



The Holy Spirit Has Set Believers Free Romans 8:1-17

Introduction

After introducing the gospel of God in chapter 1, Paul explained the universal need for salvation. All human beings are born sinners. We are slaves to sin, who can do nothing but spiral deeper and deeper into sin. We are guilty before God and unable to save ourselves. We have no righteousness of our own. Paul revealed how God has provided for our desperate need. He has manifested His righteousness in justifying believers by His grace through faith in Christ. By faith, our sin is imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us: we are justified before God. But justification is not the end of God's gracious work toward us and in us. God has also planned for our sanctification, our spiritual growth.

Paul began to speak of sanctification in chapter 6. He explained that we have died with Christ and are dead to sin. We have also risen with Him to newness of life. We are new people in Christ and now live new lives of service to God. However, in chapter 7 Paul revealed that although we are dead to sin, sin is very much alive and waging war with the new us. The law reveals the struggle which results. We desire to obey God, but find that sin often prevents the obedience we desire. *But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 7:25), Paul will now reveal our victory.

Chapter 8 explains that it is by the indwelling Holy Spirit that sin is conquered. Christ dwells in believers through the Holy Spirit and empowers us to live in newness of life as children and heirs of God. Our new life (Romans 6:4 and 7:6) is a life that is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit and this gives us assurance of our salvation.

In this life, the struggle with sin will always be present because we live in a fallen world. But the good news in chapter 8 is that believers have victory in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have assurance of our salvation through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us. We are secure because in Christ, through the Spirit, there is *no condemnation* (Romans 8:1), no defeat (Romans 8:37), and no separation from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). "Romans 8 is one of the great chapters in the Bible, and its teaching about the way the Holy Spirit operates in enabling the believer to defeat the forces of evil has always been recognized as of the utmost importance" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

Because of the importance of Romans 8, the study of the chapter will be divided into three lessons. Romans 8:1-17 explains that the Holy Spirit sets us free and testifies to our salvation. Romans 8:18-30 describes our hope of glory and Romans 8:31-39 celebrates our victory in Christ Jesus.

Outline of Romans 8:1-17

- I. The Holy Spirit Has Set Us Free from
Condemnation - Romans 8:1-4
- II. Living by the Spirit is Life and Peace - 8:5-17

I. The Holy Spirit Has Set Us Free from Condemnation - Romans 8:1-4

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

A. No condemnation - Romans 8:1

In Romans 5, Paul taught that Adam's sin brought judgment and condemnation to all people. Furthermore, Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:3, *we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath*. But Jesus' words, recorded in John 5:24 (KJV) tell us, *He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation*. Those who believe and have been justified by faith, as Paul has described in his letter to the Romans, have been *accepted in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:6) and are no longer under condemnation.

B. To those who are in Christ Jesus - Romans 8:1

Those who can claim *no condemnation* are *those who are in Christ Jesus*, the ones Paul has spoken of as being united to Christ by faith through His death and resurrection. *We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones* (Ephesians 5:30), blessed with every spiritual blessing, chosen in Him, lavished with grace in Him, accepted in Him, redeemed through His blood, glorified in Him, heirs with Him, and sealed with His Spirit. See Ephesians 1:3-12.

C. Free from the law of sin and death - Romans 8:2

Believers are not sinless, but we are free from slavery to sin, *having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness* (Romans 6:18).

D. Under a new law - Romans 8:2

Believers are set free from the *law of sin and death* because we are under a new law, *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*. The word *law* here would be better understood as a “principle” (as in Romans 7:21). The principle is that Christ Jesus is working in believers through the Spirit’s power. The Holy Spirit has joined us to Christ so that we experience the benefits of all He has accomplished on our behalf. As James Montgomery Boice has put it, “A Christian is someone who has been delivered from one realm, the realm of sin and death, and has been transferred to the realm of God’s Spirit, which is life. This, of course, is something God has Himself done, and it means that.....it is all of grace” (Romans, Volume 2).

E. God has condemned sin in the flesh - Romans 8:3

There was something that the law could not do. It was powerless to *condemn sin in the flesh* because it was *weak through the flesh*. The flesh is weak and unable to live up to the law. No one has ever been able to keep the law perfectly except Jesus Christ. Thus the law is unable to save us from sin and set us free. The fault is not in the law, but in the sinfulness of man. The good news is that what the law could not do, God has done.

1. God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh - 8:3

God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, is without sin. *He is the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1:13, 19-20). But He came to earth *in the likeness of sinful flesh*. He was similar to us in that He came as flesh and blood, lived in the sinful world, was tempted, and had human frailty. But He was different because He did not sin. He had no moral or spiritual corruption in Him.

2. God sent His own Son...on account of sin - 8:3

Christ’s death on the cross condemned sin so sin can no longer condemn us who believe.

3. That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit - 8:4

God’s purpose in sending His own Son was to fulfill *the righteous requirement of the law*. Only Christ has fulfilled all the requirements of the law. However, believers are *in Him* (Romans 8:1) and thus empowered to live obedient lives through the Holy Spirit.

II. Living by the Spirit Is Life and Peace - Romans 8:5-17

Paul contrasts two ways of living: *according to the flesh* and *according to the Spirit*. Life in the flesh is the old way, the way we lived before we were believers. It is the way which leads to death. Life in the Spirit is the new way. It is the way of the believer. It is an entirely new mindset and the way which leads to glory. Paul teaches that those who live this new way set their minds on the things of the Spirit (8:5), are indwelt by the Spirit (8:9), are led by the Spirit (8:14), and have the witness of the Spirit (8:16).

A. Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on things of the Spirit - Romans 8:5-8

The two ways of living are miles apart and in direct opposition to one another. The fleshly way involves us in fleshly things and the spiritual way involves us in spiritual things. *Those who live according to the flesh* are caught up in temporal, earthly wants and ways and do not see beyond their limited horizon. They see everything from a worldly point of view. But those who *live according to the Spirit* are set free from the direction of the flesh and its sinful appetites. “They employ their thoughts and efforts about the things of God” (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).

1. To be spiritually minded is life and peace - 8:6

This verse speaks of the consequences of the two different ways of life. The mind set on the Spirit is *life* because it is dominated by the things of God. It is open and eager for the leading of the Spirit because it is set free from death and condemnation. This is the beginning of eternal life with God which believers will enjoy forever. The mind set on the Spirit is also *peace*. In Romans 5, Paul explained that those who have been justified by faith have peace with God through the reconciliation which is ours in Jesus Christ. The peace which Paul speaks of here is the peace of mind believers possess because of our confidence that we have peace with God. The confidence comes from having Jesus Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

2. The mind set on the flesh is death (NASB) - 8:6-8

To be *carnally minded* or to have one’s mind set on the flesh (NASB) is death. Not only does it result in death, but as Leon Morris writes, “It is itself death” (The Epistle to the Romans). Verses 7 and 8 go on to explain why the mind set on the flesh is death.

NOTE: In this passage, Paul uses the word *carnal* or “flesh” (the Greek “sarx”) in the sense of human

sinfulness. It is a reference to unbelievers, those who are in Adam (Romans 5:12-14) and not *in Christ* (Romans 8:1) because they have not been regenerated and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Sarx" is used in various other ways in the New Testament also. For further meanings, see The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words, James Strong, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

- a. The carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God - 8:7

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4). The mind set on the flesh is on the side of the world. It is hostile to God because it is on the side which opposes God. The fleshly mind does not subject itself to the law of God but is rebellious against God's moral law and is unable to bring itself into subjection to God's standard. *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

- b. *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God* - 8:8

Those whose minds are caught up in worldly things can never please God. Their motives are fleshly and therefore wrong in God's eyes. Even a "good" deed done with wrong motives is not pleasing to God, and it is impossible for the mind set on the flesh to ever have godly motives (Romans 1:21-32 and Romans 3:11-18).

- B. The Spirit of God dwells in believers - Romans 8:9-11

In verse 9, Paul conveys his confidence that the Roman believers are *not in the flesh but in the Spirit* because they have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. The Greek word translated *if* in verse 9 has more of a connotation of "since". Paul is not expressing doubt that the Spirit of God dwells in the Roman believers, but is stating a fact. Therefore, the true sense would be *since indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you*.

1. *Believers are not in the flesh but in the Spirit* - 8:9

All Christians have the Holy Spirit (See Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, and 1 John 4:13) and all Christians are spiritual. The Holy Spirit *dwells* in believers. He has taken up permanent residence in us. He is at home in us. When you became a Christian, you did not just change your ideas and beliefs, you changed the realm in which you live, move, and have your being. See Colossians 1:13-14.

You were in the world, controlled by the flesh, walking in the flesh. But now you are in the realm which is controlled by the Spirit, living by the Spirit.

2. Those who do not have the Spirit are not Christ's - 8:9

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. The expression *he is not His* is a very strong statement. "It leaves no room for doubt that the person not having the Spirit (Jude 19) is outside the fold of Christ's called ones (Romans 1:6)" (The Epistle to the Romans, John Murray). Those who do not have the Spirit walk according to the flesh (8:4), set their minds on things of the flesh (8:5), are hostile to God (8:7), and cannot please God (8:8).

3. *The Spirit is life* - 8:10-11

Believers, on the other hand, live according to the Spirit because Christ is in them in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The mortal body is still subject to death but the believer's spirit has been made alive by the Holy Spirit sent from God. Believers also have the presence (indwelling) of the Spirit as the guarantee that our mortal bodies will be raised from death. Paul goes on to explain that just as death is *because of sin*, life in the Spirit is *because of righteousness*. This clearly refers to the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to believers. (It may also include righteousness believers demonstrate in their lives as a result of justification and the ongoing sanctifying work of the Spirit.) Verse 11 also explains the future hope Christians have because of the Spirit.

- a. *The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you* - 8:11

God raised Jesus from the dead and God's Spirit dwells in you if you are a believer.

- b. *God will give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you* - 8:11

God, who raised Christ Jesus, will also raise and give life to believers' mortal bodies. This will be done through the power of the Holy Spirit. *God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power* (1 Corinthians 6:14). *He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus* (2 Corinthians 4:14).

- C. Those who live according to the Spirit are led by the Spirit - Romans 8:12-15

Christians have no obligation to the flesh. We are no longer slaves to sin but *sons of God* (Romans 8:14).

1. Christians are not debtors to the flesh - 8:12

Believers have been greatly blessed by God. He has lavished His grace upon us and transferred us from the realm of sin and death to the realm of the Holy Spirit. We owe nothing to the flesh. "It would be a contradiction for us to yield our obedience and service to that from which the Holy Spirit has emancipated us!" (The Epistle to the Romans, John Murray).

2. *If you live according to the flesh you will die* - 8:13

Paul has already said in Romans 8:6-7 that *the mind set on the flesh is death* (NASB), *is hostile toward God* (NASB), *does not subject itself to the law of God* (NASB), and *is not even able to do so* (NASB). Those who live according to the flesh are separated from God. They are spiritually dead now and have nothing to look forward to but death. This is in contrast to believers who look forward to the resurrection of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit (8:11).

3. *If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live* - 8:13

This is a description of the process of sanctification or Christian growth. Believers grow in faith and righteousness *by the Spirit* who empowers us.

- a. *By the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body* - 8:13

Putting to death the deeds of the body can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit. Your efforts in putting to death the deeds of the body are the result of the Spirit at work in you and also the evidence of the Spirit at work in you.

- b. *You put to death the deeds of the body* - 8:13

Paul designates *you* as the one who is to *put to death the deeds of the body*. Paul taught in Romans 7:4-6 that believers *have become dead* to the law of sin and death through Christ's death. It was Christ's death that rendered us dead. But now we are to be active participants putting to death sin in our bodies. We have Paul's own example in 1 Corinthians 9:27: *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

- c. *Put to death the deeds of the body* - 8:13

The verb *put* is in the present tense, denoting a

continuous putting to death. It is not something that can be done one time and be effective for all time. Sanctification is a continuing process as long as we live.

- d. *The deeds of the body* - 8:13

The deeds of the body refers to sin. It includes all sin associated with your body's members and the extension of your personality—all thoughts and actions connected with the *body of sin* (Romans 6:6).

- e. *You will live* - 8:13

The result of obedience in living according to the Spirit and growing spiritually is life. It is life in the Spirit now and in the family of God now and forever.

4. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God... are sons of God* - 8:14

Those who are *led by the Spirit* describes those *who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body* (8:13). "The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield). Furthermore, Paul says that those who *will live* (8:13) are *sons of God*. The life which believers live is not just life, but life as children of God. It is a life of being *led by the Spirit*, continually growing in holiness. Those who have this life "Are on the path of discipleship. Therefore, although they may fall while walking along that path, they also inevitably get up again and go forward" (Romans, Volume 2, James Montgomery Boice).

5. *You received the Spirit of adoption* - 8:15

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". The best way to understand this passage is probably that "the spirit believers have received is not one of bondage;...He is a Spirit of sonship. The Spirit does not make people slaves but sons" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

As Paul has previously taught, believers have freedom in Christ and are no longer slaves to sin. We have been adopted into God's family and given full rights and privileges as sons. We can now call God *Abba, Father*. *Abba* is the Aramaic term for "Papa" or "Daddy" and pictures the intimacy of our relationship with God.

When Paul used the term *adoption* (8:15), he had to borrow from the Greek and Roman cultures because there was no adoption among the Jews. For a Roman adoption to be legally binding, there had to be seven reputable witnesses to attest to its validity. The believers

witness is the most reputable of all: "God's Holy Spirit confirms the validity of our adoption" (The MacArthur Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Bibles).

D. The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God - 8:16

We can call God *Abba Father* because we can know for sure that He is our Father. This is something we cannot know on our own but only through the Holy Spirit giving assurance to our own spirit that we are children of God.

E. If we are children, we are also heirs - 8:17

As believers, because God is our Father, we are also *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*.

1. *Heirs of God* - 8:17

God Himself is our inheritance. "God is the portion of His people; and in Him, who is the 'possessor of heaven and earth,' they are heirs of all things. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son* (Revelation 21:7) (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane). God is eternal and unchanging, therefore our inheritance is eternal. It is an inheritance which is *incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...* (1 Peter 1:4).

2. *Joint heirs with Christ* - 8:17

According to Hebrews 1:2, God has appointed Christ to be *heir of all things*. As joint heirs with Him, each adopted child will receive the full inheritance which Christ receives from God. *Our sonship and our heirship rest in our relation to Him,...But He has already entered upon the inheritance for which we have still to wait, and this fact is the guarantee that we too, who are his joint heirs, will enjoy the fulfillment of our expectations* (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

F. If we share in His sufferings, we may also share in His glory - 8:17

Christ's path to glory was paved with suffering (Mark 8:31, Luke 24:26, Hebrews 2:9). To *share in His sufferings* means that believers will also experience suffering in our lives. *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps* (1 Peter 2:21). If you are a Christian, you will experience suffering as you walk according to the Spirit (8:4), deny yourself, take up our cross daily, and follow Him in faithfulness (Luke 9:23) in a world which does not know Him or even want to know Him. *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution* (2 Timothy 3:12).

In the world we will have tribulation (John 16:33), but suffering is not the end. As the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*. As with Jesus, your suffering is the path to glory. Your suffering is a pledge of the glory to come.

Application

In Romans 8, Paul is teaching about sanctification, teaching us what is the truth about ourselves as Christians. We have the Holy Spirit living in us and our lives should reflect this great privilege and power. If the Spirit is dwelling in you, the evidence will be there. Are you progressively growing in holiness as the Holy Spirit empowers you to put to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13)? Which fruits of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — are evident in your life? Are you living like a true child of God?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. What was new to you, or something you consider to be very important in Romans 8:1-17?

2. Compare and contrast life in the flesh and life in the Spirit, recalling as many points as you can.

Day Two: Read Romans 8:18-30.

3. Find the words *glory*, *glorious*, and *glorified*. What do you think this *glory* is?

4. a. Find the words *groans* and *groanings*. Give verses and tell who it is that *groans* in each case.

b. Do you find anything particularly interesting about the *groans* or *groanings* Paul mentions? If so, please comment?

5. How many times do you find the word *hope*? Tell what you learn about *hope*.

Day Three: Read Romans 8:18-23.

6. a. What subject has Paul considered and what is his conclusion?

b. From the following Scripture passages, what do you learn about *the glory which shall be revealed*?
Colossians 3:4

Titus 2:13

1 John 3:2

c. What do you learn from Romans 8:19-23 about what will happen when the glory is revealed? Give verses.

7. What does Paul teach concerning *the creation* in this passage?

8. Using Genesis 3:17-19, explain why *the creation was subjected to futility*.

9. a. What two things do both Christians (*we ourselves*) and *the creation* anticipate? What do both Christians and creation do until these things are realized?
- b. With each of the following Scripture passages, write what you learn about *adoption as sons* (8:15, NASB). Indicate whether the verse speaks of the past, present, or future.
- Romans 8:15
- Romans 8:19
- Galatians 4:4-5
- Ephesians 1:5
- d. How do 1Corinthians 15:50-53 and Philippians 3:20-21 explain what Paul is probably thinking of when he speaks of *the redemption of the body*?

Day Four: Read Romans 8: 24-27.

10. a. In one word, describe the subject of verses 24-25.
- b. In your own words, try to express what Paul is saying about that subject.
- c. What do these Scripture passages teach about a Christian's hope?
- Romans 5:1-5
- Romans 15:13
- Hebrews 6:19
- 1 John 3:2-3
- d. Which of the above verses is most meaningful to you? Tell why.
11. a. How does the Holy Spirit help Christians? Give verse.
- b. Why do we need this help?
12. a. How does Paul refer to God in verse 27?
- b. What does Paul say God *knows*? Why does He know?

Day Five: Read Romans 8:28-29.

13. a. If you are a Christian, what percentage of the things that happen in your life work for your good? Give verse.
- b. ♥ (Heart Question) How is this an encouragement to you?
- c. How do we know that verse 28 is speaking only of Christians?
14. How does verse 29 explain God's *purpose* for Christians?
15. ? (Thought Question) Use Genesis 1:27, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Colossians 1:15 to help explain the significance of being *conformed to the image of His Son*.
16. To what does *firstborn* (verse 29) refer? See 1 Corinthians 15:20, Colossians 1:18, and Revelation 1:5.

Day Six: Read Romans 8:29-30.

17. List 5 words in these two verses which express the progression of God's purpose for every believer.
18. a. Read Genesis 18:18-19, Jeremiah 1:5, Acts 2:23, and 2 Timothy 2:19 and use what you learn from these passages to formulate a definition of *foreknew*.
- b. *Whom He foreknew, He also* _____.
- c. Find words in Luke 22:22 and Romans 9:23 which express the meaning of *predestined*.
19. a. *Whom He predestined, these He also* _____.
- b. How do the following verses explain what it means to be *called*?
Romans 8:28

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

1 Peter 2:9
- c. *Whom He called, these He also* _____.
- d. Use the following Scripture passages to help explain what it means to be *justified*.
Isaiah 53:4-5

Romans 3:24 and 26

1 Peter 2:24
20. a. *Whom He justified, these He also* _____.
- b. What do John 17:22, Colossians 3:4, and 2 Timothy 2:10 reveal about what it means to be *glorified*.