

Spirit * Romans 8:1-28

April 3, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I don't know if you know this but every Sunday morning, Ray Wingfield calls me to pray for me and our church before church begins. He did that in person when we were gathered altogether and the when we entered into pandemic mode, he started calling me by phone. And I appreciate it very much - God has worked in wonderful ways because of it.

Now Ray likes to give me a little mini-sermon before we pray and they're always good and helpful and he said something last week that I thought was just perfect for this morning.

Thinking about the struggle we see in Romans 7, Ray said 'the spirit is willing but the flesh it is weak'. And that's absolutely true. Our inner spirit and heart's desire as believers is to honour God with all that we are, and yet our flesh is so used to living the way we used to that we fall sometimes. The spirit (our spirit) is willing but the flesh is so weak.

So Ray said 'the spirit is willing but the flesh it is weak'. Who's going to be the tie breaker? Who's going to break the tie? Who's our secret weapon in the battle? Not our spirit but the Holy Spirit. The score might be 1-1 inner spirit versus flesh but there's someone to break the tie and that's the Holy Spirit Himself.

Now I have to admit that it's easy to go to extremes when you're talking about the Holy Spirit. On one end, there's the lady at my ordination who was shaking my belly saying 'Feel the Holy Spirit' and me thinking 'that's not the Holy Spirit lady - get your hands off me!'

You can go too far in the charismatic direction, but you can also go too far in not thinking about the Holy Spirit at all. And we can't do that, because the Holy Spirit is very important. The Holy Spirit is God Himself - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - they're all God - equal in nature but different in what they do.

I always like to think 'ABM' here - architect, builder, mover. The Father laid the blueprints for salvation, the Son completed them and the Spirit moves us into them. The Father sent the Son to save us and the Spirit helps us to live in that salvation.

And here in Romans 8, Paul gives us a glimpse of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us to do that just that. So we're going to look together at Romans 8 today and highlight three different ways that the Holy Spirit helps us to live out our faith.

The Spirit helps us to be holy.
The Spirit helps us to be children of God.
The Spirit helps us to pray.

Those are the three ideas we're going to see in Romans 8 today so join me there and we'll think about how:

The Spirit helps us to be holy.
The Spirit helps us to be children of God.
The Spirit helps us to pray.

So first the Holy Spirit helps us to be holy.

When we come to faith in God, when we turn from sin and trust in Jesus, God makes us holy. Full stop. We are washed clean and made entirely holy by what Jesus did on the Cross.

The problem which we saw last week is that we're so used to our old way of living that we forget sometimes to live in a way that is consistent with who we are now. We do the things we do not want to do and don't do the things that we WANT to do. We are clean and yet somehow want to jump back into the mud.

And so we run into the dilemma that Ray talked about last week – the spirit – OUR spirit – is willing but the flesh it is weak. Who's going to break the tie? When it's my new nature's desire to do right and my old nature's desire to do wrong, who's going to break the tie? It's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us to be holy, both to live out the holiness that is currently ours and to continue to grow in holiness.

See, without the Holy Spirit, our sinful nature takes over and leads us away from God. You can see that in Romans 8:5 –

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires... [namely, its own glory and convenience and pleasure]; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Rom 8:5-8 NIV).

Before I knew God, this was me. Before you knew God, this was you – unable to please God in any way because we were fundamentally oriented away from Him.

But that's not true anymore, is it? Our spirit may be willing and the flesh may be weak but God has given us His Holy Spirit to do what our spirit wants and our flesh cannot do. Paul says in verse 9 –

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

And just a quick aside, if you have turn from sin to trust in Jesus, then the Spirit lives in you, full stop. Paul says over in Titus 3 that God saved us "... through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..."

When we come to faith, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, cleans out the garbage and helps us to live in new and God-honouring ways. The Spirit helps us to be holy, to get rid of anything that is counter to God's character.

In fact, Paul says - 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live (Rom 8:13 NIV).

The Spirit helps us to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Now what does that look like? Well first let me just say that this shows us how seriously we should take our sanctification. Remember a couple of weeks back we asked the question – if I'm saved, can I just

keep on sinning? The answer of course was 'no' and this tells us just how emphatic that 'no' is. If you're saved, then you want to *put to death* the misdeeds of the body. Not tolerate them. Not deal with them when you have time. Not half-heartedly usher them out – no – by the Spirit of God, put them to death.

What kind of deeds are we talking about here? Well, I'm sure you know the misdeeds of your body – the things that you uniquely struggle with – but broadly speaking, Paul is calling us here to 'by the power of the Spirit' put to death anything that is counter to the character of God. C. E. B. Cranfield puts it like this: "...the activities or schemings of the sinful flesh, of human self-centredness and self-assertion."ⁱ

Anything that is inconsistent with the salvation that God has secured for us, the Holy Spirit helps us to deal with.

How? Well, I think that the Holy Spirit changes how we think, feel and act towards sin.

He changes the way we think – when our minds were led by the sinful nature, we just thought of sin as a kind of harmless pleasure that we indulged in. But now, controlled by the Spirit and renewed to think more like God does, we start to see sin for what it really is, an unproductive waste of time that actually takes us away from the only source of good in the universe, namely God.

And when we start to think about sin that way, it changes the way we feel about sin too. We stop wanting it and start hating it. Things that were once enjoyable become sour in our mouths. I know that's true for me – sins from the past that were once pleasant are now appalling to me and it makes me want to engage in them all the less.

Which of course, changes our behaviour. When the Spirit shapes our thoughts and emotions, our actions necessarily change to reflect them. We will sin less. We will resist more. We snap at people less and envy them less; we become less selfish and more other-oriented. When we sense the pull of temptation, we will call on the Spirit and say 'Spirit, deliver me from this because I know I'm better than this and God is better than this' and trust Him to help.

The Spirit helps us to be holy.

Now that in and of itself is pretty great but there's more to it than that. Because the Spirit's help doesn't just mean we have a tie breaker in the struggle against sin; the Spirit's work in us means that we are children of God. The fact that the Spirit is at work in us indicates that we are children of God.

You know the little rapid covid tests – the presence of a little red lines means there's covid antigens there? The desire to flee from sin means the Spirit's in you which means that you are a child of God. Look at verse 13 and follow the logic here -

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Which means that if you are willing to let the Spirit lead, then the Spirit lives in you. And if the Spirit lives in you, that means (following verse 9) that you belong to God. And according to verse 14, you don't just belong to God, you are a son or daughter of God. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are children of God. Look at what Paul says in verse 15 -

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (This is not one of those stiff upper lipped tight laced British shows where fathers are cold and distant from their children; God OUR Father is more like the kind that rolls around on the floor with His kids and listens intently to them. We relate to God in a real and intimate way).

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We are not just sinners, saved by grace, we are children of God and heirs of God and the Holy Spirit helps us to live that out. I love verse 16 - 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. It's like the Holy Spirit is there within us, every hour of every day, to remind us - 'you are a child of God, God delights in you as a Father, you are a child of God.' In this world where everyone feels pressure to prove themselves, to prove their worth, the Holy Spirit is in us to tell us the God of the universe loves you as a Father does.

We are heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ and the Holy Spirit helps us to live as children of God.

And then of course the Spirit helps us when we pray.

Have you ever had a situation where you didn't know what to pray? I certainly have. Some things are just so far beyond me, so complicated, so nuanced, so severe even, that I lack the words and wisdom to pray meaningfully. The Holy Spirit helps us with that too.

Verse 26 -

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

When we lack the words to pray, the Spirit prays for us. The Spirit INTERCEDES for us! Did you notice that? Twice over, Paul says - the Spirit intercedes for us, He prays for us with urgency and intensityⁱⁱ on our behalf. And we know that His prayers are 'good and effective' as it were because He prays for us in line with God's will. God will always grant the things that line up with His good and perfect will and so when the Spirit prays for us along those lines, those prayers will always be answered. Which means that God's good and perfect will will be accomplished in our lives.

Grant Osborne puts it like this:

"What a joyful truth this is! When we feel that somehow God has forgotten us, at that very moment the Spirit is closer to us than at any other time. As we groan in our infirmities, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Far from being unaware of our troubles, at that very moment the Spirit is entreating or petitioning God more deeply than we ever could! ... These intercessory groans are an expression of the Spirit's deep love and concern for us, and they are the Spirit's own, words that in a sense are "too deep for human utterance." Our own prayers are insufficient, for they are finite and ignorant of God's true plan. But that is the very source of our greatest

comfort. While we do not know, the Spirit does, and he is praying for us more deeply than we are praying for ourselves.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The Holy Spirit helps us to be holy, the Spirit helps us to be children of God and the Spirit helps us to pray.

Now let’s wrap up here by thinking about how to act on these realities in your everyday life.

I can imagine that someone might say ‘Well, this is great, but I’ve never felt the Spirit helping me to be holy or helping me to be a child of God or helping me to pray’ but I would respond ‘Have you taken the time to ask Him for help or listen to His assurance or trust in His prayer?’ These are things that we need to focus on to experience them. We need to turn the volume down on the world around us and listen to the Spirit within us to sense Him at work.

Now that being said, I don’t think that we should get so caught up in the subjective experience of feeling the Spirit that we miss out on the objective work that the Spirit is always doing. It’s exhilarating when our hearts get pumping fast from being on a roller coaster or doing exercise, but we don’t need that experiences to know that our heart’s beating. Same with the Spirit. If you have turned from sin and trusted Jesus, then the Spirit is in you. The Spirit is helping you to combat sin, assuring your conscience that you are a child of God and praying for you when you lack the words. Trust Him with that. Partner with the Spirit to grow in faith.

So with that in mind, let’s just take a few minutes here to still our hearts and listen for the Spirit.

BENEDICTION

NIV Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans Vol. 1* (ICC), 395.

ⁱⁱ Louw-Nida Lexicon - 33.169 ἐντυγχάνω: [to intercede:] to ask for something with urgency and intensity - 'to plead, to beg, to appeal to, to petition.'

ⁱⁱⁱ Grant Osborne, *Romans* (IVPNT), OliveTree, commentary on Romans 8:26-28