

1. No Condemnation: Alive in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] We could have them open at 944 and we'll have a short word of prayer. Lord God, we recognize that no human words can convey the wonder and the mystery of the word made flesh.

And yet, it has pleased you by the foolishness of preaching and by the feeble and imperfect words of humans to present the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we pray that that gracious spirit will take my words, will use them faithfully to unfold the written word, and so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. One of the great little books in English literature is R.L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I imagine most of you will know about it, perhaps most of you have read it. And that book, as you probably know, describes a man, one man, who during the day is a respected, respectable, gifted Edinburgh doctor, moving in the best kind of society.

[1 : 23] Remember, this is the 19th century, and you're allowed to say things like that. But during the night, he became Mr. Hyde. Wicked, immoral, evil, frequenting the lowest dives and the lowest alleyways of Edinburgh.

Now, Stevenson is talking there about something that's very, very deep in human nature, including Christian human nature, the tension between what is good and what is evil.

The tension that Paul has already discerned in chapter 7, the chapter immediately before the one we read, where Paul says, the thing I want to do, I can't do it.

And the thing I don't want to do, that's the very thing I do. In other words, Paul is conscious of the sense of goodness, of godliness, and yet he's very conscious as well, that he cannot attain to it. So what is the answer to that tension? What is the answer to that problem? And you'll notice that Paul begins this chapter with the word, therefore, in question, in verse 1.

[2 : 40] Now, don't worry, there are certain preachers, when they see the word, therefore, think that gives them an excuse to expound the whole of the letter up to this point. I'm not going to do that, otherwise we'd be here for a very long time.

However, I want to make one or two introductory points. The point about the therefore here is that Paul is saying, there is this tension, there is this conflict, but there is also the life of the Spirit. Paul says rightly, you cannot live the Christian life on your own. He's going on to say, anyone, verse 9, who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to him.

And the contrast here in verse 9, also in verse 9, is in the flesh, and in the Spirit. Now, the flesh is not simply the body.

There has always been a tradition in Christian thinking that's regarded the body as evil. The body is not evil, the body is fallen, and the body is going to be redeemed.

[3 : 52] And this has been, this idea that the body is evil has been reinforced by the authorised verse and translation of Philippians 3, where Paul says, we look for a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies.

The authorised version says, our vile bodies, and make them like his glorious body. The point is, the flesh, the body, the tent, if you like, in which we live, is not evil, it is fallen, but it's going to be redeemed.

But because we are in fallen bodies, in a fallen world, there is this tension. The new era has dawned, and only in the Spirit can we live in it.

So that's the first thing then. We live in the realm of the flesh, which is not just the body, but the whole human world, the vulnerable, perishable world. But the other thing that needs to be said is this.

Some argue that we move from chapter 7 to chapter 8, as if we were moving from a lower state of Christian life, to a higher state of Christian life.

[5 : 00] If you glance back at the very end of chapter 7, verse 24, Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now it would be fine and easy if Paul stopped there, but he doesn't. He says, So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin.

And some have argued that what Paul is saying is, we leave behind the struggles with the flesh. We leave behind the falling and the failing of chapter 7, and we move now into the realm of the Spirit. We move now into the realm of complete victory. Complete victory over sin. Now that seems to me to misunderstand the whole point that Paul is making.

There is not a lower level Christianity and a higher level Christianity. What Paul is saying is, that there is the tension, all the time we are in this world, we are going to be in the flesh, but we are also in the Spirit.

[6 : 11] Back in chapter 5, he described it differently. He says, we are in Adam, and we are in Christ. The difference is, the law of sin and death, has already been defeated.

At the cross, that's been defeated, and it will disappear on the last day. When the life of the Spirit will be finally realized.

So, let's keep these things in mind, as we look at this chapter. We live in this world of tension. The light in the flesh, and in the Spirit. But it's not an equal tension, because the law of sin and death, has already been defeated.

So, let's look there. What does the Spirit do then? Now, there are three things. First of all, verses 1 to 4. The Spirit, makes effective, what Christ has done, on the cross.

The Spirit, the work of the Spirit, flows from what Jesus did, on the cross. See, there isn't a gospel of the cross, followed by the gospel of the Spirit.

[7 : 19] The death of Christ, on the cross, the word of the cross, which Paul talks about, in the letter of the Corinthians, that is the gospel. That is what saves us.

That is what brings us, to Christ. But the point is, without the Spirit, that can't be fully realized. It's not enough to say, I believe that Jesus died.

The devil believes that, and trembles. It's not enough, if you like, to be orthodox, in our theology.

We need to be orthodox, in our experience as well. And only the Spirit, can do that for us.

So, what exactly do I mean, when I say, the Spirit makes effective, the work of Christ, on the cross? Well, the law of the Spirit of life, says Paul, in verse 2, has set you free, in Christ to Jesus, from the law, of sin, and death.

First of all, the Spirit sets us free, from condemnation. That's why I've called, this little series, No Condemnation. We live, in a paradox.

[8 : 24] The Spirit is in us, but sin, is also in us. And sin will eventually, lead to bodily death, unless Christ returns, before then.

But since we're in the Spirit, we will be free, from condemnation, on the last day. And that really, is so important, in our experience.

There are moments, when sin, all but overwhelms us. When guilt, descends on us. When guilt, traps us, in its iron grip.

And we feel, I'll never make it. Well, let me tell you the bad news. You're absolutely right. You will never make it, in your own strength.

That is the point. But the fact, that not only is sin in us, but the Spirit is in us, that means, there will be no condemnation, on the last day.

[9 : 19] No condemnation, now I dread. Jesus and all, in him is mine. That's why Wesley sings, without arrogance, bold I approach, the eternal throne, because the Spirit is there.

Now, of course, the Spirit, being there, doesn't mean we don't sin. And of course, the Spirit drives out sin, and we'll come to that later. But sin does not drive out the Spirit.

That is the important thing. Sin is not as strong, sin is not as powerful, as the Spirit. Sin and death, cannot drive the Spirit away. Well, though the story of John Newton, the slave trader, evil man, who was converted wonderfully, and wrote the hymn, Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound, That Saved a Wretch Like Me.

He also wrote, another less well-known hymn, Approach My Soul, the Mercy Seat, where Jesus answers prayer. And in that hymn, he talks about the attacks of Satan. And he says in one of these verses, I may my fierce accuser face.

How do we face him? What do we tell him? When the devil says, you're a fine Christian, you say the Spirit is in you, how could anyone, who has the Spirit in them, behave like you, think like you, act like you, be like you?

[10:41] And Newton writes, I may my fierce accuser face, and tell him, you have died. That is the assurance. It's that that the Spirit makes real to us.

So that's the first thing the Spirit does. And we'll come back to that later in the chapter, particularly next Sunday morning. The Spirit sets us free from condemnation. That's the negative thing, if you like.

But the Spirit also sets us free to live the Christian life, to live in the Spirit. Verse 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, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

The law reveals the nature of God, God who is holy, God who is just, God who is righteous, it's not that there's anything wrong with the law. The law failed, and fails in our lives, because of the material it has to work on.

[11:47] When I was at school, I had a brilliant maths teacher. Absolutely brilliant. But the poor guy had rotten material to work on with me.

I did eventually manage to get a no-grade maths. There was nothing wrong with his teaching. It was my inability to understand figures, an inability which remains to this day, and no doubt will remain as long as I'm in this world.

And similarly, the law is weak, not because there's anything wrong with the law, but because the law has such poor material to work on. That is to say, our sinful nature.

The whole question of the basic lifestyle here in verse 4, in order the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. Look at that verse. How is the righteous requirement of the law be fulfilled in us?

We're going to try a little harder. We're going to do better the next time. Not at all. Who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

[12:50] Who live, who devote their whole lives to allowing the Spirit to work in us and through us. So that's the first thing then.

The Spirit takes the work of Christ on the cross, makes it real in our experience. It's an objective fact, but also becomes real in our experience.

Secondly, in verses 5 to 13, the Spirit gives us a new direction. Verse 5, For those who live according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh.

Those who live according to the Spirit set their mind on the things of the Spirit. If we are in Christ Jesus, as verse 1 says, the Spirit is in us.

Now you see how this is an important section. If we take verses 1 to 4 on its own, there is really the danger of arrogance and complacency, isn't there?

[13:49] The danger of saying, oh well, Christ loves us anyway, the Spirit has been sent down from heaven to be in us and to bring us to glory. Therefore we can sit back and do nothing.

And that's often put in a phrase I used to hear when I was younger. I'm glad to say I don't hear it so much now. Let go and let God. Now this is simply not biblical.

Now where does Scripture say let go and let God? Look at verse 13. Put to death the deeds of the body.

That doesn't sound letting go and letting God. When the Spirit is working in us, then we are working. Aren't we? The painful crucifixion is the sign that the Spirit is at work within us.

It's all of God and yes it's all of us. It's not 90% of the Spirit plus 10% of us. It's 100% of the Spirit plus 100% of us.

[14:51] I told you I wasn't any good at mathematics. That adds up to 100. Not to 200. Because both of these realities are true. So how does the Spirit give us a new direction?

First of all, we need to concentrate our minds. They set their minds according to the things of the flesh. This is still verse 5. Those who live according to the Spirit set their mind on the things of the Spirit.

Our fallen nature is a very powerful pull on our minds. And unless we make definite decisions, unless every morning when we wake up, when all those sinful desires come clamoring for attention, when everything about us that belongs to, if you like, the world of the flesh, the world of death,

clamors for attention, we must turn them away from the door.

That's not going to happen once for all. It's another danger of a certain type of triumphalist teaching that you can have one overwhelming experience of the Spirit which will suddenly take away all your sinful desires, your sinful nature.

That is dangerous teaching. It leads to disillusionment. It leads to disappointment. Very often it leads to falling away from the faith when we realize that that's not what happens. No.

[16:08] Daily we must resist the devil. We must, if you like, take the side of the Spirit. The Spirit is in us. In other words, don't invite into our house those things that don't suit the Spirit.

The Spirit is the guest who lives with us. Don't invite other guests who won't suit him. It's like putting on the armor of God as Paul says in Ephesians 6.

So first of all, we need to concentrate our minds. Paul is going to say this in chapter 12 later on. Be transformed by the renewing of your minds. How we think is an important aspect of our life as Christians.

We can't be effective Christians if we are vague and muddled in our thinking. Secondly, we must submit to God's law.

Verse 6. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law.

[17:14] That is to say, the life of the Spirit will control us as we read the Scriptures, as we obey the Scriptures. It's terribly important to read the Word, to hear the voice of God.

About ten years ago, I discovered I was not reading the Bible. Now that's nonsense. I was reading the Bible every day. But I was reading it for the next lecture, the next sermon, the next talk, perhaps even a book I was writing.

I was not reading it to listen to the voice of God. That's when I began using the Murray McChain Bible reading plan, which has been republished and commented on by Don Carson.

And if you don't have a Bible reading plan, it's never too late to start it. We must listen to the Word of God. The Spirit will speak to us through that Word.

Because if we don't fill our minds, fill our hearts with obedience to the Word of God, then we are simply going to lapse into the way of flesh.

[18:16] It's a question of where our heart's land is, where our center of gravity is. And there's a need for detailed obedience. That's why Paul in chapters 12 to 16 is going on to outline in detail and in the life of the individual and the church and society the implications of the Gospel.

So the Spirit gives us a new direction by concentrating our minds, by causing us to submit to God's law, and by giving us the hope of resurrection. Verses 10 and 11.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead, the Spirit is life. 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.

This is what prevents it degenerating into legalism. One of the great devices of the devil is to get us to concentrate on parts of the truth at the expense of other parts of the truth.

Let's say, in the first part of the chapter, we are thrilled and excited there is no condemnation. And then, it's very easy to lapse into complacency and carelessness. In the next few verses, he's saying to us, make sure that you are guided by the law of God.

[19:41] That can easily become legalism. But Paul knows, but Paul is very aware of this, and in verses 10 to 11, he says, what the Spirit is doing is creating in us the life of the age to come.

Beyond the inevitable decay and death, there is the glory of the resurrection body. The Spirit is the guarantee that death will not have the last word.

Way back at the beginning of the Bible, the Lord God said to Adam, after his sin, you are dust, and to dust you will return. But as gloomy as you can imagine, until you remember that it was God who first created out of dust, and what God did once, he can do again.

In other words, live our life in the hope of the homeland to come. What C.S. Lewis calls joy, by which he means glimpses of the homeland, those places, those people, perhaps even those tunes, those books, which anticipate the world to come.

The end of the last battle, you may remember the unicorn says the reason we love the old Narnia was that it sometimes looks like this. And when we reach heaven, we will find there, I believe, caught up there, all the anticipations of the world to come.

[21 : 01] We learned here. So the Spirit makes real the work of Christ. The Spirit gives us new direction. And finally, in verses 14 to 17, the Spirit assures us that we are God's children.

You know, there are many, many Christian people, particularly of an older generation, who simply lack assurance. One of the reasons they lack assurance is they've never really been taught the truths of God's word.

They've never really been built up in their faith. Now, Paul is saying here, one of the things the Spirit does is assure us that we are God's children. Verse 14, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. You see, as he said, as he said earlier on in verse 12, we are debtors not to the flesh.

In other words, we don't have any obligation to the fallen world. Being in the Spirit is more than forgiveness. It's more than experiences. It is being part of God's family.

[22 : 18] What that means is, first of all, we are adopted. Verse 15, you receive the Spirit of adoption as sons. All of us are created by God.

All of us are made by him. But only by his Spirit do we become his children and call him Father, Abba. Now, I know lots of people say this word Abba means dad and so on, which is true.

But anyone who has teenage children knows the word dad can have so many different nuances. I'm not sure that's terribly helpful. but anyway, it means that we are part of the family.

We belong to him. And the Spirit makes that real to us. We have not been given the spirit of fear.

What about the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, which the Old Testament speaks of?

Now, that's not servile fear. That's not craven fear. That's the kind of fear that makes us bow down and worship before the one who created us. Here, the fear that's talked about here is guilty and anxious and servile fear, plagued with unworthy, plagued with feelings of unworthiness and of, and of not being able to make it.

[23 : 37] But, Paul says, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. as John says in his letter, whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.

In other words, our assurance does not depend on us. I'm always worried when I hear people saying, I rely on my faith. I depend on my faith.

But I don't. My faith is very fickle. My feelings come and go. Sometimes, I'm rejoicing. But equally, the next moment, I can be plunged into the depths of misery.

It's not that feelings don't matter. It's that feelings must not be the decisive fact. The decisive thing is the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. So, here in this world, we are his adopted children.

But also, we will share in his glory. Verse 17, if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

[24 : 42] Now, this is the subject of the next great verses we'll look at this evening, where the Spirit who is active in the present creation will transform it into a new creation.

But already, the down payment has been made. The down payment that guarantees the full payment. Now, notice this last verse here, the last part of verse 17.

Don't misunderstand this. Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified to him, as the NIV says, if we suffer with him. This is not a condition.

It doesn't mean unless you suffer, you are not going to share in his glory. Rather, it is a confirming fact. Paul says, we are bound to suffer with him.

And when that happens, it means we are bound to share in his glory. Suffering is not a sign that God is against us. Suffering is a sign that God is working in us and with us and for us.

[25 : 43] And nothing can prevent us being glorified with him. So you see, the spirit at work in us is what results in no condemnation.

It doesn't mean we are super Christians. It doesn't mean we are a special brand of Christian. After all, in Acts chapter 6, read Acts chapter 6, the apostles seek out people filled with the spirit.

And what do those people filled with the spirit do? They serve tables as well as other things. It's not something that marks out a higher class of Christian.

To be filled with the spirit is to be a child of God. It is to be in Christ Jesus. I'm not denying for one moment that experiences which people describe as being filled with the spirit do happen.

But that's not a new experience. That's not a higher grade experience. That is when the spirit graciously assures us in our hearts of what is in fact true all the time.

[26 : 48] There is no effectiveness without the spirit. Neither our brains nor our hard work will bring us to glory nor advance the cause of Christ one centimeter.

It's all of the spirit. That means then that as we live our Christian lives, we must be open to the spirit. We must be expectant. I said at the beginning that there is a certain type of teaching that's full of hype and triumphalism that expects Christian people always to be rejoicing, always to be on top of everything, signs and wonders to follow everything all the time.

And that's wrong. That's not biblical. On the other hand, let's not slip into an unbiblical unbelief whereby we expect nothing from the spirit at all.

And that's a great danger often in our circles that we are so concerned that we don't get into an experience of hype and triumphalism that we expect nothing from the spirit at all.

Let me finish quoting some words from Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century.

This is what he says. The gospel will succeed.

[28 : 04] It cannot be prevented from succeeding. A multitude that no one can count will be saved. And all that is due to the fact that there is no condemnation.

All that is due to the fact the law of the spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death. Let's pray. And Lord God as we struggle in the flesh and in the spirit as we are so conscious of the lower of the of the demands of our lower nature dragging us down as we are so conscious of the attacks of Satan help us indeed to be open to the gracious ministry of your Holy Spirit open to his gentle words and indeed to his words of rebuke so that indeed we may live rejoicing that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We ask this in his name. Amen.