

The Spirit and Freedom: He Gives You Life

Romans 8:1-4

Did you know that Romans 8 speaks of the Holy Spirit more than any other chapter in all the Bible? In the rest of the book of Romans, the Spirit is mentioned 10 times, and then just here in Romans 8 – 21 times! The Work of the Spirit leaps up off the page to us, and as I hope you will see this weekend, not in some abstract theological sense, but in a way that gets right at the heart of our experience as Christians.

In many ways, this chapter answers a question that all of us ask, in so many words:

What help does God give to us in our weakness?

For we are so weak aren't we? Whether through our own sin, or folly, or just boredom and drift, we are always coming up hard against the fact that we are so fragile, that we so often fail – we are inescapably *weak*. And so we ask: *what help does God have? What help does God have for **you**, even when you feel beyond his help?*

Romans 8 answers in all capitals, in bold, so we simply cannot miss it:

GOD GIVES US HIS VERY BEST

Romans 8 is not a pep-talk lobbed down from heaven. No, in this chapter God draws near to us and assures us that he has given us his very self, his Holy Spirit, to help us in our weakness. Like last Sunday, there is not a single command in this whole chapter. Instead Romans 8 lifts our eyes from our own weakness to see the great strength of God. It shouts from the rooftops what God has done for you, and what God has given to help you in his Spirit:

That the Spirit Gives You Life; He Governs Your Mind; He Testifies to you that you are God's child; He even prays for you, interceding for you with the Father and the Son.

God has not left us alone, he has given us his very best, he has given us his Holy Spirit.

1. The Glorious Gospel

And so Romans 8 begins where, as I was taught at College, all good theology begins: with the gospel. For the whatever the Spirit does in our lives, it will not be somehow different to or detached from the glorious gospel of our salvation. And you would be hard-pressed to find a more glorious statement of the gospel than Romans 8 verse 1:

*Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Basically every word of that sentence is brimming with good news:

There is **now** no condemnation: this is not a distant future goal to aspire towards – it is true right now!

There is now **no** condemnation – God isn't holding anything against you in Christ. It's all fully, and finally dealt with – forever.

See we live in a world where every little thing is recorded and written down, and can come back to haunt us at any moment. We sometimes even do that to each other don't we: we hold on to the hurts of the past and then we whip them out as weapons, even against those we love. And if we're honest, don't we so often hold onto our own past, to our great pain and grief.

But this is not the way of the gospel. The past is paid for and put away and God *will not* hold anything over us. The Scottish preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones says from these verses:

Would you like to be rid of [your] spiritual depression? The first thing to do is to say farewell now and forever to your past. Never look back at your sins again. Say, "It is finished, it is covered by the blood of Christ." Take that step and finish with yourself and

look to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only then that true happiness and joy are possible for you. You just begin to say, "I rest my faith on him alone, who died for my transgressions to atone."

Verse 1 tells us this good news of *no condemnation*.

Verse 2 goes on to give us this same truth from a slightly different angle, listen again as verse 2 speaks of our *freedom*:

...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Now when Paul speaks of "law" here, he's not speaking about the Old Testament Law. Rather, the law here is the power or principle that rules over and governs our lives. And without God, we're told that sin and death are in control.

At Christianity Explored on Thursday night we discussed this topic of sin, and it really hit home for me again how true a verse like this really is. The whole of human history is one grand testimony to the hold that sin and death have over the human heart and the whole world. However we spin it, all pretensions to human progress are an illusion.

But here we're told that through Jesus Christ there is freedom from the downward spiral of sin, and even of life in the face of death. There is another power at work in us and in the world: of righteousness, of forgiveness, of life! As we will see, *this* is the work of the Spirit.

Here is the gospel in 2 verses: we are forgiven the sins of the past; we have been set free from the power of sin in the present; there is real and lasting hope for the future. For the Christian, this is where we start, it's where we stand, and it's where we will stay: no condemnation, freedom.

2. The God of the Gospel

And how is all this even possible? Well it's certainly not through our own effort and exertion.

Verse 3 tells it to us plainly:

*For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, **God did** by sending his own Son...*

The commands of the Law could only ever reveal our own weakness. Only God can rescue us *from* our weakness. And that's what he did!

You can see already from these verses how it's impossible to speak of the gospel without speaking of the *God of the Gospel*. It is *in Christ Jesus* that we are no longer condemned, it is *through Christ, and by the Spirit of life* that we are set free. It is *God who sent his son into the world to condemn sin in the flesh for us*. The gospel is the work of God from beginning to end.

And then, in the same way, we can't speak of the God of the gospel, without speaking of God as he reveals himself to be: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These few verses give us something like a Trinity 101, and a necessary foundation as we consider the work of the Spirit in particular this weekend.

The basic point is this: in everything God does, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, work *together* and yet *differently*. There is no *division*: Father Son and Spirit are completely united as they work in the world for our salvation, we can truly say it is *God* who saves. But there is *distinction*: each person of the trinity has their own role in in the work of the gospel.

You can see this in these opening verses of Romans 8.

For we read of God The Father who *sends* his Son in verse 3. The Father is the source and beginning of our salvation.

And it is the Son, not the Father or the Spirit, who comes into the world, in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh. The Son is the mediator, the one who accomplishes our salvation through his saving death on the cross and his rising again to new life.

3. The Spirit who...

And so what then is the work of the Holy Spirit?

If it is the Father who sends, the Son who lives and dies and rises again, what does the Spirit do?

We read it in verse 2 didn't we?

The Holy Spirit, is the Spirit who *gives life*. He takes the finished work of Christ and brings about its intended effect in *our lives!*

Now, I know that there are quite a few people in our church who have had big trips cancelled now or for later in the year. And maybe you had postcards or brochures that you were looking at and looking forward to seeing for yourself. And you've still got those postcards, but now the reality is only a distant possibility. You know that Europe still exists of course, but for now at least, it is not our experience.

And I wonder if we don't often think of Christ's work in this way? We know that he really did die and rise again, but we feel like it is not *for us right now*. Maybe once we've dealt with this or that, or fixed ourselves up, then we can come and receive the benefits of Christ's saving work. But we feel like it is far off and distant.

But this is the great work of the Spirit. For the Spirit takes the historical reality of Jesus' death and resurrection and he carries it into our hearts. As one writer says:

The Spirit's role is to turn our postcard apprehensions of Christ's [work for us] into an experience of sitting on the beach, in a lawn chair, drink in hand, enjoying the actual experience.

The Spirit transports us out of our own weakness and failure – our reality governed by our sin and death; and he carries into a new place

of forgiveness and freedom – into a new reality governed by his life-giving power. To use the language of verse 1, when the Spirit comes *into our hearts*, he takes us into Christ – where all that he has done and won is now true of us as well. Because of the Spirit, the life of Christ is not some far, off distant reality. No. In the Spirit, no condemnation, freedom, *life*, become the most fundamental reality of who we are.

One writer sums it up perfectly:

In short, Christ and all his benefits, the love of the Father, and the grace of the Son, become our portion only in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

This is what Christians have always declared to be true of the Spirit. In the Nicene Creed we declare:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, The **LORD**, and the **Giver of Life**.*

The Holy Spirit is God himself, drawing near to us, giving us the very life and heartbeat of the Father and the Son. He does this decisively, once and for all, in our regeneration, in that first moment where we give up on ourselves and move all of our chips over to Jesus. And as we will see over the rest of our weekend, he does it again and again, 10 thousands times over as we live our lives according to the Spirit's life-giving power.

Through all our sin, all our folly, all our boredom, and our drift, in our weakness he continually guides us, leads us, comforts us, reminds us, even prays for us.

Read Romans 8:1-2