

The Gospel Story: The Spirit of Life

Romans 8:1-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

Monologue:

(Person on phone) “Okay, I’ll be there.....I don’t....soon!...

I know that God’s standards and Moses’ teaching are spiritual, but I have a corrupt nature, sold as a slave to sin. I don’t realize what I’m doing. I don’t do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate. I don’t do what I want to do, yet I agree that God’s standards are good. So I am no longer the one who is doing the things I hate, but it’s this sin that lives in me. I know that nothing good lives in me. That is, nothing good lives inside of my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don’t do it. I don’t do the good that I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I hate. So I’m no longer the one doing this. It is this sin that lives in me. So I’ve discovered this truth: Evil is present with me, even when I want to do what God’s standards say are good. I take pleasure in God’s standards in my innermost being. However, I see another standard at work throughout my body. It is at war with the standards that my mind sets and tries to take me captive. The sin’s standards still exist throughout my body. What a miserable person I am! Who will rescue me from my dying body?”

The conflict of Romans chapter 7 is not meant to be a picture of the Christian life. It is meant to convince you of the futility of believing that the Law—legalism, religion—can somehow make you live right. The Law had no capacity when you were a sinner to justify you, and the Law has no capacity, now that you’re a believer, to sanctify you. It leads Paul to the question: “Wretched man that I am, who will set me free?” Answer: Romans, Chapter 8.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Romans, Chapter 8. Thus far in the Book of Romans the Holy Spirit has not been a major player in the sense that he’s only been mentioned twice. In chapter 8 he is mentioned twenty times. No question, the answer to the question, “Who will set me free?” Answer: The Spirit of God. Verse 1:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

(*NASB, Romans 8:1)

The **Therefore** probably goes all the way back to chapter 5. In chapter 5 Paul reminded us that at one time we were in Adam. Every single one of us sinned in Adam. We were born into Adam, and in Adam we were condemned, and there was nothing we could do to change that. Our situation was as desperate as it could be. But because of what Jesus did—providing salvation and offering it freely as a gift—we could go from being *in Adam* to being *in Christ*. And that changes everything.

When you look into the Law, the Law condemns. The Law reminds you that you don’t measure up. You’re not living according to the standard—that you’re a failure; that you’re a sinner. It fills us with shame and guilt. That’s why Paul tells us that the Law actually rouses sin within us. It doesn’t make us less sinful; it makes us *more* sinful because it becomes our identity. “*I’m a sinner. I’m worthless. I’m a loser. I’ll never measure up. I’m covered in my shame and guilt.*” And as long as I believe that about myself, I will live that way.

But now that I am in Christ, I look into a different mirror. I look into the mirror of God’s truth, and I see someone who is now clothed with the righteousness of God. I am no longer wearing the sin-

stained robe that defines me. God has removed that robe and cast it aside, never to be worn again and I wear the robe of God's righteousness. When He looks at me, He sees His own righteousness now and forever, and He declares I have been justified! If you are in Christ Jesus, you are not condemned *now or forever*. Something deep and radical at the core of your being has changed.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh... (Vs. 1-3a)

He tells us that: *in Christ, the law of the Spirit of life...* Now in chapter 7 he used this idea of law as kind of a principle. He's using a bit of a play on words, that *...the law of sin and death has been conquered by the law of the Spirit of life*. There's a new law in town, and this law brings life. **"...The Spirit of life to those who are in Christ Jesus has set you free; ...for what the Law could not do...** Why? Because my flesh is weak!

This whole idea of flesh—to remind ourselves what we talked about before Christmas is the reminder that there was *me* that was in Adam. I was married to Adam, and Adam was abusive. It was a sinful relationship. It was a relationship defined by the absence of God. I was an enemy of God, so I learned certain habits; I learned certain behaviors; I learned certain attitudes; I learned certain ways to try to satisfy my needs and desires. All that defined me *in Adam*. When I married into Christ, "*I goes with me*" so the *me* that was in the first marriage—that has the habits, that has the attitudes, that has the tendency to live without *God—I'm still here*. Nobody pushes the *clear button*. I'm not suddenly super spiritual. I carry into the new marriage the habits, the thought patterns, the struggles that defined my life before. That's the flesh. It's the *me* that was married to Adam that learned some very bad habits, that's now still hanging around. So he says the flesh just simply doesn't have the capacity to live the law perfectly. So what I could not do for myself, what the law could not do for me, God did! God sent His own Son. Very carefully worded...**in the likeness of sinful flesh**. If he would have said *in the likeness of flesh*, some would have said he wasn't really human. If he would have just said *in sinful flesh*, people would have assumed he was sinful. It's worded very carefully. *He came in the likeness of sinful flesh*. He came as a man—a hundred percent man—and yet, in His flesh He lived perfectly.

It's worth noting already in chapter 8 that you have mention of God the Spirit, God the Father, and God the Son. As a matter of fact, this is going to come up over and over again in Romans chapter 8—that God is actually bringing all three members of the Trinity to bear on the answer to this question: *Who will set me free? God, in all of His fullness—Father, Son, Spirit—to see this through*. So God the **Son came in the likeness of sinful flesh...**

... and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (Vs. 3b)

Very interesting statement: He came **in the flesh**. But rather than the sin condemning His flesh, it's the other way around, because in the flesh He lived perfectly—perfectly righteous. Therefore He turned the table and He condemned sin. There's a new law in town, and the law just said, "Sin, you are done for! You're toasted! I won because in the flesh I lived perfectly!" Sin was condemned—sin and death. **He condemned sin in the flesh so that the requirement**—it's not *requirements*. If you have plural, that's incorrect. There's *one* requirement of the law and that is perfection—righteousness—which Jesus accomplished...

...so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but walk according to the Spirit. (Vs. 4)

He did what we couldn't do. He, in the flesh, lived righteously, perfectly fulfilling the law, and He did that on our behalf, that He would offer that righteousness to us as a gift. Verse 5:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Vs. 5-8)

The language gets very precise here. When he's talking about walking **according to the flesh** or **according to the Spirit**, he's talking about *in alignment with*. Those that are in the flesh have no option; they're in Adam. They are not able to please God. They're actually hostile toward God because the whole system is bent on living life apart from God, as an enemy of God, at war with God. This is a very good thing to keep in mind. You have people that you live next to, people that you work with, people at your school, people maybe in your family that perhaps engage in behaviors that are offensive. And it's easy to just keep picking at their behaviors, but we have to understand there is no way they're ever going to clean up their act until they have an encounter with Jesus Christ. They can't! They're enslaved! They have no option! Nobody gets up in the morning and says, "I'll ruin my life today!" People have within them a longing to be happy, to figure out what gives life meaning, to figure it out. But they're lost. They're confused. They're in pain. They're messed up. They're *in Adam*! And rather than picking at their behavior and trying to change them, they need to experience kindness and love and compassion, that we might introduce them to the one that *can* change them.

That's what he's talking about when he talks about those who walk *according to the flesh*. But then he talks about those who walk *according to the Spirit*. How do they do that? They set their mind on the things of the Spirit. Those who walk according to the flesh, they set their mind on those things. That's what they think about. That's why they live that way. That's their belief system. But those that set their minds on the Spirit, your mind is on the things of the Spirit; then we walk that way.

So what does that mean? What does he mean by **the things of the Spirit**? Well, we'll remind ourselves: this is the Spirit of truth. This is the Spirit of life. This is the Spirit who has inspired God's Book of Truth. As a matter of fact, the only other place in the Bible where that phrase is used—*the things of the Spirit*—is in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and they're clearly identified as the truths of God's Word. So when he's talking about setting our mind on the things of the Spirit, he's talking about the truth—the truth that's been revealed, the truth that provides a new mirror. If I look in the mirror of the Law, it condemns. If I look in the mirror of my performance, it condemns. And as long as I believe that's who I am, that's how I live. But when I look into the mirror of God's Word, I see something different. I see that God has clothed me with His righteousness. There is now no condemnation—now and forever! I have been radically changed. Those are the things of the Spirit. When I start to believe that—when I believe that God will meet my needs, God will satisfy me, the things of God are the things that matter, that I'm not in Adam anymore, I'm in Christ—the more I believe that, then the more I live that way.

He reminds them at the end of verse 8 that those who walk according to the flesh do so because they have no choice, because they're *in the flesh*. Now some of your translations have something like "*controlled by*", which is a very unfortunate translation. The word is *flesh* and the word is *in*. It's to connect us to *in Adam* or *in Christ*. So that becomes critical in verse 9: **However, you (as believers) are not in the flesh.**" It's not *sinful nature*; it's *flesh*. **You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit.** This is your identity. This is your core. I would make the case that this is your nature. I don't subscribe to the theology that you can have two natures. That doesn't make any sense. Your nature is who you are at the core. It's what flows out of you naturally. You can't have two of those. You're either one or the other, and that's exactly what he just said here. He said, "You're either in Adam or you're in Christ. You're either *in the flesh* or you're *in the Spirit*." And if I'm in the Spirit, everything changes. He says:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Vs. 9)

This is very important to understand. Every single person who has trusted Christ as Savior, who is *in Christ*, automatically has the Spirit of God. It's simply not true that you have to have some experience to have more of the Spirit or go somewhere to find the Spirit or have some sort of a second blessing. That's just not correct theology. You cannot be a Christian and not have the Spirit. The practical reality of this is that if you have trusted Christ as Savior, you lack nothing that you need to walk in righteousness. Don't talk to me about your past. Don't talk to me about your stuff. Know that you have the fullness of God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—within you that gives you everything you need to get beyond the stuff—the wounds, the pain, the addictions. Nobody has to live that way because God is more powerful than whatever it is you bring to the table. You have the Spirit of God.

It's worth noting that he calls the Spirit *the Spirit of Life*. Then he calls Him *the Spirit of God*. Then he calls Him *the Spirit of Christ*. This doctrine of the Trinity is very mysterious. It's very confusing. Nobody has it figured out. God is so much beyond us. When you have the Spirit, you have the Son. When you have the Son, you have the Father. Jesus said that. "*When you've seen Me, you've seen God.*" It's interesting that the text is saying *God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit—they're all involved in this thing to give you what you need to walk uprightly*. Verse 10:

If Christ is in you...

(Notice if the Spirit's in you, then Christ is in you; you can't separate it out),

...though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Now what's he saying here? He's saying that there's a reality to our salvation—past, present and future. The Bible talks about: *I've been saved; I'm being saved; and I will be saved*. There is a reality that just because I stand in the righteousness of God, I am not condemned, that I am not going to live forever in this mortal body. It's breaking down. It isn't working properly. Because I was married to Adam, there is residue from that, that continues to define my life; and part of that is the flesh, and part of that is just this body that *will* die. Does that mean then that somehow, something isn't working? Answer is "No"—that is part of the story. But even though this body is dying, and it will die, my spirit is alive and will be alive forever. There was a time when my spirit was dead. But the moment I trusted Christ as Savior, my spirit came to life and will never die again. Why? Because I've been justified, because of righteousness. He says, "No longer do I bear the marks of sin. I'm not condemned. I stand in the righteousness of Jesus." Verse 11:

But 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.

In other words, it's true—my spirit is alive, and alive forever; but my body someday will die. But the Spirit that dwells in me (it's a word that means *to take up residency, to live in me*), my body is not the hotel of the Spirit; it's the home. It's where it belongs. He's moved in! And if the Spirit that lives in me is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, I have every confidence to believe that one day, when this body dies, the Spirit will raise it to life and will change this mortal body into an immortal body, and I will have the fulfillment of my salvation—finally glorified in the presence of God forever! Now this is really important biblical theology! This body—this one right here—does not get put in the grave and disintegrate and God says, “*Yeah, it didn't work anyway. You know, Adam ruined that one, and so I'm going to give him a brand new one.*” The Bible does not teach that. If that was true, it would be: Satan wins round one, but God wins round two.

Romans 8 is a critical text in understanding Satan does not win round one! Go back and reread 1 Corinthians 15. This body gets put in the grave, and this body is resurrected, and this body puts on immortality, and this body reunites with my spirit and lives forever perfectly in the presence of God, as God's way of saying, “I win! I win!” We'll talk more about that next week. So then, if all this is true, how should we live? Verse 12:

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

Again, the language is very precise. We're not *in* the flesh, so there's no reason why we should be living like we're in the flesh. **According to the flesh** is living like we *used to live*. But we're not in the flesh. So he says **we are under no obligation**. We've talked about this a lot—that when Jesus saved me, now that I'm in Christ, the old man is dead. The old man that defined me in Adam—he's dead. How dead is he? He's so dead, we buried him. He's gone. This is a new me, raised in new life in Jesus. The flesh hangs around from the old marriage to the new marriage and tries to say, “*I'm still in charge here*”. We learned in chapter 6 that *he's not in charge!* We're under no obligation to the flesh. Sin has been defeated. I'm no longer in the flesh. I don't have to live that way. I'm no longer a slave to sin. The flesh is not my boss. The flesh is not in charge. I have no obligation to the flesh. And that's what he's saying here. Verse 13:

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die;

This is very strong language. Not *you should think about dying* or *you probably should someday die*. **You must die!** In other words, what he's saying is that if it's true that you are in Christ, if it's true that you're a new creation in Christ, if it's true that there's no condemnation, if it's true that you're filled with the life of the Spirit, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of life, that you virtually have everything you need—most importantly the very power of God to walk uprightly—what reason could there possibly be for walking according to the flesh other than you want to? And that's a problem.

All of us identify with the struggle of Romans chapter 7. There is a struggle because we're *in Christ*. The whole point of the struggle in chapter 7 is, “*I don't want to do bad things. I don't want to offend God. I don't want to mess up my life. I don't want to go down the path of death. I don't want that!*” And every time we sin, we grieve over that and we feel the pain of that. We say, “I

don't want to live that way!" The answer is the Spirit of life. But if you can sin as a way of life, if you can engage yourself in behaviors that you know are offensive to God and it doesn't bother you, there's no conviction, you have no deep pain that would tell you something's got to change, something is desperately wrong. It's just not possible to have the Spirit of Christ, to have the life of Christ, to have the nature of Christ in you and not be convicted of sin. If it doesn't bother you, I would suggest to you that you have every reason to believe you don't know Jesus. Something is really wrong. But I would say that doesn't describe the overwhelming majority of people here today. You would say, "I don't want to sin. I don't want to offend God. I don't want to live like that. I don't want that to define my life." And so what the text says is: *if you're walking that way, it's got to stop. You must die.* You say, "Well, how do we do that?" Well, he tells us:

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Vs. 13)

Don't miss it—**by the Spirit**. The solution is not natural. The solution is supernatural. You have been given the full power of God to give you everything you need to kill sin. The language in this text actually is very violent. The English tones it down. *By the Spirit I must kill sin!* The result of that: I will live.

Now I'm going to tell you something here. I suggest you memorize this or you write it down: *Either you kill sin, or sin will kill you!* There is no middle ground on this thing. Sin is a rattlesnake, and you're locked in a very small room. There's no getting along here. Either the snake dies or you die. How do we do it? By the Spirit! How do we do that? He's already told us: By setting our mind on the things of the Spirit. It's not enough just to spend all day saying, "*I can't do bad things...I can't do bad things...I can't do bad things.*" That doesn't work. That's chapter 7. But it's looking into the mirror and realizing: *I'm a new creation in Christ. I'm not condemned. I have the very power and presence of God within me. My spirit is alive. Everything that my soul longs for, that I seek to satisfy through sin, can be fully and eternally satisfied through God.* It's about being proactive about what I think about, what I dwell on, what I passionately pursue. We've talked about this. You should be as passionately pursuing righteousness as you were passionately pursuing unrighteousness. Starting in verse 14 he's going to fill out: *what do you see in the mirror?*

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Sons of God—there is not sons and daughters of God. It's not a reference to your gender. It's a reference to the fact that in Roman culture only the sons could inherit the family estate. Only the sons could be heirs. There's a perfectly good Greek word for children if you want to do gender-neutral. Paul chose not to use that because the idea is that we have become heirs of the family fortune; and to do that, whether you're male or female, it's about being a son.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again... (Vs. 14-15a)

The moment you trusted Christ as Savior, that was your last day of being a slave and the first day of being a son. You're now a child of God. This is not a relationship driven by fear. This is a relationship driven by intimacy.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Vs. 15)

God has adopted you as one of His children in order that you might be a legal heir to the family fortune. And with that comes all of the love, all of the kindness, all of the compassion, all the celebration of a father with his child. The idea of “**Abba! Father!**” is a term of intimacy—Papa! Daddy! The ancients believed that the gods were something to be feared. Everything in religion was about satisfying the gods—or they clobber you. But what was unique about the message of the God of the Hebrew people is He was a God who longed to be intimate, a God who wanted the kids to come in and play. You’re no longer condemned! God wants to be with you. He wants to love with you. You come into His presence and say, “Papa! Daddy!”—because that’s the relationship that He wants with you.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (Vs. 16-17)

In the Roman world, a natural-born son still had to sign off for an adopted son to receive an inheritance. That’s why we’re often referred to as co-heirs with Christ, because the Son has signed off. But you are an adopted child, and you are a full recipient of the family fortune!

Now think of it this way: What do you think is the inheritance of God the Son? Can you even begin to imagine the riches of what is His? And what He did the day He saved you is said, “You’re my child! I’m adopting you, and I’m signing off that you, with me, will be a recipient of the family fortune! What’s mine is yours forever!”

Really unimaginable! So he reminds us, for a while we suffer with Him, mainly talking about killing sin, walking uprightly, and taking our stand with the promise that one day we will be glorified with Him. Our salvation will reach its fulfillment! We’ll talk more next week from the rest of the chapter about this inheritance and this glorification that is promised.

If what you're hearing from me is, “Yes, I need to be more diligent to be a better Christian; I need to go out there and try harder,” then I haven’t been clear. You’re right back in chapter 7—enjoy the misery! Who will set me free? The Spirit of Life, The Spirit of God, The Spirit of Christ—the fullness of God—available to you, to give you everything you need to walk uprightly. It’s about submission; it’s about surrender. It’s about saying, “*It’s been my way long enough. I’ve tried to manipulate it. I’ve tried to, with legalism, fix it. I’ve tried my way. My way hasn’t worked. It’s about submission. It’s about surrender.*” It’s about saying, “*God, it’s Your way, and it’s Your Spirit and Your Power,*”—that we would be as passionate for righteousness as we were for sin.

There isn’t a single one of you here that’s trusted Christ as Savior that lacks one single thing that you need to walk uprightly. The question is: do you believe that? Because the liar whispers in your ear and says, “*That’s not true. You’re a failure. You’re a liar. You never get it right. You’re never gonna get this figured out. This doesn’t work for you.*” And it comes down to a question of: who are you going to believe tells the truth? The one who desires the destruction of your soul or the One that gave up His own Son to do for you what you could never do for yourself?

In the preaching world we look at our information through kind of this three-tiered model. We ask ourselves as preachers, “Is this something someone needs to understand?” If so, I need to explain it. Or, “Is this something someone needs to believe?” If so, I need to try to prove it. Or, “Is this something someone needs to just apply, to go out and live?” But we understand that nobody will live what they don’t believe, and you won’t believe what you don’t understand. Oftentimes there’s

too much emphasis on the living without enough emphasis on the understanding. That's never going to work. That's chapter 7. So I pose the question to you: What do you need? Do you need more understanding? Have we not explained it enough? Do you need to go back into Romans and read back through the transcripts? Go back and listen to the messages? What haven't we explained? What isn't clear? Or is it—and I would guess the majority are in this category—do we believe it? Do we have the courage to believe that what God says in this mirror is true, and it's radically different than every other mirror in our culture—that you're not condemned, that your God's son, you're His child, He delights in you, that your spirit is alive and your body is destined for resurrection, and your future is glorification, and you have everything you need to say no to the flesh and walk in uprightness, which is where you find life?

I can explain it to you, but I can't believe it for you. You have to decide. Do you think God tells the truth, or do you think He's a liar? I guarantee you, if you have the courage to believe that this mirror is true, it will change your life.

Our Father, we're thankful tonight that when the Law could not save us, when we could not save ourselves, God, You sent Your Son to do for us what we could not do. In the flesh, He conquered sin. He condemned sin and death once and for all, and offers us life freely as a gift. God, that seems like enough, but, Lord, You've done so much more than that. You, in the fullness of Your power, have crawled inside of us to offer us everything that we need in order to experience life, in order to walk uprightly, in order to glorify Your Name. Lord, may we have the courage to believe that what You say is true, to believe it to such a degree that we live like it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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The Gospel Story: The Spirit of Life

A Study of Romans

Romans 8:1-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Basically the world is full of mirrors by which we view ourselves. What are some of the mirrors in our culture? How do these mirrors potentially define how we view ourselves?
2. Why does it seem so often to be so hard to believe the mirror of God's Word is telling the truth about who we really are?
3. Do you think most Christians sin because they want to offend God and want to make a mess of their lives? If we as Christians really don't want to sin, why do we?

Bible Study

1. Review the main points from Romans 5-7. What is the capacity of the law to either justify or sanctify us? What does it do to us?
2. Read Romans 8:1-9. What is Paul's question in 7:24 and what is the answer in 8: 1-9? What cannot set us free and who does set us free?
3. Practically speaking, what does the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit mean? If these were two mirrors how would these two mirrors differ?
4. Read Romans 8:9-11. What must be true of us if we are Christians? Does any Christian lack anything he or she needs to be set free?
5. Even though our bodies are subject to death because of sin (part of the residue of being "in Adam") what is our hope as believers?
6. Read Romans 8:12-17. Why "must" we die to the deeds of the body? Does this seem like something that is optional or like something that has to be the outflow of our salvation?

7. What is true of us according to these verses? Who are we? What do we have? What is our future?

Application

1. What is the difference between the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit? Practically speaking, what does this look like on a daily basis? How do you discipline yourself to keep looking in the right mirror?
2. The law condemns us but the Spirit gives us life. What is necessary to live out Romans 8 rather than Romans 7? Name three key truths you must keep in mind.
3. What is your biggest need right now in light of Romans 8, to understand, to believe or to live it? Keep in mind you can't live what you don't believe and you can't really believe what you don't understand.