We are going to die. And two, we have a blessed hope that is as solid as the truth of the resurrection of Jesus - that we will spend an eternity in Heaven with God.⁷

Jesus who died and rose again. And the New Testament is clear that any person who has trusted Jesus has the Holy Spirit.

⁶ It is worth noting that Paul says that the bodies which believers now possess are the bodies that will be made alive at the resurrection. We will be personally recognizable in the resurrection.

All great stuff. And then, at verse 12, Paul turns a corner.

Having spoken of what is true about us in Jesus he now tells us something about how our lives are to work now that we are in Jesus.

Life in the Spirit (vv. 12-17)

Putting to Death the Deeds of the Body (12-13)

[12] So then, brethren,⁸ we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh -- [13a] for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die

No obligation to the death-inducing flesh (v. 12b)

We all understand obligation. We are obligated to our families, to our work, to our taxes, and to the dozens of responsibilities we face daily.

Paul assures us that there is one area in which we are under no obligation at all - and that is with respect to the deeds of the flesh, to sin.

Not that any of us would think, “*Well, after all, I do owe sin so much. I had better go on and do evil.*” Of course not!

But, on a bad day, any of us might think, “*I can’t help myself*” when faced with a temptation to sin. “*I can’t help myself*” is never true!

For the believer in Jesus, power is available to resist sinful impulses.

BUT, as nutty as it would be for you or for me - people who have been set free from sin’s reign! - to serve the flesh, there is the very real possibility that we might do so.

⁷ This is a reference to final resurrection, to our future in Heaven. And heaven is real. As C.S. Lewis said, “*Either there is pie in the sky, or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric.*”

⁸ The first thing I am going to point out here is the fact that Paul is writing to believers. When he uses the word “you” he has in mind the child of God.

The prison door has been flung open - and we might stay put!⁹

So, what happens if you, a believer in Jesus, live according to the flesh? Paul says “...*you must die.*”

The choice to follow the flesh is ultimately a choice for death.

If we choose to live in a way that feeds the flesh, we travel the path that leads to a deadening of our relationship with God.

Not to a loss of the salvation that has been freely given to us, but to a tragic loss of intimacy with God, and to a loss of the abundant life we were saved to enjoy.

But, of course, there is the other possibility for the Christian...

Putting the deeds of the body to death by the Spirit brings life (v. 13b)

[13b]...but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body,¹⁰ you will live.

The “*deeds of the body*” that are in view here are not the normal activities of the human body (like sleeping and eating, etc....). Paul has in mind the *sinful* activities of “*the flesh.*”

He is thinking of acts of lovelessness. He has in mind hurtful words, acts of violence, addictive behaviors, loss of integrity, a failure to repent of wrongdoing.

In short, “*the deeds of the body*” in view here are sins. And, it is at this point, that Paul tells us what we are to do with those deeds.

We are to ruthlessly, heartlessly, consistently and continually

“by the Spirit [put] to death the deeds of the body.”

This is what we are to do. But this is no quick fix.

The process of doing what the King James Bible tells us to do - “**MORTIFY the deeds of the body**” - is not an over-night or even an over-a-decade process.

Today, we have instant everything. Instant oatmeal, instant information, instant communication. We also have instant spiritual life when we place our faith in Jesus.

But, while the guilt of our sin has been cast aside (“*no more condemnation*”) and the dominion of sin has been crushed (“...*Christ Jesus has set you free*”), we will struggle with sin until we leave this life.

We can’t have instant maturity. It takes time.

And we have a role to play as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His work of transforming us into the holy people we were saved to become.

So, how does this “*putting to death the deeds of the body*” thing work?

Before God saved you, imagine that your life was a garden. It’s a beautiful plot of land, but it has been overgrown with weeds and thorns and thistles so that tomatoes and peppers and beans and lettuce don’t have a chance.

The weeds represent the dominion of sin over you and which ruled over you before you came to know Jesus.

At salvation, God delivered you from the dominion of sin and gave you power over the garden - but He didn’t remove all the weeds.

Now, God might have removed some of the weeds at your conversion. Sometimes He graciously does that. But He invariably leaves lots of the weeds and briars in place.

⁹ Now, again, the person in view here is a believer in Jesus, a person who is “*in the Spirit*” and not “*in the flesh.*” But, this believer is living according to the promptings of the flesh. He talks like a person in the flesh. He acts like a person in the flesh. He waddles like a person in the flesh. But, he is not “*in the flesh.*”

¹⁰ “*Put to death*” - a strong term; cf. 6:1; envisioning an action which is continuous, repeated again and again, not an action which can be done once for all.

At salvation our life/garden is redeemed. God enters our still weed-infested gardens. His interest is to see our gardens produce a rich harvest of righteousness and love and faith.

So, God's Spirit leads us into the garden and points out weeds. He also provides us with a trowel and a shovel and a grubbing hoe and invites us to pull the weeds of sin He reveals.

Some of the weeds are hard to see because they are buried under other weeds that have to be cleared first. Sometimes what looks like an easily pulled weed has deep roots that take some work to *mortify*.

Sometimes there is something substantial that has to go!

A few years ago I cut down a cedar tree that was growing in the middle of my garden at home. It was robbing the veggies of sunlight, so I cut it down.

The tree was gone, but the stump remained. Well, this past Monday I was finally able to remove the stump from the garden so that I can plant something good to eat. It took years to get that stump out.

There may be stumps in the garden of your soul that will take years to remove.

But, as we invite the Spirit to help us see the weeds of sin in our lives He can be trusted to reveal them. Not all at once (THAT would be quite overwhelming!), but progressively.

Then, by the tools He supplies - confession, the truths of Scripture, His own guiding presence, rich Christian fellowship - the soil of our redeemed souls can increasingly produce the harvest God intends.

And at each step of obedience, you are ***“putting to death the deeds of the body.”***

The more closely you walk with God, the more sensitized the Spirit will allow you to be to the weeds that must be removed.

Day by day the soil will be cleared so that the good seed that will produce a harvest for God can grow.¹¹

Putting to death the deeds of the body is the path to life.

As you, by the Spirit, weed your garden, your testimony to a lost world will be richer. Your intimacy with God will be deeper. Your love for others will become more powerful as the garden is cleared.

What is patently apparent is that this process of rooting out sin brings glory to God, blesses those around us AND is good for us.

And to do so is an absolutely spiritual exercise. Putting to death the deeds of the body is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Something Only a Son of God Does (v. 14)

[14] For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons¹² of God.

What does it mean to be “led by the Spirit”?

This phrase ***“be led by the Spirit”*** often has reference to Christians discovering which job to take, who we should or should not marry, what clothing to put on in the morning, and what we should do with our time away from work.

Sorry. While the Spirit certainly may lead in these matters, I am of the opinion that this verse has nothing to do with the *“leading of God”* relative to either vocation or vacations.

In coming to this or any other verse, we have to remember a key to Bible study: always look at the context. And what is the context here?

¹¹ The sages of spirituality through the ages speak with one voice that the more passionately we pursue holiness, the more completely we will sense our need for God's grace. The more we grow, the greater will be our perception of need, and the greater will be our appreciation for Jesus' cross.

¹² The term “sons” is not gender specific with Paul. He clearly means to include females as well.

Paul has been talking about putting to death the deeds of the body. The daily, hourly putting to death of the deeds of the body by the Spirit IS the context. And the Spirit's leading - at least as Paul speaks of it here - is His leading into the pursuit of holiness.

And what can we say about those people who are being so led by the Spirit of God? They are sons (and understood, daughters!) of God.

THESE are the sons of God

It is terrifically significant that Paul didn't say at this point, "*all the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.*"

No, he leaves open the possibility some of the sons of God might tragically NOT put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit's power.¹³

So...

- It is not true that people become sons of God (become saved) when they are led by the Spirit.
- It is not true that if someone is NOT led by the Spirit (is not putting to death the deeds of the body) he is proven to NOT be a son of God.

The point is that those who do, by the Spirit, put to death the deeds of the body are manifestly sons of God.¹⁴

Not slaves who have to do something because of a heartless master who is forcing them against their will. But beloved "sons" (and daughters) who desperately want to honor their Father.

¹³ He implies that some of the brethren he addresses in verse 12 might actually be living according to the flesh, and are thus, not following the Holy Spirit's lead.

¹⁴ In other words, I believe that Paul is saying that the group of "*sons of God*" is made of those who put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit's power, but includes some who have truly trusted Christ but who in significant areas are not putting to death the deeds of the body.

The "spirit" of the Believer (v. 15)

The "spirit" believers HAVE NOT received (v. 15a)

[15a] For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again

Before coming to faith in Jesus, we were of flesh, sold into bondage to sin, unable to do the good that we longed to do, prisoners of the law of sin, "*wretched*" men and women. (Romans 7:24)

Now, we're not any of that.

We don't fear death, because we have been promised Heaven. We don't fear rejection, because we have been accepted by Christ. We don't fear a meaningless life because we have been invited into partnership with God in His work of kingdom building.

We aren't slaves. We have been adopted into God's forever family.

The spirit believers HAVE received (v. 15b)

[15b]...but you have received a spirit of adoption¹⁵ as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father."¹⁶

As we know, adoption is the process of moving a child from his or her family of origin or from the foster care system to a new family.

Today, it is a precious thing when a child is adopted. Whatever the circumstances out of which the child is adopted, the big-hearted action of a loving family to bring a new son or daughter into their home is a beautiful thing to behold.

Adoption was a powerful thing in ancient Rome, too.¹⁷

¹⁵ For adoption, see Romans 5:23; 9:4, here; Gal. 4:5 and Eph. 1:5.

¹⁶ So, Sanday and Headlam. In contrast with this view some major commentaries believe that Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit (i.e. Murray, Calvin, etc...).

¹⁷ Adoption was common among the ancient Romans, and was practiced among the Jews, too. But, undoubtedly, the Gentile world provides the background for adoption here.

The Romans to whom Paul was writing were familiar with what happened at an adoption, specifically, that:

- the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate child in the new family.
- the adopted person became an heir to the new father's estate (assuming that he did not shame his new father, and lose his inheritance).
- the adopted person's old debts were wiped out.

All of this would have gone through the minds of Paul's original readers when they read "adoption."

They understood then, and we understand today that we were born into a different family but that we are now children of God. We are heirs of God's riches in Christ. And, the debt of our sin has been wiped out.

No wonder we now cry out to our new father, "*Abba! Father!*"¹⁸

And, because of the relationship we now sustain with Almighty God - Father to child - we *cheerfully* put to death the sinful deeds of the body.

Paul lets us know of yet another blessing the Spirit of God brings our way. It is the internal witness of the Spirit coupled with an anticipation of a rich inheritance in the life to come.

Children and Heirs (vv. 16-17)

The internal witness of the Holy Spirit (v. 16)

[16] *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

It is dangerous to say that "this" or "that" is normative, internal Christian experience. My emotional life is different than yours. Yours is unique to you.

¹⁸ The word "*Abba*" in ancient Aramaic was a term used by small children to address their father. Sort of a, "Daddy," with reverent overtones. The homely sense was never lost or forgotten, even into the days of Paul. But, it would have been unthinkable for a Jew to have used that term, "*Abba*," as a form of address to God.

So, in what Paul says here about the internal witness of the Spirit of God to our human spirit that we are children of God I don't want to say that you are supposed to have this or that certain "feeling."

So, let's call it a growing confidence that, having believed in Jesus, you belong to God.

Or, let's say it this way: You have heard the promise of God, **[John 3:16] *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but has eternal life***, and you are at rest. You believe in Jesus, therefore you are confident that you are His child.

This confidence is a gift from the Holy Spirit, direct to you, God's child. And as His adopted child, you stand to receive a tremendous inheritance!¹⁹

A rich inheritance to come (v. 17)

[17] *and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

Certainly eternal life and forgiven sin is ours when we believe. But faithfulness brings the additional blessing of the abundant life Jesus promised and reward in the life to come.²⁰

¹⁹ Due to time constraints, there is not freedom to go into great detail on the theme of believers' judgment, inheritance, and rewards in this message. But suffice it to say that the New Testament is full of the idea that the faithfulness of Christians here in this life determines the kind of reception they will receive in Heaven. See Rom. 14:10-12, 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:6-10 for a few of the references to the judgment and rewards of believers after this life is over. If you would like to discuss this topic further, or are interested in finding out more about it, please feel free to talk with me or give me a call.

²⁰ Since we are the children of God, we have rights of inheritance. We are heirs of God, as we have just seen. But, our inheritance (as opposed to our salvation) is conditional. According to Paul, we are fellow-heirs with Christ IF we suffer with Him for the purpose of being glorified with Him. And, what is this saying but that the measure of our inheritance in Heaven is directly tied to the way in which we

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit...

Consider what we have seen about the gifts and the graces of the Holy Spirit poured out on you and me in Jesus.

- He has replaced *“law of sin and of death”* with *“the law of life”* (v. 2)
- He empowers us to lead lives that bring honor to God. (v. 4)
- He provides us PEACE and LIFE as we set our minds on Him and His ways. (v. 6)
- Because of the Spirit’s presence in our lives, God will give life to our mortal bodies in the world to come. (v. 11)
- He enables us, by His powerful resources, to put to death the sinful deeds of the body and experience L-I-F-E! (v. 13)
- He leads us into the pursuit of holiness. (v. 14)
- He gives us an internal conviction that we are children of God. (v. 17)

Life in Jesus would be impossible without the Holy Spirit and His many, gracious, life-changing gifts!

approach life’s trials and challenges on earth? If we approach them by faith and in faithfulness, then our inheritance is great. If not, then we could forfeit - not our salvation - but our inheritance, what the Bible calls in other places, rewards. Now, let’s ask at this point, what kind of suffering is in view here? Many have seen an allusion to persecution here. But at the outset I think we would all agree that for Paul to be referencing persecution would be quite alien to this passage. As earlier, look at the context. The suffering that is in view simply cannot be that of persecution, but that of suffering through the process of putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit.