

Romans 8:1-17

Living by the Spirit

God breathed the breath of life into the first man and he became a living creature (Genesis 2:7). *To live*, in the biblical sense, is more than physical existence. Human beings do not live by bread alone, that's the physical existence, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord, that's the spiritual life leading to eternal life (Deuteronomy 8:3).

This passage in Romans is about those who walk according to the flesh, that's the fallen physical existence under the dominion of sin; and those who walk according to the Spirit, that's the spiritual existence for those who are in Christ. Christians still live in physical bodies, and there's nothing wrong with that. To walk according to the Spirit doesn't mean we are spiritual beings because we are still living in bodies (in case you hadn't noticed!). But it does mean sin is no longer our master because we have a new Master, Jesus, who defeated sin and death and rose never to die again.

To be effective witnesses for Jesus in Girton and beyond we need to be people who are filled with the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes all the difference in the life of the believer.

According to a recent YouGov poll for the first time more people in the UK now identify as 'No Religion' (48%) than Christian (44%). But when we believe nothing we are apt to believe anything. The danger is that the spiritual void in the human heart is filled with other things such as New Age spirituality, spiritualism or other religions. But it is only the Spirit of God, who like living waters, can really quench our spiritual thirst. This is what people need. Romans 8:1-17 is literally saturated with the Spirit, the Spirit being mentioned 17 times in 17 verses.

1. Set free by the law of the Spirit of life (8:1-4)

As we saw last week there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because He has taken our punishment and we are now clothed in His righteousness. The law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), that is, the Word applied by the Spirit into our lives sets us free (I think this idea is probably closer to Paul's thought, rather than a new spiritual principle.)

There are brilliant teachings in the Bible, such as the Golden Rule, *Do to others as you would have them do to you*. (Luke 6:31). Most people, Christian or not, usually agree with this. But how many are able to put it in to practice? Our sinful and self-centred nature works against us. Without the Spirit of God something even as simple to understand as the Golden Rule can be very challenging. But this is why Jesus came and this is why we need to be filled with His Spirit (Romans 8:3).

2. Focused on the things of the Spirit of God (8:5-8)

If we are going to walk according to the Spirit and follow in God's way we must be 100% committed and focused on the things of the Spirit (see Hebrews 12:2). *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace* (Romans 8:6). A life committed to God is attractive because it is life and peace, and that's what everyone is looking for. The Holy Spirit gives joy to the heart, imparts the love of God to the soul and even quickens our moral bodies. He is the supernatural dimension to the Christian life who makes all the difference.

Our self-centred and God-resistant sinful nature resists all that the Spirit wants to do in our lives (Romans 8:7-8). This is why as Christians we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (Romans 6:11). Yet in Christ we have a new nature.

2Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This is the radical solution to the human condition which is better than any self-help program and more fundamental than education. Paul's theology that all are under the power of sin would be utterly depressing and soul destroying if he left it there. But he doesn't leave it there. In Christ we are a new creation, with a new nature and new desires which weren't there before. This is the new nature that now desires the things of God, such as bible study, prayer, witness and Christian fellowship. The world, the flesh and the devil will always want to squeeze the things of God out of our lives and steal our joy. But we must continue to set our mind on the things of the Spirit, and this will result in life and peace. This in turn will be a good witness to those around us.

3. Given life by the Spirit of God (8:9-11)

The believers in Rome were not in the flesh, but in the Spirit ... if, as Paul says, the Spirit really dwells in you (Romans 8:9). How can we know if the Spirit dwells in us? He lives in all those who have truly put their trust in Jesus. He lives in our lives by faith even if our feelings say something else. So we should always thank God for the gift of the Spirit. Yet we should learn to recognise the work of the Spirit in our lives. On the road to Emmaus the two disciples Jesus talked to noticed that their hearts burned within them (Luke 24:32). Likewise John Wesley famously testified that his heart was strangely warmed when he truly committed to Christ. This is one way we can experience the presence of the Spirit. But the key thing is the He is the Spirit who gives life, which is more than physical existence: it is relationship with God.

It is possible to make out a good historical case for the resurrection of Jesus. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in your heart it's not difficult to believe! (Romans 8:10-11). Calvary is no longer a far away hill, but a vital reality in your heart; and the empty tomb is no longer just a tomb in a rock in Jerusalem, but a powerful resurrection reality in your life.

4. Led by the Spirit of God (8:12-17)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (Romans 8:14). Those led by the Spirit are those who have placed their trust in Jesus as Lord, and they are God's children. The Spirit gives an inner witness that we are God's children (Romans 8:16) and the Spirit cries out within us Abba, Father (Romans 8:15). God has made us part of His family, and this is our destiny. The forces of evil want to isolate and dehumanise us, which can result in great suffering and loneliness. But God has planned for us to live in families (Psalm 68:6) and the best family everyone can belong to is God's family, the church. We are accepted in God's family because God our Father has truly accepted us and given His Spirit to bear witness we are His children. Sometimes circumstances force us to live on our own, but when we are part of God's family we will always have friends and someone to talk to. It's a win win situation.

We also have a wonderful inheritance because God our Father is good. We will share in Christ's sufferings in this life, but this works for good so that we may be glorified with him, which means we will share in His resurrection (Romans 8:17).