

The Spirit of God

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[0:00] I just wanted to start in a slightly different way this morning. That is, I want you to imagine something that I experienced in my childhood and some of you will have experienced as well.

That is, the old ghost train ride, right, in the showgrounds or whatever it was. You know the rides that I mean where you sort of got on this little sort of trolley along with lots of other people and you went through various locations and people would jump out at you and you know scary things would happen and you sort of stop every now and then.

I want to do a sort of ghost train ride, except there are no ghosts involved, of the Old Testament to show you something that I think is important to understand Paul.

So we're going to start here, I'm going to sort of walk around and I'll come back and then I'll get back up in the pulpit. It's just a little different this morning. So I want you to imagine we're in Genesis 1. Genesis 1 is so full of promise, so full of potential.

God creates this wonderful place, puts two people in it, sets everything up for them and gives them an open slather to do anything except to not eat of one particular tree.

[1:12] And sure enough, they fail. We think, you know, what a disaster. They've stuffed it up. And so you think, well, what's going to happen from then? So in our little ghost train ride, we go ahead one stop and we stop in Genesis 12.

And in Genesis 12, what happens is you see Abraham chosen. And you think, well, here's another start. You know, perhaps things will go all right. And Abraham looks full of potential as well, doesn't he?

But when you read on the story, yes, he is full of potential. But like all humans, he makes mistakes. He's not perfect. In fact, by the end of chapter 12, he's stuffed up.

So now let's go on the next step. So if we keep moving, we go to the next station. The next station is we stop. Well, round about Exodus 20, thereabouts.

God has just rescued his people from Israel, from Egypt. He has given them a great covenant. He's entered into covenant with them. And you think, yes, and you start again.

[2:13] But then if you go past chapter 19 and 20 and you go one step further, you arrive at chapter 32, where they build a golden calf.

And they commit idolatry. They break commandment one. And from then on, they're going to break all the other commandments. So you think stuffed up again.

So you keep coming. And our next stop, if we go through, is God takes them through the wilderness and he lands them in the promised land. So our next stop is right on the edge of the promised land. They go in.

What happens? Jericho's just wonderful. But what happens is one of God's people doesn't follow God's law and actually destroys it for everyone else.

So right on the, as soon as they enter into the promised land, they fail again. So human beings are showing their nature. They show that they are just like Adam, just like Eve. What's the next stop?

[3:12] Well, you come to David. 2 Samuel chapter 7, David is given great promises. He is, God says he will make his descendants kings forever. You think, yeah, this is great too.

You think, David's such a good guy, isn't he? That's chapter 7. Chapter 11, he's committing adultery.

And he's committing murder in order to justify it. So you think, stuffed up again. Then you move on. Next stop. You stop somewhere around about the middle of the book of Kings.

By this time, the nation of Israel is separated into two. Largely because of sin. And you read all the kings.

And you think, well, if David got it right a lot of the time, the kings get it wrong a lot of the time. And they lead their people astray. They lead them into idolatry. They totally corrupt the people.
[4 : 11] And the end is, they end up in exile. And you think, oh, well, perhaps I've learned from this. Seventy years ought to give them a lot of reflective time where they can sort it out. And then they come back from exile.

And they're caught in sin again. They're intermarrying. They're doing all sorts of things that they shouldn't be doing. They stuff up again. Friends, that's very important. That's the story of what is going on in Romans 7.

Paul is imagining himself as just yet another picture of Israel and of humanity as a whole. And he's saying, this is us.

This is where we get. And he gets to the end of it and he says, wretched man that I am. Who can free me from this body of death? That's where we've got to today. And now we can go back up here and we'll pick it up.

So get your outlines out if you could, because we're going to go through what Paul has to say for us. And friends, as we do this, I think let's start by praying.

[5 : 19] Father, we pray that you'd help us to understand your word this morning and understanding it, to live by it. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, my view is, as I've said to you, that in Romans 7, Paul is talking about Jews throughout history.

That little scenario that we followed. This is their experience of the law. Paul is a Jew. And before his conversion, that was his experience as well.

That's why he uses that I language throughout chapter 7. However, I want to add something, you see. It seems to me that when we as Christians read Romans 7, and I bet you all do the same thing as I do, we find ourselves nodding assent.

That is, we read Romans 7, we read Paul's experience, and we find ourselves thinking, yeah, I've been where you've been, Paul. I know what you mean.

I have felt that. In fact, some of you might even say that about your present existence as Christians. That is, you might read Paul in Romans 7, you say, yeah, I'm with you now, Paul.

[6 : 25] That's my experience as a Christian. I know what you mean. I'm feeling that right now. My struggle is your struggle. Well, friends, let me tell you why I think this happens.

I think that we experience these feelings because many of us live like Jews. That is, many of us have developed a long list of do's and don'ts in our brains, do's and don'ts that make up for us what it means to be Christian.

You know the sorts of things I mean. Don't be idolatrous. Don't be greedy. Don't commit sexual sin. Go to church every Sunday. Do keep the law of the land. Do read your Bible and pray every day. And you'll have a lot more in your brain as well. And the tendency for us as Christians is to measure how we're going with God through our observance or non-observance of those sorts of things.

We know that we fail. And so we resonate with Paul in Romans 7. We've been there. We've felt what he's felt and we know what he knows. That is, we know we cannot keep the law as Christians.

[7 : 27] And not only the law of God, but even that law that we have devised ourselves. It's a dead end in terms of pleasing God because we just cannot do it. And that is why some of us, even if we are Christians, do find ourselves nodding in agreement and feeling his frustration when he calls himself a wretched man and he cries out for deliverance.

Friends, that is the background to the first part of the passage we're going to look at today. We will come back to this notion that I've raised now right at the end. But I want you to look at Romans 8, 1 to 4.

Now, we've got some hard work to do this morning. So let's get down to it and hope you'll stick with me. Look at the first two verses with Romans in Romans chapter 8. Paul says, Now, one of the most important things to do, I think as Andrew has told us, is that when we see the word therefore to ask what it is there for.

Okay. What does the therefore refer to in this first verse? Well, in some sense, it refers back to all of Romans 3 through to 7. Paul is saying, given all that has been done in Christ, there is now no condemnation.

However, in another sense, it refers to the immediately preceding question. Can you see it there? Look back in verse 24 and 25 of chapter 7. First, Paul states something.

[9 : 01] What a wretched man I am. Verse 24. Second, he asks something. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Verse 24. Third, he answers his own question. Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. Friends, listen to what he has to say.

Romans 5 told us that because we were in Adam, we were subject to condemnation. We were lined up behind Adam.

We were subject to the same condemnation as him. But if we are in Christ, we are justified. That is, we are declared righteous before God in right relationship with God.

There is therefore now no condemnation. Now, let me tell you what no condemnation means. No condemnation means no condemnation.

[10 : 01] It means exactly what it says. And that means no condemnation now and no condemnation in the future. Now, Romans 3.24 says those who believe in Jesus are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came in Christ Jesus.

Then Romans 5.9 says, Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

So justified now, no condemnation now, and no condemnation in the future either, when we will be saved from his wrath because there is nothing to condemn us.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation now. No condemnation in the future if you are in Christ.

Well, why? Well, verse 2 tells us. Let's have a look. There is no condemnation because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

[11 : 08] There is no condemnation because we have been liberated. The law of the Spirit who gives life has set us free from the law of sin and death.

Now, notice the contrast. On the one side, there is the law of sin and death. I think that's probably Mosaic law, which showed up the sinfulness of Adam and Eve and their descendants and condemned them.

You see, when the law came, it showed up just how sinful people had been. When we were in Adam, that was our state. And if we followed the law, then this was our state.

But if we are in Christ Jesus, our situation is different. If we are in Christ Jesus, we are justified, not condemned. We are liberated.

We are free from the law of sin and of death. Through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit has given us life.

[12 : 07] Friends, if you are Christians, then verses 1 and 2 have told you two wonderful and beautiful truths. Truth 1. Stated in verse 1.

There is now no condemnation for you. Truth 2. Stated in verse 2. You are now liberated, set free. Let's look at verses 3 and 4. These verses are truly profound because they present God's great purpose in Jesus. They tell us who did it and what it involved.

First, look at it with me. Well, look at it with me. First, we're told about God the Father. Now, we know he's a father. Why? Because he's got a son. It's not actually said that he's a father, but that's implied by the context.

Second, we are told that this father did something. He sent his son into the world. Third, we are told that this son was in the likeness of sinful flesh.

[13 : 05] What does that mean, do you think? Well, it probably means he looked human. He was the part of a human being. He was human. However, he was really human, but he was different from other humans in that he was not sinful.

I think that's what's being said there. He was like other humans in that he was human himself. He was not like other humans in that he was not sinful. He was in the likeness of sinful human flesh.

Fourth, he came with a purpose. And that purpose was to be a sin offering. That is, he came to die as a sacrifice to take away the problem of sin.

And he came to enable the righteous requirement of the law to be fully met. Fifth, this purpose was to be met by a totally different way of living.

To live according to the flesh is to live as Adam did. So let's go back to our earlier illustration. To live according to the flesh is to live as Adam did. What is it?

[14 : 10] What does it mean to live according to the flesh? It's to live dependent upon yourself and your own ability, which is sure to fail. If you're a Jew, it meant depending upon yourself and your

own ability to keep the law.

Well, Jesus, the son came to end that way of living. He came to replace it with another way of living. And that way of living is to live trusting Jesus and depending upon him.

You notice the two differences? One, trusting yourself and your own ability. Two, trusting Jesus and all that he has done. That way of living, trusting Jesus is the Christian way.

It is the way of living according to the spirit. It is living before God and for God only through Jesus Christ. That is to live before God and to live for God, depending on the grace of God and not our own efforts is to live by the spirit.

There's one more thing to notice here. I wonder if you noticed it. I deliberately went through it this way. Did you hear it? God, the father sent his own son so that we might live according to the spirit.

[15:25] Can you hear the Trinitarian language? This move is thoroughly from God from beginning to end. It is thoroughly grounded in God. God, the father sends the son whose work is applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit thoroughly from beginning to end from God by God.

Friends, let's now move to verses 5 to 17. We're not going to spend as much time on these verses, but let me just give you the big picture of them. Now, in order to set the context, I want you to think about what do you think your goal as a created person is?

What is your goal as a created person? You get glimpses of it elsewhere in Paul's writings. In 2 Corinthians 5 verse 9, he says, whether he's in the body or he's away from it, his goal is to please God.

We were made for God. As people made for God, our goal is to please our maker, to please God. Well, in verses 5 to 8, Paul tells us about two different mindsets as to how you might approach pleasing God.

Okay? These two mindsets have two different lifestyles, and these two mindsets have two different results. Let's see if we can pull it all together. Look at verses 5 to 8. When Paul talks about the flesh, by the way, Paul doesn't mean this.

[16:52] It doesn't mean this flesh. That is the thing that you can pinch. The thing that sits above our bones. It's not that. But for flesh, it means our sinful, egocentric, sin-dominated self.

Now, the flesh is sort of a realm in which we move, and it has its own mindset. And that mindset is totally dominated by self.

As verse 7 says, it is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law. It's totally unable to do so. And it has its own lifestyle.

Look at verse 5. It speaks of people who live according to the flesh. That is, you live, you have a lifestyle according to the flesh. And the end result, verses 6 and 8, death and inability to please God.

You are never, when living by the flesh, going to be able to please God. Realm 2 is very different. It's the realm of the Spirit. And, of course, the Spirit here is the Holy Spirit.

[17:57] Now, the Spirit has its own mindset as well. It is a mindset not full of self, but full of God. It's great, isn't it, when you see the Holy Spirit is constantly pointing people away from himself and to the Lord Jesus.

That's his job. It's to witness to Jesus. So his job is to witness to Jesus. So the Spirit has its mindset as well, and so does the person filled with the Spirit.

It is a mindset focused on what the Spirit of God desires. You can see that in verse 5. But it also has a lifestyle. That is, the lifestyle of a person filled with the Spirit, of the Spirit.

You can see in verse 5. It's a life lived in accordance with the Spirit. And it even has a result. Can you see that there? Verse 6. The result is not death. On the contrary, it's life and peace.

Instead of being hostile toward God, as the flesh causes us to be, instead of being distant from God, there is peace with God, a lifestyle aligned with God, and a lifestyle that pleases God.

[19:06] So, verses 5 to 8 set out two alternative approaches to life. Now look at verse 9. Verse 9 tells us who we are if we are Christian.

If we are Christian, that is, if we are believers in Jesus, then we are not in the realm of the flesh. No, we are in the realm of the Spirit.

Those who belong to Jesus have the Spirit of Christ. Friends, if you are a Christian, you don't have to wait around for the Spirit. You have Him already. If you are Christian, you have the Spirit.

And you are in the realm of the Spirit, under the control of the Spirit. Friends, please hear this. This is who we are. Those who have been transferred out of the realm of the flesh, and are now in a new

realm, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit.

God's Spirit dwells within us. And through His Spirit, the God who raised Jesus from the dead is giving life to our mortal bodies.

[20 : 15] This is who you are. This is where you are. This is what God is doing in you.

And if this is the case, then you have an obligation to be who you are. Can you see that? You have an obligation to be who you are. This is what verses 12 and 13 are about.

Look at it and listen to Paul. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you'll die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Friends, rehearse where we've been. Verses 1 to 4, Spirit creates in us a new spiritual existence.

5 to 8, the Spirit leads us to a new lifestyle. Verse 9, declares that we are in the realm of the Spirit under His control because we are believers in Jesus.

[21 : 11] Verses 10 and 11, we're told that the Spirit gives us life and will eventually raise our bodies to be where we already are spiritually. Then, verses 14 to 17.

Verse 14 is the key to this section. The Spirit, in whose realm we are, has given us new status and being. We are those who are led by the Spirit.

We are children of God by the Spirit. He brings about our adoption. Friends, I wonder if you know, have known, the glory of the situation expressed in verses 15 and 16.

Just read them to yourself. Friends, have you ever been faced with your own inability to please God by your own efforts and then, in Christ, been able to turn to God and call Him Father?

Have you known that? I love the prayer book service, if for nothing else. It reminds me of this all the time.

[22 : 21] Do you remember it in the prayer book service? You're taken through the service, you confess your sins and then someone stands and says, you're forgiven. And if you listen carefully in the communion service, it will tell you, there is no condemnation for you.

That is, you are God's child and He receives you as one of His own. If we are God's children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. And friends, let me tell you, this is something I'm constantly moved by, constantly overawed by, constantly driven to my knees by, that God would call me His child, that He would receive me as His child and that He would allow me to call Him Father.

Friends, I want to go back now just to wrap up to the note on which I started, only because it's a very important thing for us to remember and I think there's hints in here with Paul that he's wanting to remind people of this.

Do you remember the ghost train right at the beginning? Okay? Our sort of survey of all of history of Israel. Do you remember that I said that even Gentiles, as Gentiles, we were constantly in danger of resurrecting a fleshly way of existence?

[23 : 39] Let me explain it some more. You see, we human beings have a sort of moral principle sewn into our psyche. We somehow know that if we are good, things will be okay with us in the long run, don't we?

If we are bad, then things will eventually go badly for us. Our movies, our books, our upbringing all reinforce this principle.

And the flesh in us takes it and twists it and turns it into a way of relating to God. And we develop a thing called checklist religion.

That is a list of do's and don'ts. If I do these things, I'll be okay and be acceptable to God. If I don't do these things, I won't be acceptable to God. If I do these things, then God will be pleased with me.

If I don't do these things or I do other things that I shouldn't be doing, then God will be displeased with me. Now, we Christians know what Paul knew at the end of Romans chapter 7.

[24 : 45] We know that the cross spells an end to such ways of thinking. We know that's gone. You remember, many of you can remember the day you became Christian and you realised this.

I was without hope. I was a wretched person. But through Christ, I'm accepted. I made a child. We've depended upon Jesus for right standing with him.

We've accepted with joy that there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We've embraced being God's children, adopted into sonship. However, as I hinted at the beginning, my experience is that we as Christians only do away with that sort of religion for a very short moment.

If you read through the New Testament, you'll find that the early Christians were very similar. And that's why we find ourselves so at home with Paul's self-expression in Romans 7. Even as Christians, my experience is that very soon after we become Christians, we have a tendency to revert to the flesh.

And if we keep going that way, it will do great damage, if not permanent damage. And the way it happens looks something like this. Let me tell you how it looks in the contemporary world.

[26 : 00] Very soon after we become Christians, we become aware that there are categories or grades of Christians. We even have words for them, words for them, you know, those good Christians and those bad Christians.

We have committed Christians as opposed to those who are just ordinary Christians. We have evangelical Christians as opposed to ordinary Christians. Spirit-filled Christians, depending on where you come from, as opposed to Christians who just believe in Jesus.

Christians who have made Jesus their Lord as well as their Saviour. Good Christians are Christians who read their Bibles, know where to find certain things in the Bible, you know, can find over dire, for example.

In our brains, we sort of construct things that tell us who's right, who's good, who's bad, who hasn't quite made the grade yet. Christians are those who speak in certain ways, read their Bible daily, pray daily, turn up at prayer meetings, have been trained in evangelism, share the gospel with people all the time, and so on and so forth.

You know, different groups of Christians will say, if you can speak in tongues, you can say with assurance, God spoke to me and said, or you don't have certain lives, whatever, we say they're a better category of Christians, even if we don't say it, we think it, don't we?

[27 : 16] Now, I could go on all day, but each of you will have in the back of your brain a checklist that every now and then we will undoubtedly mentally tick off. And the reason we'll do this is to see how we're going with God, isn't it?

It's to see how we're going with Him, to see if God's pleased with us. Well, let me tell you this. If you do this, do you need the cross anymore?

It's a good thing to want to be growing in godliness. That is right. We must be putting aside the deeds of darkness. But if you're into ticking boxes to check out how things are going with you, with God and you, then why don't you just dispense with the cross?

No, this is not the realm of the Spirit. Such thinking has caused us to go back to that realm, that old way of living. Friends, God does not like, hates even, checklist religion.

God wants us to abide in and live in the Spirit. And that will mean putting to death the misdeeds of the body.

[28 : 28] It will mean growing in godliness. It will mean relying on the Holy Spirit to put to death the continuing sinful patterns of our behaviour from our old way of life.

It will mean an active wanting to do these things. But doing this will not justify us before God. Only Jesus justifies us before God.

Receiving Jesus is the only ground for being acceptable before God. And this is so before you became a Christian and it is so while you are a Christian.

So, let me just stress it. Friends, I urge us all today, myself included, to embrace our adoption. We have been made children of God. Embrace it, and enjoy it. It is a wonderful truth.

[29 : 34] Call upon God the Father by the Spirit and live as adopted people, adopted by your heavenly Father to a life filled with the Spirit and glorifying the Son.

God has equipped you with everything you need for this. He has given you His Spirit. He has filled you with His Spirit and He caused you to live by the Spirit.

Friends, that is who we are and that is who we are to be. Let us pray. Lord God, thank you that you have adopted us through the work of your Son into the life of your Spirit.

Father, please, we pray, cause us not to revert back to an old way of living, thinking that our relationship with you can be measured by something that we might be able to muster up.

Father, please help us to continue to depend upon Jesus, to live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us, to live in the realm of the Spirit, we pray, in Jesus' name.

[30 : 57] Amen.