

Alive in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Well, let me welcome us all to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. It's good to see you. Now, one of the fascinating things about the Bible is that like a very variegated landscape, it's got masses of different types of material in it.

And we're going to look at one of the great chapters of the Bible over the next few weeks, Romans chapter 8. It's one of the mountain peaks of the Bible matters, of course.

None of it is unimportant. There are certain chapters, certain passages that are really mountain peaks in the surrounding landscape, and this is one of them. So, if you turn to page 944, please, in the Bibles, and we're going to read Romans chapter 8, verses 1 to 17.

The title of this little series is called Alive in the Spirit, and we're going to be looking today at verses 1 to 17. Paul writes, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

[1 : 26] By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, we'll walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. For 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.

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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

[2 : 45] So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, but if you live according to the Spirit, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

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, but you received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Amen. That is the word of the Lord. So let's have a moment of prayer. Father, we turn aside for some moments from ordinary living, from the good things and the bad things, to listen to what you have to say to us in the middle of the week.

We come from different places, different backgrounds, different circumstances, different stages in our spiritual journey. And yet we know that by your riches in Christ Jesus, you can supply all that we need.

[4 : 05] And we pray, Lord, that today as we hear your word, as we think of the amazing gift of your Spirit, not only to be in us now, but to lead us to glory.

We pray that our hearts will be gladdened, our faith will be strengthened, as we leave here and go back into the ordinary business of living.

And we pray, Lord, that this may indeed be the experience of everyone here. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. One of the great little books is Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by R. L. Stevenson. Many of you will have read it, Dr. Jekyll, a respected and respectable doctor, an upright and good living citizen by day, but at night as Mr. Hyde, treading paths of deviousness and darkness.

Now, that, of course, is a wonderful dramatization of what human nature is like. Simultaneously, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

[5 : 23] One thing I want to say right at the beginning is, those of you who know the letter to the Romans, it's not a case of going from the Mr. Hyde of chapter 7, the darkness of chapter 7, and then getting into the light of Dr. Jekyll in chapter 8.

Chapters 7 and 8 are two parallel realities. The reality in chapter 7 of the terrible struggle we continually have with sin, with our own fallen nature, and with everything that tempts us away from the path of true discipleship, and parallel to that, not subsequent to it, parallel to that, in chapter 8, is the life of the Spirit.

We are alive in the Spirit. Because we are alive, we cannot lose our salvation, however tough the struggle may be. That's why Paul says there is therefore.

Now, don't worry. There is a certain type of preacher. When they see the word therefore, they think that gives them an excuse to expound the whole of the letter up to this point. I'm not going to expound chapters 1 to 7.

I just want to say two things, though. First thing is that this all flows from chapter 1. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

[6 : 48] And Paul has developed that in great detail, powerfully, eloquently, full of vivid language in the chapters leading up to now. And the second thing, really, is to repeat what I've already said.

This is not a second stage. We don't graduate from the flesh to the Spirit, and leave the flesh behind us, and then become a kind of super-Christian in chapter 8.

What happens is the struggle remains, but it's not an equal struggle, because the Spirit is in us. We are alive in the Spirit. Paul has already said in chapter 5 that we are in Adam, meaning we are fallen.

We come from a fallen parent, and we are going to keep on sinning, as long as we're in this world.

But we're also in Christ, which means that sin is eventually going to be defeated.

And here we have one of the fullest descriptions of the Spirit's presence in the Christian life. The Spirit is with us now, and the Spirit will bring us to glory.

[7 : 58] So let's look at that in a little bit more detail for some moments. The first thing Paul says is, the Spirit's work flows from what Christ did on the cross.

The fact that we have the Spirit is because Christ died on the cross. You see, in verse 3, God had 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.

There is not a separate gospel of the Spirit. We are not saved by the gospel of Christ. And then we graduate to a higher grade, which is the Spirit.

The point is that without the Spirit, we cannot respond to the gospel in all its life-changing power.

Once again, chapter 1, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

And notice what Paul says. It's not accompanied by the power of God. It's not that we hear the gospel, believe in Christ, start the pathway of discipleship, and then we have a more powerful and more nuanced gospel, the gospel of the Spirit.

[9 : 23] The point is that without the Spirit, we could not have responded to the gospel in the first place. It is the Spirit who moved in our hearts, causing us to respond to Christ.

And it is the Spirit who leads us day by day, the Spirit who is with us in our struggles, in our battles, and the Spirit who will bring us to glory.

And Paul has two particular emphases here. First of all, we are free from condemnation. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Christians are no longer under condemnation. But this is a paradox, isn't it? The Spirit is in us, but sin is still in us.

If you glance back, just on the same page, chapter 7, verse 24, for wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

[10 : 25] Sin is still in us. It's a body of death. We will certainly die unless Christ returns before then. That is true. And sin is still in us.

And there therefore is tension. But we are free from condemnation. Not that we don't sin anymore. Not that we achieve what some people have called sinless perfection, which is impossible in this life.

But rather, that on the last day, there will be no condemnation. And that is what the word justify means.

That's one of Paul's words used so often. We'll come back to that in our final study in a few weeks' time. We're never completely free from sin in this life.

And we will die because we are sinners. Nevertheless, the Spirit will keep us. And the Spirit will see us safely to glory.

[11 : 26] And that's why there's this tension between 7 and 8. We must read these chapters in parallel. Both are true. And if we overemphasize chapter 7, of course, we get to a depressed state and feel that nothing is possible in this life at all.

That it's all going to be defeat after defeat. Now, that would be to misrepresent the power of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. On the other hand, we mustn't misinterpret chapter 8 to say that we are going to find in this life what is only true of the church in the world to come.

We will not, until we stand before the Lord, be free from this body of sin. But we are free from condemnation. And then secondly, we are free to live in the Spirit.

That's the point, really, of verses 2 to 4. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Now, Paul used the word law a great deal. It doesn't always mean exactly the same thing. There is, of course, the law of God, particularly embodied in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments.

[12 : 42] But here, he's talking about how the law reveals the nature of God. If we could actually live by the law, then, of course, we would be righteous in the sight of God.

But the law failed, not because there's anything wrong with the law, but the law had such poor material to work on. Our human nature was poor raw material to work on.

And the body, the sinful flesh. Now, flesh or body, remember, it's not evil. The body is not evil.

The body is fallen, but it's not evil and will be redeemed on the last day. Salvation isn't just about, isn't about the saving of souls. It's about the saving of the whole person, body and soul.

Paul has to say in a later letter in Philippians that we look for a Savior from heaven who will transform our lowly bodies. Fortunately, the authorized version translates that, vile bodies.

[13 : 50] That's wrong. Our lowly bodies. And make them like his glorious body. Just as, and we'll look at this next week in the renewing of creation.

So, we are able to, we are set free to live in the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit. And, walk, verse 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.

And, walk, as so often in Scripture, means a whole lifestyle, the way, the way our lives are going.

So, that's the first thing. The Spirit's work is related to the work of Christ on the cross.

And secondly, the Spirit gives us a new direction. Verses 5 to 13. Now, verses 1 to 4 really is a statement of facts. This is the reality.

God has transformed us. God has put us in Christ. He's put the Spirit in us. And the Spirit is the one who assures us our sins are forgiven, and that we are on our way to heaven.

[14 : 58] Now, we are, we are, of course, by nature, prone to extremes. When we grasp one truth, it's so easy to ignore other truths.

And if we so emphasize that we're in Christ and in the Spirit, that can lead to arrogance and complacency. That's why Paul, in this section, is telling us there are things we need to do.

Verse 13. You must put to death the deeds of the body. When I was young, I used to often hear a phrase, which I don't hear so much nowadays, thankfully, let go and let God.

The idea was that once you were converted, you just, you just went with the flow, so to speak, that the Spirit of God would, without any response on our part, simply heal us and move us, and we do all the right things automatically.

That's not, Paul is saying, it's a painful crucifixion. If the Spirit is at work in us, it's painful, it hurts, it's tough.

[16:04] And Paul says, first of all, we need to concentrate our minds. Verse 5. Set their minds, not on the things of the flesh, but on the things of the Spirit.

You see, our fallen nature always has a powerful pull on our minds, doesn't it? When we're waking up in the morning, the thoughts that rush into our minds straight away, I don't know about you, but the thoughts that rush into my mind straight away are not holy and just and pure and of good report. I know to tell you the thoughts that rush into my mind, I'm pretty certain you wouldn't tell anyone. Wouldn't it be most embarrassing if people could actually see into our minds and see the thoughts and pictures that were formed and the moment we wake up, the impulses of our fallen nature attack us.

Now, we know they're illogical and irrational, but then that's very much the way we are made. We respond to what we like, to what we enjoy, and we need to resist these.

Now, what Paul is going to say in chapter 12, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It's not simply an emotional spasm. We don't become godly simply by thinking blessed thoughts and doing nothing at all about them.

[17:32] We must set our minds. We must positively, day by day, after all our failures, and all our difficulties, set our minds.

And in verse 7, we need to submit to God's law. The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, does not submit to God's law.

What does submitting to God's law mean? Well, first of all, we've got to know God's law. We can't submit to it if we don't know it. Hence, the importance of reading and studying our Bibles.

Hence, the importance of preaching, of Bible study, of all the kind of things that introduce us more deeply to the mind of Christ and to the law of God.

And once again, law here isn't just the Ten Commandments. Law, very often in the Old Testament, and Paul often used it in this sense, isn't the sense of teaching. Submit to God's teaching, the whole of the Bible.

[18:36] A book like Proverbs, for example, a book of practical godliness, a book that deals with the everyday and with so many of the things that affect us day by day.

And the opposite of the Spirit-filled life is allowing the sinful nature to dominate. And as I say, this is the problem of let go and let God.

If we simply let go, then we are going to give into the impulses of the flesh. We're going to give into our desires, our fantasies, and so on.

That's what will happen. So, we need to concentrate our minds, we need to submit to God's law, and we need to look to the resurrection.

You see, houses not just become legalism. It's awfully easy for the Christian life to become a joyless business of rules and regulations.

[19:38] But, the point is, the Spirit anticipates the world to come. Verse 10, if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

That's the life of the world to come. 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.

In other words, we anticipate the life of the world to come. Now, in this world, of course, we need rules and regulations. We need them in society. I mean, otherwise, we're simply going to have anarchy, which history shows to be the worst type of tyranny of all, mob rule and intimidation.

And we need to have ways of living that please God. But the point is, ultimately, it's not about rules. In the new creation, there'll be no notices up saying do not murder. Rather difficult probably to do that with the resurrection bodies anyway. But, you see the point I'm getting at, there'll be no notices saying do not commit adultery because we will be free from the self-centeredness and the selfishness that causes these things.

[21:10] That is the point. And, in this life, never perfectly, the Spirit anticipates that. But we know that we have to work at it.

Try Wesley prays in his hymn, take away the love of sinning because we do enjoy sinning. That is why it is such a pull on us. The resurrection means that the Spirit and not sin and death will have the last word.

So, the Spirit takes the work of Christ on the cross and applies it to us. The Spirit gives our lives a new direction and we know the Spirit is giving that direction not when we are sitting filled with

blessed thoughts but when we are working very hard to please God.

That's not the gospel of good works because it's God who works in us to both want to do it and then to do it. And finally, verses 14 to 17, the Spirit assures us that we are God's children, that we are part of a family.

See, being in the Spirit is more than the forgiveness of sins. It's becoming part of God's family. All of us who are Christian are God's adopted children.

[22 : 33] Now, all of us are created by God. Every human being is created by God but only by His Spirit do we truly become His children and adopted into His family and call Him Abba Father.

By the way, don't overdo the thing that some preachers do. Abba means Daddy. Anyone who's brought up children knows that there is a time comes when Daddy becomes, is replaced by Dad who are so embarrassing.

I never knew until my daughter was in her teens how many nuances the word Dad could have. Dad. Then, of course, Dad, have you got any money? You see, so don't overdo it.

It is an affectionate word but let's not sentimentalize it and that's, of course, paralleled by Father. And He is our Father but He is our Father in Heaven.

He is the one whom we reverence and fear as well as love and the Spirit bears witness. Now, once again, that is not vague feelings.

[23 : 44] There will be times when we do not feel that we are the children of God. I suspect I have to ask everybody here, do you feel at this moment that you're a child of God?

Many of us have answered, no, I don't. But that's not the point. The point is the Spirit, even in times of doubt and fear, gives us increasing reassurance.

There's a lot more to be said about this next week in the passage that we'll be looking at. It's not, I don't mean it's nothing to do with feelings.

It's not worth the opposite extreme and say feelings don't matter. Of course they matter but we mustn't depend on them because they come and go. And the second thing is we will share in His glory.

We are not only children, we are heirs. once again, more of this next week, which means we have an inheritance in Christ. Remember Christ in the Bible has many titles and one of them of course is our elder brother.

[24 : 51] It's one we don't use too often because if we use it too often it can exaggerate simply into a cozy kind of relationship. relationship but in Christ because as His younger brothers and sisters it means that we will share in His inheritance provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Don't misunderstand this. This doesn't mean we've got to go out and look for suffering and say well if I don't suffer I'm not going to share His glory. What Paul is saying is there is no way of avoiding suffering.

We are all going to suffer one way or another. And this is something we need to remember.

Persecution suffering comes in different ways.

You'll be a little horrified when we read of the terrible persecution of our brothers and sisters under the Islamic State and in other places and we may feel guilty.

Remember when you stand before the Lord he isn't going to say how did you deal with the persecution that I didn't send you? He's going to say how are you faithful in the circumstances that I did send?

[26 : 09] And there are so many ways in which we suffer in this world. We suffer because we are part of humanity and we suffer too because we are Christians. What Paul is saying is the glory is as inevitable as the suffering.

There is no chance that the glory will not come. And that's going to of course be the emphasis of the great passage of this chapter climaxes and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Now Paul is saying we are alive in the spirit. Our lives are still struggle and will be struggle until the end but our path to glory cannot be thwarted.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord, pray that these great truths may encourage us. Everybody here will be facing difficulties of one kind or another. Everybody here will have problems.

Everybody here will have experienced tragedy. Everybody here will have found sometimes it was almost too much to bear. Help us to keep our eyes on the finishing line and to realize that in the spirit in Christ our way to glory is secure.

[27 : 28] Amen.