

The Spirit Sets Me Free

Romans 8:1-14

The Christian will experience lack of strength to overcome sin.

The Christian will even experience feelings of despair over his own wickedness.

But present experience and personal feelings are not what is most important about us.

Instead, God declares to his beloved children mind boggling truth. The question is whether or not you will believe that truth. Or whether you will be like so many in the world who maintain the form of religion while denying its power.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

The Gospel Message includes power, the power of Almighty God.

Romans 1:16-17 ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,¹ as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."²

The Christian may often say, "What a wretched man I am!"

He will regularly cry out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

But he cannot ever truly say, "There is no one! I am who I am and will always be so!"

No, the Christian must, in faith, conclude with Paul: "God, through Jesus Christ!"

If you look to God in Jesus Christ, to deliver you from your sin, it is absolute certainty – you will be rescued from your sin. One of the greatest lies of Satan is that Jesus cannot actually help you in your struggle against sin. When we get to glory, we will clearly see that Jesus' success rate was 100%. Every person who looks to Jesus in faith, and keeps on looking, will indeed be saved from their sin. But, it is equally true that every person who is trusting in Jesus, as long as they draw breath in this world, will continue to struggle with sin.

Therefore, in the midst of this ongoing struggle we need to continue believing what God says is true more than what our personal feelings are telling us.

Romans 8:1-14

There is therefore now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Condemnation is what we have in Adam. But now that we are “in Christ” there is no condemnation left for us.

Paul has already taught this in chapter 5 as he explored the glories of justification. Why does he bring it up here again in chapter 8, in the midst of an argument for sanctification? It is possible that he simply wanted to repeat himself. But the language does not seem to indicate this conclusion. Paul connects there being no condemnation BOTH with what he has just said AND with what he is about to say. He uses the word “therefore” to connect with what he has just said. And he then uses the word “For” in the next verse to connect what he is about to say with verse 1.

So, the truth of there being no condemnation is vitally joined together with two important aspects of your sanctification.

First, it is while you are still struggling against sin that you need to hear the truth that you are no longer condemned.

HC – 56 - What do you believe concerning the “forgiveness of sins”?

- A. I believe that God, because of Christ’s atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, in His grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.

When your struggle with sin is over, and you are dwelling eternally in glory, you will not have to be reminded that there is no longer the sentence of condemnation hanging over you. But while you are still struggling, and sometimes failing, you need to hear the truth of Romans 8:1 repeatedly. There is therefore, now no condemnation, for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Second, it is the truth of “not being condemned” that enables and secures the working of the Holy Spirit. If you are under God’s condemnation, he is not going to pour out upon you the blessing of the Holy Spirit. It is only to those who are now under his blessing that he pours out the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The fundamental question regarding your receiving power to grow in holiness and to overcome the power of sin, is whether or not God is “for you in blessing” or “against you in condemnation.” If God continues to be “against you” then there is no hope whatsoever of true sanctification. But, if God is now “for you”, then he is exerting a new force upon you... a force of true life, a force of true freedom.

“For Paul ‘no condemnation’ means freedom not only from sin’s guilt, but also from its enslaving power.” Hendrikson

If God is not condemning you then he is most certainly saving you! To be free from God’s condemnation is to be assured of the whole of God’s salvation. Everything that we said in Romans 7 about the new heart not being as strong as the old heart is solved by this new force – this new law (law here being a force that influences and powerfully moves).

Ezekiel 36:27 ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. It is only the Almighty Power of the Holy Spirit that has the strength necessary to overcome the flesh, the world, and the spiritual forces of evil.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life
 has set you free
 in Christ Jesus
 from the law of sin and death.

The law of sin and death is the force that continues to enslave you to sin and lead you to its final result, eternal death.

The law of the Spirit of life is the powerful working of the Holy Spirit to produce life and lead you to true holiness.

The Spirit is fully God. As a person, He is distinct from the Father and the Son. But in essence, there are not three gods. Nor can the One God be divided into three parts. The Holy Spirit is not “part” of God. The Holy Spirit is fully and completely God.

So, when we speak of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer, we are claiming that the fullness of the divine power now dwells in us. That means power like we have never known before. That is why the Christian can never come to the conclusion that “conquering sin is impossible”. It would be like saying that sin is stronger than God.

Paul has certainly come to the conclusion that sin is too strong for him. But he could never come to the conclusion that sin is too strong for God. If that were the case, then the gospel would have indeed lost its power. We must never be like those who are denying the power of the gospel. No, it is a fixed law of the Universe that the Spirit has the power to conquer sin and give life. His grace is greater than all my sin.

And, this powerful grace IS at work in ALL who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life is not merely for some who are in Christ Jesus. Any and all who are in Christ Jesus are the recipients of the working of the Holy Spirit – setting them free.

Paul is so convinced of this truth that he can speak in the language of perfect fulfillment, even while you are continuing to be in the heat of the battle against sin.

The law of the Spirit of life “has set you free” from the law of sin and death.

Are you in Jesus Christ through faith alone? Then victory over sin is guaranteed! Final and complete victory over all sin is guaranteed! Not just some partial improvements.

Not just the surface sins. Jesus does not just give you a facelift.

Jesus is in the business of freely giving full and complete victory over all sin.

If you believe this, it is hope inspiring. But, as powerful as the Holy Spirit is, and as certain as is final victory, the Holy Spirit is not controlled like a light switch that brings you light with the flick of a finger. There is no quick fix.

The Holy Spirit chooses when and where and how to exert his power such that He will bring God the greatest glory.

John 3:8 ⁸ The wind¹ blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We often want the Spirit to remove struggle. If we are honest, we want the Spirit to make sanctification easy – quick and easy.

Believe me – the Holy Spirit has the power at his disposal to make sanctification easy. It is not his intention to do so. Jesus understands your struggle. He is able to sympathize with your weaknesses. He can even become more intimate with you in the midst of the struggles.

You may want Jesus to remove the struggle. He wants to walk with you through the struggle. So, expect to have seasons where it appears like the power of the Spirit is not working at all. But do not believe it for a moment. Continue to cast yourself upon Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, and him alone, is victory over sin. Don't let your present frustrations deter you from continuing to cling to Jesus. Be like Jacob as he wrestled with God: I will not let you go until you bless me. Hear Jesus' own words, “If you seek me, you will find me.” The word seek is in the present tense meaning, if you seek me and keep on seeking me, you will find me.

Remember the goodness of God, “Do you really think that if you ask for the Spirit to free you from sin that he is going to give you a snake instead?” Of course not.

You will not just pray Paul's prayer once. You will pray it throughout your life: Who will rescue me from this body of death? And you must always come to the same conclusion:

Romans 7:25 ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The road is long, but it always leads to freedom.

3 For God has done
 what the law,

weakened by the flesh,
could not do.

By sending his own Son
in the likeness of sinful flesh
and
for sin,
he condemned sin in the flesh,
4 in order that the righteous requirement
of the law
might be fulfilled in us,
who walk
not according to the flesh
but
according to the Spirit.

Paul contrasts the life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit with the impotence of the law. Paul has gone back to using “law” in the sense of command. And I might even argue that here he has the OT Mosaic Law in mind. God promised life to Abraham and to all who had the faith of Abraham. And some 400 years after Abraham, God clearly defined his will for his people in the Mosaic Law. One might have expected when this law was clearly spoken, that it would have ushered in the Messianic Kingdom. At least, the people themselves in Moses’ day were confident of their obedience.

Exodus 19:7-8 ⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

But their confident words did not work out so well. And this is precisely what Paul explains happens to all of us. Just having the commandment, and the willingness to follow it, does not result in true obedience. The command is “weakened by the flesh”. This is a summary of Paul’s experience of Romans 7. But then Paul explains what God does to break the cycle of sin. The cycle is broken by God, not us. God has done what the law could not do. Victory over sin is the work of God. It occurs in the hearts of men. But it is fundamentally the work of God.

How did God do this? “He condemned sin in the flesh.” God may have freed you from condemnation. But he condemned your sin. This is God’s judicial judgment upon the power of sin at the cross.

“God executed this judgment and overthrew the power of sin; he not only declared sin to be what it was but pronounced and executed judgment upon it.” Murray

God did not merely say that sin was evil. That would have done nothing to the sin itself. In Christ, on the cross, Jesus crushed sin.

“In the barely declarative sense the law could condemn sin; this is one of its chief functions. But the law cannot execute judgment upon sin so as to destroy its power.” Murray

Jesus, on the cross defeated sin. He conquered sin. He executed judgment upon it and pronounced freedom to all who are now in Him.

God condemned sin “in the flesh”. The flesh, according to Paul, is everything that you are in relation to Adam. It is the “you” that loves that which is evil and refuses to truly submit yourself to God and to love him with all of your heart. God does not simply pronounce the evil of your sin. God executes the sentence of death upon all that is evil within you.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, the power of sin was receiving its death blow. Jesus declared its end when he said, “It is finished.” And the Holy Spirit is now carrying out this sentence in the lives of all who are in Jesus by faith alone.

in order that the righteous requirement of the law
might be fulfilled in us,

Here we see the result of God’s work of condemning sin. There is no doubt that the death of Christ results in the justification of the believer. Paul has clearly taught this in Romans 3-5. But in Romans 6-8, Paul is working out the doctrines that make possible sanctification. So when he says, “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” he is talking about actual righteous living – sanctification.

Jesus died to make you into a righteous person. He did not only die to forgive you. He died to make you righteous. He first declares you righteous. But then he pours out his Spirit to actually make you righteous.

Justification occurs outside of you. It is a legal declaration. But here we see that the “righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled IN US.” It is to the Father’s glory that we bear much fruit. Our sanctification is not something we do for God. Our sanctification is the ongoing work of God IN US because we are justified and united to Jesus Christ.

Paul knows that what he is saying is wonderful. But he also knows that because of our continual struggle it is not easy to believe. That is why in the remaining verses Paul encourages faith in his hearers.

5 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.
 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death,
 but
 to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh
 is hostile to God,
 for it does not submit to God's law;
 indeed, it cannot.
 8 Those who are in the flesh
 cannot please God.

Repeatedly, in these verses Paul stresses the need to “set the mind upon the Spirit.” This is a responsibility that we must do. But what does it mean to “set your mind upon the Spirit”?

First, it is the opposite of setting your mind upon the flesh. It seems obvious then that to set your mind upon the flesh is to “make it your ambition to fulfill your sinful passions.” If this is your goal, and you choose to NOT war against your sin, death is the sure outcome.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:26** For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

What does it mean to set the mind upon the Spirit? At a minimum, it means to focus on that which is good and true and right. But Paul could have simply said, “set your mind upon the law” if that is all that he meant. I believe there is more. We are called to set our mind upon the Spirit. Specifically, we are called to set our mind upon what it is that the Spirit is doing IN US. The Spirit is leading us to life and peace – true life in perfect holiness and the peace of perfect fellowship with our holy God. The path to victory begins with setting our mind upon what God is doing IN US by his Spirit.

It is not so much getting rid of all the wrong desires that exist inside of you. It is making a conscious choice to fixate on the deeds of the Spirit. The lie of the flesh is that your sin most defines you. I continue to have wrong desires, therefore, those desires define who I really am.

To set your mind on the Spirit is to believe that Spirit is at work, and then to get on board with His program. You are not so much trying to make yourself righteous. God is making you righteous, and you are learning to submit to his work in your heart.

If you are waiting for all of the desires and passions within you to be those of devotion to God, you will never walk with God. You will always have within you, that is in your flesh,

sinful desires. But these passions do not have to define you. You can choose to be defined by Jesus Christ, and the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says as much in verse 9.

9 You, however, are not
 in the flesh
 but
 in the Spirit,
 if in fact (if indeed/since)
 the Spirit of God dwells in you.

It is really amazing that Paul can say this!

Look at what he said about himself in chapter 7.

Romans 7:14 ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

As it concerns his old nature and his continuing struggle against sin, Paul can say “I am of the flesh.” But, as Paul lives by faith in Jesus Christ, he can see himself, and all who are in Christ, as being “IN the Spirit.” And so, he says to those who are still struggling against sin, “you are in the Spirit.” We are called to accept in faith, and set our mind upon, the reality that the Spirit lives in us and defines who we are.

But then Paul seems to put a seed of doubt in our hearts as to whether we really are “in Christ”.

“if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

I do believe that for every person who claims to be a Christian, it is healthy to search their heart and sincerely ask, “Does the Spirit of God live in me?” “Do I see the fruit of the Spirit being produced in my heart?”

No fruit... no hunger for righteousness... should raise doubts in our hearts as to whether we are truly in Christ at all. Part of a proper assurance of salvation does include looking at evidence of the Spirit’s activity in the soul. And this may be what Paul is saying here. But I am not fully convinced that he is. The Greek word *ei;per* can be taken in a conditional way: if indeed. Or it can also be taken in a declarative sense: since.

You however ARE in the Spirit, since the Spirit lives in you.

The reality of the Spirit in your life is not first something that you feel. It is a reality that you embrace by faith.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Are you continuing to place your faith in Jesus Christ to save you? Then you are in the Spirit. The Spirit of God dwells in you.

If you have Christ, then you also have the Spirit. It is not possible to have Jesus and not have the Spirit. Many have tried to separate the work of Christ to save, from the work of the Spirit to give power for living. Do not think this way.

To not have the Spirit, is to not have Christ. Therefore, to be a Christian IS to be on the road to holiness. If you are not purposely seeking to walk with the Spirit on this road, however imperfectly, then you do not truly belong to Jesus Christ.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ
does not belong to him.

10 But
 if Christ is in you,
 although the body is dead because of sin,
 the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 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.

Paul will have nothing to do with a gospel that lacks power.

He will not let you say, "I am a Christian. I have forgiveness in Jesus Christ and am going to heaven. I do not have to really strive to be holy. I am who I am. I can never change. At least, I will never change in this life."

Paul will allow for the ongoing struggle in the Christian life. He will accept that the victory will never be complete in this life. Biblical salvation is even large enough to include seasons of rebellion and defeat. But, biblical salvation cannot ever accept the idea that change is impossible. Or that purposeful endeavoring after obedience is not necessary.

For Paul, that would be a denial of the Spirit's power, and a denial of the gospel that declares our sin condemned in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

To say, "I will never change, is to say that "the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead" does not actually live in you. It is a declaration that the Spirit has lost his power to save.

Jesus is clearly ABLE to give life to your mortal body. Of course Jesus will transform our bodies at the Resurrection. But here I believe Paul is teaching that God is able to impart spiritual life now, even while you are still in your mortal body.

There are things about your mortal body that are messed up, and even in the best mortal body death is approaching. The Spirit does not fix the mortal body – not now, not until the Resurrection of the body on the last day. But, the Spirit does give life to your mortal body. The Spirit is able now, in this world, to enable you to submit to God, even in the messed up and dying body in which you live.

You may want God to fix your mortal body. Jesus will one day do just that. But it is not today. But even in your mortal body God can impart life. He can and does begin the process of making you righteous, enabling you to submit to God's command, today.

Do not think that you are truly exalting grace by thinking, "I am just a lowly sinner saved by grace." You do justice to grace when you continue to believe in the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in you, even on your worst day.

The Christian does not owe obedience to his sinful flesh. Our bondage to the sinful flesh has been broken. We now have a new Master – the Lord Jesus Christ. And our new Master is not simply giving commands from his throne in heaven. Your new Master is dwelling within your heart by His Spirit. And by this Spirit, you are being made able to put to death the deeds of the sinful nature.

Putting to death sin is the daily work of the Christian. But it only possible because the Holy Spirit is working in you to will and work according to God's good pleasure.

12 So then, brothers,
 we are debtors,
 not to the flesh,
 to live according to the flesh.
13 For if you live according to the flesh
 you will die,
 but
 if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body,
 you will live.
14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God
 are sons of God.

The Holy Spirit is not only living in you. He is also leading you to holiness.

You do not put sin to death so that you can gain the Spirit.

Because the Spirit is living in you, you are putting to death the deeds of the body.

Putting to death sin is the lifelong challenge of every true believer. Inner battle against not only sinful actions, but also sinful desires IS a mark of being a true Christian. The Spirit has

been given a very clear purpose in your life: to make you holy. To be led by the Spirit is to submit to his working in your life.

We are indebted to the work of grace in our hearts. Every day that the Spirit continues to work, you incur a greater debt to God's grace. We often think of what we owe to Jesus. But we owe just as much to the Spirit for continuing to exert his power to overcome our sin.

Summary Points:

1. As you fight against sin, you must remind yourself that God is no longer condemning you, but rather is working for you, to free you from your sin.
2. God declares to all of his children that they have been set free from their sin, you must believe this even before you experience it.
3. God has condemned your sin – so your sin must die.
4. Your sin may be more powerful than you, but the Spirit is more powerful than your sin.
5. The Spirit dwells in every Christian, so every Christian must strive to be in agreement with the working of the Spirit. To not fight against sin is to not have Christ.
6. The Spirit will not fix your mortal body until the resurrection, but He will give life to it now.

God is working by His Spirit to destroy all of the sin of all of his children. This is the power of the gospel.

As Christians, we are to live by faith. God gains the most glory as his children trust him. So, he declares something to be true even before it actually is true.

God declares that you are free from sin even while you are living under its power. The declaration of the promise and the response of faith in the believer brings glory to God. God could fix you apart from faith. But that is not his plan. It is our faith that brings him the most pleasure.

No saint has ever reached the final goal of the Spirit's work in this life. But every saint has died clinging to the promise that the Spirit's work will indeed be completed. Both when they see Jesus face to face and in the final resurrection.

"The Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus."

Many days, you will rejoice in that truth as God empowers you to conquer sin. But remember that this statement is just as true when you are crying out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

The Spirit will not fail you. He is every bit as trustworthy as Jesus Christ.

Amen!

