

New life in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're reading from Romans 8, starting from verse 5. For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit. If in fact the spirit of God dwells in you, anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. 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 dwells in you.

I turned it off. Good morning. As Simon has already introduced, we're continuing in our series on Romans 7 through 8 and looking at the issue or the matter of assurance, the assurance that we can actually have in our faith, in our relationship to God.

And last week David looked at our foundation, that foundation being in Christ. The key verse, which we used to put on t-shirts back in the day, bumper stickers, all that sort of things, is verse 1.

[1 : 44] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation. But gee, if we're going to actually even get through that verse, I think one of the things that we do as a culture at the moment is we kind of skirt around condemnation.

If we stay far enough away from it, it's okay. We can read that verse through and then swallow it. But if we get anywhere near the word condemnation, I think we really struggle. See, I'm amazed.

I'll try not to slip into a rant here. You know, I'm 50 now. It's starting to come up in me. But there was a time when truth used to come from outside of yourself.

There was a time when everyone agreed on what truth was and what right and wrong was. I remember as a child, if I disobeyed, if I broke one of these rules, it didn't matter who caught me up, they would give me a clip around the ear.

If I complained to my parents, they would give me another one because they were pretty sure that that first person was right. Now, in my case, maybe that was more often than perhaps it was for you.

[2 : 48] But that's the reality of things. There was this sense of what is right and what is wrong. And it was understood to be out there, to be out there, to be objective, to be something we could refer to and that everyone in society could refer to as well.

Well, now we have a name for people who have that kind of view of the world. We call them old. But here's the problem.

You see, that old view is kind of the view that's actually represented by the Ancient of Days, our God. That expectation that there is an objective truth in the world. We've moved to this place where we've actually internalised where we find truth.

So we look inside ourselves when we were looking for truth. What that looks like, for example, is that when I'm trying to work out what's right and wrong in my life, I look inside myself and I decide, well, what feels best for me?

What do I think will best serve my purposes? What do I think will actually best give me a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment? I want to tell you something up front.

[3 : 55] Because this concept of pursuing wholeheartedly what I think, I feel or I desire is a really thorny one. If we go down that path, it's a really thorny one on two counts.

First, in the direction that it can lead. And second, I think if we go down this path, it's a very hard path to see that we're on.

When I judge the world and my own behaviour within it, how I interact within it, on the basis of what I find within, it is very hard for me to see when I'm going wrong.

In fact, I'd go so far as to say this, if you are sinning, if you are sinning and you're not enjoying it, you're doing it wrong.

So if I'm actually looking internally to find that compass that will actually help to direct me through life, I'm going to really struggle. I'm going to really struggle with how I live.

[5 : 01] This issue of condemnation, I've got to keep that way away from me. Because it confronts me. But the problem that we have is that we're left in this nebulous place of existence where, man, we don't want people to say that there's something to be condemned.

But we really, really want to have some kind of direction in life. We want to know what it means for there now to be no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What does that look like, lived out? That sounds like a passing. What does it look like, lived out? And what happens as we go into verses 5 to 13 is we actually find out what it actually looks like to live it out.

Verses 1 to 4 go on to unpack this issue of no condemnation. The removal of condemnation in Christ bit. It unpacks what it, this passage that we're about to go into, unpacks what it means to be in Christ Jesus in an ongoing sense.

And as it does, it builds and strengthens the assurance available to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Last week, new life in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 11] This week, new life in the Holy Spirit. Notice that salvation is a Trinitarian work and we'll see this as the Son, then the Father this week, and then the Spirit this week, and then the Father next week.

Father, Son, and Spirit are wholeheartedly involved in saving us. Only in Christ are we set free from condemnation and only through the Spirit is this freedom applied to us.

In a real and tangible and meaningful sense. So let's look at how Paul does this, because what he does is he actually presents us with a comparison. It begins in verses 5 and 6.

Paul has already introduced the role of the Spirit in verse 2. The Spirit applies the truth of the Gospel to us. We'll unpack that a little bit more in a moment. But here in verse 5, what Paul does is he compares flesh and Spirit to show how that role works.

He says these words, 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Now, to understand what Paul means here, we need to understand the terms Paul uses.

[7 : 20] When he says to live according to, he doesn't mean the things that you do in life. He means who you are. The Greek word that Paul uses here for live means to be.

It means my life, who I am, what I live for, my foundation for existence. And ultimately, it's a comparison here between life according to the flesh on the one hand, or not Christian, and life according to the Spirit on the other hand, or Christian.

He takes life according to the flesh first. Let's start there. Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Those who live according to the flesh are those who live for themselves.

It's when I define myself by who I am, and what I think, and what I feel, and what I desire. It's life apart from God. And living according to the flesh can look like one of two paths.

Rebellious, which I think is easy to see. Or religious, which is really interesting because it actually looks very much like the Christian life that we should be living. Let's start and have a look at these then.

[8 : 38] So the rebellious life. And think too, as Paul is actually speaking to the Roman church, where he's trying to dovetail two different people groups, in the Jews and the Gentiles, coming into one family, one church.

Think of how he's drawing these two groups in, and which group these particular groups might represent, rebellious or religious. But think also about ourselves. Let's think about ourselves and how we actually fit into this too.

You see, when we talk about rebellious, I think we get what rebellious is. And Paul describes his pathway in Romans 1, verse 18 and following. So you can go and look back at that and get a sense of what it's like.

It's basically, in a nutshell, those who actively turn their backs on God. Those who reject the truth. Those who choose to pursue a life that conflicts with God's rule and plan and design.

But what it looks like in their minds is not actually a form of rebellion, but a form of pursuit, of fullness of life. A rebel pursues the life that they decide is fruitful.

[9 : 51] And in terms of wondering, well, how does this actually work? How do I know when this is the path I'm on? Well, let me just suggest this. That people on this path struggle with criticism. Now, everyone struggles with criticism, but let's actually unpack why they struggle with criticism.

They struggle because they reject anyone else's right to judge them. If that's the kind of thing that wells up in your heart, hang on a minute. I'm me.

I get to choose who me is. How dare you confront or challenge or rebuke me for being me? The religious person, as I said, is slightly different and harder to see.

They also struggle with criticism, but we'll come up to that in a moment. The religious person, in fact, it's even possible for us, for some of us here, to think that we're Christians, but be in this camp of religious person.

Paul describes a religious pathway in Romans 2, verses 12 and following, as he addresses the Jews. There it's the Jews who obey the Mosaic law zealously, but reject God's offer of salvation through his son when he comes.

[11 : 06] A religious person pursues God by living the life that they think is worthy. They try really hard to be a good person because it's this goodness, this goodness in their life that determines how good their relationship with God is.

And as I've said, people on this path, they also struggle with criticism. But they react badly for a different reason. They react badly because their spiritual identity is defined by how they live.

They're chipping away at the very foundation that they're using to build on to move closer to God. If we're going down the religious pathway, we'll also be prone to hiding our flaws and judging others.

Not to help them, not to speak truth into their lives, but to rank them on a scale of goodness. Because the religious person builds a sense of spiritual superiority over others on the basis of their goodness.

So as Paul speaks of those who are in the flesh, we need to remember that he actually has both the rebellious on the one hand and the religious on the other, both groups in his sights.

[12 : 28] The rebel abandons God and pursues the life that they decide is fruitful. The religious person pursues God by living a life that they think is worthy. But both reject Christ because both are building their foundation on the flesh.

Those who are in the flesh, on the one hand, are not grounded in Christ. But those who live according to the Spirit are grounded in Christ.

Paul goes on to say, those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Now Paul isn't saying to switch your brains off here just so you understand. You know that old let go and let God type thing, kind of get in touch with our spiritual side.

As far as I'm concerned, that's not far off a Christianized version of the Ouija board. What Paul is saying here is actually the opposite. Focus on what the Spirit is doing and get in step with it.

Cooperate. Be a part of it. Cheer the Spirit on. My first trip to England, I was about 15, I think I was, when we went across to England. And it was my brother and I who went to visit our relatives who we'd not seen.

[13 : 41] My parents are English. They brought us out here. Anyway, so I went back to visit my grandparents and my cousins and all that sort of thing. And I had a great opportunity to go and watch Sheffield Wednesday.

My family team, the team that my family has supported for generations, to go and watch Sheffield Wednesday play at Liverpool, against Liverpool, at Liverpool, at Anfield Road.

Now the thing was, Sheffield Wednesday back then was a decent team. There were lots of people supporting it. And you only get a little thin wedge of supporters if you're playing away. So you've got to get in early to get your tickets.

We didn't get a ticket in that area. The only way we could get a ticket was to buy one in the Liverpool area. And so what that meant was, we turned up wearing absolutely no team colours.

And when we walked in, we discovered that that made us obvious. That demonstrated exactly who we were supporting. Because we turned up and we walked into the ground and there was this thin wedge of blue and white, surrounded by a sea of red.

[14 : 48] And there we were in neutral clothes, just jeans and a jumper. Everyone knew what we'd done. We were sitting amongst these guys. The score was two all. At one point, I actually jumped to cheer one of the goals and my brother grabbed the back of my jumper and pulled me back into my seat.

Because he didn't want me to give away who I was barracking for. Man. When we get a sense of what's going on here, what Paul is saying is, those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

He's saying, get on God's side, get on with seeing what the Spirit is doing and cheer Him on as He transforms your life. So what is the Spirit doing?

Well, as I said earlier, just a few verses earlier in chapter 8, verse 2, Paul tells us. Here Paul speaks of the law of the Spirit of life setting us free. Now, law in the Bible, even in Romans, can refer to rules, like the Old Testament law, or it can refer to a binding power or authority.

And here, in this verse, Paul is saying that the Spirit has that binding power or authority to set us free in Christ.

[16 : 14] He doesn't introduce a new law that we have to obey, a new rule we have to obey, but he actually represents that power that can liberate us. The Spirit applies the gospel of Jesus Christ to our lives.

The Spirit sets us free from condemnation in Christ. That's the work of the Spirit that Paul has in mind here. And what does that look like?

Well, it looks like this. The Spirit shows us ourselves and how far we have fallen short of God's righteousness. That's a hard thing to hear if we're defining right and wrong for ourselves.

But here's the thing that, this is something that Spurgeon said, which I think is really helpful. He said this, If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be.

Those who live according to the Spirit know the truth of this. They know they are far worse than anyone around them will ever realize. They are far worse than they themselves will realize.

[17 : 24] This is part of the work of the Spirit, but the Spirit doesn't stop there. He rebuilds our foundation on Christ. There is no condemnation for us. It's not that we escape or that we're let off.

It's that our sin has been punished already. The law has been fulfilled, we read in verse 4. Now David described last week how our sin can undermine our assurance of salvation.

Big sins in the past, he described, that we still feel the shame of as they come into our consciousness. Persistent sins that we can't get rid of. But nothing we have done or are doing or will do can condemn us because the Spirit is bringing us to life.

Through the power of the Gospel, he's applying that power to us. So for those who live according to the Spirit, life begins now.

Enjoying the reality of life and peace with God begins now. And it's a life we're called to participate in. Now there's these two ways of living that Paul's described here that he's contrasted.

[18 : 40] And then he goes on to look at the outcomes of those ways. And these are quite confronting again for however we approach life. These are challenging. See, two different lives build on two different foundations, both with very different outcomes.

Because, as Paul goes on to say, those in the flesh cannot please God. And those in the Spirit receive new life. In the flesh, Paul continues in verse 7, for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law.

Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God.

Please notice, there is no Switzerland here. In this age of tolerance, I don't think we like to think of ourselves as hostile to anyone, but we are. We're hostile to anyone who takes away our freedom to think and do what we want.

But think about it. This is something that Abraham Kuyper once said. He describes the sovereignty of God over us in this way. There is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

[20 : 11] Don't you find that just a little bit jarring? I cannot even keep one part of me back from God. I can't compartmentalise just one little bit of me and say that's mine, that's how I'm going to live in that part of my life, but everything else God can have.

I can't do that because it's all God's. And when I try to hold back, I'm actually stealing from him. Now guys, we know stealing is a crime.

You know, we can acknowledge that. But hostility, I think that's something entirely different that we really struggle with. It means being enemies, like two countries fighting.

That's what the word, the Greek word means here. And even as we understand fighting, when two countries fight, we understand that when enemy fighters are captured, they're treated according to the Geneva Convention.

They're locked up, but they're cared for. But that's enemy fighters. When a member of a country at war chooses to fight against their own country, they're not called prisoners of war.

[21 : 21] They're called traitors. And what we do with traitors is entirely different. Traitors, in the last great war, were executed.

Now, Kuyper says, we are gods. So if we go to war against God, we aren't just rebels. We are traitors.

We have betrayed our rightful king. Whether openly rebellious or religiously zealous, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Because they've rejected their rightful king. They've switched sides. Worse than enemies, they are traitors. But, says Paul, in verse 9, the ray of light shines in.

But, says Paul, you are different. Let's look at verse 9. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you.

[22 : 25] Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. The language here of not being in the flesh, but in the spirit, is about identity.

To be in the spirit is to absolutely identify with the spirit. It's an all-in commitment. And the mind-boggling thing here is that it's mutual.

I love the way that Sam told the kids' story this morning about the spirit moving into the house. It's mutual. You and I are in the spirit.

And, the spirit of God dwells in us. Christ is in you. And Paul goes on to say in verse 10 that there's some implications to that.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the spirit is in you, if Christ is in you, then he's for you.

[23 : 29] That first trip back to England that I got to go and watch that football match, I was on the sides, you know, wanting to barrack with all my heart. But the crazy thing is the God whose power is at work in my life is barracking for me.

He loves me dearly. He wants to promote good in my life. The Holy Spirit is working zealously for me.

All the time applying the gospel to me. Now, when I remember that sin that I regret, and you'll know this, you'll know this experience, I'm sure.

You know, the memories that you hide from people that you don't tell even your closest friends. The ones that cause you to well up with shame. When I remember that kind of sin, and I wonder if I can even be a Christian, it's the Spirit who reminds me that God has already condemned that sin on the cross.

It's real, but it's paid for, and I'm free. And when I get caught up in that same weakness again, and again, and again, and the last place I feel I can go to, the last person I feel I can get anywhere near to is God.

[25 : 01] The Spirit draws me back to the gospel. The Holy Spirit is there in me saying, in Christ, you're forgiven. children, child, you are mine. God already knows who his precious children are.

It's us who have to realize who he is as our Father. The Spirit of God is not idle. He is constantly applying the gospel to my sinful soul.

But the Spirit doesn't just push back death or push back condemnation. The Spirit brings life. Paul goes on to say in verse 11, 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 dwells in you.

The Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies. Let's be clear, we're going to continue to age and die this side of Christ's return. Paul says in verse 10 that we will continue to age and die in the flesh.

And we do that because our bodies are dead because of sin. Spoiler alert though, there is a time coming when even the dead even that death will be rolled back. It's coming up in a couple of weeks.

[26 : 23] I think David's got that one, that passage. So, we will continue to age and die but he also says that the Spirit will bring life now.

And I'm going to suggest to you that this means we are being transformed now. That new life that we will experience in fullness at some point in the future is breaking in here and now.

This life the Spirit gives us now is to put to death the deeds of the body in verse 13. Let's read those verses out, 12 and 13.

So then, brothers, Paul concludes, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh for if you're living according to the flesh you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.

here's the partnership that means we participate in this. We are involved in setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. The Spirit is at work in us.

[27 : 22] He calls us to actually get involved in what he's doing. We're also involved in putting to death the old ways of the flesh. But it's the Spirit that leads this process.

It's in his power that it's accomplished. And how does he do this? Well, the Spirit exposes our flaws to us. He teaches us how the Gospel redeems us from the guilt and shame of those flaws.

And he replaces our old mindset with a new mindset. He transforms us into something better than we could ever conceive alone. I've got to say this here and now that I don't fully appreciate what the Gospel is doing in me.

I can't see what I'm to be because I've never seen it. I need the Spirit to do this work in me.

Our families are fans of a TV show called Antiques Roadshow. Perhaps more so because we're flying out to England next week and so Joe and I are getting re-acclimatised to the accents in the countryside and anticipating our holiday and we're kind of in that point.

[28 : 43] We're not counting down, although it's eight days and seven hours before we fly out. No, we're not counting down the days but certainly as we approach going back home we start to think about things of England and there's this one particular Antiques Roadshow episode that was really interesting.

You see, they introduced me to this concept or this craft called Kintsugi. I don't know if you've heard of this but it's a centuries old Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with a special lacquer basically mixed with gold powder.

Beautiful seams of gold glint in the cracks as you can see up on the pictures here of ceramic where once they've been broken is how they fixed them. They give a unique appearance to every single piece.

This repair method actually celebrates each pot's unique history by emphasising its fractures and breaks instead of disguising them as had been the case in the past.

Kintsugi often makes a repaired piece even more beautiful than the original. Revitalising it with new life is what they're aiming for.

[29 : 57] Friends we we boast in our strengths so when I talk about the role of the spirit and actually showing us our weaknesses and transforming those things towards God's likeness I don't think that's a particularly welcome thing.

We boast in our strengths whether it be religiously or because we've chosen those things to be the defining characteristics of our lives but the spirit works on our weaknesses those cracks those imperfections the things we hide are showing the gospel far better than our best efforts to be good ever could.

We boast in our strengths the spirit will have us boasting in what God can do with our weaknesses breathing new life into us turning those areas that were just such a source of guilt and shame to us transforming those areas into pure gold in his hands our brokenness is turned into beauty and nothing commends the gospel to me more than seeing that at work in my life and seeing it at work in your lives this is the assurance that Paul offers us the God who so identifies with us that he not only dies in our place but dwells in us and as he dwells in us he transforms us into something far more beautiful than we've ever seen before and he does this the last way we would want him to he exposes our flaws and cleanses them and transforms them into his beautiful likeness through the power of the gospel friends that spirit is at work in you let's pray father god we don't know what perfection looks like because none of us have achieved it so none of us have ever seen it but we do know through your word that you are perfect and you have demonstrated it not only have you demonstrated but you've invited us into your presence cleansing us from unrighteousness not just legally so that we're no longer condemned but day by day purifying us returning us and restoring us to the way we were intended to be to just display your likeness to the world but I pray that you would help us by your spirit to build our lives on the truth of the gospel and not in the hope that we can in any way approach you through anything we do father god show us the goodness in Jesus name amen