

Life According to the Spirit

Romans 8:9-13

March 11, 2018

Introduction:

Throughout life, we can experience events that bring about significant changes in us. For example, I can recall becoming a parent for the first time. Our lives radically changed after Savannah was born. Whereas before we were free to go out on a date when we liked or hang out with our friends late into the evening, having a baby changed all that. Bedtimes and sleeping schedules curtailed our freedoms and rearranged our priorities. We couldn't go out whenever we wanted anymore. A weekend trip meant more than quickly packing a duffle bag of clothes and heading out the door; now we had to pack diaper bags and bring a portable crib with us and make stops whenever she had to be fed or a diaper needed to be changed. No longer could I just think about myself; I had a baby who needed me, that I was responsible to provide and care for. Becoming a father radically reoriented my life.

But while the changes that shape you once you become a parent is significant, it pales in significance to what takes place when you become a Christian. When a person turns from sin and trusts Christ as his redeemer, God does something in you that radically changes you from who you were before. Through the Holy Spirit, everything in your life is shifted and reoriented, such that what was true of you before is no longer true anymore. As the apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5 when describing the massive transformation that comes with saving faith, he puts it like this, "If anyone is in Christ, here is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!"

So what is the new that has come for those who are in Christ? What is the nature of this radical transformation that comes about in Christians? Paul is going to spell that out for us in the passage we'll be looking at this morning. Last week we gave our attention to who we were before: we talked about what it meant to live according to the flesh and what used to characterize us back when we were still enslaved to sin. But this morning we're going to shift our attention to what it means to be made alive in Christ, and in particular, to live according to the Spirit of God as opposed to living according to the flesh.

So let's get right to it by opening your Bibles with me to the eighth chapter of the book of Romans. We'll be studying v. 9-13 today, which can be located on pg. 944 of the pew Bibles should you not have your personal Bible with you. We'll read through the passage in its entirety first and then work our way through it in detail. So please follow along as I read just v. 9-13 of Romans 8. **"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. 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 Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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."**

The central focus of these verses is upon the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is mentioned seven times in these five verses because it is his work in believers that brings about the life-changing transformation that comes to those who trust in Christ. So as we go through this passage in more detail, I want to highlight in each of the points how the Spirit works to radically change us from what we were to who we are as Christians.

So then, Paul identifies five essential changes that have come about through the Spirit to those who are believers and the first is this: as a Christian...

1. You've been transferred from the power of the flesh to the power of the Spirit

Those of you here last week might remember Paul's focus was on unbelievers living life according to the flesh and it wasn't a pretty picture. He said that those who lived in the flesh had their minds set on worldly things, were hostile to God, possessed absolutely no capacity within themselves to do anything to please God, and as a result of their sinful rebellion, were under the condemnation of eternal death in hell. So then, it's important we take notice of the first two words of v. 9. Paul switches gears here and says, "**You, however...**" Everything he said in the verses we studied last week *isn't* true of the Roman Christians to whom he is writing. So Paul is saying in effect, "For those people who aren't believers, what I said about them living according to the flesh applies to them, but however, for you, there's a very different tale to tell."

What is that tale? Look at this first sentence in v. 9. "**You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.**" When Paul speaks of being "**in the flesh**" vs. "**in the Spirit,**" he's speaking of one's status in terms of the dominion (or power) a person falls under. We saw this both in last week's passage and throughout Romans 6-7. If we're in sin or living in the flesh, then we're under its power and authority. Think of it like this: if you are visiting North Korea, then you are in North Korea and therefore under its laws and authority. Should you steal something while in North Korea, you will suffer whatever brutal punishment they sentence you to. But if someone came to help you escape and cross the border into South Korea, then you wouldn't be under North Korea's rules any longer. You're free. You've been transferred to a free country where the laws and punishments of North Korea don't apply anymore.

So that's what has happened to us spiritually. We were once trapped in the realm of darkness and sin, facing the punishment for our disobedience. We were unable to escape our enslavement. But Christ rescues us and transfers us from Satan's kingdom to the kingdom of God through the Spirit of God. As a result, as Christians we are now living in the realm of God's Spirit. We've been set free of the oppressive regime of sin we once lived under. While our flesh once controlled us and dictated what life was to be like for us, now the Spirit of God is the controlling force in our lives.

This is what is true for all believers "**if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you,**" Paul says in the middle of v. 9. While Paul doesn't doubt their salvation, the fact remains that this is only true of those who have the Spirit of God in them, which is simply another way of saying this is only true of Christians. There is no such thing as a Christian who

is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So what Paul has to say is about living according to the Spirit is only applicable to those are believers in Christ, who've been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So moving on, the second change that's true about us as Christians is...

2. You belong to Christ because the Spirit of Christ dwells in you

Look back in your Bibles at v. 9 again, focusing on the second half of the verse. **“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.”**

Now I want to briefly point out how the Holy Spirit is referred to in this verse because it's an important one for our understanding of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit here is referred to three times, first just as **“the Spirit,”** then as **“the Spirit of God”** and then finally as **“the Spirit of Christ.”** Without going off on too long of a bunny trail, the point I want to make here is that the Holy Spirit is related to the Father and the Son by both coming from the Father and the Son as well as revealing them as part of the work of his ministry. Thus he can be referred to as the **“Spirit of God”** because he comes from God and is God and furthermore he can be called the **“Spirit of Christ”** because he reveals Christ through opening the eyes of faith to see Christ as the only begotten Son of God and Redeemer of sinners. So even though Paul uses three different terms in this verse, they are all referring equally to the Holy Spirit.

Now Paul says something here he repeats twice again in v. 11 and that is that **“the Spirit of God dwells in you.”** That's an amazing statement! When you go back to the Old Testament, you find God dwelling with his people... how? Do you recall? God would dwell with them in the Temple and before that in the Tabernacle. But now God is present with his people not in a building to which people must travel but rather the Spirit of God is dwelling in us as believers. Paul raised this very point in 1 Cor. 6 where he asked, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” We have become the Temple where God's Spirit dwells.

That is meant to be an incredible encouragement for us. It means God is always present with us. You are never alone, even if you might mistakenly feel that way at times. As Christians, God is present with you because his Spirit dwells in you. He hasn't abandoned you. He's not “out there” somewhere such that you need to figure out how to connect with him. So for those of you struggling with life's challenges right now, who are facing trials and tribulations, God hasn't left you. His Spirit dwells in you and is therefore present with you as you go through these trials. Never lose sight of this precious promise of God that he's always with you because he dwells in you.

But connected to this is that if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, then that marks you as belonging to Christ. Paul says at the end of v. 9 that if you don't have the Spirit of Christ, that is, if you're an unbeliever, you don't belong to Christ. But that means the reverse is true: since you do have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, that makes you Christ's possession. The Spirit marks you as one of his own.

It makes me think of the movie Toy Story when Andy writes his name in permanent marker on the bottom of Buzz Lightyear's boot, marking him as his toy. That's an important moment for the toys because that marks them as one of Andy's precious possessions. Well, the Holy Spirit acts for us as Andy's name does for his toys. God sets his mark on us by giving us the Holy Spirit to indwell in us in order to say to the whole universe, "This person is mine. He belongs to me. I purchased her with the blood of my Son and now she is my precious possession."

Perhaps we need to be reminded of this more often. Sometimes we can focus so much on what the Holy Spirit does for us that we forget what it means to have him indwelling in us in the first place. It's the equivalent of God writing his name on your heart with permanent marker. He's saying, "You are mine forever." You and I need to hear that we are God's possession who he has marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. You are God's treasured possession. Hear that. Believe that. Let the joy and security of that take deep root into your heart. The Spirit of Christ dwelling in you set you apart and marks you to be God's own possession now and forevermore.

There's more that could be said, but we need to keep moving on, so we need to turn now to the third change that has come about as a result of being a Christian, which is...

3. You've been made spiritually alive by the Spirit although your body is dead

Look back in your Bible with me at v. 10. **"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."** There's two aspects to what Paul's saying here. The first is, **"the body is dead because of sin"** which obviously doesn't mean they're physical dead (otherwise he wouldn't be writing this letter to them!). Rather, the idea is the same as what we find in Eph. 2 where Paul says, "As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins." He's using metaphorical language meant to describe our total inability to respond to the things of God. Dead people can't do anything. They're utterly incapable of hearing or speaking or seeing or listening. Thus when Paul says we were "dead in our trespasses" in Eph. 2 or that **"the body is dead because of sin"** here in v. 10, he's speaking of the fact that in our flesh, in our own power, we cannot respond to God to obey him or please him in any way. It's another way of saying what he stated just a couple of verses before this. He said back in v. 7 that, "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."

But on the other hand, while our flesh is dead to the things of God, we now have the Spirit of God dwelling in us and therefore Paul goes on to say, **"the Spirit is life because of righteousness."** Because of the perfect righteousness of Christ who lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died, we've been given the Holy Spirit who has made us spiritually alive. So even though our flesh is unable to please God, we now have the Holy Spirit who has made us spiritually alive so that we can know, love, and obey God as Christians. We're now able to do as Christians what we once could not as unbelievers because our fleshly bodies have been indwelt by the life-giving Holy Spirit.

If you've come to faith later on in life, and you can recall what it was to live apart from Christ, then you can understand this. When I became a Christian during my first year of college in Savannah, GA, I became spiritually alive. To hijack the song lyrics from *Beauty and the Beast*, "There was something there that wasn't there before." I began to love and treasure Jesus. I wanted to study the Bible, to pray, to go to church and be in fellowship with other Christians. I talked about Jesus every chance I could with anyone who would listen, and even those who didn't want to listen! Whereas before I was dead to the things of God, as soon as I was born again, and the Holy Spirit took up residence in me, I became alive to the things of God. That was as radical of a change as has ever happened to me and it was inescapably obvious to anyone who knew me.

But besides spiritual life in the here and now, the indwelling Holy Spirit also promises to raise us up to a glorified physical life after death. So the fourth point we need to see about what has become true of us as Christians is that...

4. You will be resurrected in a glorified body through the Spirit

Paul says this in v. 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."**

Whereas in the last point we talked about how the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life when we were spiritually dead, now we're told that the Spirit will also give physical life to us after physical death. Just as Jesus died and was raised from the dead into a glorified body, so also with the Holy Spirit, he will not abandon us to the grave but will bring us back alive so that we, like Jesus, will be resurrected to new physical life.

A couple of things are worth remembering here and the first is that death is not the end. If you're a Christian, you will be raised to new life in a glorified body like Christ had that will be fit to live with him for all eternity. I know it's easy on this side of eternity to sometimes forget that. Loved ones die and years and years can pass by without them and they fade from our memories. Death seems so final, so permanent from our perspective. But this verse reminds us that physical death for Christians is only the doorway we must pass into eternal life. You will see those loved ones again, provided the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwelt in them and also dwells in you. Death for the Christian is only a temporary good-bye, a "See ya later" because later will certainly come. Death is only a momentary parting. Those who are in Christ will be reunited together in the resurrection.

Second, this verse also reminds us that the resurrection is a physical resurrection. Jesus came back in a physical body, albeit a glorified one. Heaven is not a place where we float around as disembodied ghosts. We aren't going to stand on clouds strumming harps for all eternity. The new heaven and new earth is a physical place where we will have physical bodies. The glorified body the Holy Spirit will give us in the resurrection is a physical body that unlike our current bodies will not age or suffer

from disease or death. And our eternal habitation will be a physical place no less physical than where we live right now.

So this is something we ought to look forward to. The Holy Spirit indwelling in you as a Christian is a deposit that guarantees what is yet to come. What happened to Jesus on Easter will happen to you. Death's cords will be unraveled, and its sting forever removed, because death will be swallowed up by eternal life. Rest in that promise and take joy in the certainty of that future that awaits all those who have the Spirit of God in them through faith in Christ.

That then brings us to the final point I need to make this morning about living life according to the spirit and this point concerns what God then expect of us in the here and now as we await this glorious resurrection to new life. So our fifth and point we need to consider is this. As a Christian...

5. **You are a debtor to the Spirit, to live by the Spirit in putting sinful deeds to death**

After describing the numerous benefits that have come to us by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we're called to action. Look at v. 12-13 in your Bibles. Paul writes, **“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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.”**

Just because God has saved us by his grace, justified us by the redeeming sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and given the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, doesn't mean we get to kick up our feet and do nothing while we reap the benefits of our salvation. Paul says we are **“debtors.”** We owe something, but not to our flesh, no to our sinful desires to which we were once enslaved. We owe our very lives to God. We can never pay off our debt to God, but if he purchased us by the blood of his Son and we now belong to him, then we are not our own. We owe God everything. We have a debt of gratitude to take our redeemed lives and use them to bring God glory through us.

People only have two options: keep living according to the flesh, that is, keep living in unrepentant sin, living life however you want in according with your sinful desires and attitudes, and as a result, Paul says in v 13, **“you will die.”** That road ultimately leads to eternal death in hell. The only other option is to live according to the Spirit by first turning to Christ in faith, so you can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who will set you free from your enslavement to sin by transforming your heart and mind so that you have the power to begin to live righteously. That option, of living according to the Spirit, has a different result: Paul says, **“You will live”** if you do that, not only live an abundant and far more soul-satisfying life now, but you will enjoy eternal life in heaven.

But notice what Paul says about what living according to the Spirit looks like. It not about speaking in tongues or having ecstatic visions or being slain in the Spirit or anything else that can sometimes happen in charismatic churches. What does he say here? He says, **“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”** Back in days of yore, there was an old English word used to describe this idea

and it's the word "mortification." Old Puritan writers were fond of using the term "the mortification of sin" which means putting sin to death. Paul tells us we need to "**put to death**" or "mortify" the deeds of the body.

I want you to feel the weight of this idea. Putting something to death is not meant to be understood in a gentle way. It's violent. It's ruthless. It's final. Paul is telling us to hunt down and totally eliminate any pockets of sin that might still reside in us. When we see sin in our lives, we are to go to war against it and have a scorched-earth policy: you completely annihilate it. You don't take prisoners of war, you don't make deals or compromises, you don't go easy: you root sin out of every fox hole and trench in your heart and eliminate it.

Are you doing that with sin in your life? Or are you playing games with it? Are you toying with it, like a cat does with a mouse for amusement? We can use grace as a cover up to excuse our lackadaisical approach to sin. We can think that because we are saved, that because all of our sins are forgiven in Christ that we can be soft on sin because, after all, even if you do sin, Christ will forgive it. That's not at all what anyone anywhere in the New Testament says about how we are to live the Christian life. Paul certainly doesn't. He says if you want to live eternally, if you really do have the Holy Spirit indwelling in you, then "**put to death the deeds of the body.**" Kill it! Don't tolerate it. Don't act as if it is not a big deal. Slay it! Destroy it! Jesus said if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye, gouge it out. His words might be metaphorical, but his sense of ruthless urgency most certainly is not.

Listen, you cannot keep sin under control. You can't keep indulging in some secret sin and expect that the Spirit within you isn't going to know or care. You can't claim to be the Bride of Christ and then keep committing adultery with your little private affairs with sin. If you belong to Christ, then belong to him completely and cut off any relationship you have with sin - destroy it - whether it be anger or lust or gossip or bitterness or theft or anything else you know full well that you are tolerating that is sin. Paul says you need to put those things to death: that coddle them and allow them to grow and your feed and nurture those sins. Kill it!

Conclusion

We've talked about a number of wonderful aspects of the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit this morning, and I hope there has been much to encourage you. But Paul is doing more than simply encouraging his readers with what God has done: he's also calling us to action. We have the Holy Spirit so we can live according to the Spirit and that starts by relying on the power of the Spirit to help us ruthlessly pursue the total destruction of the strongholds of sin in our lives.

So I want to leave you this morning with the serious call to not tolerate any sin in your life. Mortify it. Put it to death. Kill it. Cut it off. Slash and burn it. If you have been tolerating it, repent of your spiritual adultery. Stop playing games. God doesn't find your indifference towards sin amusing. He has given you the power to put it to death, so what are you waiting for? Hunt down and destroy all pockets of sin in your life. Living by the Spirit is not

a passive experience: it is a call to actively wage war on sin by putting it to death so that the positional righteousness of Christ given to you by grace might begin to manifest itself in you as you repent of sin and bear the fruits of righteousness.

So as we close this morning, I'm going to ask you to spend some time in prayer and reflect on where you need to wage war against sin in your life. What sin have you been tolerating that you need to put to death? Where have you been allowing sin to grow that you need to take the axe to the root and kill it? Let's not be those who tolerate sin and thus deceive ourselves, because Paul is clear: if we live according to the flesh, we will die. But if we put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, we will live. So let's live for Christ our Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit and deal with our sin by putting it to death. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2018.