

Romans 8:1-11
The Spirit is Life In Us

Main idea: Jesus fulfills all righteousness in us. Therefore, we receive His Spirit and walk in freedom.

How we live is a matter of life and death.

I read the results of a study that showed how when drivers hear a train whistle, they tend to speed up a little. Because the train sounds panicked, we panic for an instant, even when we're perfectly safe. Hearing the whistle, which is meant to be a warning, can even lead people to take dangerous risks. Even knowing all of the risks, about 600 people die every year at railroad crossings because they have the audacity to attempt to cross the tracks quickly as a train approaches, even weaving through the lowered gates, when they ought to have stopped before the tracks. But ignoring the warnings, about 600 people every year suffer the consequences, and pay for it with their lives.

You see, how we live today truly is a matter of life and death. In our life choices, in our split second decisions. If we live for ourselves, ignoring the warnings, we show that we're dead. And the Bible is clear that we were all dead in our trespasses and sins.¹ But when we live for God, it's then that we show that we're truly alive.

Romans 8, starting in verse 1. Please stand with me for the reading of God's word.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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. 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. (Romans 8:1-11)

The word of God for the people of God. *Thanks be to God.*

In our lives, we're constantly faced with hundreds of choices every day that will have a significant impact on our lives and on the lives of those around us.

In the book, "Between Two Truths, Living with Biblical Tensions," there's the true story about how during World War II, Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice. The British secret service had broken the Nazi code and informed Churchill that the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives. He could (1) evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives at the expense of indicating to the Germans that the code was broken; or (2) take no action, which would allow hundreds of citizens to be killed, but would allow

¹ Ephesians 2:1

them to keep intercepting Nazi information, and possibly save many more lives. Churchill had to choose and followed the second course of action.²

The choices we make matter. Maybe the choices we make today won't save or kill hundreds of people, and yet, they will impact the spiritual and emotional lives of our loved ones, which is just as important, maybe even more so. Because how we live today is an indication of what we believe about eternity.

We saw last week at the end of Romans chapter 7 that there's a war going on inside of us. Although we want to do good, we often end up doing the sinful things that we didn't even want to do. We often say the wrong thing that unnecessarily offends someone. We often hurt those around us by not following through on our promises. Or, sometimes we simply have every intention to do something we know is good, and just don't do it.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said this:

"One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility." - Eleanor Roosevelt

William James said:

"When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that is in itself a choice." - William James

And the truth is, so often we know the good we ought to do, but don't do it.³ The book of James says that when we do that, we sin. We fall short of the glory of God.⁴

But Romans chapter 7 ended not just with a glimmer of possible hope about our situation, but with the assurance of certain victory. Because while we may have this war going on inside of us, we also have the victory through Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, and saves us from this body of death.⁵

So chapter 8, verse 1 begins, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In other words, because Jesus died for us, even though we still mess up and sin, none of our sins are counted against us! God's grace covers them all.

I've yet to see the movie, but at the very beginning of the book, "Les Miserables," Jean Valjean was released after spending 19 years in prison. He spends days looking for a place to stay, but no one will take him in because of his past. Finally, he's able to spend the night in a church's parsonage due to the kindness of the bishop. But that very night, Jean Valjean steals the church's silver and is caught by the police, and he knows that he will likely spend the rest of his life in prison.

But when the police bring him back to the church, everything changes. The bishop denies that Valjean stole the silver, saying that it was a gift, and even gives Valjean the most valuable silver candlesticks in the church.

² Klyne Snodgrass, *Between Two Truths - Living with Biblical Tensions*, 1990, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 179.

³ James 4:17

⁴ Romans 3:23

⁵ Romans 7:24-25

Valjean deserved judgment and condemnation, but instead, he received grace. Not just forgiveness for his sin, but an abundant, over-the-top gift. And it's this act of grace that's the basis for Jean Valjean's life transformation, and the rest of the events of the story.

And the same is true for our stories. By grace, through faith, God forgives all our sin. And that's the basis for our life transformations. We love because He first loved us.⁶

We talked last week about the paradox of the self. When we focus primarily on our selves, we become self-absorbed, self-centered, and self-indulgent. And I think we can add this week that we also tend to be self-condemning. We condemn ourselves for all the evil we've done, but by grace through faith in Jesus, we don't have to do that. Jesus took our condemnation upon Himself.

But He didn't just take our self-condemnation. In other words, He didn't just take the condemnation that we think we deserved, He took our true condemnation. He took our punishment. He died the death that we deserved to die, and rescued us from the condemnation of hell. And by grace, we're saved from hell, unto heaven! We're set free!

Verse 2.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)

I want you to notice the three times in this passage that the words "Spirit" and "life" are found very closely together. It does it here, in verse 2, and then next in verse 6, it says, "to set the mind on the Spirit is life," and then finally in verse 10 it says, "the Spirit is life."

We often think of life as biological. We're alive because we have all the right ingredients in our bodies. We breathe oxygen, and consume calories which our bodies break down and use as fuel. And we have all these electrical impulses constantly sending information from our brains to various parts of our bodies so that we can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. And we call that life.

And that's certainly part of existence. But that's not really life. Because you can do all of those things, and yet feel so dead. Like life is meaningless. And if you all ever do and live for are those things, then you're acting like life is meaningless.

But most people, even unbelievers, know that life is more than that. A life worth living includes non-biological realities such as love, joy, and peace. Life is not merely about existence. Life is about purpose. And mere biology can never describe purpose. God, our Creator, tells us our purpose, and invites us to begin to live according to our purpose by receiving Jesus and His Spirit.

And by the Spirit of life, we have freedom from hell in eternity, and freedom from sin today. There's no condemnation in the future, or in the present. We're free.

So how does a free person live? Verse 3.

⁶ 1 John 4:19

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4)

It's interesting to me that often when I'm most focused on my goals, and most focused on my performance, and most focused on doing a good job, I'm also most self-condemning about it all, even when things are going reasonably well. In other words, when I'm focused on laws, even self-imposed laws, I'm condemned.

But a free person doesn't walk according to laws, but walks according to the Spirit.

It's like the story I heard Andy Whitten preach in a sermon about a year ago. A man from the north visited the south in the early 1800's, and he happened to come across an auction in which they were selling slaves to the highest bidder. And he was so appalled by it that he went in and placed a bid on a young woman who was for sale. After he purchased this woman, and they were travelling out of town, he ordered the shackles to be removed from the slave girl. And he simply said to her, "You're free."

She responded, "Does that mean I'm free to say whatever I want to say?" He said, "Yes. You're free to say whatever you want to say." So she asked, "Does that mean I'm free to be whoever I want to be?" He said, "Yeah. You're free to be whoever you want to be." So she asked, "Does that mean I'm free to go wherever I want to go?" He said, "Yes. 100% free. I've bought your freedom. You're free to go wherever you want to go." So she said with a smile, "Then I think I'll go with you."

You see, when you're set free, you'll begin to love God not as a law, but with joy.

Now, I'm certainly not saying we should never set goals, or that we shouldn't obey laws. But I am saying that Christ fulfilled everything for us so that we would set goals and obey laws in freedom, rather than to prove ourselves or to gain things for ourselves.

I think that's what Paul went on to say in verses 5-8.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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. (Romans 8:5-8)

So, what are you setting your mind on? Do you mostly think about the things of the flesh, or the things of the Spirit? Do you mostly think about all the things that our broken world tells us to care about, whether our possessions, or bank accounts, or pleasures of this life, or are you more concerned with spiritual things, such as glorifying God, and growing in godliness, and seeing others receive Jesus?

If you're mostly concerned about you, and about your enjoyment in this life, verse 7 says that you're hostile to God, and verse 8 says that you cannot please God. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote that all of our activities, our work, our play, our goals, everything we do, if done for the sake of itself or ourselves, is meaningless, like chasing after the wind.⁷

⁷ Ecclesiastes 1:14

There's a story about when President Ulysses S. Grant was being shown how to play a new sport called "golf." His tutor placed the tee in the ground, and carefully placed the ball on the tee, and then demonstrated how to swing the club. He took a mighty swing with perfect form, but the club hit the turf next to the ball and scattered dirt all over the President's beard, while the ball remained untouched on the tee. So he took another swing, and missed again. And then another, and missed. President Grant watched and waited while his tutor swung the club six times with perfect form each time, missing each time, and then the President quietly stated, "There seems to be a fair amount of exercise in this sport, but I fail to see the purpose of the ball."

So many people live their lives like the golf tutor. They just keep swinging, putting in a lot of energy, but not really fulfilling their purpose. They might be doing everything technically right, following the laws, and yet missing the point.

But that's not what God wants from you! So many people think Christianity is merely about obeying the rules of the Bible, but that's actually missing the point. Christians, on the other hand, when it comes to living life, are to set their minds not on the laws and rules themselves, but on the things of the Spirit. 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. 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. (Romans 8:9-11)

Maybe you've felt so incredibly dead. The Bible actually says that we ought to feel dead when it comes to our sin, because we were dead in our sin. And yet, because Jesus rose from the dead, we can be alive as we trust in Him.

And trusting in Jesus is more than simply believing certain things about Him. When you trust in Jesus, you also receive His Holy Spirit. He comes to dwell in you. And you begin to truly live, not according to your own old plans, because that leads to death, but according to the Spirit of God who lives in you.

Richard Evans once said, "The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it."⁸

Here's the lesson I want you to take away from this sermon. It's very simple. Jesus fulfills all righteousness in us. We don't become righteous by working really hard, or by going to church enough times. Jesus fulfills all righteousness in us by His death for us on the cross. Therefore, we receive His Spirit and walk in freedom.

Don't put it off any longer. If you've never received Jesus and His Spirit, now is the time.

⁸ Richard L. Evans, Bits & Pieces, March 4, 1993, p. 2.