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Romans / Sanctification; Spirit of God; Spirit of Jesus Christ; Liberation / Romans 8:1–17

Series Number: 17

Readings:

- Ezekiel 36:24-28 NIV

- Matthew 5:13-20 NIV

- Romans 8:1-17 NIV

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
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Introduction

Introduction Proper

Have you ever really tried to improve something about yourself?

Last year, I played indoor soccer with a new group of people.

Including an old, battle-hardened Korean man. Yes he was old, but he weaved the ball around the pitch like Lionel Messi.

Well eventually he came to me and said: “Stop running around like a madman, always trying to dribble around everyone! Anyone can run around and score a goal, that’s nothing! Pass the ball! Make it fun for everyone! You’re too selfish!”

At first I was angry. But then I realised - I was angry because I knew he was right!

For a while I tried to pass more to make him like me - but soon I realised he never would.

Then I tried to pass more so that all the other players would think **I’m** a good player.

But none of those would fix the main problem, you know why? The *real* issue was my *selfishness*. I played soccer mainly so that I could have fun!

Each of those reasons I tried to change are selfish too, aren’t they? I tried to pass more to make others like me, or think I’m a good player, or to have good self-esteem.

But that's not *real* change! It only changes my outward behaviour, its only surface-level, superficial.

But did you know that's how many religions work? We try to do more good things than bad deeds - why? So we can go to heaven! Or we need to reach enlightenment for ourselves! Or maybe we obey God so we won't go to hell. But those reasons are based purely on *selfishness*.

We change our *behaviour*, not our heart - we don't really become *good*. It doesn't actually change our character.

So why should we expect to go to heaven? It doesn't matter how many good deeds you try to throw in - if your heart is still evil, that evil will only earn us God's judgment.

Where do we get power to *really* change, to change *inside*? Well in our Bible passage today, [Romans 8:1-17](#), the Apostle Paul shows us that God's *Spirit* gives us that power. He truly frees us from evil, and all its consequences. Real power to change comes from God's Spirit, who liberates us from sin and judgment.

Releases Us From Sin's Domination

State the Point

My first point this morning is that God's Spirit release us from sin's domination. He releases us from sin's domination.

Show from the Bible/Explain

Sin's Domination

Last week we looked at [Romans 7](#), where the Apostle Paul writes:

Romans 7:18-19 NIV

¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Does that sound familiar? This describes living “in the flesh”.

Now skip down to [Romans 8:5](#) with me: “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”

See, living in the flesh is a mindset, a way of life.

Now look down at v7: “The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”

Living in the flesh means trying to be independent from God. It means refusing to depend on God as our source of power, goodness, happiness, and satisfaction. We don’t really believe God wants the best for us, so we try and get what we want on our own. We end up slaves to the cravings and desires of our bodies. So of course, we rebel against him. (Porter 2014)

Its a bit like a child who throws away the healthy lunch their mum or dad made them to buy junk food with their friends. They disregard their parents because they think junk food will make them happy.

Living in the flesh means relying on our own effort, our own humanity, instead of trusting in God. This is what most religions do. You think you just have to *try harder* to do good, use more willpower and self-discipline, just reach deeper inside yourself, and maybe you’ll find goodness there. (Porter 2014)

The problem is, our flesh, our humanity, is weak! We can’t actually become *good*, without God we just change our behaviour for a while.

Even though we might *want* to be good, there is a stronger evil power inside us that dominates us - the power of sin.

And of course sin has consequences, right? Just like eating junk food. Look at v6: “The mind governed by the flesh is death.”

One day our bodies will die because of sin. But also, by living in the flesh we find ourselves *spiritually* dead - we are rebels against God! V8 says “Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.” And as rebels against God, we are condemned - we face his judgment. Sin has dominated us, death has won.

The Spirit’s Release

But wait - look back up at v1: “...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”

What? No judgment for those who believe in Jesus? Why?

Well, v2 says: “...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

Now sometimes when Paul uses the word “law”, he means “law”, but sometimes the word also means “principle” or “authority”. Here, he mixes both meanings - he’s using a bit of wordplay.

He’s saying that God’s life-giving Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comes into a believers’ heart as another “principle” or “authority”. And he liberates us from the “principle” or “authority” of sin and death! The Spirit rescues us from sin’s domination! (Moo 2018, 496-500)

But how does this work? Well, keep reading into v3:

Romans 8:3 NIV

³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

Now in v3, Paul uses the word “law” to mean God’s law, that he revealed to Israel in the Old Testament. (Moo 2018, 500)

What was even God’s law powerless to do? It was powerless to make us truly righteous, or good! It was weakened by our sinful, human flesh! On our own, without God’s help, we cannot make ourselves truly *good*. God’s law shows us what is good, but our flesh is too weak to fully obey it. (Kruse 2012, 325)

Its like having a flash new 500 horsepower V8 supercar. You know it could drive over 300km/h, but you probably can’t afford the fuel to drive it!

But *God* has solved that problem!

Look at v3 again: He sent his own divine Son, the second person of the Trinity, to become fully human. He looks just like us, he is truly flesh like us, but *he* is not sinful. And when Jesus put his own flesh on a cross and died, God was *condemning*, he was *judging* that evil power of sin through Jesus’ flesh. (Kruse 2012, 325-327; Moo 2018, 500-503)

Our sin was punished in Jesus’ death. This evil principle that dominated us is beaten. The price of justice for our evil deeds is paid.

But there’s still more!

Look at v4: he says that those who live according to this new power, God’s Spirit - *they* can actually *fulfil* the righteous requirement of the law! They can be truly good!

Just like we read earlier in Ezekiel, God promised long ago that one day the people of God would all have his Spirit within them, and he would cause them to actually obey his righteous law! And Paul says here in [Romans 8](#): this promise is being fulfilled in those who follow Jesus, those who have God’s Spirit in them.

God condemned sin through Christ's death! And now his Spirit lives inside us as a new principle, a new authority that rescues us from sin's domination!

Illustrate

It reminds me of my childhood. In a child's eyes, there are only two kinds of grandparent, right? The strict ones or the fun ones!

Well one grandma was the fun kind. When I was little we would visit her house and she would give us lollies, bubblegum, lots of TV, and just generally loads of fun. At least that's how I remember it. And then, she'd hand us back to my parents, spoiled rotten.

And my brothers and I would say things like, "Grandma lets us eat lollies", and "Grandma lets us stay up really late", "Grandma lets us watch TV all the time!"

And of course Dad and Mum had to restore some health and order to our lives. They'd say, "you're not at Grandma's anymore. We're in charge now."

Its a bit like that spiritually too. We live in the flesh, following its cravings and desires - either self-righteousness or immorality. We find ourselves dominated by sin and headed for death.

But when we choose to follow Christ, God's Spirit takes control, he frees us from sin, and he produces real goodness in us.

Apply

Maybe you've tried to keep the five pillars of Islam, or you've tried to do many good deeds as a Buddhist, or maybe you just try to be a good person. Eventually, you'll realise that you're only changing your behaviour; you're not dealing with the evil inside. And you'll find you have to water down God's law to a level you can keep.

Ultimately, you will be frustrated by the weakness of your flesh. You need another power, a *real* power to come into your life to transform you from the inside out.

Come to Jesus. Let his Spirit rescue you from sin's domination. Trust *him* for your happiness and your goodness.

If you're a believer in Jesus here this morning, you might be feeling a bit frustrated right now. You might be thinking, "why am I still battling with the same sins month after month, even year after year?" I have the Spirit in me, why aren't I seeing change?

I know that feeling.

When I was younger, I wrestled for years and years with an addiction to pornography. And I was a Christian! I just couldn't seem to beat it!

But through those years, the Spirit used that addiction to teach me humility, because I was very self-righteous! He taught me honesty and integrity, because I had been hiding my sin. He taught me about his amazing grace. And finally, he showed me that he really, deeply, *loved me*.

His love gave me the right motivation to change, the self-discipline to do it, the will to fight sin. The change took eight years, but it was real, and it was permanent.

So be patient, and trust in the Spirit's power. Depend on him, fight against sin, and be assured that he *does* rescue us from sin's domination.

Raises Us to Life

State the Point

Now the Spirit doesn't just free us from sin, he also frees us from sin's *consequences* - and one of them is physical death. So we'll see now how the Spirit raises us to life. The Spirit raises us to life.

Show from the Bible/Explain

An uncomfortable fact of life is that every human dies. But even more importantly, what happens after that?

Let's look at:

Romans 8:10–11 NIV

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Jesus was crucified, killed on a cross. But he didn't stay dead. A few days after he died, God raised Jesus' physical body to life again! 2000 years ago, he was resurrected from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That same power lives inside every person who follows Jesus. So that same power will raise our physical bodies to life too one day!

Apply

Doesn't that fill you with hope? So much of our lives is governed by the fact that we're going to die one day. We try to fulfil all our happiness in this life, to tick off all the items on our bucket list! But we don't need to stress about that.

One day, the Spirit will raise our physical bodies to life again, and we will live on this earth forever - for hundreds, thousands, even millions of years! We'll have all the time in world to build houses, travel, eat and drink, build friendships, and do all the things you enjoy.

That hope of resurrection should stir us to trust that God *does* want the best for us. The Spirit rescues us from sin, AND its consequences - he raises us to life!

Reveals Our True Identity

State the Point

Another things the Spirit does is he reveals our true identity. The Spirit reveals our true identity.

Show from the Bible/Explain

In [Romans 8:13](#), Paul says “if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live”. Paul knows we're going to die, so the life he means here is eternal, resurrection life.

But why does putting to death the misdeeds of the body result in eternal life?

Well he explains in v14: Its because if you are being led by the Spirit to grow in righteousness, that must mean you are a Son of God. Only God's sons are led by the Spirit!

Here, Paul actually uses the masculine word for “son”, not the gender-neutral word “child”. Why?

I suspect he's alluding to Israel's history. Thousands of years before Paul wrote, Israel was bitterly oppressed under slavery in Egypt. But God adopted Israel as his firstborn Son and loved them. He miraculously defeated the Egyptians, and by his Spirit, he led his son Israel out of Egypt. That's how everyone knew Israel was loved by God - he led them out of slavery in Egypt. (Kruse 2012, 337-338; Moo 2018, 521)

So how does someone know if *you* are God's adopted son, just like Israel? If you, too, are being led by God's Spirit out of slavery to sin! That's an identifying characteristic of a son of God!

Then Paul goes on in v15-16 and says “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

You see, the Spirit reveals and nurtures our relationship with God. He helps us know God deeply, relationally, as a loving father, not a slave driver who just wants us to follow more rules. The Spirit assures those who believe that we *are* God’s children.

And in v17 Paul makes a logical jump - if we are God’s children, then we are also his heirs! One day we will inherit the new creation, a renewed earth, and eternal life with God!

So, if you are led by the Spirit to beat sin and grow in righteousness, that shows you’re a child of God! Clearly, you have a relationship with God as your father. That means you’re his heirs, just like Christ is - so you get to inherit eternal life!

Remember, at the moment you’re saved, Christ’s righteousness is credited to you. We grow in righteousness because we’re *already* saved, because of who we are, not in order to *be* saved!

So the Spirit reveals our true identity.

Apply

› V9 slide

If you’re a follower of Jesus, know that the main point of this passage isn’t just: “do better.” It shows us who we ARE. V9 says we ARE those who have the Spirit, and this victory over sin and death is already ours! (Kruse 2012, 330,332)

That means we should *expect* to beat sin. When it seems too powerful, when our flesh seems week, know that the Spirit will win!

Over time, we should see growth in goodness, holiness, righteousness. You’ll reveal that you are a child of God as you’re led by his Spirit. Expect victory.

But there’s another side to that. And I say this in love, not judgment, because I care for your soul.

If you consider yourself a Christian but still willingly live in the flesh, in attitudes and actions that displease God, test yourself: are you being led by the Spirit? Are you driven by career ambition rather than love for God? Do you hoard your money, or spend it all on selfish pleasures? Do you have sex outside of marriage? Do you self-righteously criticise everyone else, but never yourself?

There's a better way. Choose to follow Jesus and be led by his Spirit, and he will transform you into a child of our loving Father and produce true goodness in you.

Conclusion

Johnny Lee Clary was disgusted. He, the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan had just been tricked into shaking hands with a black man. That black man was a preacher named Wade Watts.

Johnny was so enraged that he and the KKK started stalking Watts. They burned a cross outside his house, they surrounded him in a restaurant and intimidated him. They tried to burn down his church.

But Watts didn't seem to care. He just kept showing Johnny love and kindness. He told Johnny that Jesus loved him, no matter what he did.

Eventually, Johnny left the Klu Klux Klan and chose to follow Jesus. Through God's Spirit he found true life and peace - he was transformed from the inside out. For the next 23 years, he travelled the world preaching about God's love and grace. He taught against racism and helped bring reconciliation and peace between black and white people in the USA. (Bello 2010; Kelly, n.d.; TheBeautifulDisaster 2011; Wikipedia 2025, "Johnny Lee Clary")

What a change, right? The Spirit really transforms people!

If we try to be good without God, we'll continually be frustrated by the weakness of our flesh, our humanity. Come to Jesus, know him *deeply* through the Holy Spirit, and he will rescue you from sin's domination, raise you to life, and reveal your true identity as a child of God the Father.

8:30 Now we're going to say the Nicene Creed together? (Service leader: Leanne) Then Anthony to lead in prayer.

10:30: Let's now sing, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us"

Confession & Assurance

Romans 8:13 NIV

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Perhaps you've heard this sermon and you know you've been living in the flesh. Either you've tried to be good enough in your own strength and you've failed. Or maybe you've been just

living in a way that is really all about satisfying your cravings and desires, and its left you high and dry. You've seen that trying to live independently of God just produces death.

You know you need the power of God's Spirit to transform you. We have a time now where you can confess that to God. Ask Jesus to save you from the sin that's dominated you. He will, because he is love. He delights to save people. Take a moment now to confess that to God, and then we'll confess our sin all together.

If you want to know more about how to follow Jesus, what it means to believe in him and live his way, come and see me or Mike after the service - we'd love to talk to you about it!

Romans 8:14–15 NIV

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Those who confess their sin and turn to Jesus become adopted children of God. If you truly repent and come to him for forgiveness, he accepts you and calls you his child, and you can call him father. How wonderful is his love, right church?

Now David is going to come lead us in prayer.

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