

Sermons from the Book of Romans

Chapters 8 to 9

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¹ This numbering continues from previous, Chapters 6 to 7.

Romans 8:1–2. No Condemnation In Christ (05.31.2026)

Reading: Romans 8:1–18

Praise: Psalms 32:1–5; 32:6–11; 150:1–6

1. The Meaning
2. The Reason
3. The Knowledge

Our text this morning is verses 1 and 2, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

With the text before us this morning, we begin the grand chapter of Romans 8. Romans 8 is marvellous. Romans 8 is wonderful. God’s people are drawn to Romans chapter 8. And no wonder that God’s people are drawn to this chapter, because the theme of Romans 8 is that the Christian, who is justified by faith alone, has his justification, not only as its own comfort; but he has his justification as the ground, the solid, firm, unshakable ground of his comfort concerning all things. The child of God who is not condemned, because he is in Christ Jesus and is righteous with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the child of God who can look all the way ahead to the future. He can look all the way ahead to the end. And he can look at all of the things that will belong to his life. And he can say, on the foundation of justification, that all these things must serve him, that all these things shall be for his good, that all these things shall not be able to overcome him; but that he is more than a conqueror in all of these things, through the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved him. The child of God, who is justified by faith, stands upon that justification as the solid ground of his comfort in all of his life, and looks by faith all the way to the end with hope, and with triumph, and with victory. And so, in Romans 8, the apostle is going to set the feet of the believer upon this solid ground of justification, and show us the implications of that solid ground in all of our earthly life, all the way to the end.

We can see something of that theme of the chapter in the opening connection word, although it’s the third word in our King James Version. It’s the opening connection word, and that word is “therefore.” The word, “therefore,” ties chapter 8, not only our text, but it ties all of chapter 8 back to what the apostle had said previously. And the “therefore” does not merely connect chapter 8 to the end of chapter 7, or even into chapter 6; but the word “therefore” in chapter 8, verse 1, reaches all the way back into chapter 5. In fact, it reaches all the way back to chapter 5, verse 1, where the apostle said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle has already spoken of the comfort of God’s people who are justified; and that comfort is that we have peace with God. That’s chapter 5, verse 1. And the “therefore” of chapter 8, verse 1, reaches back to chapter 5, verse 12, where the apostle taught the union, the spiritual union, between Jesus Christ and his people, the federal headship of the Lord Jesus Christ; so that he represents us and stands for us. And now here in chapter 8, verse 1, reaching back to that comfort of justification, and reaching back to that truth of Jesus’ federal headship, the apostle says, “therefore [there is] now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” And you see in this opening text, both that comfort of justification called back, and you see that federal headship of the Lord Jesus Christ called back. There is no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ.

The apostle also opens chapter 8 with a second connecting word, the word “now.” “There is therefore now no condemnation.” When the apostle uses the word “now,” he does *not* use it temporally, that is, he is not referring to a certain moment in time, the way we sometimes use that word “now.” Rather, the apostle is using the word “now” as a *logical* connection. The apostle is saying, Now, the fact that everything I have said in chapters 1 through 7 is true. There is also this truth, that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Now, all of this being true, it is also true that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. The apostle here is not saying that there are some moments when we are condemned, and then other moments when we are not condemned. But he is saying, logically, because all of this is true, it is also true that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

The apostle teaches, in the opening text of chapter 8, that there *is* no condemnation. That’s the ringing, resounding theme of this text, there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ. And it is the ringing, resounding theme of the entire chapter. This truth, that there is no condemnation, will be the solid ground upon which the child of God stands in Christ, as the apostle takes us into all the things of this life, and takes us all the way to the end; and shows that having this ground, we have comfort in all things. The grand conclusion, and the solid ground of our comfort, is that there is no condemnation for them that are in Jesus Christ.

And so, we consider this text this morning under the theme, No Condemnation In Christ. In the first place, consider the meaning. In the second place, consider the reason. And in the third place, consider the knowledge. No Condemnation In Christ; the meaning, the reason, and the knowledge.

We begin with the meaning, then, of there being no condemnation. When the apostle uses the words, “no condemnation,” he indicates that we are dealing with a matter of judgment. We are dealing with a verdict. And we are dealing with a judge. Condemnation or no condemnation are legal matters. They are matters decided by a judge. They are, indeed, the legal matters of God’s own judgment. The apostle, by opening Romans 8 with the words, “no condemnation,” reminds us that we have to deal with God. We have to do with God. We stand before God, who is the Almighty judge, the holy judge, and the perfectly righteous judge. We stand before this God who is always judging. The apostle speaks of there being in the present, “There *is* no condemnation.” And what the apostle means by that is, that God never stops judging. There is always a judgment being rendered by Jehovah God. Jehovah has always been judging. He’s been judging from the beginning of the world. God is the one who judged in the garden of Eden. He’s the one who judged Adam and Eve. He’s the one who judged the serpent. God is the one who judged in the days of Cain and Abel, judging their sacrifices. God is the one who judged in the days of Enoch, when men sought him, but Enoch was not found, for God took him. God has always, always been the one who is judging. And God continually speaks his verdict and maintains his verdict. It is not as if God, the righteous judge, is trying to discern the facts of the case, so that he can come, finally, to a righteous judgment in the end. But God constantly judges, and judges righteously, and maintains his judgment; and no one thwarts his judgment. When the apostle opens the eighth chapter with the words, “no condemnation,” he reminds us that we are dealing with the eternal judge who maintains his perfect verdict from eternity to eternity.

And when God judges, he judges according to himself. There is no external standard that God introduces in order to judge. God judges according to his own being. God’s holy law reflects that

being of God. Thou shalt not have any other gods before me, because there are no other gods; so that the first commandment reflects God's holy being. When Jehovah God judges them, he holds men in front of him and judges them according to his being. Not this, that God sees if the men before him are infinite and eternal as he is. But this, that God measures them according to his own upright standard, of his own dealings with himself. In God's dealings with himself, he is perfectly devoted to himself, and perfectly against all that is contrary to him. And so, when he judges men, he judges whether they also are perfectly devoted to him in all things, and perfectly opposed to all that is against him. God is the righteous judge, as the apostle reminds us, when he opens with the words, "no condemnation."

The apostle teaches us the verdict that Jehovah God makes concerning his elect people. When the apostle says, "There is no condemnation," then he is teaching that the verdict that God makes concerning us in Christ is that there is no condemnation to us. And that's because when God judges, either condemning or acquitting, God also acts upon that judgment. He is the God who curses those who are condemned, and he blesses those whom he acquits. And the apostle says now about God's people, that "there is... no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The apostle states it negatively, there is no condemnation, but we could state it positively. Positively, it would be stated, there is righteousness, there is acquittal. There is no condemnation means, You are righteous as you stand before me. It means that you conform to my very being. It means that just as I am wholly devoted to myself, so I judge that you are wholly devoted unto me; and just as I am perfectly opposed to everything contrary to me, so I judge that you are perfectly opposed to everything contrary to me. The judgment stated positively is that we are righteous. God measures his people according to his own righteousness, and declares about us, You, too, are righteous.

This has been the good news of the gospel, that the apostle has been unfolding in the book of Romans. It is the good news that the apostle opened the book of Romans with, when he said in chapter 1 that he was the "apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," and that gospel of God has as its content the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, and who is the righteous one. It is the gospel that the apostle continued to teach later in Romans 1, when he spoke of not being ashamed of the gospel of God, "for it is the power of God unto salvation." It is that gospel that he further defined by bringing us to the heart of the gospel. When the apostle said in chapter 1, verse 17, "the just shall live by faith," showing us there that the heart of the gospel is justification by faith alone. It is the gospel that the apostle taught, after he took the tour of mankind and saw the sin of all men, and then concluded that righteousness cannot come by the law, but that righteousness must come from outside of the law; it must come from God himself. It is the gospel of justification that the apostle taught in Romans 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." It is the gospel of justification that the apostle has been unfolding in chapters 6 and 7, as he dealt with objections to the gospel of justification. The apostle, from the beginning until now, has been teaching this gospel of justification by faith alone, which is the doctrine that God declares his people righteous, declares them to be in perfect conformity with his own being, for the sake of another, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now the apostle opens this grand chapter in the book of Romans, chapter 8, with the declaration, You are righteous, you are righteous! Or, stated negatively, "There is therefore now no condemnation." Now, we can state that doctrine of justification positively, God declares us righteous. But the apostle declares it negatively. He does not say, There is righteousness, although that's the

meaning. But rather, the apostle puts it in the negative, "There is no condemnation." And the apostle puts it in the negative, in order to highlight that the declaration God makes, "There is no condemnation," contradicts many other verdicts concerning us; in fact, every other verdict concerning us. The child of God, has many, many verdicts concerning him. There are many who speak a verdict concerning the child of God. When the apostle puts God's verdict in the negative, "there is no condemnation," he indicates that, that verdict of God stands opposed to all of the other verdicts; every one of which says, There is condemnation. And the child of God knows that very well, by his own experience and his life, too. There are many verdicts against me. And every one of them tells me that there is condemnation. There is the verdict of my flesh. Look at my flesh. You look at your flesh. Consider our flesh. Consider the old man of sin. Consider our totally depraved nature. It is filthy. It is vile. It is an evil fountain, a foul fountain. It spews out, without ever stopping, all manner of iniquity and sin. There is no spark of goodness in that totally depraved nature. You cannot sift through that nature and discover, way down at the bottom of that nature, a little scrap of love for God or love for the neighbour. That nature is totally depraved, that nature is thoroughly corrupt, and the verdict that must come because of that nature is this, There is condemnation! Look at how filthy you are. There is condemnation for you. Or, there is the verdict that comes because of every single sin that the child of God commits. Those sins that proceed from that totally depraved nature, as from a foul fountain, which sins are hatred of God and hatred of the neighbour, which sins are so gross, that even the good works that God gives me to do, I pollute and render them in every way reprehensible. The child of God has all of these sins. Sins when I wake up, sins when I go to bed, sins when I deal with my family, sins when I go to work. Sins, sin, sin in my thoughts, sin in my mouth, sin in my hands. Sin all the day long. There are all these sins, a multitude, an uncountable multitude of them. And every one of those sins must render the verdict against me, There is condemnation. There is condemnation for you. Or, there is the verdict that must be rendered by my connection through this sinful human race, I am a member of this sinful human race. And when you consider man, you find that man at his best is altogether vanity. Here we sin as members of the human race, fallen in Adam, and liable to condemnation, so that our connection to the world of mankind must bring against us the verdict, There is condemnation. Or, there is the verdict from my enemy, my opponent. My enemy says about me, You are guilty. I know you are guilty. Here is where you are guilty. The verdict from the enemy must be, There is condemnation. There is the verdict that my conscience must render. My conscience, which is that inner testimony concerning everything I do and everything I think; and in that inner testimony, which sees all that is in me, and which knows all my sin; in that inner testimony, there must be this verdict, There is condemnation. And then even in my suffering, and in my physical diet, there is a testimony of condemnation; because the one who lays his hand upon me in his sovereign providence that kills me is Jehovah God himself, so that in my dying there must be this testimony, There is condemnation to you. Many verdicts from all sides. And every single one of these verdicts is that there *is* condemnation.

But now the apostle teaches us the verdict that God himself speaks, never mind what all these others speak. God himself also has a verdict, and God's verdict is, "there is no condemnation." None! And when God speaks his verdict, "There is no condemnation," then all of these other judges must be quiet. They must fall silent. All of their judgments are rendered void and null. The only verdict that stands is the verdict of Jehovah God, There is no condemnation. The flesh's verdict may not stand when the flesh says there is condemnation, then God says there is no condemnation. When my sin says there is condemnation, then God says there is no condemnation. My conscience, and my enemy,

and my very dying, say, There is condemnation. And God says, from heaven, “there is no condemnation.”

And that verdict of God is absolutely sure. That verdict of God cannot be overthrown. When the apostle uses the word “no,”² in the phrase, “no condemnation,” that word, “no,” is literally not one, or not any. Not one may speak. When Jehovah comes to speak, all my judges must be silent, they must put their hand over their mouth, and they must listen and hear the only verdict in all of the world that there is. My conscience may not speak. The law may not speak. My sin may not speak. Nothing may speak. There is *not one* condemnation that may be heard; for Jehovah has counted me righteous. That’s an absolutely certain verdict. That’s the verdict that you hear, that God gives to you, in the midst of your sin. With all of your sins, and all of your regrets, all of your guilty conscience, piled up in your heart and piled around you; then from heaven comes this verdict from the holy judge, There is no condemnation to you. When you lay dying, and your earthly life is near to its end, and you reflect, in the weakness of your deathbed, over all your sins, and you see all that you have done wrong, and you consider that from a child, from a youth, you have wrestled with this sin and that sin; as you lie there dying, the verdict of God from heaven resounds in your soul, There is no condemnation to you. Whatever it feels like, whatever all of the other judges may say; this is the truth of things, “There is therefore now no condemnation.”

The reason that there is no condemnation is Jesus Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are *in Christ Jesus*.” Now, as we deal with the second and third points of the sermon this morning, it is very important that we follow the *judicial* line of approach. Following the judicial line means that when the apostle Paul explains the reason why there is no condemnation, he does *not* introduce the sanctified life of the child of God. The apostle Paul does *not* introduce the good works of the child of God. The apostle Paul does *not* introduce the living in this world of the child of God. The apostle Paul, when he explains the reason that there is no condemnation, *strictly, strictly* follows the judicial line. He is speaking of a judge. He is speaking of a verdict. He is speaking of a court. He is speaking of the judgment and the verdict of the holy God, who says, There is no condemnation.

Now, there is such a thing, in the life of the child of God, as the believer’s spiritual life of gratitude. There are such things as the good works that God gives to his people. But the apostle will deal with all of that later. The apostle does not introduce that here. The apostle strictly follows the judicial line. And we make such a big point of this, because it is very, very popular and very common, in explaining this text, of all texts, to try to introduce the grateful life of obedience, and the sanctified life of the child of God, to introduce that sanctification in some degree, and for some purpose. Men, for example, point to the word “walk” in verse 1, “who *walk* not after the flesh, but [who walk] after the Spirit”; and they say in the word “walk,” is the life of the child of God, the godly life of the child of God. And that godly life must be introduced here, in order to explain something of the reason for why there is no condemnation, or at least to explain the reason why I may be sure that there is no condemnation. Or, others point, in verse 2, to “the law of the Spirit of life,” and explain that “law of the Spirit of life” to be something of the sanctified life of the child of God. So that at some point in this “no condemnation,” whether it’s in the verdict itself, that there is no condemnation, or whether it is in the assurance, my assurance that there is no condemnation; the godly life of the child of God

² [transcriber’s note: The Greek, οὐδενί, from root, οὐδεῖς, means no one, nothing; never man, not any, not at all.]

must be brought in. That's an error. That's a grievous error. If the life of the child of God is brought in here, then that means that the verdict of God concerning me rests, to some degree, upon my life, then I am condemned. Or, it means that my knowledge of this verdict, that there is no condemnation, rests, at least in part, on my obedience; and then I have no knowledge of it.

And the second and third points of the sermon on the reason and the knowledge, we must follow the apostle's line, which is the line of the *judicial* declaration, There is no condemnation. The apostle strictly follows that line. He will talk about our life later, and then he will use the word "live." He'll do that a little bit later, in verse 8; when he speaks of not living after the flesh, verse 12; and then again, verse 13, "if you live after the flesh, ye shall die," but rather "mortify the deeds of the body." There's our life! There's the implication, there's the outflow of this doctrine of justification by faith alone at the beginning. But at the beginning, we must follow very strictly the judicial line. Do not introduce the law of God here. Do not introduce the good works of man here. There is no condemnation in Jesus Christ, to them which are in Jesus Christ. That line alone must be followed. Romans 3:28 could be picked up and applied here, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." That's the apostle's doctrine, that he continues, "justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

What is the reason, then, as we follow that judicial line, that there is no condemnation? The reason that the apostle gives is this, I am in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Those in Christ refer to those elect people of God who are united to Christ, such that Jesus Christ is the representative head of his people. It means that he is the mediator and the substitute. This is the teaching of all of the word of God. This is what the apostle has been teaching in the book of Romans. He developed that at some length in chapter 5, when he showed that there is a federal head, a representative head, who is Jesus Christ, the last Adam. The apostle taught that, in chapters 6 and 7, when he said that being baptised into him, we "were baptised into his death" [6:3]. There is such a union between Christ and his people, that Jesus Christ represents us as our head. That's the legal line of thinking. The legal development of it that the apostle gives. And who is this Jesus Christ who represents us. Why? Jesus Christ is the righteous one. Jesus Christ is the one who stands before God and measures up to God. He is the one who is perfectly devoted to God, and perfectly opposed to all that is opposed to God, just as God himself is. When Jehovah God looks upon the Lord Jesus Christ and measures the Lord Jesus Christ by God's own being, then the verdict concerning Jesus Christ is, He is righteous. The perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ included also his obedience to the will of God, that he suffered the curse in our place. That's what a representative head does. He stands in our place. He is our substitute. In his obeying God, he is our substitute. In his suffering the curse of God for us, he is our substitute; so that by his substitutionary obedience and his substitutionary atonement, we are righteous before God.

And what is God's verdict concerning this Jesus Christ who stands before him? God's verdict is this, You are righteous. God's verdict is this, There is no condemnation to you. God's verdict is, You are my beloved Son. God's verdict is, I am well pleased with you. Christ Jesus is righteous before God, and you are in him. He represents you; so that representing you, what God says about Jesus Christ is true of you; when God says concerning Jesus Christ, There is no condemnation to you, you have obeyed everything I gave you to do; then the verdict concerning you is, There is no condemnation to you. Not because you or I did anything. But because the Lord Jesus Christ has. And the law has nothing to do with this. The law is not brought in here. The law has nothing to say about this. It is the verdict of

Jehovah God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The one thing that God looks at is Christ. And the one thing God says when he sees Christ is, No condemnation. The law doesn't know where to look. When the law comes to you and to me, the law looks at you and me. It's looking at the wrong place. Only God looks at the Lord Jesus Christ. And when God looks at him, our representative head, he says concerning him and us, No condemnation.

The apostle drives home the certainty of that verdict, and the reason, the certainty of the reason, for that verdict, that we are in Christ; when he says in verse 1, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Most explain the word "walk,"—in fact, everybody I could find explains the word "walk,"—to mean the sanctified life of the child of God in obedience and good works. And the better commentaries on this passage say that means, that our certainty of our verdict is in the way of this life of good works. That's the better of the commentators, and that doctrine itself is awful. The apostle uses the word "walk" here. We must follow the judicial line. The apostle is not introducing our life. Rather, by that word "walk," the apostle means, Who has dominion? He is speaking of who has the right to have dominion over us. That's evident from the whole context of these chapters we've been dealing with. The apostle, again and again, has spoken of who has dominion. He said in chapter 6[:14], for example, "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." The apostle said at the end of chapter 7, "O wretched man that I am! who shall *deliver* me from the body of this death?" Deliver is a judicial concept, being delivered from the right of sin to rule over me. The apostle speaks that in verse 2, is going to speak that in verse 2, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me *free* from the law of sin and death." The whole context is a matter of dominion, Who has the right to rule? And the apostle here is saying, The flesh does not have the right to rule over me. The judicial arrangement between the flesh and me is, that it is not my master; but rather the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, has the right to rule over me. So far I'm out from being judged by the flesh and hearing the verdict of the flesh; that the only verdict I hear is the verdict of God concerning Jesus Christ.

And then, if someone asks, Well, why does the apostle use the word "walk" then, which often in scripture does refer to our life, our walk in this world? Then the answer is, that the apostle uses the word "walk" as a vivid description of a slave following his master. A slave *walks* after his master. A slave's whole life is not his own, but belongs to his master. The slave wakes up, not for himself; but for his master. He follows his master through the day, doing the work the master gives him, for his master. Even the slave's sleep is not his own, for he remains at the beck and call of the master; but also he sleeps to be refreshed, so that in the morning he can serve the master again. The slave *walks after* his master. That's why the apostle uses this language. It's a judicial term here. Who has the right to have dominion over you? Not the flesh! It has no right. Whatever its verdict may be makes no difference. It doesn't enter in. You walk not after the flesh. You don't serve the flesh. It doesn't have dominion over you. But rather, you walk "after the Spirit." The Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit who is named here because he's the author of faith, and the Spirit, is the one who works comfort; for "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the [Spirit] which is given unto us," Romans 5[:5]. The Spirit here, as the Spirit of Christ, indicates that Jesus Christ is the one who has dominion over us. And that means, then, that in this verdict, the flesh has nothing to say about it, and you may tell your flesh that, too. You may tell your conscience that. When all these verdicts come in, that there is condemnation, there is condemnation, there is condemnation; you may say, You have no say, you have no authority over me, you are not my master; you have nothing to say

here. The only one who has anything to say here is God. And God says, There is no condemnation for you are in Christ. And I judge you in Christ.

The child of God is given the knowledge of this verdict. The knowledge is taught in verse 2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Without going into all the many various explanations there are of that passage, let us simply get the main line of that passage. When the apostle refers to "the law of sin and death," he means the law of God, he means the Ten Commandments. It is "the law of sin and death," not because there's anything bad about the law. The law is not sin. The law is holy, it is just, it is pure, it is good, it is spiritual. There is nothing wrong with the law. But the only thing the law can say to a sinner is, You are condemned. That's the only message the law has for a sinner. The law cannot ever have, for the sinner, the message, You are righteous. The law can only condemn. It's a good law. But its message for the sinner is condemnation. And now I have been freed from that condemnation. I have been freed from that law. Its verdict has no say for me. The law is always trying to give its verdict, but that law has no verdict for me. It may not speak in my verdict. And that means, too, that the child of God does not go to the law for his verdict. He does not go to the law to find out if he is righteous. He does not go to the law to be sure that he is righteous. The moment he goes to the law, the law's verdict will only be, There is condemnation. But I have been freed from the law of sin and death; delivered from it, emancipated from it, liberated from it.

And how have I been delivered from that law of sin and death? By "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." And now, briefly, that law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the gospel. You could substitute the word, "the gospel," for all of that "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." The *content* of that message is Jesus Christ. It's the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The content for sinners is this: You live, the just shall live by faith. That's the message of the gospel. For the sake of Jesus Christ, you live. For the sake of Jesus Christ, you are righteous. And it is called "the law," though it is the gospel, because that word "law" has been used throughout these chapters to mean that which reigns, that which has the say-so, that which speaks, that which has the final word concerning the matter. It is "the law of the Spirit" who applies this gospel to my heart by faith, so that I know that I have life and righteousness and all things in the Lord Jesus Christ. Its announcement is that I am righteous; that there is no condemnation. That's how I know that there is no condemnation by the gospel, by the message of the gospel, which reigns, and which has the final say-so, and which liberates me from the verdict of the law. The verdict of the gospel is, No condemnation. And the child of God knows that then by faith worked in him by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, which Spirit unites him to Christ; so that the child has everything, the child of God has everything of Christ, and knows all these truths by faith alone and the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Now, this is your foundation. This is immovable. This does not change. This is the verdict of God from eternity to eternity in the Lord Jesus Christ concerning his people. His verdict is, No condemnation for Jesus' sake. And that's the foundation upon which the child of God stands and looks with the apostle by the Spirit, as we shall see in the coming texts, Lord willing, all the way to the end, all the way to glory; and is able then to look at all things in this life, and stand firmly and immovably upon this righteousness in Jesus Christ. What a grand chapter! No wonder God's people are drawn to it. And now hear the verdict of God over against every other verdict, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Amen.

Let us pray. Our Father, which art in heaven, we thank thee for the gospel of our Saviour to us this morning. Bless it to our hearts, and wilt thou teach us, by the gospel of our Saviour, evermore, that verdict that there is no condemnation to us, for Jesus' sake, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Romans 8:3–4. God’s Son Sent For Sin (06.07.2026)

Reading: Romans 8:1–18

Praise: Psalms 1:1–6; 2:1–7; 2:8–12

1. The Necessity
2. The Substitution
3. The Purpose

Our text that we consider this morning is verses 3 and 4. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Romans chapter 8 is the great comfort tour in the book of Romans. The apostle Paul, in the book of Romans, often takes tours of all things. He took a sin tour, in chapters 1 through 3, as he made his way through the entire human race, in order to show that in all manner, whether Jew or Gentile, whether church-going men or pagan men; that all men were unrighteous, and in all men, there was no good. But that all men came under the condemnation of the law, and all men by nature were under sin. And Paul took that sin tour of all men, in order to show that the righteousness of the people of God must come from outside of ourselves. It must be an alien righteousness. In fact, it must be the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and that is the good news of the gospel.

Well, just as Paul took a sin tour in Romans 1 through 3, Paul takes a comfort tour in Romans chapter 8. And by that, we mean that the child of God, at every moment of his life, stands before all the things that shall befall him in his life, that stretch out before the child of God all the way to the horizon; and in that vista of the child of God, as he looks all the way to the horizon, he sees many things. The child of God sees “principalities and powers,” that is, the spiritual powers of angels and devils. The child of God sees that there are afflictions in his life, that there is peril and nakedness and tribulation and sword. The child of God sees persecution for himself. The child of God sees his own weakness and his own sin. He sees that he does not even know how to “pray as [he] ought.” The child of God, at every moment in his life, stands before this entire life, with all of its things that stretch out before him as a vista. And now what the apostle Paul does, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in chapter 8, is pick up that child of God, and the Holy Spirit carries the child of God all the way forward, all the way to the horizon, all the way to the very end; illuminating all of these things that the child of God sees in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So that the child of God, at every moment in his life, can see all the way to the end by faith, that all of these things illuminated in the gospel cannot be against him, but that all of these things must be for him. The child of God then confesses with his fellow believers, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” The child of God confesses that no man can condemn us, and that no man can “lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect.” The child of God sees, in the light of the gospel, that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,” and that nothing of “things present [or] things to come,” or any other thing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The child of God, at every moment in his life, has this comfort tour, which is simply the comfort of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ applied to every aspect of the life of the child of God.

And the heart of that gospel light that illuminates all things is this, that there is no condemnation to the child of God. That’s the way the apostle opens chapter 8. “There is therefore now no

condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” No condemnation, that is, justification by faith alone. There is no charge against me. But there is only the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that gospel of justification by faith alone is the light of Jesus Christ that illuminates the whole life of the child of God; so that the child of God, who is *not* condemned by God, but who is righteous before God, has this certainty, that therefore all things must be for me, and nothing can really, truly be against me.

Our text, in verse 3, opens with the word “For.” And by that word, “for,” is connected to the immediately preceding context. Verse 2 ends with the mention of the law, the law of sin and death. And now verse 3, with that word “for,” connects itself to that law, and refers to that law again, “for what the *law* could not do.” But the word “for” that opens our text also connects our text back to chapter 8, verse 1, the opening verse of this chapter, which states that “there is therefore now *no* condemnation to them which are in Jesus Christ.” And our text will be a further explanation of how it is possible that there can be no condemnation to us in Christ. The doctrine of our text is this, substitutionary atonement. Our text teaches that “what the law could not do,... God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and *for* sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” God sent Christ *for* sin, *for* our sin; that he might be condemned in our place, and that we, therefore, might be righteous with his righteousness. We have in our text, verses 3 and 4, the doctrine of Jesus’ substitutionary atonement as the foundation of our righteousness before God.

And so, we consider our text this morning under the theme, God’s Son Sent For Sin. In the first place, consider the necessity. In the second place, consider the substitution. And in the third place, consider the purpose. God’s Son Sent For Sin; the necessity, the substitution, and the purpose.

When we come to our text in verses 3 and 4, the issue that the apostle is still treating is this marvellous declaration of verse 1, that there is *no condemnation*. When the apostle uses the word “what,” in our text, as the second word, “for *what* the law could not do,” that “what” means deliver us from condemnation. The apostle has said, There *is* no condemnation. We have been delivered from that condemnation. We have been set free from “the law of sin and death” by “the law of the Spirit of life,” which is the gospel. The apostle has said, We have been delivered from condemnation, and now the apostle continues in verse 3 with that “what,” referring to that condemnation. And the question that the apostle is dealing with now in our text is this, How can it be possible that there is no condemnation for us in Christ? It is a wonder that there is no condemnation. It is unexpected that there is no condemnation for us; and it is a wonder, and it is unexpected, because this is true for sinners. That’s the people who are not condemned. Those are the ones who are delivered from their condemnation. They are sinners. They are in Christ. They are in Christ, but they are sinners according to their flesh. And the apostle brings up the flesh of the child of God to emphasise the fact that we are sinners.

There is no condemnation to us sinners, but how is it possible that there be no condemnation to us sinners? And the answer of man, is always it is by the law that there is no condemnation to us sinners. The answer of man is always this, By our obedient work to that law, we have delivered ourselves from condemnation. Take a look at the law. The law says, “Thou shalt have no other gods,” and I have no other gods. I don’t call myself a servant of, and now fill in the blank, of whatever pagan deity you want. I am not a servant of those pagan deities. But rather, I am a servant of God. I keep the first commandment of the law, and therefore there is no condemnation to me against that first commandment. And on and on it goes. The child of God, all men by nature, think that there is no condemnation by the law. That’s true of every pagan religion in the world. Every pagan religion finds

its acceptance before its deity by its obedience, by following the steps, by going through the practices that the deity lays out for the people to do. By the law, there is no condemnation for us before our deity. But much of what is called the Christian church in the world simply practises and teaches that same old pagan religion, because much of what is called the Christian church says that there is no condemnation by the law. By your keeping of the law, you become right. By your keeping of the law, you become worthy. By the keeping of the law, you distinguish yourself from other men, so that there is no condemnation for us by the law.

But the apostle comes and says regarding us sinners, and the fact that there is no condemnation for us, that the law *could not* deliver us from condemnation. “What the law *could not do*.” And when the apostle says the law could not, the apostle does not mean for some people, the law could not deliver them from condemnation. They were just too sinful. They were just too wicked. But for other people, the law could deliver them from condemnation. They were better people. No. When the apostle says, “what the law could not do,” he means *absolutely* what the law could not do. For no one could the law deliver them from condemnation. And when the apostle speaks of the law as that which could not deliver us from condemnation, he means God’s law. He does not mean the invented law of the scribes and the Pharisees. He does not mean the law that comes out of the imagination of the mind of man. The apostle means the very law of God itself. The apostle has just referred to that law of God in chapter 7, verse 25, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” The apostle has called that law earlier in chapter 7 a holy law, and a holy commandment, and “just, and good,” and “spiritual”; chapters 7, verses 12 and 14. And now the apostle says about that law, about that holy law of God, The law could not deliver us from condemnation. It was impossible for the law. It *absolutely* could not deliver anyone from condemnation.

The apostle goes on to describe and explain why the law could not deliver us from condemnation. “It was weak”! The law “was weak through the flesh.” Verse 3, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.” When the apostle speaks of “the flesh,” he is referring to that totally depraved nature of the child of God. He is referring to what we have called the sin power, or the sin principle in the nature of the child of God; what the apostle called in chapter 7, the law of death, and “the law of sin,” and sin itself; meaning by the word “law” there, the principle, the power, the operative force. The child of God by nature, and all men by nature, have within them this sin power, this sin principle, this totally depraved nature. The apostle will describe that elsewhere, in Ephesians chapter 2, as being “dead in trespasses and sins.” It is the corruption of our flesh. And the apostle uses the word “flesh” here,—the law was “weak through the flesh,”—because this sin power, and this sin principle, manifests itself in the flesh; that is, the body of the child of God in this life, that flesh, including everything that belongs to our earthly makeup, our soul, as well as our body. That’s our earthly makeup. That sin power manifests itself in our flesh. It manifests itself in our will. It manifests itself in our mind. It manifests itself in our hands, which work evil; and our feet, which go where they ought not; and our eyes, which see what they should not; and our ears which hear what they may not; and our mouths which speak what they are forbidden; and our whole body. The members of the flesh are used by the child of God to serve sin, though the child of God has been delivered by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from his bondage in sin. The child of God carries with him that sin power, that totally depraved flesh, and that totally depraved sin power, and that totally depraved nature manifests itself in his flesh; his hands have sin, and his eyes have sin, and his feet have sin.

The law, the holy, good law of God is weak through that flesh. And when the apostle uses the word “weak,” he does not mean it is very hard for the law to make any progress against the flesh, but the

law can make some progress against the flesh. It's weak. It is not strong, it is not powerful, it does not get very far, but it does get somewhere. That is not what the apostle means by the word "weak." The word "weak"³ that he uses here means helpless. It's a word that means empty. In fact, it is a word that we could translate here, "useless." The law is useless through the flesh. That is, the law is useless to deliver me from condemnation. That's the weakness of the law. It's helpless to deliver me from condemnation. It is empty to deliver me from condemnation, and it is useless for that through the flesh, through my totally depraved nature. The explanation of the apostle's doctrine here is this, that the law and the flesh are irreconcilably, irreconcilably opposed to one another. Where the law says, Yes; the flesh always and only says no. The flesh never says yes with the law's yes. And where the law says, No; the flesh always says yes. The flesh never says no, along with the law's no. When the law says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," the flesh says, But I will. And when the law says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," the flesh says, But I won't. The law and the flesh are irreconcilably opposed, so that whatever the law says, the flesh says the opposite. And that's why, as the apostle has said before, the law was added because of sin. And the motions of sin are by the law. What that means is this, as soon as you hear the law say, Thou shalt not, your flesh has to respond, I shall. And as soon as the law says, Thou shalt, then the flesh has to respond, I shall not. The law comes and provokes the flesh, and stirs the flesh up; so that the flesh disobeys the law. The more you hear the law, the worst sinner you'll become. That's the reality of the law and the life of the child of God. The more you hear it, the worse you become.

You can see that in Israel. Who among all the nations of the earth had the law like Israel? And they were the worst nation on the earth. All they did, seeing the mighty miracles of God, day after day, and giving them manna from heaven; all they did is spit it back in his face, and wish they had died in Egypt, rather than live with God in the wilderness. Israel was the worst nation upon earth, and she had the law! But you don't even have to look to Israel, you only have to look to yourself, and I, to myself, to see that the more you hear the law, the worse you become. There is no one on the face of the earth as bad as you and I. When we say that we are the chief of sinners, that is not a mere statement. That's not a slogan. That's the truth of it. We truly are the chief of sinners. When you hear the law, and you have heard this law, and I have heard this law; when you hear the law, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and that means, then, that you don't make a god in your own image, you don't make a god that saves by the will of man, you don't make a god who's waiting upon the will of man to save, you don't make an Arminian god and a Pelagian god. When you hear that first commandment, and you understand it by the Spirit, and you know that I may have no other god, and the truth is above all, and the gospel is more important than anything; the moment you understand that, that's the moment that your flesh and my flesh lashes out against it. So that we are worse. As those who know that the truth is above all, we are worse than all of those churches and all of those people who don't know that. Or, when the second commandment comes and says to us, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"; and we understand the depth of it, that that means that we may not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word; when we see that that means that the worship of the church must be made according to the will of God, and not the will of man; and when we get that more than other people get that, we become worse than that. That law, that second commandment, stirs our flesh, so that knowing the truth deeper, we still do not worship God perfectly.

³ [transcriber's note: The word is *ησθενης* (root, *ασθενω*); meaning, to be weak, feeble, to be without strength, powerless.]

The law of God can only stir up the flesh. The law is “weak through the flesh.” It’s useless through the flesh to deliver me from condemnation. The law, then, can only condemn. That’s all it can do to me. It’s useless to deliver me from condemnation. The only thing the law can do is condemn me. When it comes to condemnation, so far from delivering me, the law tells me that I am condemned. And that is why the law is called, in verse 2, “the law of sin and death.” The law of sin, the law of death, the law that condemns as sin, the law that condemns as worthy of death. That’s why the apostle, in 2 Corinthians 3[:6], calls the law “the letter [that] killeth.” He calls it the ministry of condemnation and graven in stones. That’s the law for you. That’s the law for me. Useless, through the flesh, to deliver me from condemnation. And that shows the utter folly of trying to bring the law back in to deliver me. That’s the utter folly of proposing, that by the law comes some righteousness. Or, by the law comes the assurance of my righteousness. The law cannot give that righteousness. The law cannot give that assurance. The law is useless through the flesh for any of that assurance; because every time the law speaks, then, immediately, the flesh is stirred against it. The law could not deliver me from condemnation, because “it was weak through the flesh.” The law is holy, the law is good. “But I am carnal, sold under sin.” And therefore, the law is weak through the flesh, it cannot deliver me from condemnation.

And so how then, can those, who are sinners, be delivered from condemnation? How is it that the apostle can say, in verse 1, “There is... no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” when “them which are in Christ Jesus” are sinners, when you are sinners, and I am a sinner? And the answer of the apostle, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that it is by God’s Son. God’s Son is the reason that there is no condemnation to you. Not the law. Not you, not me. Not our obedience, not our striving, not our sincerity, nothing of you, nothing of the law, which is useless through the flesh to deliver us. God’s Son is your deliverance. Because of God’s Son, there is no condemnation to you and to me. That’s what the apostle teaches in verse 3, “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemns sin in the flesh.” God sent his Son to do what the law could not do. And that does not mean that God sent his Son as a backup, as if God’s first plan had been that we are delivered from condemnation through the law. When that failed, then God came to salvage what he could and give salvation through his Son instead. That’s not at all the meaning. But that God sent his Son to do what the law could not do means that it had been God’s eternal purpose to save by the Son. God’s purpose had *never* been to save by the law. God had other uses for the law. He gave the law a glorious office. But the office of the law was not to save. The office of the law is to expose; the office of the law is to condemn. The office of the law is to be the rule of gratitude, but the office of the law is not to deliver, not to save. It never was. It was always by God’s Son. From the very beginning, when God confronted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and gave the promise of the seed of the woman, there was God’s purpose. And when God killed the animal to clothe Adam and Eve with the coats made from its skin, there was the purpose of God. Always it was God’s purpose to deliver us from condemnation by his Son.

And the apostle says wonderful things about this Son of God and the sending of God’s Son. The apostle speaks of “God sending his own Son.” “His own Son” means that we are dealing here with the second person of the Trinity. That’s the eternal Son of God. That is the second person who is equal with the Father and the Spirit. That is the second person who is himself God, with the Father and with the Holy Ghost. Not that there are three gods, there is one God; and three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and these three are one God. It’s the second person of the Trinity who remains, even now so, and eternal God. But this is the Son who is sent; God’s “sending his own Son.” And by that *sending*, God indicates that the second person of the Trinity came in our flesh, as the *servant* of

God, so that he also is man, even as he remains true and eternal God. According to his divine nature, he is equal with God. According to his human nature, he is sent by God and subservient to God, and the servant of Jehovah. This is the one whom God sent. It's our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle says about God's Son, that God sent him "in the likeness of sinful flesh." That does not mean that it only *seemed* like Jesus was a man, but that Jesus was not really a man. He was only in the likeness of flesh. The truth of the matter is that Jesus was and is a real man. He is a real and true man. He has real flesh and blood. He was really born of the virgin Mary. He does not merely seem to be a man, he *is* a man. He is a man as much as you and I are men. But that word, "likeness," refers to "sinful." God sent him "in the likeness of *sinful* flesh." What that means is that the flesh of Jesus Christ was *not* sinful, it was real flesh. Jesus had real eyes that saw through an optic nerve. Jesus had a real mouth with a real tongue that moved to form words. Jesus had real hands that could touch and handle. Jesus had real feet by which he could walk. But in those hands, and in those feet, and in those eyes, and in that tongue and mouth, there was no sin. Your flesh and my flesh is sinful flesh. Our flesh becomes the members and the instruments by which we sin. But the Lord Jesus Christ had flesh, real flesh and real blood, that were not the instruments of sin. That he was "in the likeness of sinful flesh" means what the Holy Spirit says in another place, in the book of Hebrews [2:17], that he was made like unto us in all things, *sin excepted*. He was a real human being, a real man, but he did not sin, and he had no sin of his own. He was a perfectly righteous man. But he was sent "in the likeness of [this] sinful flesh." He was made a real man, and yet without sin. Jesus Christ had no totally depraved nature. He had no sin principle, no sin power within him. He was the spotless Lamb, righteous from beginning to end.

And then the apostle says about the sending of God's own Son, that he was sent, "*for* sin." And in that phrase, "*for* sin," we find this idea of substitution. We can hardly fathom what the Holy Spirit is telling us here. The Holy Spirit is saying Jesus was "*for* sin," that is, Jesus was *because of* sin. And now that becomes very personal. You must put your own name there, and I must put my own name there. Jesus was *for* your sin. And he was *for* my sin. Jesus was sent for your sin. And sent for mine. What does that mean, that Jesus was sent *for* our sin? Well, it does not mean this, that he was sent as the judge of our sin. It's possible to be sent "*for* sin" as the judge. So that the judge is sent in order to clean up the sin, in order to condemn all of the sinners, and clean up society. That's not the meaning here, that Jesus was sent "*for* sin" to judge our sin and to judge my sin. But that Jesus was sent "*for* sin" means that he was sent as the *accused*. He was sent as the one who would be judged. He was sent as the one who was guilty with our sin. He was sent by God "*for* sin." That means that the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ which were only "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that is, that were real hands, but that had no sin of their own; those hands were covered with sin. Not with his own sin, but with your sin, and with my sin. Jesus was sent "*for* sin"; and his eyes, which never once saw in sin, were covered with sin; not his own, but your sin and mine. And his tongue, which was never used to commit sin, was nevertheless covered with sin, your sin and my sin; and his feet and his body, and all that he was, was "*for* sin." What a weight of sin the Lord Jesus Christ carried in his hands. It is an unbearable weight of sin for one of God's people. They have that guilt of a lifetime of the sins of his hands to be on his hands. And what a weight for the child of God to have on his ears the guilt of *all* of his sins of hearing. The child of God cannot even bear the weight of his own sin, but the Lord Jesus Christ had on his hands the sins of *all* his elect people. He was *for* sin. And on his eyes the sins of *all* his elect people's eyes; his eyes were for sin. And on his feet, the sin and guilt of *all* of his elect people; his feet were for sin. The Lord Jesus Christ was sent by God for sin, for your sin, and for mine; and for *all* of his elect people.

And then “God sending his Son... for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” We must not understand that to mean that God made the flesh of his people better, so that now the flesh of his people could serve God. That’s not the meaning of condemned sin in the flesh. Do not interpret this verse as sanctification, as God going to work to improve his people, so that they will serve him. That’s not the meaning. Stick to that legal line, a legal line that is introduced in verse 1, there is no condemnation. And that now comes up here again in verse 3, “God... condemned sin in the flesh.” It’s the legal line. What God is describing here is what he did to Jesus, as the substitute for you, and the substitute for me. You could read that last part of verse 3 this way: God sending his Son for sin, condemned my sin in Jesus’ flesh. That’s the idea. God condemned my sin in Jesus’ flesh. My sin is damn-worthy. My sin must be condemned. God has not condemned me for my sin. God condemned my sin in the flesh and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. God drove the nails of his wrath and his curse through the hands of Jesus Christ, because Jesus’ hands were for my sin. And God drove the nail through the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus’ feet were for my sin. And God caused the blood of the brow of the Lord Jesus Christ to run down into his eyes and his ears and his mouth, because the brow and the eyes and the ears and the mouth of Jesus Christ were for sin, for my sin. God came with his everlasting curse to the Lord Jesus Christ, and condemned sin, my sin, in his flesh. And when the Lord condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus Christ, God had his full-say about sin. God left nothing unsaid. God did not reserve some little part of that curse to be spoken to me later, God came to Jesus Christ, whom he sent for sin, and God had the full-say of condemnation against my sin. There was a full spiritual judicial reckoning made at the cross of Jesus Christ.

God sent Christ “for sin, [and] condemned sin in the flesh.” And that means that the law had its full say about my sin at the cross of Calvary, because all that the law can ever say is what God says about sin. What does God say about sin? He damns it. He condemns it. And so the law must damn and condemn sin. And when God came to Jesus Christ at the cross and condemned sin in the flesh, that means that the law had its full-say about my sin at the cross of Christ. And that means that the law can never have any say about my sin ever again. Full say has been made. The full judicial reckoning has taken place. Sin, my sin, has been condemned in the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is how we sinners can be delivered from condemnation. That is how it can be true for you, for such as you, for such as me, the worst sinners that there are upon the face of the earth. There is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus.

The apostle teaches that, too, when he teaches the purpose of that substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, made as a substitute in our place. When the apostle says in verse 4, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Stick to the judicial line here. Do not follow so many by taking that word “in,” “in us,” and making verse 4 to be about sanctification. We’re still following the judicial line. This still is the justification of the people of God. It is still the truth that there is no condemnation to us who are in Christ Jesus. The purpose of Jesus’ substitutionary atonement is, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. We’re dealing with the other side, as it were, of no condemnation. No condemnation is negative. That’s put in the negative with the word “no”; there is no condemnation. If you were going to say that positively, then, positively, it is this, that righteousness is fulfilled. No condemnation means you are not guilty. Righteousness fulfilled means you are innocent. They’re the other side of the same judgment. And this has to do with the legal possession of the child of God. That’s the significance, again of “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The apostle is not yet talking about the holy life of the people of God; he will talk about that later. And sometimes in scripture, the word “walk” is used to talk about that life of thankfulness of God’s people, but that’s not the apostle’s meaning here. The apostle is dealing with

condemnation. He is dealing with the fact that there is no condemnation. He is dealing with the fact that righteousness is fulfilled in us. And the apostle means by that walking not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, that we have been *liberated* from service to the flesh. It has to do with the right to possess and the right to own. The flesh has no right to own us. The flesh has no right to have the say over us. It wants to yet, it tries to yet, but it has no right. The Spirit has the right of possession, because the Spirit is simply the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the idea of walk here is that of a slave, then, or a servant, who follows his master; because he's the possession of that master. The servant wakes up when the master says, Wake up, and sleeps when the master says, Sleep. The slave walks after his master, as the possession of that master. The apostle here is speaking of this liberation from walking after the flesh, and this liberation of belonging to Jesus Christ.

For them, for the righteous in Christ, for the redeemed in Christ, there is no condemnation. But there is righteousness. And what the apostle means, then, when he says "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," he does not mean this, that now you may start living to the glory of God. That's true, that deliverance from the condemnation of the law liberates us unto a life of service and gratitude to God. But that's not what the apostle is dealing with here. Rather, the apostle means this: Every single thing that the law says about fulfilling righteousness has already been done! Every single thing that the law requires in you, and the law requires all kinds of things in you; it requires perfect love in you for God, it requires love for the neighbour in you; everything that the law requires in you has already been fulfilled. It has already been accomplished. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the substitutionary atonement, obeyed God; and obeying God, becoming a servant, even unto the death of the cross. So that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. When the law comes to you and says, This is what you must do, and this is what you must be; then you may say to the law, That's already been done. I'm already righteous. You have nothing to say to me, as far as condemning me. You have nothing to say to me, as far as making me righteous. You are weak through my flesh. You are useless through my flesh, to make me right with God. It cannot be by you, law; though you are the law of God, it cannot be that by you I escape condemnation. It cannot be by you that I am righteous before God. That's only through the Son of God, whom he sent "for sin [and] condemned sin in [my] flesh." So that you, law, have already been fulfilled in me. Already fulfilled; already have been done. Everything you require is already accomplished. And that's the comfort of the child of God, the sinner, the child of God who's a sinner, the child of God who lies in the midst of death in this life, the child of God who feels his flesh and who sees the apparent power of that flesh welling up in him. The comfort of the child of God is this, But there's no condemnation to me, a sinner. There's no condemnation to me in Christ. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son [for sin] in the likeness of sinful flesh,... condemned sin in the flesh." And I am righteous; all the laws of righteousness that it requires have already been fulfilled for me, and in me by the Lord Jesus Christ.

What comfort for the child of God, what a gospel is this gospel of our righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that the child of God, at every moment in his life, with that whole vista of his whole life spreading out before him as this starting point in the comfort regarding all of his life, There is no condemnation for me; for my sin has been condemned in Christ.

Let us pray. Our Father, which art in heaven, we thank thee for the gospel of our salvation. Wilt thou bless it to our hearts, and comfort us by it, and give us its peace. We thank thee for Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent for sin, and condemned sin in the flesh. Wilt thou hear our prayer, answering us in mercy, blessing the remainder of our sabbath day, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Romans 8:5–8. The Impossibility of Flesh-Righteousness (06.21.2026; 1st service)

Reading: Romans 8:1–39

Praise: Psalms 92:1–9; 92:10–15; 14:1–7; 53:1–6

1. The Meaning
2. The Reason
3. The Comfort

The text that we consider this morning is verses 5–8. “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, in Romans 8, the apostle Paul is taking a tour of the comfort of the child of God. Just as the apostle, in previous chapters, had taken a tour of the sinfulness of mankind and had shown the corruption that belongs to all men, whether Jew or Gentile; and had shown that no man of his own works could be righteous before God, so now the apostle Paul takes a tour of the comfort of the child of God. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the apostle, takes us by the hand, as it were, and takes us into all the corners of this world, and to all of the corners of the experience of the child of God, in order to show that in all of these things there *is no* condemnation for the child of God. The child of God is righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is nothing then that can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The Holy Spirit takes us into the life of prayer, and shows us that even there “the Spirit... helpeth our infirmities.” The Holy Spirit takes us to the things that have happened and to the things that shall be, and says, In the past, the present or the future, there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love. The Holy Spirit takes us to every accuser, the devil and all his host, men and all their wickedness. He takes us to every accuser and says, There is no condemnation for us. No one can condemn you who are in the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle, in Romans 8, takes a great tour of the comfort of the child of God. And prominent in Romans 8 is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is mentioned already in verse 1, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” And as we read through the chapter again and again, the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is mentioned. And that is because the Spirit of Christ applies, to the child of God, Jesus Christ himself, and all the blessings that are in Jesus Christ. So that the child of God, by that Spirit who brings to him Jesus Christ, has comfort and assurance and peace in all of the things that he may encounter in this life. And all of that comfort, in this great comfort tour of Romans 8, begins with this *resounding* declaration, “There is therefore now *no* condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” That is the resounding word of God to his people. *No condemnation*. No condemnation. Because the condemnation that we deserved, he laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ in our place. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

And now our text begins with the connecting word “For.” And with that connecting word “for,” the Holy Spirit ties our text, in verses 5 through 8, to the immediately preceding context. And the immediately preceding context is that this righteousness of the child of God could not come by the law. The law could not do it. The law could not come and say to us, no condemnation. The only thing that the law can ever say to us is condemnation. This righteousness, this escape from condemnation, could not come by the law. The law is weak through the flesh. And now the Holy Spirit is going to explain further this matter of the law being weak through the flesh. Why cannot the child of God be

righteous by the law? Why cannot he escape condemnation through the law? Well, because the law is weak through the flesh, and the righteousness of the law, all that it requires is fulfilled in us through Jesus Christ. Not through our own obedience to the law, not through what we have done. Everything the law requires, Christ has done. And now the explanation for why the law is weak through the flesh is this: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." That's why; those who are after the flesh only mind the things of the flesh. So verse 8, the apostle's conclusion in this text, "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The problem is not the law. The problem is you. The problem is me. The problem is flesh. And so, the apostle here explains this truth, that the righteousness of the child of God and the escape from condemnation can come only through Jesus Christ, and not through the law.

The apostle's instruction in this passage is striking. The apostle is teaching that the flesh cannot please God. The flesh cannot make itself righteous. That is, it is *impossible* that there be such a thing as flesh-righteousness. That's what the apostle is condemning. That's what he's ruling out, the *impossibility* of flesh-righteousness. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." But the apostle's instruction is so striking, because the apostle connects law-righteousness with flesh-righteousness, works-righteousness with flesh-righteousness. The child of God cannot be righteous by the works of the law because all law-righteousness, all works-righteousness must be flesh-righteousness. And it is impossible for the flesh to please God. The apostle then here teaches, in other words, but with great clarity and conviction the truth that flesh-righteousness is impossible. And that is wonderful for the church of Jesus Christ, because that means the only righteousness that is left to us is the one righteousness that can answer to Jehovah God. And it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the righteousness that is outside of us, in him, and that is imputed to us by God's grace in justification.

And so let us consider this text this morning under the theme, The Impossibility of Flesh-Righteousness. In the first place, consider the meaning. In the second place, consider the reason. And in the third place, consider the comfort. The Impossibility of Flesh-Righteousness; the meaning, the reason and the comfort.

Let us begin when then with the meaning of the impossibility of flesh-righteousness. And we find in our text that the apostle is speaking of those, verse 5, "that are *after* the flesh." That's the way he identifies them, "they that are *after* the flesh." When the apostle speaks of those who are *after* the flesh, he is using a little bit different language than he has before, and that he will subsequently, to describe the exact same people. The apostle means by those that are after the flesh the same as those who in verse 4 and in verse 1, "walk... after the flesh." A little bit different phrase, but the exact same meaning. There are those who walk after the flesh. There are those who are after the flesh. And then at the end of our text in verse 8, he describes these very same people as "they that are *in* the flesh"; walking after the flesh, being after the flesh, and being in the flesh, all describe the same reality, according to the apostle. Most explain the identification of those who walk in the flesh or walk after the flesh, who are after the flesh and who are in the flesh, as the apostle's referring to our life in this world, our moral life, our ethical life. There is a certain kind of walk that makes up our life in this world. And those who walk after the flesh then is describing the moral ethical life of these people. It is not a good life. It is a life of sin. It is a life of breaking the law of God. Well, it is true, according to the scriptures, that there is such a sinful walk of people in this life. But that is *not* what the apostle is referring to in this section of the book of Romans. When he speaks of those who are after the flesh or those who are in the flesh or those who walk after the flesh, he is using very vivid striking language to describe a matter of *possession*. *Not* an ethical moral matter of how one lives but

rather a *legal judicial* matter of to whom one belongs. The apostle is describing the bondage that men are under, by nature, to sin. When he speaks of walking after the flesh, verses 1 and 4; and being after the flesh, verse 5; and in the flesh, verse 8; he is describing the reality by nature, that we are bound in sin, that sin is our master. We do not have the right of ourselves to be apart from sin. Sin has the say over us. We give answer to sin and must answer to sin. The apostle is describing a judicial, a legal issue of being bound in sin. The apostle describes it in the language of walking after the flesh or being after the flesh, in order to draw out, in striking language, how comprehensive that bondage is.

The apostle is using the language of a master and a slave. The master owns the slave. The slave must listen to the master. The master has the say-so over the slave, and the slave therefore walks after his master. He follows his master, serving his master hand and foot. When the master says, Sleep, then the slave sleeps. When the master says, Awake, then the slave awakes. When the master says, Labour, then the slave labours. The slave's body belongs to the master. The slave's experience belongs to the master. His sweat, his blood, his tears belong to the master. That slave is the property of his master. He belongs to him by legal judicial right. And so, he walks after his master, in order to serve his master in all things. What fills his vision is his master. That's the idea of walking after the flesh. The apostle is using the language of slavery here. Those who walk after the flesh are in total and complete bondage to the flesh. They owe their allegiance to the flesh. They must answer to the flesh. They must do what the flesh requires. Those who are walking after the flesh have no rights apart from that flesh, but owe that flesh everything they are the possession of that flesh. And that bondage in sin is a matter of the law. The apostle has already taught that, in verse 2, when he speaks of "the law of sin and death." There is this law of God that is "the law of sin and death." It is the ten commandments, and that ten commandments comes to those who sin and says, Now you are condemned. Now there is condemnation to you. You have violated the law of God. And therefore the punishment that must be inflicted upon you is, that you now belong to sin. You belong to the flesh. You have no freedom. You have no right. You have no liberty. You are the servant and the slave of the flesh. It is the law of sin and death. And how the apostle is describing these men, "they that are after the flesh," they that walk after the flesh, they that are in the flesh. It's a matter of right. It is right that they serve the flesh, by the judgment of the holy God himself against their sin and their iniquity.

On the other hand, there are those that the Spirit identifies, in our text, as "they that are after the Spirit," verse 5, "they that are after the Spirit [do mind] the things of the Spirit." The apostle has used and will use other descriptions of they that are after the Spirit; verses 1 and 4, the apostle describes them as those that "walk after the Spirit." And, in verse 9, the apostle will describe them as being "in the Spirit." But it's all the same reference, just as with walking after the flesh. Those who are after the Spirit are those who walk after the Spirit and those who are in the Spirit. And this too is a vivid description of a master and servant, master and slave relationship. But now the master is not the flesh. Now the master is the Spirit. The apostle has already said that those who are in this relationship are those who are in Christ; verse 1, "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Being in Christ is the same thing as being after Christ. It is the same thing as being after the Spirit and walking after the Spirit and being in the Spirit.

What does it mean to "walk after the Spirit"? What does it mean to be in Jesus Christ? Well, it means this: It means that the Lord Jesus Christ, by his death upon the cross, has borne in his own body the curse that was due unto us, the curse of that law of sin and death, the curse of that law that can only condemn. The Lord Jesus Christ has borne that curse fully. And because the Lord Jesus Christ has

borne that curse, the law may not say to you, it *may not* say to you, You belong to the flesh. The law may never say that to you again. It feels like it, in our own experience, because the flesh is strong. The flesh, being a word here for sin, because sin manifests itself in the flesh; a word for that sin power, that sin principle, that totally depraved nature. You have that. I have that. We'll have that till the day we die. We never improve it. That flesh roars and rages within us. That flesh is very much alive to us. But you are not after the flesh. You do not walk after the flesh. You are not in the flesh, that is, that flesh has no right to be your master. As the apostle said in Romans 6:2, we are "dead to sin." We are dead to sin. And therefore, we don't serve sin any longer. It's not our master. We are united to the Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 6:3, 4. Being united to the Lord Jesus Christ, being baptised with him "into his death" and being raised with him "in newness of life," sin is not our master. And by his blood shed upon the cross that covered our sins, the Lord Jesus Christ purchased us as his possessions. And his purchase of us was our liberation. It was our redemption, so that we are redeemed from the curse of the law. We are redeemed from bondage in sin. We are redeemed from walking after the flesh. We are redeemed from that judicial legal belonging to sin and to the flesh. Sin is not eradicated in me or in you. But sin's authority is broken. It does not own you. It has no say over you. You belong to another and I belong to another, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle describes this as *walking after* the Spirit or being *after* the Spirit or being *in* the Spirit, because the Spirit of Christ is the one who applies Jesus Christ to us. The Spirit of Christ is the one who unites us to Christ, as the body is united to the head. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the union that is made between Jesus Christ and his people. So that dwelling in him, as the head, and in us, as the members of the body, is this very same Spirit, this holy breath of God. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is he who unites us to Christ and applies Christ and all his benefits to us. So that walking after the Spirit or being after the Spirit or being in the Spirit means those who belong to Jesus Christ, who owe him our allegiance, who are his possession; and who are given that by the operation of the Spirit. The apostle says that those who are after the Spirit then, or the apostle means that those who are after the Spirit are those who are fully redeemed from sin. He's not talking about our life yet. Our life is coming and that life will be by faith. That life of sanctification will be by faith, just as much as our justification is by faith. But the apostle is not yet here speaking about our life.

He's still speaking about who owns us. And the one who owns us, the one who has the rights to us is the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is not a matter of the law, but this is a matter of the gospel. And the apostle has said that too in verse 2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." That "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is just another word for the gospel, describing the gospel as that which reigns, as that which has the authority to speak, as that which has the right to declare. So in that sense, it's a law but it's just the gospel that declares, as its message, Jesus Christ; and that gives them the Spirit and life. That is the gospel that declares to us, You are free. You are free from sin. You are free from its guilt. You are free from its bondage. You are dead to that sin. It is not your master. It does not own you. But you belong now to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what the gospel declares to the child of God, who knows it by faith and only by faith. Because when we look at ourselves yet, and see our pollution, our corruption, that sin principle, that still remains in us, it seems often times that we still owe our allegiance to sin. But it is not true. It is not true. You have no allegiance to sin. You are *not* the possession of sin. No matter what sin tries to tell you, no matter what your flesh tries to convince you of, you are *not* the possession of sin. You have been purchased. You have been redeemed. Your sins have been covered in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle brings up this matter of being after the flesh and after the Spirit, in order to demonstrate the main point that he is teaching in this text: that it is *impossible* for that *flesh* to be righteous before God. It is impossible that there be a flesh-righteousness; verse 8, as the apostle summarises and concludes the text, “So then they that are *in* the flesh *cannot* please God.” Those who belong to the flesh as their master, those who serve that flesh, those who have that flesh as their rightful lord, they *cannot* please God. They cannot measure up to God. They cannot have the declaration spoken to them, There is no condemnation. Those that are in the flesh cannot please God. What does it mean to please God? Scripture uses that in different ways, but here to please God means to do what God requires as what is right. That’s the whole context. Verse 4, “the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.” So pleasing God means doing what God says for righteousness; and verse 1, to escape condemnation. Those that are in the flesh cannot please God. They cannot do what the law requires. They cannot be righteous by their obedience. They cannot escape condemnation by what they do. Those that are in the flesh *cannot* please God. It is the impossibility of flesh-righteousness.

But now the apostle, in teaching this doctrine, uses very powerful language, and the apostle teaches a very strong doctrine. The powerful language that he uses is “cannot.” He does not say it is unlikely that those who are in the flesh would please God, but still possible. He does not say it will be very difficult, more difficult than otherwise for them to please God. He says they “cannot,” it is *impossible* for they that are in the flesh to please God. And the strength of this doctrine is, that the apostle is connecting here, in our text, what we are calling flesh-righteousness with law-righteousness and with works-righteousness. The apostle is saying, that if anyone ever anywhere would like to be righteous by works and wants to be righteous by the law, then you must be righteous by the flesh. You cannot speak of being righteous by works or righteous by keeping the law and talk about faith and talk about grace. You may not do it. You cannot do it. There is a connection between works-righteousness, law-righteousness, and flesh-righteousness. All of those belong together as the same kind of righteousness. It is the righteousness that will come out of the flesh, the righteousness that will be accomplished by our works, the righteousness that will be according to the law of God by our obedience. This text then gives a powerful answer to those who say that we are righteous by works or have assurance of our righteousness by works, but those works are all given by the grace of God. You may not talk that way. The apostle will not allow us to talk that way. When we speak of works-righteousness, when we speak of anything of our salvation coming to us by our labour according to the command of God, then you are speaking about a righteousness that must come out of you; come out of your flesh. It is a flesh-righteousness and a works-righteousness and a law-righteousness. That flesh-righteousness is impossible. The one who is bound to the flesh cannot please God. He *cannot*, he *cannot* be right before him. There is another righteousness. That other righteousness is not a works-righteousness, a law-righteousness or a flesh-righteousness. It is a righteousness outside of us, an alien righteousness. It is the righteousness of God. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is the righteousness announced in the gospel. It is the righteousness by faith. That’s the other righteousness. That is the only righteousness that pleases God and that answers to him. A flesh-righteousness is impossible, which means that all works-righteousness is absolutely condemned.

But now the apostle describes the *reason* why a flesh-righteousness is impossible. And this is instructive for the child of God, for the church of Jesus Christ. There is a reason why flesh-righteousness cannot be. The apostle describes the reason using the word “mind” and “minded.” And that’s a very important concept in the text. It’s a difficult concept to get a hold of at first. Not because there’s anything unclear about the text, but because we’re dealing here with the deep things of the application of salvation to the child of God; and we do not always pick up on that right

away. We do not always understand those things at first. The apostle is speaking of the *reason* that a flesh-righteousness is impossible by using the word “mind” and “minded.” Verse 5, “they that are after the flesh do *mind* the things of the flesh.” Verse 6, “for to be carnally *minded* is death.” Verse 7, “because the carnal *mind* is enmity against God.” Now, in order to bring out the meaning of that word “mind” and “minded” that the apostle is using, it is actually helpful to use a little bit different translation than verses 6 and 7. In verse 6, we read, “For to be carnally minded is death.” But more literally, that reads, “For the minding of the flesh is death.” It’s the very same kind of construction as we have in verse 5, “they that are after the flesh do *mind* the things of the flesh.” That’s the construction, *minding* the things of the flesh. That’s the same construction the apostle will use in verses 6 and 7. For to mind the things of the flesh is death, verse 6. And the minding of the flesh is enmity against God, verse 7. This is the concept that the apostle is developing. It is this idea of minding the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit.

What does the apostle mean by *minding* the things of the flesh? Well, the apostle means this, that what you think, what you know, what you feel, what you perceive, what you apprehend, what you gravitate towards, what you lean into, what you choose, all of those activities of the mind, all of that is flesh. He who is after the flesh knows, thinks, understands nothing but the flesh. We can illustrate that using that language of master and slave again that the apostle is working with. The apostle has described the slave to the flesh as one who walks after the flesh. That’s quite a picture there. In our minds is that master walking along ahead. And right behind him, following his every step, is that slave who belongs to that master, who has no right to turn around and leave that master, but walks right behind that master. What does that slave see? What fills his vision? What fills his ears? What fills his mind? His master. That’s all he knows. What? Walking after that master. That’s all he can see walking after that master. “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh.” And what does the flesh know? The flesh doesn’t know anything. The flesh doesn’t know God. The flesh doesn’t know Christ. The flesh does not know heaven. The flesh does not know righteousness. The flesh thinks it knows everything. But the flesh is empty of knowledge. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh. It is blindness. It is deafness. It is spiritual insensitivity. That’s those who walk after the flesh. And now we have a word for that. We have a word for that kind of minding. And it is *unbelief*. That’s the word. That’s what the apostle is describing. That’s the concept that he’s developing. You can follow that right through. They that are after the flesh do not believe the gospel. They do not have faith. They mind the things of the flesh. That’s all they know. Verse 6, for the minding of the flesh is death; or substitute unbelief, for unbelief is death. Verse 7, because unbelief is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. The apostle by this idea of minding is speaking of the unbelief of those who are slaves to the flesh.

The apostle speaks also of those who are after the Spirit, the elect children of God, who are redeemed by the blood of Christ from their bondage to the flesh, and who now belong to Jesus Christ, which is marvellous liberty in the gospel. They mind the things of the Spirit. What is it to mind the things of the Spirit? Well, here we are. There in front of us is our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been united to him, so that what we see is what Christ sees. What we know is what Christ knows. What we hear is what Christ hears. He fills our vision. What we know is heaven. What we know is righteousness. What we know is eternal life. We mind those things. We understand those things, not because we are so brilliant, but we understand them spiritually. And we have a word for that, too. It’s called *belief* or *faith*. The apostle is describing the faith of those who are redeemed from their sin and death through the blood of Christ. They know him. They see him. They understand him. And you can follow that right through as well. Verse 5, “they that are after the Spirit [believe],” and they know

those things of the Spirit. To believe is life and peace. The child of God redeemed from his sin is given this gift of faith.

Now the apostle says regarding those who mind the things of the flesh because they are after the flesh, that they have in them condemnation. That's the word that must be spoken concerning them. Verse 6, "for to be carnally minded," or literally, the minding of the flesh, or using our word, that concept word for unbelief, "is death." The law comes to those who do not believe, and the law says, You are condemned. The law comes to those who belong to the flesh, and it says, You must die. You must belong to that flesh and you may not be delivered from it. We could imagine it this way, that the police receive a report that there is a group of criminals who are meeting together. These criminals are all assembled in one place, and so the police break through the door, burst into the room and arrest those criminals and say to them, You are condemned for your crimes. That's the idea of this law that bursts into the room of sinners, and declares to those sinners who are after the flesh, You must die. You are condemned.

But not so for the people of God. "To be spiritually minded," or the minding of the Spirit, or faith, "is life and peace." There the law has nothing to say. There, only the gospel may speak. The law of sin and death may not declare any verdict concerning you whatsoever. It may not speak concerning you. It must be silent. Only "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" may speak, and that is the word of the gospel. To use that illustration of the police breaking into a room: let's say that the law heard that there was a group of sinners assembled, and indeed there is, for here assembled this morning is a group of sinners, and the law, gathering its forces outside the door of the room, would kick the door in and break into the room, and spring upon the sinners who are meeting. And as the law looked at those sinners, the law must fall silent. The law may not say anything to those sinners who are assembled there. For there in their midst is the Lord Jesus Christ. The law may not say, You are condemned. There is only this, "*no* condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," but righteousness and righteousness alone. The law already had its say about your sin. It had its say about your sin in the hands and the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. The law had its say about your sin and the nails that were driven through his hands and feet. The law had its say about your sin in the blood that poured from the body of the Lord, in his broken body and his shed blood. The law had its say about your sin. And now the law has *no more* to say about your sin forevermore. The only thing that there is to say about your sin is that it's forgiven. That's what faith knows. That's what faith sees, beholding the Lord Jesus Christ and his perfect righteousness. When the law breaks into the room, its mouth falls silent. But the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ speaks and says, "Neither do I condemn thee." Neither do I condemn thee. There is no condemnation to you who are in me.

Faith knows that. Unbelief does not. Unbelief, verse 7, the minding of the flesh is enmity against God. That's all unbelief can do. It has to be the enemy of God. There can be no flesh-righteousness because unbelief is not subject to the law. Unbelief can only ever hear condemnation from the law. There is no works-righteousness because righteousness can only be by faith. This is the comfort of the child of God; the great comfort. The apostle rules out flesh-righteousness. But there is another righteousness, a righteousness that is not out of our flesh, a righteousness that does not arise from us in the slightest, not at all. It is a righteousness external to us. The righteousness of another, the righteousness of Jesus Christ who obeyed the law and who suffered the curse of the law, in his people's behalf. There is that righteousness. It is not a flesh-righteousness, but a Christ righteousness. It is not a works-righteousness, but a faith righteousness. It is not the righteousness of the law, but the righteousness of the gospel. It is the righteousness that is declared as the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ to his people. That is the righteousness that we have. It is impossible

that there be a flesh-righteousness. So don't seek a flesh-righteousness. And let the church of Jesus Christ never introduce as cruelty to the people that there's a flesh-righteousness for them, some works that they must perform, in order to be right with God. How cruel, how wicked, how contrary to the gospel. There is a righteousness that the gospel announces. Do not substitute for it a flesh-righteousness. And that righteousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the righteousness of Christ himself, is ours by the Spirit who unites us to Christ and gives to us faith, so that we who belong to him, by his blood, know him and know the things of the Spirit, and know the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a glorious tour the apostle is taking us on in Romans 8. What a glorious tour the Holy Spirit gives to us. It is a comfort tour and that comfort tour has this message at its heart: There is no condemnation to you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Our father which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word to us this morning, blessed to our hearts. Wilt thou give to us the comfort and peace of our righteousness in Jesus Christ? And we pray that thou would also keep us from all flesh-righteousness, and preserve us from that error. We thank thee for the gospel. We thank thee for its good news. Wilt thou comfort our hearts by it? Forgive our sins and keep us from sin, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Romans 8:9–11. The In-Dwelling Spirit (06.28.2026; 1st service)

Reading: Romans 8:1–39

Praise: Psalms 102:1–10; 102:11–16; 102:17–22; 102:23–28

1. His Identity
2. His Gift
3. His Life

The text that we consider this morning is verses 9–11. “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul has opened this eighth chapter of the book of Romans with the resounding declaration of the gospel, that “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” That is the truth of the gospel for you. That is the truth of the gospel for all of God’s elect people. There is no condemnation to you in the Lord Jesus Christ. The condemnation that should have fallen upon you and me fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ in our place, so that there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle has developed this grand resounding declaration of the gospel, he has spoken often of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He speaks of the Spirit in verse 1, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” He speaks of the Spirit in verse 2, “for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” He speaks of the Spirit in verse 4, walking “after the Spirit.” He speaks of the Spirit in verse 5, the minding “the things of the Spirit.” Verse 6, the minding of the Spirit “is life and peace.” The apostle has spoken often of the Spirit. And as the apostle has spoken of the Spirit, he has followed the legal or the judicial line with regard to that Spirit. He speaks of being after the Spirit or walking after the Spirit or being in the Spirit; all of which refer to the same reality. And the reality is this, that we have been purchased from sin and death by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we belong to Jesus Christ as his possession; and belonging to Jesus Christ as his possession, “there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.”

Now in the text before us this morning, the apostle advances this line of thinking, by explaining how it is that we came to be the possession of Christ. He’s been speaking of possession, legal possession by the Lord Jesus Christ. And now he explains how it is that we came to be the possession of Christ. The doctrine of our belonging to Jesus Christ, in the first place, is that Jesus purchased us by his blood. All of that stands as the background to all of this doctrine. It stands as the constant light that shines forth from all of this doctrine. The Lord Jesus Christ has purchased us by his blood. And the Lord Jesus Christ, having purchased us by his blood, takes possession of those whom he has purchased by his Holy Spirit. And that’s what we see in verse 9, as the apostle makes a transition from this following after the Spirit or walking after the Spirit or this matter of possession, to this matter of having his claim upon us and having taken possession of us. He says you are “not in the flesh.” That means you do not belong to the flesh as the possession of the flesh. But you are “*in* the Spirit.” That means you belong to the Spirit as the possession of the Spirit, by the blood of Jesus Christ. And now the apostle says, “if so be that the Spirit of God *dwell* in you.” The Holy Spirit here, through the apostle Paul, teaches the doctrine of the *in-dwelling Spirit*. The apostle teaches us that the Spirit *lives* and *abides* in the hearts of the elect people of God, and that, it is that living and abiding in the hearts of the elect people of God, by which Christ who has purchased us by his blood

takes possession of us as his own; the end of verse 9, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” none of his possession. That is, so that in verse 9, we see this transition that the apostle is making from walking after the Spirit, that is, being the possession of the Spirit, to those who have the Spirit dwelling in us, living in us.

The doctrine of the text and the theme of the text then is *the in-dwelling Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ*. And that is a marvellous reality. It really is too much for us to take in, because the apostle, who has been talking about the Spirit and mentioning that Spirit in almost every verse, now says to the members of the church of Jesus Christ, That spirit that I’m talking about, I’m going to tell you who he is. He is the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit of Christ. And he lives in you. He abides in you. And no one can take him away. He lives with you and will give unto you every single thing that Christ purchased for you. Your body now is dead because of sin, but your Spirit is life because of righteousness. But I say unto you that that Spirit of Christ that dwells in you, he will raise you from the dead. And God who gave you that Spirit through Christ, he will raise you from the dead. Your mortal bodies shall be raised, so that every single thing that the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased shall be delivered unto you certainly. And that’s true of God’s people. They have the Spirit dwelling in them. That’s a marvellous thing. We who are so sinful, we who are so weak, we who are so earthly, we who are so mortal, we who are dying every day, we have the Spirit dwelling in us. And that’s true of your neighbour. That’s true of your brother in the Lord Jesus Christ as well. He too has that Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in him. So that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of this constant dying and the constant discouragement, that is this earthly life, has this blessed news of the gospel, that the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ lives in me and will surely deliver unto me everything that the Lord has purchased for me. That is marvellous. That is comfort that restores the life and the comfort and the happiness of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, this morning, we consider this text under the theme The In-Dwelling Spirit. In the first place, consider his identity. In the second place, consider his gift. And in the third place, consider his life. The In-Dwelling Spirit; his identity, his gift and his life.

Let us begin then with the identity of this in-dwelling Spirit. In these three verses that make up our text, the apostle refers to the Spirit seven times. He refers to the Spirit using different terms and different descriptions, but he refers to the Spirit seven times. And in all seven of those references, he is describing the same essential entity. He is describing the Spirit. It is no accident that the apostle refers to the Spirit seven times in this text. Often the Spirit is connected with the number seven. In Revelation 1:4, for example, we read of “the seven Spirits which are before” the throne of God. And then again in Revelation 4:5, we read of “seven lamps” which are the seven Spirits which are before the throne of God. And again in Revelation [5:6], we read of the “seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits.” The Holy Spirit is connected with the number seven. Now in the book of Revelation, those seven Spirits are just the one Spirit of God. And those seven lamps and those eyes, those all refer to the one Spirit that is the Holy Spirit of God. But he’s described as the seven Spirits and the seven lamps, because that number seven indicates covenant fellowship, covenant dwelling, covenant abiding. So that, when the apostle Paul, in our text in Romans 8:9–11, makes seven references to the Spirit, that is no accident; but is meant to describe and reinforce to the church the covenant dwelling of God with his people in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Let us find those seven references in our text. First of all, in verse 9, Paul says, “Ye are... *in* the Spirit.” There’s his first reference. And there’s where he is making the transition from us being *after* the Spirit or us *walking after* the Spirit. That is, us being the legal possession of the Lord Jesus Christ by his

Spirit and according to his Spirit through his blood, to the Spirit taking possession of us by *dwelling* in us. You are in the Spirit, he says first. Now second, “if so be that *the Spirit of God* dwell in you.” Now this Spirit is called “the Spirit of God.” Then again in verse 9, “if any man have not *the Spirit of Christ*, he is none of his.” And it’s evident that the Spirit of Christ is the very same as the Spirit of God, because being none of Christ’s is the same as not being in the Spirit. So that it’s the same essential reference here. Then strikingly, in verse 10, the apostle refers to the Spirit using the name “Christ.” We shall see the reason for that shortly, Lord willing. But for now, just note that that name Christ is the fourth reference to the Spirit in our text. The fifth reference is at the end of verse 10, “the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” There’s a question whether to capitalise the word “Spirit” there or leave it all lowercase. What spirit is being referred to? The Holy Spirit who is divine with a capital-S, or our spirit which is not divine with a small-S. We’ll look at that too, Lord willing, shortly, but for now recognise that that’s the fifth reference to the Spirit in the text. And then in verse 11, “if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you”; and then the seventh reference at the end of verse 11, “he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by *his Spirit* that dwelleth in you.” All these references, in this compact text, seven references to the Holy Spirit.

What is the identity of this Spirit that the apostle is speaking of? The identity of this Spirit, in the first place, is that this is the Spirit of God. This is the third person of the Trinity. That reference is evident in verse 9, “in the Spirit” which is the Spirit of God; and “*the Spirit of God* dwell in you,” in verse 9. And then again in verse 11, “the Spirit of *him* that raised up Jesus from the dead.” Well, he that raised up Jesus from the dead is God. So that it is his Spirit. The first identification of this Spirit is that he is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the first person, the Father, and with the second person, the Son. In the second place, the identification of the Spirit is that he is the Spirit of Christ. That’s in verse 9, “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” This refers to the same entity, the same person, that is, that third person of the Trinity. But now it refers to that Spirit as the Spirit that is *given to the Lord Jesus Christ to be his own Spirit*. It is the third person, as that third person is given by the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to Jesus Christ; and that Spirit is *given* to the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that that Spirit belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, according to his human nature. Jesus’ human nature, Jesus as the mediator, Jesus as the Saviour, Jesus as the servant of God who is raised to the right hand of God, is given the Spirit as his own Spirit. There is mystery here that is beyond our ability to grasp; just as in the truth of the Trinity, there are depths that we cannot fathom, just as in the truth of Jesus’ incarnation, there are depths that we cannot fathom. God becoming flesh; so also in the giving of the Spirit to Jesus Christ as his own personal Spirit, as the mediator, so that Jesus, as that mediator according to his human nature, has that Spirit to send and to give as he will. There are mysteries in this. But this is the word of God in Acts 2. When Peter preached at Pentecost, he explained the outpouring of the Spirit from heaven as that which the ascended Jesus Christ, who had been in the grave, but who was raised from the grave, and ascended into heaven; that Jesus Christ was given by God the promise of the Spirit. And being given by God the promise of the Spirit, he poured it out upon the church. And the evidence of that Spirit, in that apostolic age, were seen. This Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. And this Spirit as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is so closely connected to Christ, so closely united to him as his own, that when you have one, you have the other. When you have the Spirit of Christ, you have Christ. And when you have Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ. That is why the apostle, in verse 10, refers to this entity, the same entity throughout, as Christ. And it’s evident that the apostle is referring to the same reality, because throughout he’s speaking of the Spirit of God dwelling in you, the Spirit of Christ abiding in you. And now he says that this is Christ being in you. The Spirit belongs

to Jesus Christ without confusion of the persons. This giving of the Spirit to Christ did not make an identity out of the second and the third person. The second person is still the second person. The third person is still the third person. But the Spirit was given to Christ, and has all of the blessings of Christ to give to his church, and is united to Christ so closely, that when that Spirit is given to you, that's Christ being given to you. And when you have one, you have the other.

Then in the third place, the identity of this Spirit who is, in the first place, the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, who is, in the second place, the Spirit of Christ given to him. In the third place, this Spirit is the Spirit of Christ that he has poured out upon his church. So that the Spirit of Christ in his church here in this room, in the hearts of his people and among the communion of the assembly of the people of God, as a whole, that Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. It belongs to him, and he has now poured it out upon us and given that Spirit to us. This is the Spirit that we are talking about. The Spirit is God. This Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this Spirit is given unto you.

Now the apostle's emphasis with regard to this Spirit is that he is the *in-dwelling* Spirit. The apostle is not giving some abstract explanation of who the Spirit is. He is saying the Spirit of God lives with you. The spirit of Christ is *in* you. Jesus Christ himself by that Spirit is in you. The apostle is teaching that this Spirit is an in-dwelling Spirit, and he makes many references to that as well. Verse 9, "the Spirit of God dwell[s] in you." The apostle uses a very strong word there. It is the word for house⁴. The same word for house. What happens in a house? You live in a house. Wherever your house is, whether that is a flat, whether a condo, whether anything else, where you live is your house. What happens in your house is that you dwell there, you sleep there, you eat there, you come back to that house after your work is finished. That house is where people live. And the Holy Spirit now, through the apostle Paul, uses that word for house to describe this dwelling, "the Spirit of God dwell[s] in you." The apostle says, next in verse 9, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ," but then by implication, if any man *have* the Spirit of Christ, so that the Spirit of Christ is in your possession, not as if we are the lords and masters over that Spirit, not at all; but we have that, we own that Spirit as our own. He speaks, in verse 10, using a very powerful preposition, the word "*in*." "If Christ be *in* you," there is an *in-dwelling*, an abiding in. That's hard for us to fathom too. It's beyond what we can comprehend. But "*in* you" right now, *in* you, you human being, you elect child of God, human being that are sitting there, *in* you is the Spirit of God. He lives in you. You're his home. He dwells in you. And by that, Christ dwells in you.

And then, in verse 11, the apostle uses that same idea of dwelling and in again. But here, in verse 11, the apostle uses a word that puts the preposition and the word *house* together. So that, whereas before it was just the word *house* and then later the word *in*, now we have those words smashed together as one word, an *in-dwelling* Spirit, a Spirit who dwells *inside* of his people. The emphasis of the apostle throughout this text is that this Spirit of God is the in-dwelling Spirit. And the question that the child of God immediately has is, Where? Where in me does the Spirit dwell? I have a hard time understanding this. This whole matter of the Spirit in-dwelling in me is mysterious to me. I have a hard time fathoming it. I have a hard time comprehending exactly what it means. Where in me does this Spirit dwell? And the answer to that is in verse 10, "the Spirit is life because of righteousness." And here comes this question, What we're supposed to do with that word "spirit"? It seems quite evident from the context that the apostle is referring to something of ours, because in the first part of verse 10, he speaks of our body. Our "body is dead because of sin." And now there's

⁴ [transcriber's note: The Greek for "dwell" there is *οικει* (root, *οικεω*); meaning to occupy a house, i.e., reside (figuratively, inhabit, remain, inhere); by implication, to cohabit: dwell. Its 9 occurrences are translated "dwell."]

some other part of us that contrasts with that dead body. And that other part of us that contrasts would be a living spirit. So that the spiritual life within us, that inner man,—someone might even say the soul within us,—might be referred to here. The body is dead because of sin, but my spirit in me is life because of righteousness. And if that were the case, then we would want to put a lowercase-s for the word “spirit” there to refer to our spirit. But when the King James translation puts an uppercase-S for the word “Spirit,” it is correctly identifying that Spirit, the Spirit that we are talking about that is alive in us is that Spirit of Christ. It is that Spirit of God.

We might use the word “heart,” and the Bible uses that word “heart” in other places to describe the reality of what is being described by the word “spirit” here. Our heart is the spiritual centre of a man. From a man’s heart proceed the issues of life, as the Proverbs [4:23] teach us. So that the heart is the spiritual core, the spiritual kernel, the spiritual centre, of a man. When that spiritual core is a stony heart, then that man is dead, spiritually dead. He very much is alive in his body. It appears he’s very much alive in his inner life. He goes places. He has thoughts and plans. But that man with a dead heart, with a stony heart, is spiritually dead. God performs the wonder work upon his people of giving to us a new heart, a living heart, a spiritual heart, a heart of flesh. We call that work of God the work of regeneration. That work of regeneration does not take away our totally depraved nature. We remain totally depraved. But that work of regeneration gives to us a *new* spiritual centre, a new spiritual heart; so that just as your physical heart is a kind of centre of all of the life in your body, so that new spiritual heart is the centre, the spiritual centre, of a man. And now here we have the identity of that heart, that regenerated heart. That regenerated heart is the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Christ. Your spiritual centre is the Spirit. We’ve seen that in other passages. You can find that in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. When those prophets speak of the heart transplant, the taking away of the stony heart and the giving them a heart of flesh, then in the very same breath, those prophets say, “And I will put my spirit within [them]” [Ezek 36:27]. That transplant of a heart is the placing of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ in us. So that the spiritual centre of the child of God is Christ. It’s Christ. That’s verse 10, “if Christ be in you,” Christ is in you. He’s in you as your heart. He’s in you as your spiritual centre, because this spiritual centre is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. And having one, you have the other. The child of God has a very difficult time understanding this. It’s true. It’s simple. And yet, when we start to try to pry into our own inner life and discover all what is in there, we find that the heart of man is deep and even desperately wicked. That’s the corrupt nature that we have yet, so that we can become confused looking inside. But hear the truth of the gospel. Hear the truth of what the apostle teaches, that Christ is in you. Christ is in you and “the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is that spiritual centre.

There are other descriptions in the word of God that can help us understand this truth. Regeneration is one of them. That regeneration is the giving of a new life. And it’s not some new life out of me, but it is the life of Jesus Christ himself. Another theological term that can help us is the mystical union. The mystical union refers to our connection to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we are one organism with him. He is the head. We are members of the body. He is the root of the vine. We are the branches on that vine, where there is a union, a real union, so that what belongs to Christ is ours and what belongs to us is Christ’s. Well, the location of that union in the being of the child of God is our heart, where that Spirit is life because of righteousness. Another description that we could use to help understand this is simply faith. Faith according to its essence as a bond. Faith in its essence is a union. Faith is a graft. Faith is a bond between us and Christ. So that there is a real connection between Christ and us. The Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord’s Day 7, Question and Answer 20, speaks of that that essential bond of faith that we are engrafted into Christ “by a true faith.” The child of

God has, as his spiritual heart, the Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ. *Christ is in you*. And that's the covenant. That's covenant fellowship. The Holy Spirit here uses house words, home words, dwelling words, in order to impress upon his church, I am with you. I dwell with you. The Spirit of God dwells in you. The Spirit of Christ is in you. Christ himself is in you. The Spirit of God indwells you. And that Spirit of God will never remove. He will never be taken away. He cannot be taken away. Men can take many, many things away from you. Men can take away all your possessions. Men can take away your freedom, and they can take away your life. But they cannot take that Spirit of Christ from out of your heart. Christ is in you. He dwells with you. He abides with you. He is the in-dwelling Spirit.

The apostle speaks of this in-dwelling Spirit according to the idea of a gift, so that we must understand with regard to this in-dwelling Spirit the matter of the gift or his gift. And we mean two things by the idea of his gift. First of all, the Spirit himself is a gift. And secondly, the Spirit carries with him a gift. The Spirit is a gift and the Spirit carries a gift. The Spirit is a gift from Christ, and the Spirit carries with him the gift of Christ; so that the Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ, and to have one is to have the other; as soon as we talk about the gift, we are talking about Jesus Christ.

Let us consider, in the first place, then, the matter of the Spirit himself being a gift to us, a gift from Jesus Christ. That is taught in a marvellous way in verse 10, "if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." The Spirit is life because of righteousness. Remember the Spirit there means the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ, as that Spirit is given to us to be our spiritual centre and our spiritual heart. And what does the apostle say about that living Spirit who abides there in our hearts and who is our heart? He says that, that Spirit is life *because of righteousness*. Because of righteousness. And with those words of the apostle, he carries us to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and stands us before that cross, in order to behold the transaction that was accomplished there. The transaction that was accomplished is this: That your sins which were a great mountain and my sins, your iniquities and my corruption, was all lifted from us and laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ; that that sin, that pollution, that corruption, was laid upon him in all of its guilt, that he might suffer and die, paying the penalty of what that guilt deserves. There you stand. There I stand at the cross. Look at yourself there and let me look at myself there. You with your totally depraved nature and me with mine, that is capable of the most awful sins, perhaps even that you did not think yourself and I did not think myself capable of, all of the hatred of God all, of the hatred of the neighbour, all of the self-serving, all of it, there at the cross. And what does God do? God says to Jesus, I have somewhat against thee. And what I have against thee is all their sins, of all my elect people, I hold you responsible, Jesus, for you are their head. I lay all the guilt of these sins upon you, and I curse you for them. And the Lord drank in the whole cup of that curse, which did not pass from him; but which was given him to drink to the dregs. The Lord Jesus Christ having suffered the infinite curse of the infinite God, compacted into that space of a few hours and a lifetime, bore that curse away, so that that curse is entirely exhausted with regard to us. Or, to put it positively, God's justice is satisfied. God says those sins have been paid for; there is *nothing* more to pay, even if you would come to me, my people, and say, I want to pay for my sins. First of all, I would say, That's impossible. But second, I would say, There's nothing to pay; there's no sins left to pay. The Lord Jesus Christ has paid for them all. Look at yourself there again at Calvary again. Look at how you appear now, washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are righteous. You stand there clothed in a white robe that has been dipped in the blood of the Lamb. There is no sin to see upon you. No spot of it, no condemnation that could possibly be spoken against you. Though you stood before the bar of justice of the holy God himself, the declaration that rings out from Calvary into the hearing of

your ears and mine is this, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

What does it mean that there is "no condemnation"? It means that you are righteous. You are righteous, not for your sakes and me not for my sake, but for Jesus' sake. We are righteous. And being righteous, we have the right to this Spirit, "the Spirit is life because of righteousness," the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how that Spirit is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church. He purchased that Spirit for you by his death upon the cross. This is the answer that we give to our conscience. And this is the answer that we give to every accusation that says, But I am not worthy. I of all men am not worthy that the Lord Jesus Christ should live with me. He has to depart from me, for I am a sinful man. I am not worthy that his Spirit would take up his abode with me. The answer that must be given to the conscience and to every accusation is this, But I am righteous in Christ. I have a right to that Spirit, not because I'm entitled to it in myself, not because I'm worthy of it in myself. I have a right to that Spirit because of Jesus Christ and his cross. That's the gift, Jesus' gift of the Spirit to his church through his cross.

But then, we can also speak of the gift that the Spirit brings. The Spirit *is* himself personally a gift given by the Lord Jesus Christ through his righteousness. The Spirit also brings a gift. When Jesus Christ pours that Spirit out upon his church and gives you that Spirit as your spiritual centre, as your heart, that Spirit brings something to you. And that something can be summarised in one word, even though that one word has riches that will be unfolded to all eternity and that one word is this, *Christ*. That's what the Spirit brings to you. That's the gift that the Spirit brings. He brings *Christ* to you, so that you have Christ as your own. As the apostle says, in verse 10, "Christ be in you." He's in you because the Spirit has been brought to you. All the blessings that belong to the Lord Jesus Christ are yours. The blessings that you have now. You have spiritual life now. You're alive. You have righteousness now. You have covenant fellowship with God now. You have the assurance that you are the son of God. As the apostle will say, in a few verses, you have the Spirit's intercession for you and Jesus' intercession for you. You have the promise of all things. Everything that belongs to Christ is now yours by the gift of the Spirit; all these things that are now, and you have things to come from Christ that belong to him. And the apostle speaks of that too in verse 11, "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." It's hard for the church to fathom this because this is so great. We have Christ and we have everything that belongs to Christ; that's ours, that's our own indeed; it is by the gift of the Spirit.

To try to illustrate, that we could imagine it this way, that there is a prince who is the heir to a grand kingdom in a far-off country. That kingdom is full of the most magnificent riches. The palace in that kingdom is a wonder of the whole world. And that prince, according to his own will and according to the will of his father who is the king, has set his love upon a poor little girl far away in another land. A girl who is not beautiful. A girl whose face is disfigured with sores and with all manner of disease. A girl who has nothing that she could possibly give to that prince, in order to attract him or draw his love. And that girl in the far-off country is the church. And that prince who is the Lord Jesus Christ, according to his Father's will, loves her. And that prince gave his life for her. And now says to her, You are my bride. We are to be married. And everything that I possess is yours. And now, that prince sends his porter, sends his man, to take to that girl all manner of the treasures of the kingdom, as the promise of what she shall have when they are married, and she is brought into the kingdom and the palace of her lord husband. So that in that girl's life, every day anew comes a new gift, treasures and riches, silks and glorious carpets and demonstrations and jewels. All of them coming to her day after

day. Salves to heal her wounds and to give unto her beauty. All of this is given unto that girl. And as the gifts come, never, never does the prince say to her through his servants, Now you owe me. You have to pay something before I give you this gift. Before you have the jewels, you have to pay part of the price. Never. They're given freely and graciously unto her.

That's such a weak illustration, but maybe to help us understand what the wonder of having this Spirit who brings to us Christ is, the Spirit is like that porter, like that man of the prince who brings daily to the prince's bride all manner of the riches of his kingdom. He brings to us the knowledge of our righteousness. He brings to us the assurance that we belong to him. He brings to us the comfort for he is the Comforter. And where the illustration especially limps, but where the reality is glorious is, that all of that sending of all of those gifts is not merely the gift of a thing and another thing and another thing; but is the gift of the prince himself. For the Spirit carries the Lord Jesus Christ to us and all of his blessings, so that we not only have the righteousness of Christ, we have Christ. We not only have the assurance from Christ, we have Christ. The Spirit brings to us all of Jesus Christ and all of his gifts.

And here the child of God, who has that spiritual centre of the Spirit, and who has the Lord Jesus Christ and all of his wonders, wakes up and dies, wakes up and dies this day again and the next day again. And lives his whole life in the midst of this world, lying in the midst of death, lying in the midst of his sin, and finds his life here below to be nothing but a continual death. Nothing but a continual death. The gift of the Spirit which is the gift of Christ is that he comforts you and he comforts me in the midst of your dying too. Our Sacrament Forms teach us about this. The Baptism Form says that this life is nothing but a continual death. The Lord's Supper Form says that we lie in the midst of death. That's our life here. That's our experience here.

And the apostle brings that up too. He says in verse 10, "the body is dead because of sin." That's simply the reality. The body is dead because of sin, the body through which you live your life, the body through which that inner man, that is, your person, sees everything. He sees through this body's eyes. He hears through this body's ears. He works through this body's hands and walks through this body's feet. And this body is dead. And the testimony of the death of this body is, that I have sinned. I have sinned and I continue to sin. And yes, those sins are washed away in the blood of Christ. Not one of them can be attached to me again. There is no condemnation for me. But the dying of my body is a testimony that I have fallen in Adam. The apostle says in verse 11, that our bodies are mortal, "your mortal bodies." And mortal means subject to death. Mortal means that someday, when the measure of the days that the Lord has appointed to you is full, that this body is going to die. And as one has said, Your death will not be this, that your spirit leaves your body and then your body dies as a result; but this that your body dies. It is a mortal body. It is subject to death. And when you come to the measure of the days the Lord has appointed, that body will cease to work. There will be no more sight through the eyes and no more hearing through the ears and no more working through the hands. That body will cease to work. It will be dead. And then your soul will leave and be taken by God to glory in that very moment. The body is a mortal body. It is a body that is subject to death. And not only in the day, when the measure of your days is full, do you die, but you die while you live and I die while I live. Our whole life is nothing but a continual death. Oh, how foolish we are. Oh, how foolish men are, when we fight tooth and nail for that mortal life, when we think that the pinnacle of what is good is to gain this life and to gain this world and all of its things that are mortal.

The high and glorious life of the child of God is *not* this mortal life. These bodies are mortal. They are subject to dying, and we must learn to die in our bodies. Here we lie in the midst of death in nothing but a continual death. And yet we have the whole of the kingdom of heaven, which is the kingdom of Christ's, and which he has graciously given to us according to the Father's will and through his cross by which he has purchased it. The Lord Jesus Christ has given us all of that. And the apostle's point here, as he speaks of our mortal bodies, is to say to us, So sure is this blessing of all the salvation that is in Christ that even your mortal bodies, which die every day, shall be *quicken*ed in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you want proof that your body shall be raised, not to live here on the earth anymore, this old earth, this mortal earth; but to live in the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells, where with your eyes you will see the things that by now you only see by faith, and with your ears you will hear the things that now you only hear by faith. If you want proof of this, then you go to the grave of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find it is empty. There is no one lying there. The Lord Jesus Christ has arisen from the dead. He, that is the king, has raised Christ by the power of the Spirit that now dwells in you. And therefore, he will by that same Spirit raise your mortal bodies in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you have all of this, because there is no condemnation to you who are in Christ Jesus. It is marvellous, is it not? It is wonderful, too great to fathom, but very comforting for the heart of the child of God; that we who are nothing, we who are low, we who live in the midst of death, have dwelling in us by the will of God and according to the righteousness of Christ, the in-dwelling Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that Christ is in us and so that we have all things that belong to our Saviour.

Here is the gospel for God's weary people. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word to us this morning. Wilt thou bless it to our hearts, and give us the comfort and the peace of our Saviour and his gospel? Forgive our sins, wash them away in Jesus' blood, and comfort us by thy Spirit who dwells within us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Romans 8:12–13. Debtors, Not to the Flesh (07.05.2026)

Reading: Romans 8:1–18

Praise: Psalms 3:1–8; 4:1–5; 4:6–8

1. The Truth
2. The Privilege
3. The Grace

Our text this morning is verses 12 and 13. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

In our text this morning, the apostle continues his comfort tour in Romans 8. The apostle has begun with the resounding declaration, that “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” And building upon that truth of our righteousness in Christ, and the fact that there is no condemnation to us in Christ, the apostle launches a tour of all things, in order to show us the comfort that belongs to those who are justified by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ. In our text, it is evident that the apostle comes to a sort of conclusion. It is not his final conclusion of this comfort tour, but it is, nevertheless, a waypoint on this comfort tour. And, it is evident that the apostle draws a conclusion, because of the word, “therefore,” which begins verse 12. “*Therefore*, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” Those connecting words are important, in order to show us the relationships between the truth and the doctrine that the apostle is teaching. As we will see later in the text as well, the connecting words are very important for a right understanding of the text. Here, in our text, the apostle begins with the connecting word, “therefore.” And that means that the apostle is drawing a certain conclusion of this truth, that there is no condemnation in Christ, that that condemnation came through the atonement of Christ, and not by the law, that that righteousness did not come by the flesh, or by our obedience. But that this righteousness came from Christ alone. And that, on the basis of that righteousness, we have the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling within us. The apostle takes all of that and he draws a certain conclusion.

Now, the conclusion that the apostle draws is an *unexpected* conclusion. There is something surprising about it. What we would expect the apostle to say, at this point in his conclusion is, Therefore, brethren, ye ought *not* be debtors to the flesh. Or, we would expect him to say, Therefore, brethren, you must *not* live after the flesh. Or, we would expect him to say, Therefore, brethren, you *must* mortify the deeds of the body. We would expect the apostle, in his conclusion, to make an exhortation, to give a command, to show us the life of gratitude that we are to live to God. The apostle often draws those kinds of conclusions, and he does that often even in the book of Romans. The apostle is going to do that later in chapter 12, where he is going to say, after teaching the whole truth of election and reprobation, and the sovereign good pleasure of God in saving his people; he is going to say, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The apostle’s conclusion with the “therefore,” in chapter 12:1, is an exhortation, on the basis of the gospel, to live in gratitude to God. The apostle has made that kind of conclusion already in the passages that we have seen in Romans 6, for example, verse 12. After the apostle has taught that we are dead to sin by the death of Jesus Christ, he concludes, verses 12–13, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof, Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” The apostle often, after teaching the doctrine of the gospel,

will conclude with an exhortation to the people of God to live as befits that doctrine, that is, to live a grateful life of good works unto God.

That's what we would expect here, when we come to this waypoint in the chapter, in the eighth chapter. The apostle uses the same word, "therefore." But the apostle *does not* give an exhortation. And that's especially unexpected and especially surprising, because most of the time this text is heard but as an exhortation. It is heard even by us as an exhortation. If I would ask you to just remember what you have heard of the text, without looking at the text again, and tell me whether the text declares something, or whether the text commands something, very likely, our answer would be, The text commands something. It sounded like an exhortation. There was something about being a debtor to the flesh, about not being a debtor to the flesh. There was something about not living after the flesh. There was something about, if you live after the flesh, you shall die, but if you, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, then ye shall live. It *sounds* like an exhortation. We hear it as an exhortation, but it is not an exhortation. Nowhere in this text, does the apostle say, Now this is the way that I command you to live in gratitude. Rather, the text, rightly understood, is another declaration. It is a continued declaration of the gospel, that the apostle has been declaring throughout chapter 8, and back into chapter 7, and chapter 6, and chapter 5. It is the declaration of our belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ, of our having been redeemed by him, and therefore being his possession; so that we are not the possession of sin. We are dead to sin. We are not the possession of the flesh. We are dead to the flesh, even though the flesh is not dead to us, and the flesh is very much alive to us. We are dead to that flesh.

The text before us is not an exhortation, but it is a declaration of the good news of the gospel. And, the good news of the gospel is this, My brethren, knowing all of this, that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus to you; therefore, you are not debtors to the flesh. You do not belong to the flesh. The flesh has no say over you. The flesh is not your master. You are not debtors to the flesh. It is the glad tidings of the gospel for sinners, that we hear through the Lord Jesus Christ. For the reason that we are not debtors to the flesh is, that the Lord Jesus Christ has bought us to be his own, so that we belong unto him. The text before us, there's a conclusion, but it is an unexpected conclusion. It is a surprising conclusion. But it is a glorious conclusion. It is a conclusion of the gospel. It is the declaration that we are not debtors to the flesh.

And so, this morning, we consider this grand doctrine, that the apostle declares unto us, that the Holy Spirit declares unto us. And, we consider it under the theme, Debtors, Not to the Flesh. In the first place, we consider the truth. In the second place, we consider the privilege. And in the third place, we consider the grace. Debtors, Not to the Flesh; the truth, the privilege, and the grace.

Let us begin, then, with this truth. The truth can be stated this way, in one sentence, We are *not* debtors to the flesh. That's the apostle's doctrine in verse 12, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh." The apostle speaks of not being debtors to the flesh; there is this concept of being a debtor. It is a concept that we have encountered before, but we have encountered it in other terms. And now, the apostle brings up that same concept, but using the word "debtor." What is this concept that the apostle is teaching? Well, it is the same concept that he has taught before, as belonging to, or being after, or walking after. It is the concept of having a master. It is the concept of being legally bound to someone, so that we owe that one our allegiance. But now, the apostle speaks of this reality as that of being a debtor. A debtor is one who owes another one something. We often use that term "debtor" in the context of borrowing and lending. When someone borrows from a lender, then the borrower is a debtor to the lender, and the lender is a

creditor to the borrower; so that the borrower owes that lender the amount and the interest that must be paid. But, we can speak of being a debtor in other senses. There is a certain sense also in which citizens of a nation are debtors to the nation; that becomes especially stark for us in Singapore, when our young men must serve their national service. Every young man in Singapore is a debtor to the nation, to serve his two years of national service. And there are other debts that we owe to the nation as well, whether that be in the form of taxes or other duties that we owe to the state.

Or, we can speak of being a debtor in the sense of slavery, and that is the context in which the apostle uses this word, “debtor.” A slave is a debtor to his master, that is, the slave owes his master. The slave owes his master, without ever being able to fulfil the owing to his master. He belongs to his master. He owes the master all of his time. He owes the master his work. He owes the master his rest. He owes the master everything. And, that is the concept that the apostle had been teaching throughout this whole section, with phrases like, *walking* “after the flesh,” or *being* “after the flesh,” or being in servitude to the flesh. The apostle is teaching that same concept, but now he is using the word “debtor,” and that word “debtor” draws out the significance of that being a slave, that the slave owes the master everything that the slave has. The apostle draws that out even more, when he speaks of living; that’s in verse 12, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to *live* after the flesh.” With the words “to live,” the apostle identifies the debt that is owed. What is it that the slave owes to the master? The slave owes to the master his life! He lives after the master. We’ve seen that before, too, and that idea of walking after the flesh, or being after the flesh. The servant follows behind the master. Now the apostle, with the words “to live,” brings out that the slave owes everything to his master. It is an absolutely comprehensive term. The debt that is owed is one’s life. It is a life-debt of the slave to the master. It includes the slave’s allegiance, that is, the slave must side with his master. He must take his master’s part. He must be of his master’s cause. The slave is not at liberty to take the part of another, or to show allegiance to another. All of his allegiance of his life belongs to his master. The slave’s work belongs to his master. The slave’s rest belongs to his master. His mind and his knowledge and his expertise belong to his master. His hands and the work of his hands and the produce of his hands belong to his master. The slave owes a life-debt to his master, to serve him in all things. The apostle is speaking of the very same concepts that he has before, but now he is using this language of debtors and living after the creditor, in order to draw out the comprehensiveness of that servitude.

And now the gospel, the glad tidings of the gospel, that the apostle proclaims concerning this indebtedness, is that we are **not** debtors to the flesh. In fact, the apostle is emphatic in how he says it. The apostle could have said it this way, in both the Greek and in the English translation, We are *not* debtors to the flesh. There’s a way to say that in Greek. That’s the proper word order that the Greek could use,⁵ just as in the English, that’s the proper word order: We are not debtors to the flesh. But that’s not the word order that the apostle uses. Our King James English captures perfectly the word order that the apostle Paul uses, in order to bring out, in order to emphasise, this truth. The apostle says, “we are debtors.” He starts with that bold, bold statement, “we are debtors, not to the flesh.” When the apostle says, “we are debtors,” that puts us on the edge of our seats. That gets our attention. We are debtors, are we? To whom are we debtors? And, the answer is, “not to the flesh.”

⁵ [transcriber’s note: The Greek is, *οφειλεται εσμεν ου τη σαρκι*, literally, in its order: debtors we are not to the flesh. The word for debtors (*οφειλεται*) is *first* in the sentence, implying it is emphasised or stressed or of importance.]

We are debtors, not to the flesh. It is an emphatic statement of the gospel. It is an emphatic reality and truth concerning the children of God: We are debtors, not to the flesh.

When the apostle uses “the flesh” here, to which we are not debtors, he means that sin principle, or that sin power, that he has spoken of before. When Adam fell into sin, then the corruption of his nature was this sin principle and this sin power. It is called, in scripture, the “old man of sin” [6:6], or it is called, as in our text, “the flesh.” It is called the flesh often, and even “the body,” as he will call it in verse 13, that you “mortify the deeds of the body,” not because sin has its seat in our physical substance. Sin has its seat in our souls. But, the sin power that is within us comes to expression through the body, and expression through the flesh, so that this sin power, or this sin principle, is often called “the flesh.” The flesh is the devil’s likeness. That sin power looks like the devil, so that to be a debtor to the flesh means to be a debtor to sin and a debtor to the devil. If sin is our master, and we are debtors to the flesh, then that means that sin has the possession of us. Sin has rights to us. Sin has a claim upon us. It means that sin has the say regarding us, just as a master has the rights to his slave. He has a claim upon that slave. He has the say concerning that slave. In fact, so much is the slave in this scenario that the apostle presents, so much is the slave the *possession* of the master. That the master has the last word concerning that slave. And, if we are debtors to the flesh, that means the flesh has the last word with regard to us. It means that sin is responsible for us. It means that sin answers for us, and that when God stands us before him in judgment, that we might give an answer to him, That it is sin that has the possession, and sin that has the say, and sin that has the right to speak in that courtroom. And the only thing that sin can say, with that right to us, is this, They are condemned. They are sinful, they are mine, they belong to me. That’s what it is to be a debtor to the flesh. Men don’t understand that. We don’t understand that by nature. Men want to speak about the responsibility of man, and make a big deal about the responsibility of man. And when men speak all the time about the responsibility of man, what they think they are safeguarding is that man has some say in his own destiny. If man is responsible, then that means that man, by what he does, will determine what happens to him. Men are very interested in the responsibility of man, but man does not understand the responsibility of man. Because to say that man is responsible is to say that man is a debtor to the flesh. If man finally must give an answer for himself, with regard to his sin, then that means he must give way to his master to have the last word concerning him. To be a debtor to the flesh means that *sin* has the responsibility to speak on behalf of man.

The apostle’s doctrine is that we are debtors, not to the flesh. We don’t owe the flesh any allegiance. We do not have to take the part of the flesh. The flesh tries to say that we owe it! The flesh makes it seem as if we belong to it. But, the *truth* of the doctrine of the apostle, the truth of the gospel, is that we are not debtors to the flesh. We do *not* owe the flesh any allegiance. We do *not* belong to sin as to our master. We are free from sin. We are liberated from that bondage. We are entirely free of it. That’s not how it appears. This is not something you know, by looking inside of you and saying, Now, let me see what it looks like inside of me. Let me see what my soul looks like. Let me see if it looks like I’m a slave at all to sin. The child of God looks inside of him for this conclusion. Then the conclusion that he will invariably come to is this, I am a debtor to sin. He owns me, sin tells me what to do, and I have to do it. I am a debtor to the flesh. But, that’s not the truth of the matter. That’s only the appearance of things. The *truth* of the matter is, that we are *not* debtors to the flesh. We don’t owe it anything. We don’t owe it allegiance. We don’t owe it obedience. And, it means that sin does not have the last word concerning us. That, too, is not how it appears. If the child of God would look at who has the last word concerning me, then it would appear that sin must have the last word. I can’t stop sinning. I cannot stop sinning. Constantly I sin. I have this sin power within me. It dwells

there within me, and I might be dead to it, but from what it feels like, that sin power is there, and it must have the last word; so that when I, with that sin power, stand before the Almighty God and the holy eyes of God, then the last word must come from sin. It must be that way. But the apostle's doctrine is, we are debtors, *not* to the flesh. Sin does not own us. Sin does not have the say concerning us. Sin does not have the last word concerning us. We are *entirely liberated* from the bondage of sin. Sin has no rights to us. That's true of your legal standing before God. Your legal standing before God is not that sin. It is not determined by that sin power. Your legal standing before God is, that you are righteous, and sin has nothing to say about it. But, this is true also with regard to your life. With regard to your whole life, sin has no rights over you, has no say over you. With regard to your life, even of obedience, and your life of gratitude to God, sin is not your master. "Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh."

If we are not debtors to the flesh, then the truth is the opposite, that we are debtors to the Spirit. Now, the apostle leaves that part unsaid. He leaves that implied. He says in verse 12, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh." And implied is this, but we are debtors to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit. When the apostle, by implication, speaks of being debtors to the Spirit; by the Spirit, he means that Spirit of Christ that we saw last time. It is that Spirit who is the third person of the Trinity, as the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who is so closely united to Christ, that to have the Spirit is to have Jesus Christ himself, without confusing the second and the third person. It is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that to be a debtor to the Spirit means that we belong to him, that he has the say concerning us. And because having the Spirit means having Christ, it means we are debtors to Christ. It means we belong to him. It means that he has the last word concerning us. It means that he has the say concerning us. It means that he is responsible for us. So that when we stand before the bar of God's judgment, that an answer must be given for the life and the sins and the iniquity of his people, it is Christ who has the responsibility to answer. And that responsibility of Christ was fulfilled by him upon the cross. When he took our sins upon himself in our place, and suffered the curse of God in our stead, there Christ acted as our Lord. There Christ was having the final say concerning his people, for we are debtors to him. This is the glad tidings of the gospel, to not be the debtor of the flesh; or to not be a debtor to the flesh means that we are the servants of Christ. It means that we belong to him. It means that he has the say over us and the rights concerning us. By his blood, he purchased us as his own. By his blood, he covered all our sins. The child of God is a debtor, not to the flesh, but to the Spirit. The child of God is that debtor to the Lord Jesus Christ in his whole life, to live after the Spirit. Everything about us belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he has the say concerning it all.

This gospel is the answer that the child of God gives to the flesh. When the flesh rises up, and the flesh seeks to claim ownership, and the flesh makes it seem as if we do belong to the flesh, and that we are hopelessly bound to the flesh; then the answer of the child of God to the flesh is this word of God. It is this, I am not a debtor to the flesh, but I am a debtor to Christ. This is the answer of the child of God to the conscience. When the conscience of the child of God accuses him, that he has violated the whole law of God, and when the conscience tries to make the last say, the last word, before God to be the word of accusation; then the child of God answers the conscience with this word of God by faith, I am not a debtor to the flesh, but I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the gospel answer to the sinner, the sinner who is broken over his sin, the sinner who is filled with shame at his sin, and whose guilt nearly crushes him as he sees that he cannot help himself, but that he remains this diseased thing, that he has this sin that rises up in him. The answer to that sinner is this news of the gospel. It's the answer to you, sinners, this morning. It is the answer to me, sinner. It is

this truth of the gospel, but you don't belong to the flesh. You don't belong to it. It has no saying with regard to your righteousness, it has no last word for you. You are a debtor to Jesus Christ. You belong to him. He owns you. He has the say concerning you, and he has the last word concerning you, and his last word is this, "It is finished." It is finished! The salvation of my people is finished! The covering of their sins in my blood is finished! It is finished! And that is the word that comforts the sinful child of God, I am a sinner, but I am righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the truth that the apostle teaches in the text. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh."

The apostle goes on, in verse 13, to express the privilege, that it is not to be a debtor to the flesh. Now, the way we could write verse 13, or say verse 13, in order to get to the point of verse 13 is something like this: That only those who live, mortify the deeds of the body; and only those who die, live after the flesh. And therefore, it is a privilege for you, that you are not debtors to the flesh, but debtors to the Lord Jesus Christ. You are those who live. It is a marvellous privilege. We can restate the verse that way, but then that requires some explanation, because that's not the explanation that's usually given to verse 13. How are we to understand verse 13? Here is how verse 13 reads, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Now, that looks, at first glance, like a condition. A superficial reading of verse 13 will find there a condition, or a cause-and-effect statement. There is, after all, an "if." "If ye live after the flesh," and there is an implied "then," then "ye shall die." And that's a conditional grammar. That's what we call that kind of grammatical instruction; it is a conditional statement. And so, a superficial reading of verse 13, we'll find there a condition, not merely a grammatical condition, but a theological condition, a doctrinal condition. A superficial reading will find a cause-and-effect statement. So that verses 12 and 13 are often explained this way: that in verse 12 we have an exhortation not to live after the flesh. We've already seen that's not the case; there's no exhortation in verse 12. Verse 12 is a declaration of what's true concerning you; not an exhortation for what you should do now, but a declaration of what is true right now. You are not a debtor to the flesh, to live after the flesh. You don't owe the flesh anything. But verse 12 is often explained as an exhortation, and then verse 13 is explained as a threat. The threat for why you should not live after the flesh is, that if you do live after the flesh, you will die. But if, through the Spirit, you do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. So, you better get busy mortifying the deeds of the body. You better get busy not living after the flesh, so that you do not die, but instead live. Verse 12, an exhortation; verse 13, a threat. So that then, the child of God is supposed to be scared into obeying God. Because he doesn't want to die, and he would much prefer to live.

That interpretation of the text is *decisively* ruled out by the very language of the text itself. It is decisively ruled out by the word "for," at the beginning of verse 13, and here we see how these connecting words are so important. The word "for," in verse 13, is giving a reason, or a further explanation of what was said in verse 12. And remember, what was said in verse 12 is the declaration that you are not debtors to the flesh. Not an exhortation, but the declaration, You are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh. Now in verse 13, with that connecting word "for," we have the very same statement, but now in further explanation. In verse 12, we are the debtors to Christ. But *if* the conditional idea of verse 13 is true, then that means in verse 13, Christ is the debtor of us, or God is in debt to us. If we live after the flesh, then we shall die; if that's the condition for dying. And then, if you do mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit, ye shall live; if that's the condition for living, then by mortifying the deeds of the body, we put God in our debt. Now, he owes us life! That's the way the condition works. If you do what you are supposed to do, then God will do what he is supposed to do. That *cannot* be the meaning because, in verse 12, God is in *no* debt to us. Rather, we are in debt

to Christ. So that in verse 13, the “for” is not teaching that, now here’s the way that you get God to be in your debt. Not at all. That wrong interpretation of verse 13 is decisively ruled out by the word “for.”

What is the apostle teaching then, in verse 13, when he uses that grammatically conditional language? And it is grammatically conditional; if-then is a conditional sentence. But if-then is not, in scripture, conditional theology. It is not conditional salvation. In verse 13, the if-then is not a condition, but a *definition*. And there’s a world of difference between those two. A *condition* teaches what someone must do in order to merit by that doing the result. What he must do is the cause to bring about the effect. That’s a condition. A *definition*, rather says what is true about someone. A definition says, that these things are true of the one we’re defining, of the one we’re talking about. This is the definition. If this is true of someone, then this is also true of someone. Now, if someone does this, then they will earn this; but if this is true, then this other thing is also true.

Let’s give us an example of that. By illustration, if I would say to you, If you are in prison, then you are a criminal. That would be an example of an if-then statement defining what we’re talking about. If you are in prison, then you are a criminal. In that statement, your being in prison did not make you *become* a criminal. If you are in prison, then you are a criminal. Your crime made you a criminal. The sentence of the judge made you a criminal. But your being in prison do not make you a criminal. It’s simply true of those who are in prison, that they are criminals. That’s the idea of this definition. Both of these things are true of someone. Another way you could reword this, in order to bring out the meaning instead of using if-then is this: *Only* those who are dead live after the flesh. And *only* those who are alive, do, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body. That’s the idea of this definition, and that can be proved from the verse as well, that we’re dealing here with a definition. In verse 13, the words, “ye shall die,” in the original,⁶ are not the normal way of saying, ye shall die. There’s a normal way. You can use the future tense, you could use another mood of the verb. There are different ways to construct that idea of *you shall*. In this verse, there is another word entirely, that is inserted, that means *you are about to die*. It’s properly translated, you shall die. That’s a fine translation, but the idea behind it is this: You were *appointed* to die. And the appointing comes first. So that what the apostle is teaching here is the definition of those who are appointed to die. Those who are appointed to die, they live after the flesh. That’s all they can do, because that’s what they were appointed to. But those who are alive, those who are appointed to live,⁷ they mortify the deeds of the body.

The apostle is teaching all of this, in verse 13, and we’re going through all of this in order to bring out the apostle’s point in teaching this. The apostle’s point is, that it is a *privilege* to mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit. It is a *privilege* to be one of those who are alive, and it is a privilege to be those who are liberated from being debtors to the flesh, and who are made debtors to Christ. Paul’s point is not to make a threat, to scare the believer into obedience. But rather, Paul’s point is to declare the privilege of our liberty in Christ. By nature, you should be a debtor to the flesh, and so should I. By nature, you should be appointed to die, and so should I. By nature, you should live after the flesh, and so should I. That’s what we deserve of ourselves. But that’s *not* the reality concerning us, it’s not the truth. The truth concerning us is, that, “brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” And when the apostle goes on to say, only those who are dead, and appointed to

⁶ [transcriber’s note: The Greek for “ye shall die” is *μελλετε αποθνησκειν*. “Ye shall” is *μελλετε*, root *μελλω*, (present active indicative) meaning, to be about, to be on the point of doing or suffering something, to intend, have in mind, think to. It’s variously translated: shall, should, would, to come, will, things to come, etc.]

⁷ [“ye shall live” from *ζησεσθε*, root *ζαω*, (future, middle deponent, indicative, 2nd person, plural) meaning, live.]

die, live after the flesh; and only those who are alive, do through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body; he's saying, don't you see the privilege of this? Don't you see how amazing this is, that God has appointed us to life and not to death? And God has given us the privilege, then, of living our life not to the flesh, but mortifying the deeds of the flesh. And indeed, that is a marvellous privilege. To mortify the deeds of the body is to kill and to hate those deeds of the body. You don't have the right, and I don't have the right, to hate the deeds of the body. You and I, by nature, have the right only to love the deeds of the body, to serve the deeds of the body, to make it our business to live in that sin power of the flesh, here called "the body" again, because the body is where that sin is manifested.

The privilege of the child of God is that he is delivered from bondage to the flesh. He is not a debtor to the flesh. And therefore, he has the privilege of hating the deeds of sin. He may hate those. He may hate those by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the apostle teaches that the child of God mortifies those deeds of the body by the Spirit, through the Spirit. And that explains what's happening in us, in that hatred of the deeds of the body, it is the Spirit who is that new spiritual centre in us. He doesn't replace our person. He doesn't yet take away our totally depraved nature. But he makes himself the new spiritual centre of the child of God, so that he is our heart. Jesus Christ himself dwells in us as our heart, and that Spirit of Christ hates sin. That's the mortifying of the deeds of the body, the Spirit's hatred of sin; so that we through the Spirit hate and mortify the deeds of the body. Even that we are corrupt because of that flesh, so that the Spirit perfectly hates the deeds of the body. And yet, we do not perfectly hate it, and so even that good work must be forgiven in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all of this teaches that the very life of gratitude of the child of God is itself a gift. The life of the child of God is not a condition to anything. The life of the child of God is a gift. Our grateful obedience is a gift. It's *given* to us by God. It's not something we have of ourselves. We don't even have the right to it. But, brethren, the truth is, we are "debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh," that have been given this privilege of belonging to the Spirit. What the child of God sees by faith, then, concerning all of this is the grace of God to him. That's the point. That's the ultimate purpose of all of this, to highlight the grace of God. And we can see that, when we set this text in the light of the whole book of Romans. What is man in the book of Romans? Man is a sinner. That's the way the book opened. That's what the apostle demonstrated at length, verse after verse, chapter after chapter, in his opening. "There is none righteous, no, not one." What is man in the book of Romans? He's a sinner. What are you? What am I? In the book of Romans, we are sinners. And yet, what has God done?

And what's the truth of this text? You are not debtors to the flesh. You don't belong to the flesh. You're liberated from the flesh through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, by his righteous atonement. You are free from that guilt and bondage of your sin. This is the grace of God to sinners, the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners such as us. And that's what makes this text and this book such good news for the child of God. It's not good news for those who are righteous in themselves. They have no need of this other righteousness, but this is good news for sinners. And even in this, we're not as sinful as we should be. So that at the end, all we can say is, It is the grace of God that has liberated me. It is pure, sheer, grace. And, that is the point, is it not, that the child of God, who has been graciously delivered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, gives all of the glory to Jehovah God? for whose gospel it is, after all, that the apostle is proclaiming,, and that by the Spirit is proclaimed yet today. It is the gospel of God, the gospel that belongs to him, the good news that he has sent, that has as its content, Jesus Christ and him crucified. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors,

not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Amen.

Let us pray. Our Father, which arts in heaven, we thank thee for thy word to us, blessed to our hearts, and give us the comfort and the peace of the gospel of our salvation. We thank thee for this comfort, and for the tour of this comfort, upon which thou dost take us. Wilt thou apply it to our hearts? Wilt thou hear our prayer? Bless the remainder of our worship, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Romans 8:14–16. The Spirit of Adoption’s Witness (07.12.2026)

Reading: Romans 8:1–18

Praise: Psalms 5:1–6; 5:7–10; 5:11–12

1. The Content of His Witness
2. The Means of His Witness
3. The Manner of His Witness

The text that we consider is verses 14 through 16. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

The topic that the apostle Paul deals with, in the text before us this morning, is the witness of the Holy Spirit of Christ, that we are the children of God. That is stated throughout the text, but most plainly, in verse 16, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we *are* the children of God.” The connection of our text, this morning, to the preceding context is found in the word “For” that opens verse 14. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The assurance that the Holy Spirit gives to us, when he witnesses to us that we are the children of God, is the assurance that we are not slaves to the flesh. The apostle has been dealing, in the preceding context, with this whole matter of being slaves to the flesh, and liberty from that slavery to the flesh. And now the apostle says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are [or they know that] they are the sons of God.... [For] the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The Spirit gives witness that we are the children of God, and thereby witnesses that we have liberty from that slavery to the flesh. The apostle, then, is declaring what he opened the chapter with, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” In fact, so far is it from being the case that we are slaves to the flesh, that we are the sons of God. The apostle brings up this beautiful concept and truth of being sons of God; and, by that, teaches that we are as far as possible from being in bondage yet to sin and death and the flesh. The knowledge that we are the sons of God is not natural to the child of God. In fact, it is very unnatural to us. All the world testifies that we are not the sons of God. Our flesh testifies that we are not the sons of God. Our circumstances testify that we cannot be the sons of God. Our sin testifies that we are not the children of God. But over against all of that testimony of the world and the foe, of our flesh and sin and death, and of all of our circumstances and suffering, stands this witness of the Spirit with our spirit, that we are indeed the children of God.

That gift of the assurance of the child of God, that he is the child of God, so that by the Spirit he cries unto God, Abba, Father, is a very important assurance for the child of God. This witness of the Spirit is a very important witness. It is very important for the comfort of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the church, in the midst of this world, can have no confidence that she is indeed the church of Christ. But having this witness of the Spirit, she cries unto God, Abba, Father. And this witness of the Spirit is very important, because it is a witness that honours the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a witness that is given in him, and given by his gospel. “For [we] have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” We “have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

And so, this morning, we consider this lovely, wonderful witness of the Spirit of adoption with our spirits, that we are the sons of God. Let us consider this text, then, under the theme, The Spirit of Adoption’s Witness. In the first place, consider the content of his witness. What is his message? In

the second place, consider the means of his witness. And in the third place, consider the manner of his witness. The Spirit of Adoption's Witness; the content of his witness, the means of his witness, and the manner of his witness.

Let us begin, then, with the content of the witness of the Spirit of adoption. The message that the Spirit of adoption brings to us is, that we are the children of God. This is his message. This is what he lays home upon our hearts. This is what he binds to us, so that we know it and we are sure of it. The Spirit of adoption's witness is, that we are the children of God. That comes out in every verse of our text. It comes out in verse 16, where we have it written explicitly, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, *that we are the children of God.*" There is the content. But that content of the Spirit's witness is evident also in verse 14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The idea of that verse is *not* this, that, if we find in ourselves some internal evidence, that we are being led by the Spirit of God, then we can finally have some assurance of being the children of God. But the idea is this, "as many as are *led* by the Spirit," they *know* they are the sons of God, by that leading of the Spirit, who witnesses with their spirits, in his leading of them; by the leading of that Spirit, we know that we are the sons of God. And then the content of the Spirit's witness is also evident in verse 15, where the Spirit is identified as "the Spirit of adoption." Being adopted means being taken into the family of another, so that the Spirit of adoption is the one who comes with this witness whose family we belong to, with the witness that we have been adopted *indeed* by God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the apostle is emphatic regarding the content of the Spirit's witness. The apostle uses three different words for *children* throughout this brief text. In verse 14, he uses the word "sons." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [they know that] they are the *sons* of God." That word, "sons," expresses the essence of the relationship that we have to God. The essence of the relationship is this, we are his sons, and he is our Father. The relationship is not this, that we are cursed of him, or condemned by him. The relationship is not this, that he will take us and cast us out of his presence as having no right to be with him. But the essence of the relationship is this, we are the *sons* of God. As many as are led by the Spirit, they know that they are the sons of God. The second word that the apostle uses to emphasise this truth is the word "adoption" in verse 15. Adoption speaks of the legal right to be a son. One who is adopted is given the full rights and privileges of sonship, even though that one naturally did not have the full rights and privileges of sonship. That word "adoption" speaks of a certain grace involved in our being sons of God, for God set his love upon us. And, God has said from all eternity, I will have these as my children. And then the apostle, in verse 16, uses a different word altogether to emphasise our sonship. He uses the word "children," a different word than the word "sons" in verse 14, or "adoption" in verse 15. And the emphasis of the word "children" is the genuineness and the reality of our being children. It is *true*, beyond any doubt, that we are indeed the children of God. The apostle, by these different words for sons and adoption and children, emphatically teaches that the content of the Spirit's message and his witness to us is, that we are the children of God, we are the sons of God, we have very really been adopted by him. That's the reality, whether we know it or not. We are the sons of God.

But now the emphasis of the text is that we know it. The Spirit witnesses to us, so that we cry by that same Spirit, Abba, Father. It is the doctrine of the certainty of our sonship, as the Spirit witnesses that truth of the gospel to us. What a witness this content is. What a message the Holy Spirit lays upon our hearts. We are the sons of God. We are the children of God. We are adopted by him. And, in that word "adoption," there is the expansive idea of the grace of God in making us his children. We find that this matter of being adopted is a matter that goes all the way back into eternity. Before the

foundation of the world, God adopted us to be his sons. That's evident in this chapter, Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." That's also taught in Ephesians 1:5, that our adoption unto sonship is from eternity. Jehovah God, that is, the triune God from all eternity, according to his own will and good pleasure, has set his fatherly love upon us as his sons and his daughters. There was nothing about us that drew his love. Indeed, we did not even exist. We were not born. This is before the foundation of the world. But, Jehovah God set his love upon us in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ said regarding us, They are mine, they belong to my family, I am their Father, and they are my children. In that word, "adoption," we have the wonder of our being adopted from all eternity in Christ.

In the second place, that idea of being sons by adoption is that God adopted us at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the price of the blood of our Saviour. That is taught in Galatians 4:5. Galatians 4:5, where we read that Christ came in "the fullness of time," "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The adoption of sons happened by redemption. It happened by the price being paid to purchase us as sons. It happened through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; so that God, who had adopted us in all eternity, in his decree of election, unfolded that decree in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there shed his only begotten Son's blood in our place. By nature, we had no right to be the sons of God. By nature, we had the right only to be the sons of the devil. But, God laid our sins and guilt upon his only begotten Son, and cursed him in our place, slaying him upon the tree of the cross; and by that, purchasing us as his own sons and daughters, so that through Jesus Christ and his cross, we are adopted as children.

In the third place, with regard to the wonder of being the sons of God, the Holy Spirit assures us of that adoption by faith, and that's the impact of our text. Verse 15, "ye have... received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." This adoption that was accomplished by God in eternity, in his decree of election, this adoption that was unfolded in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on Golgotha; this adoption is made known to us by faith through the Spirit of adoption, who causes us to cry, Abba, Father.

And in the fourth place, this truth of adoption will be revealed and sealed at the resurrection of the dead, and that's in this chapter as well, Romans 8:23, "And not only they," that is, all the creatures in the creation; "not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the *adoption*, to wit, [or that is,] the redemption of our body." In the resurrection of the dead, there will be a public testimony that these are my children. Now, the whole world tells us that we have no right to be the children of God. Now, our sin tells us that we are not the children of God. Now, our flesh does not believe that we are the children of God. Now, our circumstances and our sufferings and all of our loss and all things testify to us, that it is impossible that we be the sons of God. And the whole world and the false church and all men join in that testimony. But, at the resurrection of the body in the last day, there will be an adoption; that is, there will be a public testimony of our adoption. There will be a public declaration, that these are my sons, and they have always been my sons and my daughters. From all eternity, they will be my children. So that the testimony that we hear now, by the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, will be heard by all men in that day.

This is the wonderful truth of adoption. This is the wonderful reality that is ours already now, of being sons and daughters. And this is the truth that the Spirit witnesses of, that he makes us sure of, so that as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they *know* that they are the sons of God. And we

have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. And the Spirit itself witnesseth with our spirits, that we are the children of God. The content of the Spirit's witness is, that we are the sons of God.

Now, why do you need that witness? And why do I need that witness? You and I need that witness as the testimony that we are *not* slaves to the flesh. The apostle has been dealing, in Romans 8, with this whole idea of our *liberty* from bondage to the flesh. The apostle has spoken of walking after the flesh, verses 1 and verse 4. And we have seen that that language of walking after the flesh means those who are in bondage to the flesh. They are the slaves of sin. They rightfully owe sin their life, and the flesh their life. But we are *not* after the flesh, but now, after the Spirit, indeed, verse 2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." We are liberated. We are delivered. That liberty is liberty that we have in Jesus Christ. That has been the doctrine of the apostle. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The condemnation that should have come against us, because of our sins, was made against Jesus Christ in our place. And Jesus Christ, having fulfilled all of the law's requirements regarding our curse, and having fulfilled all of the law's requirements regarding a life of obedience, the Lord Jesus Christ is our righteousness; so that there can be no condemnation that is levelled against God's people. It simply does not exist. There is no condemnation whatsoever. The condemnation is exhausted and has been exhausted by the Lord Jesus Christ's atonement. There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. That sets us free from sin. That sets us free from the flesh. That sets us free from bondage to the law. So that, when the apostle speaks here of the witness of the Spirit that we are the sons of God, he means that witness of the Spirit over against the testimony of the flesh and all things that we are in bondage to the flesh.

The furthest thing from a slave is a son. And, the Holy Spirit here could have said, You are slaves. In fact, he has said that. He has said, You walk not after the flesh, but you walk after the Spirit. Your bondage, and your servitude, is not to the flesh, but you belong to the Spirit, you belong to God, and you belong to Christ. But, now the Holy Spirit brings forth this idea of sonship in order to drive home the point to us, and in order to comfort our souls with this witness of the Spirit, because the furthest thing from a slave is a son. The furthest thing from a slave of the flesh is a son of God. The son belongs to the father. The son has all the things that belong to the father. And, the apostle is going to go on to speak of that, when he speaks of being joint-heirs with Christ. And now, we see that all of our suffering, which the apostle will deal with in the rest of the chapter, all of our suffering, is not worthy to be compared with the inheritance that we shall have. The truth for the child of God, that is witnessed by the Spirit of Christ, is, that we are the sons of God. We have everything that is coming to sons, and the Spirit teaches us this. The Spirit assures us of this. The Spirit witnesses that we are the sons of God. He is the Spirit of adoption, and the message of his witness is that we are the children of God.

We can go even further yet in understanding this content of the Spirit's witness. And, we can go further yet by asking the question of the text, and asking the question of the word of God, Why is the content of the Spirit of adoption's witness, that we are the children of God? Why is that is his message? Why is that what he makes us sure of? Why not some other message? There are many good messages that we could perhaps imagine. But, the message of the Spirit, the content of his witness to us, is that we are the sons of God. Why that? The answer to that question takes us very deep into the comfort of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reason that content of the Spirit's witness is that we are the children of God, is that the Spirit who makes this witness is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of adoption is the same as the Spirit of Christ. And what is Christ? Jesus Christ is God's Son.

Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son. Jesus Christ is God's Son come in our flesh. So that the holy thing that was born of the virgin Mary was called the Son of God. That's the truth of Jesus. That's who he is. In fact, in some ways, that's the whole gospel. The whole gospel is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That was Peter's confession when Jesus asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" Then Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And upon that rock Jesus would build his church. That's the gospel. Jesus *is* the Son of God. And now, the Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit who belongs to him, the Spirit who is his breath. And, that Spirit of adoption, as the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, knows what Jesus knows. That's true of the spirit of a man. The spirit of a man within him knows the thoughts of that man. He knows what is in that man's mind. So also, the Spirit of Christ knows what Christ knows. The Spirit hears what Jesus hears. The Spirit says what Jesus says, as Jesus testified in John 14:16, when he promised his disciples that he would send his Spirit, the Comforter, who would abide with them. Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would testify of Jesus, for the Spirit had received the things of Jesus and would bring to remembrance all the things that Jesus had spoken to the disciples. The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of Christ, who knows what Jesus knows, hears what Jesus hears, and says what Jesus says.

And that Spirit of adoption, as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is the Spirit that he has breathed forth into his church, pouring out that Spirit upon his church, so that that Spirit inhabits the church, even as that Spirit inhabits Jesus Christ. This is why we often call the union of the church to Jesus Christ a mystery, and why we speak of the Spirit's work as mysterious. It's hard for us to understand, it's hard to comprehend, but the reality of it is that the same Spirit, that dwells in Jesus Christ and knows all the things of Christ, is the Spirit that he has breathed into his church, so that he and his church share the same breath. And, now it is by that Spirit of Christ that dwells in you, as a member of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you have this witness of the Spirit that you are a child of God. How does that work? Well, the Spirit hears what Jesus hears, and what is it that Jesus hears? Jesus hears God say to him, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Spirit hears that with Jesus, and so you hear that with Jesus, because that Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of adoption in your heart. You hear God say to you, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the operation of that Spirit, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And what does Jesus say? Well, Jesus says, "Abba, Father." That is Mark 14:36. In Mark 14:36, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, prayed this, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt." Jesus uses the words "Abba, Father" there. The word "Abba" is a Chaldean word that simply means Father. It's Jesus saying, Father, Father, in two different languages, but the depth of that expression is that Jesus cries out in confidence to God, even in the garden of Gethsemane, that this God is his Father. Jesus has heard God say to him, "Thou art my beloved Son." Jesus knows God as his Father, and so Jesus cries, Abba, Father, in his praying to God. And now, because the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who says what Jesus says is in you, you'll cry, Abba, Father, as the apostle says; that we "have received a Spirit of adoption," verse 15, "whereby," that means by which spirit, "we cry, Abba, Father." That's the wonder of the depth of this witness of the Spirit with our spirits, that we are the children of God.

That's the meaning, that depth is the meaning of what the apostle says in verse 16, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The apostle uses a very intriguing term there, when he uses the words "beareth witness with"; "the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." He refers to "our spirit." What is the spirit of the child of God? Well, that word can mean different things in different contexts. But what that word has meant in this context, in Romans chapter 8, is that spiritual centre of a man. As we saw a few sermons ago, in verse 10, "if Christ be in

you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” The “spirit” here refers to the spiritual centre of a man; what we otherwise call the heart, or the spiritual heart of a man. That spiritual centre of a man is that centre out of which the issues of that man’s life flow. And now, being united to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have that Spirit as our spiritual centre. That Spirit abiding as our spiritual centre does not replace our person. That is *not* the idea of the heart. The heart is not your person. The heart is your spiritual centre. We each retain our own person, that unique person that God made us, that subject of all of the activities of our rational, moral nature. It is that thing in you, your person is that thing in you that says, I, I do this, or I do that. The Spirit does not erase our person. We remain that person. Through all eternity, we will remain the person that God made us. But now our spiritual heart, our spiritual centre, is that Spirit of God dwelling with us and abiding with us.

And now, the apostle says about that Spirit, that he witnesses “with our spirit.” And the idea is that we know this truth about who we are, by the operation of the Spirit, and we know it in the *same* breath as the Spirit. That’s the idea here, bearing witness with, has the idea that the Spirit and our heart say the same thing at the same time. It is *not* this, that the Spirit has to come to us. And the Spirit has to sit us down, and the Spirit has to take out a logbook of all of the times that we obey God, and take out a logbook of all of the times that we prayed and cried Abba Father, and try to convince us, on the basis of what’s written in that logbook, that we are the sons of God. That’s *not* how we ought to convince each other in the moments of our doubt, either. In the moments of our doubt, if we turn each other to our works and say, Well, these works that you have done ought to be a witness to you that you are a son of God; then the child of God is quickly going to despair. But rather, the Spirit’s witness is this with us, that it’s a spontaneous and instantaneous witness with our spirit. The Spirit hears, the Spirit of Christ hears God say, Thou art my beloved Son; and the Spirit in your heart knows I am God’s beloved son. And the Spirit of Christ says, Abba, Father. And in that instant, and spontaneously, you say, Abba, Father. That Spirit, and you say it together. The idea is not this, that our personality is replaced, or that we become a different person than we were. But the idea is this, that that Spirit witnesses with our spirit in the same breath, in the very same breath as the Spirit, our spirit says, Abba, Father. This is part of Jesus’ teaching in John 14:16, that he would send the Spirit to his church as a Comforter.⁸ The term that Jesus used in the Greek, transliterated into English as *paraclete*. Comforter is a good translation of *paraclete*. The *paraclete* has the idea of one who is called alongside; something like a soldier in battle who has been wounded needs his companion to come alongside of him and bear him up and hold him and carry him along through the battlefield. That’s the idea of the Comforter, the *paraclete*, the one who is called alongside. That Spirit dwells within us. He’s alongside of us, not in the sense of being next to our shoulder, but in the sense of being in our hearts. And that Spirit witnesses with our spirit there, so that we know of a certainty we are the children of God.

It is a marvellous thing that the apostle describes here this witness of the Spirit, that we are the sons of God. That’s the meaning then also of verse 14, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God,” that is, they have the Spirit of God within them. The Spirit of God is our spiritual centre. The Spirit of God leads us, and as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they know that they are the children of God. Without doing anything, they know that they are the children of God. Why? They can’t help it. They cannot help it. It’s not as if this can be stopped, it’s not as if you can turn off that witness of the

⁸ The Greek, *παρακλητον* (masculine, accusative); meaning one called, summoned to one’s side.

Spirit. The Spirit, who knows what Christ knows, witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

The apostle also identifies the means of the Spirit's witness that we are the children of God. The means of the Spirit's witness, in the first place, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of adoption witnesses by means. In general, the means that the Spirit of adoption witnesses by is the word of God. But, more specifically, the means is the gospel of God. It is the message of that word of God. It is the good news of that word of God. And it is that message as it is proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel. The Spirit uses as his means of witness, that we are the children of God, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This stands in opposition, then, to an error that is widespread today, that teaches that the Spirit operates apart from the means of the word, that he operates independently of the word, that the Spirit operates by giving new revelations to people; so that they learn things, apart from the word, that they did not know before. They learn the will of God for them by that Spirit, let's say, apart from the word of God. That is an error. Ongoing revelation is an error that divorces and separates the Spirit from the word. The Spirit does not operate independently of the word. The Spirit operates by the gospel. And that means, then, that the child of God, in his knowledge that he is a son of God, does not wait for the Spirit to whisper somewhere in his consciousness that he is a child of God; so that the child of God before did not know it, but now, having heard that sweet whisper of the Spirit, knows that he is the child of God. That's *not* how the Spirit works. The Spirit operates by the means of the gospel. Through the preaching of that gospel, the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God. The Spirit takes that gospel message and lays that gospel message upon our hearts, so that we know that truth.

The truth, then, is that we *know* we are the sons of God by the Spirit applying the gospel to us. That is taught by the apostle in the text, in the intriguing language that opens verse 15. There, the apostle says, "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." What is this "spirit of bondage" of which the apostle speaks? The spirit of bondage is the same as the false gospel. It is the same as what is referred to, in verse 2 of chapter 8 this way, "the law of sin and death." I have been made free from the law of sin and death, but there is such a thing as the law of sin and death, and the bondage from which I am now free. But the bondage of that law of sin and death is the doctrine that I must keep that law in order to live, in order to be saved, or in order to have anything else from God. The law of sin and death, as we saw in a sermon on that verse, is the same thing as the Ten Commandments. It is that law that says, Do this and live. It is the law that says, Thou shalt, and Thou shalt not. If salvation is to come by that law, then there can only be death. It is the law of sin and death. Bondage now, or the spirit of bondage, is the teaching of that false gospel that puts me under the bondage of that law again. And that says, that for my salvation, I must keep the law; or for my blessing, I must keep the law; or for my assurance, I must keep the law. That's the spirit of bondage. That false gospel comes with its own spirit. It comes with a spirit that puts us back in slavery. It's a spirit that puts us back under the slavery of the flesh and binds us to sin. There can be no freedom in that false gospel, that salvation comes by the law. There can only be bondage. The spirit of bondage that the apostle refers to here is this false gospel that comes with its own spirit, that puts me under the law. And that is "the spirit of bondage again to fear." The only fruit of that spirit can be fear. I have to live in terror of not obeying the law enough.

And the apostle says, "ye have not received [that] spirit of bondage again to fear." In fact, you have been *freed* from that spirit of bondage to fear. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me *free* from the law of sin and death." When the apostle therefore speaks of the spirit of bondage, that goes along with the false gospel of works-righteousness. Then, the implication is that the Spirit

of adoption goes along with the true gospel and works by that true gospel. The Spirit of adoption works by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same gospel, that is referred to in verse 2 again, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." And we saw that, that law of the Spirit of life is the gospel; called "the law" there because of its authority. Nevertheless it's the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the gospel of salvation, the good news of what God has done for me, the good news that there is no condemnation, the good news that being righteous by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That gospel is the gospel by which the Spirit of adoption works. He brings that word and carries it to our hearts. He puts that word where no minister can put that word, where no parent can put that word, where no brother or sister can put that word. The Holy Spirit carries that word right to our hearts and applies it to our hearts, so that by that gospel the Spirit witnesses to us that we are the children of God.

Significantly, the apostle means that gospel as it is proclaimed in the assembly of God's people. He is speaking of the preaching of the gospel in the assembly of the church, or in the assembly of the fellowship, on the way to becoming the church, Lord willing. The apostle indicates that, when he speaks of a plural, "ye" and "our" and "we," but a singular spirit. Verse 16, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." Jesus Christ pours out his Spirit into the church. And, in the church, the members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ have this witness of the gospel that is proclaimed to them, and have the witness of the Spirit, who is pleased to use the means of the preaching of the gospel to assure our spirits.

There is a very powerful temptation for God's people in times of reformation to leave the church. It is an almost irresistible temptation. And, that temptation works this way, that during a time of reformation, it is the false church institute that begins to kill its people. It kills its people with the false gospel it proclaims to them. That false church institute kills the people by the false church discipline that is exercised against them. The false church institute persecutes God's people. And after that happens a time or two, God's people are very powerfully tempted to say, I am finished with the church institute. I have no place there anymore. I will not be a member of that church institute. And then the people of God are tempted to leave and just exist on their own, and probably console themselves with this, At least I have the Bible yet. And, at least I'm part of the universal body of Christ, even if I'm not part of any instituted body of Christ upon this earth. The temptation for the child of God is understandable. We have all felt that temptation to one degree or another, but that temptation is still wrong. It is still not according to the word of God. And that course of action is still ruled out for the child of God by a passage like this.

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ witnesses with our spirit, as the members of the church of Christ, that we are the children of God. The Spirit has shown how he is pleased to bring this witness. He is pleased to bring this witness by the preaching of the gospel. It's mysterious; no one can understand it, not the minister, not the people who hear. To the minister and the people who hear, and to all the world, the preaching of the gospel makes no sense. How in the world could the preaching of the gospel ever work? How could God ever save by that, when the people who preach and the people who hear are so weak and so full of sin? And yet, by the foolishness of preaching, it pleaseth God to save such as believe. God is pleased to save by that preaching, and the Spirit is pleased to witness with the Spirit of his church, that we are the children of God.

In the second place, the Spirit witnesses by means of faith. That is, the Holy Spirit, by the gospel, creates faith in the heart of the child of God. So that the child of God, by faith, hears what Jesus hears, and by faith says what Jesus says. The child of God knows, I am a son of God, because God

said to Jesus, "Thou art my beloved Son." And the son of God says, Abba Father, because Jesus says, Abba Father. The apostle has been dealing with faith throughout the whole epistle so far. He has been teaching justification by faith and not by the deeds of the law; so that here, when he speaks of the Spirit's witnessing in assuring our spirits, he is speaking of that faith once again by which we know a truth of God.

The manner of the Spirit's witness to us is sovereign, effectual, efficacious, powerful. The manner of the Spirit's work is not this, that he sends the child of God on a quest to find assurance that he is a child of God. Beware of that teaching, that there must be this quest, this strenuous quest; and that the child of God, for a long time and for many years in his life, ought to be expected not to have the assurance that he is the son of God. That is *not* the truth of the Spirit's witness. The Spirit works sovereignly, so that the effect of the Spirit's work is that spontaneously we cry, Abba, Father. By that Spirit, we cry, Abba Father. That's the significance of the word "whereby" in verse 15. Whereby means by the Spirit, not by our own quest, not by our own discovery, not by our own work, not by our own willing, not by our own stack of evidences that we have piled up. Rather, by the testimony of the Spirit, who witnesses with our spirits that we are the sons of God. By that Spirit, we cry, Abba, Father.

The truth of the Spirit's manner as being sovereign is important for the child of God, for the child of God's comfort, because the child of God who lives in the midst of sin and death here, looks around him and can see nothing that resembles this gospel. All he can see is dead ends. All that he can see is his own sin and iniquity and death waiting for him. That's all that there is, according to the appearance of all things. And the apostle is going to work through all of this in the rest of Chapter 8. He's going to delve into our sufferings, and answer the problem of our sufferings, and things present, and things to come, and height, and depth, and all the creatures here below. The apostle's going to give an answer to all of that suffering, in the rest of Romans 8. The child of God, as he looks around here in his life, he can see nothing of this message of the gospel. He can see only its opposite. And therefore, if the child of God must be cast upon himself in the slightest to gain for himself, by what he does, the assurance of his sonship; then the child of God must despair. But the child of God is not cast upon himself. But rather the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption and who is the Spirit of Christ and the sovereign Spirit of God, witnesseth with our spirits, that we are the children of God. So that we cry by faith, given by that Spirit, Abba Father.

What a glorious topic the apostle unfolds here in our text. It is the topic of the Spirit of adoption's witness, that we are God's sons. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Amen.

Let us pray. Our Father, which art in heaven, we call upon thee with gratitude for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the witness of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption, and the Spirit of Christ, and who gives us faith that we might hear what Christ hears and say with him, Abba, Father. I pray that thou will evermore give us this comfort, and take it not away. Forgive the sins we have committed, blot them out in Jesus' blood, and keep us from sin, for Jesus' sake. Amen.