

Resurrection through the Spirit: Romans 8:9-11

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Last week we studied verses 7-8 and saw the hostility and inability of those who are in the flesh. This morning we're going to study verses 9-11 and see the tremendous blessings and assurance and future hope for those who are in the Spirit.

Preaching a passage like this presents a significant pastoral challenge. On the one hand, we do not want individuals to have false assurance of salvation. We don't want people to think their souls are secure simply because of their religious activity. As I talked about last week, it's possible to be very moral in many respects and yet remain at enmity with God. So we don't want to give people assurance of salvation that is not biblically grounded.

On the other hand, we do want true believers to be assured of their standing with God through Jesus Christ. This is a major purpose of what Paul is writing about in this great chapter of Scripture. He begins this chapter by proclaiming "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." And the chapter concludes with the great promise of "no separation." Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Having that assurance is a powerful thing, and God wants believers to have this assurance. This assurance is honoring to Him, because it's a manifestation of our deep confidence in what He has done for us. This assurance will also overflow in our lives in joyful worship, bold evangelism, and risk-taking acts of service to others.

God wants us to be assured of our right standing with Him. He doesn't want us to meander through life, constantly introspective, worrying about whether we're going to heaven or not. He wants us to have a firm confidence that there is no condemnation and there will be no separation between us and our Savior. This is very good news for us—not only the Good News of our salvation, but also the good news that God wants to give us assurance of our salvation.

The pastoral challenge, the challenge for any of us who seek to communicate these biblical truths to others, is to simultaneously shatter false assurance and strengthen legitimate assurance. For those who think they are believers, but are not, we want them to see what the Gospel really is. We want them to put their trust in Jesus, not religion. And for those who are truly saved

but struggle with doubt, we want them to experience the joy of assurance.

And the fact of the matter is, there are plenty of times when we don't know which category a person is in. Sometimes it is fairly clear, if a person says, "Yeah, I'm going to heaven, because, after all, I'm a pretty good person." If that's the basis of their assurance, we can try to break down that assurance and show the person that salvation comes through Jesus, not ourselves. But there will be many cases where we are unsure of where a person is at. I'm very aware of that this morning, and it's why I tremble at the weight of preaching this message. I do not want anyone leaving here today saying, "Yes, I'm definitely in the Spirit," if that is not really the case. And I don't want any genuine believers to leave here today with a cloud of doubt and despair hanging over them. Do you see the difficulty of this? This is why we must rely on the Spirit to apply the Word to each individual here, and to convict and assure according to what is happening in each one's life.

Pray: We pray that those who are not in the Spirit will realize that this morning. And we pray that those of us who are in the Spirit will be bolstered in our assurance and joy and confidence in what You have done in us and the great hope we have for the future.

Let's begin by thinking about the amazing reality of the indwelling Spirit, and then we will consider the future hope resulting from that—the hope of our future resurrection.

The Indwelling Spirit

In verse 4 Paul contrasted walking according to the flesh and walking according to the Spirit. There are these two paths, and every person is on one of those two paths. Verses 5-6 begin to describe these radically different paths.

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."
(Romans 8:5–6, ESV)

Then verses 7-8, which we studied last week, go to the depth of what the flesh is—hostile toward God and totally unable even to make any move toward Him, unable to submit to Him or please Him in any way.

But now verses 9-11 focus on the Spirit. And Paul wants the believers in Rome to have this assurance that they are, indeed,

in the Spirit. And I want the believers here this morning to have this assurance.

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” (Romans 8:9, ESV)

Do you see Paul’s pastoral concern here, and how he wants to be careful to give appropriate assurance? He begins by saying to the church as a whole, “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” But then he clarifies that statement by adding, “if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Those who are not in the flesh but in the Spirit are those who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. And then to further clarify, he states it negatively. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” The indwelling Spirit is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian. If the Spirit dwells in you, you are a believer. You belong to Him. But if the Spirit is not dwelling in you, then you are not a believer and do not belong to Him—at least, not yet.

Spirit of Christ

Notice here in verse 9 that Paul refers to the Spirit as “the Spirit of God” in the first part of the verse, and then “the Spirit of Christ” later in the same verse. The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is the Spirit of God the Father, and also the Spirit of Christ. This gives us an interesting insight into the Trinity. The Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ in a few other places as well (Gal 4:6- the Spirit of the Son; Phil 1:19- the Spirit of Jesus Christ; 1 Pet 1:11- the Spirit of Christ). And listen to these words of Jesus to His disciples in John 15:26,

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26, ESV)

The Spirit proceeds from the Father and is also sent by the Son. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth and bears witness about Jesus Christ. One of the things this shows us is the deity and the glory of Christ. And it shows us how closely connected the Spirit is with the Son. The Spirit proceeds, not only from the Father, but also the Son. And the Spirit bears witness about the Son.

There’s actually a debate that goes way back into the church history, over whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father only, or from the Father and the Son. This was part of what divided the Eastern and Western church in the Great Schism of 1054. The Eastern Orthodox church did not want to affirm that the

Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. But the Western church did affirm this, by adding the Filioque clause to the creeds (filioque is Latin for, “and (from) the Son.” Our church stands in that tradition. Our Statement of Faith, in the chapter on the Trinity, affirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. And these verses I’ve mentioned here seem to clearly affirm that. These are wonderful mysteries to contemplate, to think of the relationships existing between the Three Persons of the Trinity—One God in Three Persons, and the particular role of the Spirit—sent by the Son and bearing witness about the Son.

Verse 10 of our passage begins, “And if Christ is in you . . .” So it’s not only that the Spirit indwells believers, but Christ, Himself, also indwells believers. New Testament scholar Doug Moo summarizes the significance of this very helpfully, “What this means is not that Christ and the Spirit are equated or interchangeable, but that Christ and the Spirit are so closely related in communicating to believers the benefits of salvation that Paul can move from one to the other almost unconsciously. . . . The indwelling Spirit and the indwelling Christ are distinguishable but inseparable.¹ This ought to give us double assurance. We have the Spirit within us. We have Christ in us.

Now, you might be saying, that all sounds nice, but it also sounds very abstract. What are some concrete ways I can try to discern if the Spirit and Christ are really part of my life? How can I tell? How can I have assurance of this?

One fundamental clarification that needs to be made is this: where are you looking for this assurance? Are you looking to yourself and your own efforts, or are you looking to Christ and what He has done? Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a pastor in London (died in 1981), tells of spiritual conversations he would have with people, and he would ask them, “Are you now ready to say that you are a Christian?” Many would hesitate and respond, “I do not feel that I am good enough.” And Lloyd-Jones says, there you see that you are looking to yourself rather than to Christ. “At once I know that . . . they are still thinking in terms of themselves; their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian. . . . It sounds very modest but it is the lie of the devil, it is a denial of the faith. . . . you will never be good enough; nobody has ever been good enough. The essence of the Christian salvation is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him!”² He goes on to emphasize this by saying, “It does not matter if you have almost entered into the depths of hell, if you are

¹ Moo, *Romans*, pg. 491.

² *Spiritual Depression*, pg. 34. Quoted in Keller, *Center Church*, pg. 30.

guilty of murder as well as every other vile sin, it does not matter from the standpoint of being justified with God. You are no more hopeless than the most respectable self-righteous person in the world. Do you believe that?"

Here is a good place to start in testing yourself. Are you hoping in something within you, or outside of you? You must be looking to Christ. You must be looking to His perfect life. You must be looking to His sacrificial death. You must be looking to His glorious resurrection. Do you believe?

And then, as a result of that belief, there should be fruit in your life that affirms how the Spirit and Christ really are at work within you.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22–23, ESV)

The fruit is not what achieves our salvation. The fruit is not what earns us the right to have the Spirit dwelling in us. No, fruit is fruit. It's something that grows from something else. And the fruit of the Spirit are things that grow in the life of a person who has the Spirit indwelling them.

I'm reminded again of how these things could be construed in different ways, and so I'm reminded of how we are all dependent on the Spirit to apply this rightly to each of us. An unbeliever with false assurance might say, "I'm patient and kind and gentle—see, there's the proof!" Whereas an overly sensitive believer might respond to this by thinking, "I fall so far short of that. I feel so convicted of my impatience and lack of kindness and lack of self-control. How can I call myself a Christian?"

To that person I would say, I think your sensitivity to sin and your conviction of sin is an encouraging thing to see. And I would encourage that person, Look to Christ! Yeah, you're a sinner, and you will continue to stumble in this life. But Christ is a great Savior! He has taken our sin upon Himself on the cross.

Here are some other questions to ask yourself. Do you hate sin? Do you recognize sin in your life and wish it were not there? Do you look forward to the day when we will be totally free from sin? If there is an honest hatred of your own personal sin, and you are fighting against it, that is the Spirit's work within you. As we're going to see in the next verses, "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (v. 13).

Do you love God's Word? Do you desire to read it? Does it come alive to you as you commune with God in His Word? The Bible is not a textbook. It's not just there to communicate facts or historical events. It's more like a love letter. It is intensely personal, and it communicates the story of what God has done for us through the sacrifice of His Son. If the Spirit is in you, if Christ is in you, then because of your relationship with God you're going to want to know Him better—and that happens through listening to Him in the Word.

Imagine an engaged couple who are living in different cities through much of their engagement. And imagine that the husband-to-be faithfully sends handwritten letters to his fiancé, week after week. But the bride-to-be, when her friends ask her about these letters, she says, "Oh, you know, I just don't have the time to read them. In fact, I haven't opened them. They're sitting in a pile in the corner of my room, collecting dust. I'm just too tired at the end of a long day at work. I'd rather just veg out in front of the TV." What would we conclude from that? I don't think she really loves him!

If you love the Lord, if the Spirit of Christ is in you, then you are going to have a desire to open this Book and read it. And many of you know that feeling. Not that we are always as disciplined or diligent as we would like to be. But we have an interest in this Book. We are drawn to this Book, because it is God's Word written to me, for my joy and to assure me of His love for me.

And as you read the Word and listen to the Word preached and taught, do you submit to the truth? I talked about this some the past couple of weeks, in terms of some of the hard teachings of Scripture. When the Bible confronts you with a truth that is hard to swallow, like the total inability of unbelievers to come to Christ, how do you react? Or when the Bible confronts you with a command that really challenges your lifestyle, like "abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess 4:3), or put away bitterness and anger and slander (Eph how do you react? The Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and if He is dwelling in us, then there will be that inner prompting to submit to the truth. There will still be battles between the truth and our remaining sin, but there will be that witness within us that attests to the truth of the Word.

Finally, do you love other believers?

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35, ESV)

“if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12, ESV)

The Spirit dwelling in each of us draws us together in a unique way. We may not like each other all the time—that’s part of living in a fallen world. But there’s a bond there. There’s a guy I’ve been getting to know through some of our kids’ activities. The first time we met each other there were other dads around and it was mainly small talk. But the next time we were talking, we got into a deeper conversation and talked about the Lord and our testimonies and our love for the Word and our love for the church. And he made the comment to me, “I could tell you were a brother.” That happens. We can often recognize in one another that spark of the Holy Spirit’s work.

It’s been a joy in my life to be able to travel to many different parts of the world and meet believers and fellowship with them and worship with them, even when there are language barriers, but to know that the same Spirit who dwells in you also dwells in me and that is an amazing bond of love to have.

It’s my prayer in all of this that has been said so far, that some of you will be realizing, “I don’t think those things are true in my life. I need to repent and cry out for God to save me. I need the Spirit to come and live inside me.” If that’s where you find yourself this morning, I’d love to talk to you more after the service. It’s also my prayer that many of you will be resonating with these things and praising God that the Spirit is active in you. May we have a joyful assurance of what Christ has accomplished for us and the work that the Spirit is doing in us even now.

Future Hope

Having the Spirit gives us assurance of our salvation and it gives us a great hope for the future, namely, the hope of our future resurrection.

“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:10, ESV)

There is debate as to whether the reference to “Spirit” in verse 10 should be given a capital “S” or a lower-case “s.” Is it a reference to the “Holy Spirit” or to the human spirit? I wrestled with this some this week, and there are compelling arguments on each side. It could be that Paul is contrasting the believer’s physical body, which is going to die, with the believer’s spirit, which is going to live. Or it could be that he is contrasting the fact that the believer’s physical body is going to die with the fact that

the Holy Spirit gives life. These are not contradictory ideas. The Holy Spirit gives life such that our spirit lives. And this is because of righteousness, a reference to the righteousness which Christ achieved for us. That is where this life comes from.

I lean toward the view that it is the Holy Spirit referred to here (as the ESV translates it with the capital “S”) because verse 11, then, explains this further.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” (v. 11)

This is the resurrection we have to look forward to, which is going to happen through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Because of the Fall into sin, because of our fallenness in this world, we will all die, unless Jesus comes back first. We live in a world where death (and taxes) are certain. And that’s depressing.

But as believers we have great hope because even though that is the case, we have the Spirit as a guarantee of our future inheritance (Eph 1:14). We’re going to be raised, like Jesus was raised, and we’re going to have resurrection bodies for all eternity.

I love to meditate on this. I was meditating on this in my prayer times this week. Especially on Wednesday, as I prayed, I was thinking through many of the wonderful things we’ll experience in heaven. We will not be tempted to sin. We will not feel jealous or angry or bitter toward others. That love for one another (that I was talking about earlier) will no longer be mixed with the petty annoyances and quarrels we encounter in this world.

With resurrection bodies, we will not have any pain or sickness. There will be no death. There will be no injuries or disabilities. In the new heavens and new earth, I imagine us running through grassy fields and climbing majestic mountains, beholding waterfalls and oceans, swimming in flowing rivers, jumping and singing and dancing, praising our Savior. And then sitting down at the banquet table to enjoy the most amazing food we’ve ever tasted, and the most superb wine (which, I assume, Jesus will be making, like He did at that wedding at Cana). We will celebrate together and feast and commune with our Savior. And we’ll go on like that forever! It will never get old. There will always be new things to experience, new things to discover about our Savior, new delights, new songs to sing . . .

That's the amazing inheritance we have to look forward to. And we can have great assurance that it will, in fact, happen, because God raised Jesus from the dead, and He will raise us too. Paul made that point in Romans 6,

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:5, ESV)

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20, ESV)

Believers will be raised like Christ was raised.

Another reason we can have great confidence in our future resurrection is because the Spirit dwells in us, and it's through the Spirit that God is going to raise us. That's how verse 11 ends. God will give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us.

Brothers and sisters, this is a joy-filled, hope-filled text, if, in fact, you belong to Christ. I pray that you do. I pray that you will be assured of what Christ has done for you. I pray that you will see in your life the fruit of what Christ has done for you, the fruit of the Spirit's activity within you. And I pray that you will look to this great inheritance that is guaranteed to all of us who are in the Spirit.