

Romans: Chapter Eight (1)

Romans 5.12-8.39: SANCTIFICATION (Righteousness Realised)

It is hard to miss Paul's emphasis in Romans 8 on the Spirit of God. Until now He has only been mentioned on *two* occasions (1.4; 5.5). In this chapter, the word *pneuma* (spirit) is used **22** times, **19** of which refer to the Holy Spirit. He is the *power* by which the justified man lives, and the *pledge* of great spiritual blessings, both present and future. *Romans 8 gathers up various strands of thought from the entire discussion of both justification and sanctification and ties them together with the crowning knot of glorification.*

The Power and Presence of the Spirit is Life (8.1-13)

In vv.1-13, the Holy Spirit is recognised to be the **power** by which the doctrine of Romans 6-7 is put into practice. Christians have died to *sin* and the *law*. They are to yield themselves entirely to God, and their members as weapons of righteousness (6.13). Every believer is also dead to the law and married to Christ that they might bring forth fruit unto God (7.4). All this is done in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

vv.1-4 provide a succinct summary of the preceding *three* chapters. **v.1:** Summarises 5.12-21. 'Therefore' could refer back to 7.6 – believers having been liberated from the law and its consequent 'condemnation' – or even further back to 5.16-18, the last and only mentions of condemnation. Those in Adam are under judgment and hastening to condemnation. Those in Christ are declared righteous with no possibility of condemnation! '**No**' is emphatic, standing at the beginning of the Greek sentence. 'Condemnation' means 'the execution of sentence upon a guilty person' which for those in Adam is eternal death. Thank God we are 'in Christ'. Note. It is likely that the last phrase of the verse 'is wrongly inserted' (WE Vine). If it is retained, then it merely states what is characteristic of those in Christ (see v.4). **v.2:** Summarises Romans 6. 'For' is explanatory. The word 'law' here is used in the sense of a principle that operates in a uniform way (e.g. the law of gravity). Every believer has been made free (*aorist*) from the authority and power of sin (6.7; 7.23) by the 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. In Christ we have received the Spirit who gives life (John 6.63). He is the power to impart and sustain the eternal life we now enjoy in Christ. Like the law of life in a bird is stronger than the law of gravity seeking to drag it down, so every believer has a new controlling power which proves far stronger than the old.

vv.3-4: Summarises Romans 7. The law 'could not' set a person free from the power of sin and death. It promised life for obedience (Leviticus 18.5), but could not impart life because of mankind's disobedience. The good, holy and just law was working with defective and frail human flesh (illustrated by the impotent man of John 5). What the law could *not* do, God has done. He sent no less a person than His 'own Son' (see v.32) in the 'likeness of sinful flesh'. It was not the 'likeness of flesh' – His was real flesh and blood (1 John 4.2). It was not 'sinful flesh' for in Him is no sin. It was the 'likeness of sinful flesh' indicating real manhood and sinless nature. Christ was sent 'for sin', that is, as a sacrifice to deal with the root principle of sin (Hebrews 10.8). There at Calvary, God 'condemned' sin, executing its full sentence upon the Saviour in His flesh (body). Thus for those in Christ, the power of sin has been broken. The glorious result is that the righteous requirement (singular) of the law, i.e. condemnation and death has been 'fulfilled' or 'satisfied' in our case (Galatians 3.13). Note. Many commentators take **love** as the 'righteous requirement' of the law, i.e. the sum total of what the law requires (see 13.9-10). This requirement is satisfied **in** us as the work of Christ enables the indwelling Holy Spirit to pour out the love of God in our *hearts* (5.5; Galatians 5.14). Love is evident as believers 'walk' or order their behaviour as guided and controlled by the Spirit (Galatians 5.22). Those who are not saved 'walk after the flesh', i.e. are dominated by the physical and sinful desires of the natural man.

vv.5-11: It is essential to notice that Romans 8, and this section in particular, is not speaking of two *kinds* or *types* of believer. Rather it is a *contrast* between a man in Adam and a man in Christ; a man in the flesh or a man in the Spirit. There is no overlap. Note. Galatians 5 is different as it concerns two principles (flesh and the Spirit) in conflict within one man. This is not the thought in Romans 8. The apostle mentions a contrast in **conduct** (v.4), **thinking** (vv.5-7) and **character** (vv.8-11). The way a man *is* (character) dictates how he *thinks*. This, in turn, controls how he *walks* (conduct).

» **Thinking (vv.5-7).** **v.5:** The unregenerate are 'after' or dominated by the flesh (*sarx*). This is a word which can be used *physically* (cf. v.3; 2.28; Galatians 2.20) or, as here, *morally*. It refers to the natural desires of fallen man under the influence of indwelling sin. It is the tendency to live for self – I, me and my – not God. Being *dominated* by the flesh, unbelievers 'mind' the things of the flesh, their whole persons being fully absorbed by sinful, selfish desires. They live for the physical and material which regulates the course of their lives. This mind-set of the flesh is hostile ('enmity') towards God desiring its own will, not His (**v.7**). This way of living leads to eternal death (**v.6**).

- But, for the believer, the power of indwelling *sin* is broken. He now serves God under the influence of the indwelling *Spirit*. Their minds and wills are fully absorbed with the spiritual. This way of living leads to the enjoyment of **life now** in terms of communion with God, and the calm reassurance of **peace** in the soul (v.6).
 - Although these statements are positional, it is possible for a believer to indulge the flesh. **Stott**: *It is a question of what preoccupies us, of the ambitions which drive us and the concerns which engross us, of how we spend our time, concentration and energies.* **Moo**: *Christians who read nothing but the latest novels, watch nothing but television, and talk to nobody but unbelievers are never going to display the mind-set of the Spirit. Feed the spiritual.*
- » **Character (vv.8-11)**. **v.8**: To be 'in the flesh' is descriptive of an unbeliever (see 7.5) controlled by its sinful desires. How solemn to think that such a person is incapable of pleasing God. They may do a good number of kind and beneficial things for others, but the motive of their thoughts and deeds is inherently selfish. **v.9**: The believer, however, is not in the flesh but 'in the Spirit'. He lives in an altogether different sphere, under the Spirit's rule and influence since He indwells (makes His home) every believer. The Spirit is called the 'Spirit of God' because He was given by God and the 'Spirit of Christ' because His residence in the believer reproduces the character of Christ.
- **v.10**: Furthermore, the risen Christ dwells in us by His Spirit (Ephesians 3.16-17). **Moule**: *The supreme work of the Spirit is to acquaint the soul with Christ.* Despite this, our physical bodies are still subject to death because of the presence of indwelling sin. But 'the Spirit is **life**' (his essential character) which He has communicated to us because of our righteous standing before God. **v.11**: This *spiritual* quickening, will result in *physical* quickening in a future day. Since God raised up 'Jesus' from among the dead by the Spirit (His resurrection viewed *personally* in history) then we can be sure that the raising up of 'Christ' (His resurrection viewed *officially* and *representatively*) and the indwelling Spirit are guarantees that our mortal bodies shall be 'quickened' (made alive). Note the use of 'quickened' rather than 'raised'. There will be many believers whose mortal bodies will not require resurrection for they will be alive when the Lord comes. Instead they will be 'changed' (7.24; 1 Corinthians 15.45).

vv.12-13: This is a word of warning and self-examination. **v.12**: As believers we have no 'debt' or 'obligation' to the flesh, that is, no duty to be obedient to the corrupt desires of indwelling sin. **v.13**: In fact, those who continually pursue and are controlled by such desires (the unsaved) are 'about to' or 'must' die eternally. By way of contrast, the Spirit's indwelling presence enables the believer to constantly 'mortify' (put to death) the deeds of the body through which sin operates (6.12-13). This is characteristic of those in the Spirit. Believers treat sin as any dead man would – they *do* not and *cannot* respond to its demands. They must seek the Spirit's help to immediately put to death any desire to sin. **Gilliland**: *Judicially we died with Christ at conversion, but we are to practically put to death the deeds of the body. Are your eyes watching unsuitable things? Are your feet taking you to unsuitable places? Give those things no oxygen. Starve them! If you don't kill them, they will kill you as far as usefulness for God is concerned.* Believers, characterised by this practice, enjoy **life** in fellowship with God *now* and the promise of the full enjoyment of eternal life yet future.

The Privilege of the Spirit and Witness (8.14-17)

v.14: Those 'led' by the Spirit are the 'sons of God'. Being led by the Spirit (*passive*) does not refer to guidance in everyday life, but being under His control (co-operation is implied). He governs our lives, *not* indwelling sin and *not* the law (cp. Galatians 5.18). We are all sons of God by faith in Christ (Galatians 3.26), but the leading of the Spirit develops the character that is proper to those who are sons. '**Son**' expresses *dignity* and *status*, and implies a *moral* family likeness. The imagery comes from the OT where Jehovah is pictured as the 'father' of Israel (Deuteronomy 32.6). Under the law, the nation of Israel was like an infant under a schoolmaster. But believers are full-grown sons in the Father's house. **v.15**: Believers were released from a 'spirit of bondage' (slavery to sin and the law) characterised by fear but were adopted into God's family as **sons** by the Holy Spirit. He grants us the great privilege of crying 'Abba, Father'. At fourteen, a Roman son would be formally and publicly acknowledged as such, becoming the *heir* of his father's property and *representative* of his interests. God has done the same for us. We can now 'cry' or 'call in fervent prayer' upon our God as 'Abba, Father' employing the same language of *nearness* and *intimacy* (not familiarity) as the Lord Jesus (Mark 14.36). 'Abba' is an Aramaic word meaning father, which some Jewish writings suggest was the normal way for infant and adult sons to address their fathers (but never the household slave). It is now our privilege to address God as such. **v.16**: Believers can cry in this way because the Spirit of God 'testifies' and 'confirms' to their spirits (intuitively and by the word of God) that they belong to the family – they are 'children' (emphasises *birth*). **v.17**: Being children and sons, they are heirs of God Himself (Deuteronomy 18.2; Psalm 73.25) and joint-heirs with Christ. Christ has been appointed 'heir of all things' (Hebrews 1.2; John 17.10), thus all things are ours in Him. The full enjoyment and manifestation of this inheritance awaits a coming day. In Paul's eyes this is assured. Since we 'suffer with Him' (not conditional, but characteristic) we are assured we will also be 'glorified together' as our eternal portion. This is the suffering, not of the *soldier* (suffering *for* Him), but of a *child* in the family (suffering *with* Him). We suffer by our mere birth-association with Christ (John 15.18; 17.14). What grieves Him should grieve us. What pains the Head will pain the members (cp. 1 Corinthians 12.26).