

Called to Life in the Spirit

Bible Background • ROMANS 8

Printed Text • ROMANS 8:1–14 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 6:1–14

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: **CONTRAST** living in the flesh with living in the Spirit; **DESCRIBE** emptiness of trying to find life following the flesh; and **SHARE** what it means to have our mind set on living in the Spirit.

In Focus

Henry had run from his past for years. He couldn't tell anyone about it. The addiction was a disease. He knew that. But his actions while addicted—and the people he had hurt—were wrong. It was sinful. His 12-step program taught him to make amends with those he harmed and sinned against. That was crucial, and he did the best he could, with an awareness that he might or might not receive forgiveness from the harmed party. He worked the steps. Sober for twelve years, happily employed for eleven, saved for nine, married for seven, and three children later, he found himself here. He could not imagine why his pastor would entrust him with another young brother who was struggling with addiction. Henry had moved on and didn't want to dig up the past. But through the experience with this young man, Henry would redefine his views and be forever changed.

When he was charged with being a light, Henry found that impossible, because he had not worked his steps thoroughly the way he believed he had. When Henry went through the steps, he made amends with everybody except for one person: himself. He hadn't forgiven himself, because he hadn't acknowledged his sin against himself. Dealing with this young brother forced him to face that. He could not truly be free until he faced the reality of his sin and received God's forgiveness for himself. Henry acknowledged the sin, faced it, and was freed from the shame and power of the disease over his life.

How can being an example for others of God's grace help us receive more grace for ourselves?

Keep in Mind

“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Flesh sarkos (Gk.) — Sinful nature.

B. Condemnation katakrima (Gk.) — Punishment from wrong standing, penalty.

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

NIV

Romans 8:1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

2 And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

4 He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

6 So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

7 For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will.

8 That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)

10 And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

12 Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.

13 For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

The People, Places, and Times

The Law of Sin and Death. This law represents our unsaved and condemned state before sanctification in Christ Jesus. The power and authority sin had over our flesh separate us from right relationship with God. We were unable to free ourselves from sin and death's power. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit, called the Spirit of Life in this passage, that we are able to become free from this law. The Holy Spirit works within us to walk in new life with Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to follow the law of the Spirit?

Background

At the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses two different methods of justification that the people have been disputing over: justification by works and justification by faith. He explains that God has transitioned us from works to faith-based justification, as Jesus' resurrection leads to justification and life for all, regardless of their nationality or background (Romans 5:18). We respond to this gracious gift by submitting to God and His commandments, out of love and faith in Jesus. Leading up to chapter 8, Paul begins speaking of the power of sin and our constant struggle to break free from this enslavement—it is easily apparent that this is something we are incapable of accomplishing as humans. We are instead set free by God for the purpose of now becoming subject to righteousness. Here in chapter 8, we hear all about the power of the Holy Spirit to free us from sin, bring life to our dead flesh, and transform us as children of God!

Have you ever been excluded from something because of your nationality, race, or past history? How did you respond to your exclusion? What might have changed if someone had stepped in on your behalf?

At-A-Glance

1. No Condemnation (Romans 8:1–8)
2. The Spirit of God Dwells in You (vv. 9–11)
3. We Are Children of God (vv. 12–14)

In Depth

1. No Condemnation (Romans 8:1–8)

Here, Paul speaks of the work that Jesus has done as a new law that frees us from the law of sin and death. At the same time, we know from the previous lesson that God's Law from the Old Testament is still important for how we respond to God's righteousness and love for us. So, what exactly does it mean that we have been set free from it? Paul breaks this down in terms of what things we set our minds on. According to the previous law, we were directed to set our minds on the things of the flesh, staying focused on all of the things that we should and shouldn't do to please God. This was important because sin had the power to keep us in our graves! But with God's new law, we are directed to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. We learn to trust the things that God has done through Jesus, rather than put our faith in what we can do as humans. The law of sin leads us to death in displeasing God, but the leadership of the Holy Spirit leads us to new life in Christ.

Sin has lost the power to keep us in our graves, but it hasn't lost all of its power. Does this change the way you think about your own sins?

2. The Spirit of God Dwells in You (vv. 9–11)

As Christians, we are no longer “in the flesh.” We are now “in the Spirit” because God’s Spirit lives within us. This creates an interesting dynamic for our existence here on earth. We are dead in our flesh and our humanity, yet we are very much alive because we receive the Spirit of Christ. But the two don’t remain separate. Because this is the same Spirit that worked to resurrect Jesus, we, too, can believe in the resurrection of our flesh. We don’t have to wait for our flesh to go away so that we can be fully alive; the Spirit is able to give life to our mortal bodies as well.

We are no longer “in the flesh,” but we do still have our flesh. How does this affect the way we experience life with God?

3. We Are Children of God (vv. 12–14)

We can see that there is tension between what the previous law and the new law each means for us. Here, Paul says outright that how we live is important. We are free from the power of death, but there is an appropriate way to respond to what God has done for us. Consider the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). We have received the Spirit of Christ that has the power to resurrect our dead flesh. But how do we see that this has happened or begun to happen? We see it in the way that we begin to live our lives and treat the world around us. And, of course, it doesn’t happen overnight. We are like children who will always be learning, making mistakes, needing to adjust, until God makes us perfect. And we can rejoice because there is no condemnation in this. Being like children before God—teachable, playful, malleable, joyful—is an invitation and a gift from God.

What characteristics do you think of when you think of children? How might God be inviting you to be His child?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why is changing our mindset a necessity (Romans 8:6–8)?
2. What are the problems of relying on our flesh? Why is humanity flawed (vv. 3, 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Do you think there are places where the things of the flesh and the things of the Spirit overlap? What tools do we have to discern between the two?
2. How do we “put to death the deeds of [our] sinful nature” (v. 13, NLT)? How are we commanded to respond to our sins? (Think: Repentance? Reconciliation? Reparations?)

Liberating Lesson

By the power of the Spirit, we change the way we live in response to God’s love. And though we repent and are free from our past sins, this does not reverse the damage that we have done to ourselves and others in our sinfulness. What responsibility do we have to make amends for the things that we’ve done prior to receiving the Spirit of Christ? What does a full view of repentance look like? Is it simply turning away from a particular sinful act or way of living, or are we called to rectify the damage we have done?

Consider the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1–10). After encountering Jesus, Zacchaeus says to him, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (v. 8). This is not what Jesus asks of him, rather, what he feels compelled to do as a response to his encounter with God. Might his transformation have still been complete had he not decided to repay (and in excess!) for his past sins? Can you think of situations in which you should have gone as far as repaying for past sins but were reluctant to do so? What situations can you name, personal or historical, for which reparations might be a sign of a more complete repentance of sin?

Application for Activation

Take a moment to engage in musical worship as a way of setting your mind on the Spirit. You can listen to a worship song or sing some songs together as a group (e.g., “I Surrender All” or “Be Thou My Vision”). Afterward, take a moment to silently pray to God, asking Him to speak to you about any areas in your life where you may have given power to sin. Invite God into that particular situation, repent of wrongdoing, and consider how God may be inviting you to take action as part of your repentance. If comfortable, consider sharing with the group some of the possibilities that arose.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Romans 8:1–14

Prior to this passage, Paul ardently proclaims salvation and justification by faith through God’s loving grace (Romans 6–7). He then addresses the constant struggle the believer has with the sinful nature (“the flesh”). Paul acknowledges that even he tries to keep the Law, but is unable to do so using his own will and efforts. Here, though, Paul preaches power! He argues that the power of the Holy Spirit changes the believer through faith in Jesus Christ. In previous chapters, Paul introduced the power of sin. Now he turns his attention to the solution: the power of the Holy Spirit over sin. The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit offers us triumph rather than struggle. Through the “law of the Spirit of life” (Romans 8:2), the believer’s faith gives the power to become the new creature God has declared him or her to be.

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Paul’s theme in this chapter is centered on power in the life of the believer. The New Testament writers in general, and Paul in particular, generally write of two specific words that get translated as power in some English translations: *exousia* (Gk. ex-oo-SEE-ah) and *dunamis* (Gk. DOO-naw-mees). The first, *exousia*, means authority, and is the power equated with divine authority. Jesus refers to *exousia* when He declared to His apostles that “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (from Matthew 28:18). The second power, *dunamis*, is a power that means to be able to do something. This power is the dynamic strength or wonder-working power exercised through the Holy Spirit by the believer. *Dunamis* is the power that is referred to when Jesus instructs His disciples that “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). It is this latter power, this gift of the Holy Spirit, which emboldens and enables believers to live a Christian life.

Paul personalizes this very important teaching by addressing the Roman church in the first person. He has already emphasized the stronghold of sin, in general, and sinful nature, in particular: “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15, NLT). There is, he points out, a constant battle to subdue the sinful nature and bring it into submission. The Law, Paul explains, only seems to make him more aware of how far he is from righteousness. Paul concludes that there are two laws at work: God’s law and the law of sin. In his mind, he admits, “I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin” (from v. 25, NLT).

Moving forward, Paul is adamant that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” To be sure, the first-century Roman believers, to whom this letter is addressed, had an immediate understanding of the concept of “condemnation.” Many of the Hebrew Christians were not citizens of Rome and enjoyed none of its privileges or protections. These Hebrew Christians were under constant and oppressive scrutiny from the Roman government. They would have been painfully aware that the tiniest infraction could result in their immediate condemnation by the Roman authorities. Found guilty of any breach of Roman laws (e.g., failing to show the proper deference to the emperor or other authority figure) could subject them to loss of property, beatings, or imprisonment.

Similarly, we should recall that even the strictest adherence to the Mosaic Law did not have the power to free man from sin. In fact, everything about the Law condemned the sinful nature. The Law could only offer a standard for righteousness. At best, it served to demonstrate how far afield humanity was from righteousness. Humanity’s salvation was accomplished only through Jesus’ redemptive death on the Cross. Thus, through Jesus Christ, we are free to live under grace and not the Law. To put it another way, Jesus’ death and resurrection justified man, or made us guiltless before God. Through Jesus Christ, we were brought out of sin

and returned to right relationship with God. Through our faith and belief that Jesus died, was buried, and rose to save us from our sins, our penalty is forever removed from our lives as believers.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

The spirit Paul refers to in verse 2 and the following verses must be understood to be the Holy Spirit, in Greek the *hagia pneuma* (HA-gee-ah PNEW-mah). Not a “thing,” but rather we should understand the Holy Spirit to be a distinct person of the triune God and a significant influence in the life of believers. He is the same Spirit Jesus referred to when He told Nicodemus “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Paul again refers to the inadequacy of the Law. The Law held only the power to condemn. It had no power to renew or change a person’s desire to live a godly life. This renewal was accomplished through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God, Paul explains, fashioned His only Son in the form of a human in order to sacrifice Him for the sins of humanity. Jesus, in flesh, died for the flesh. From that, the power of sin to condemn us to death has been nullified. God will no longer condemn us to death for our sins as the Law once did.

Here again, the reader must appreciate Paul’s candor. He makes it clear that the struggle between the sinful nature, or “the flesh,” and righteousness is always present in his life (indeed, in the life of every believer). It is obvious he knows that the Roman believers are struggling as he has been struggling. He wants to make it clear that God does not condemn or reject the believer for the struggle. Through Jesus Christ, we are members of God’s family, and He does not kick us out because of our failures. This security was bought by Jesus’ blood. No matter what we do, as believers we have the blessed assurance that God will never reject us.

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It is important to note that neither our salvation nor our justification eliminated sin itself. Sin still exists. We still wrestle against it. Paul acknowledges this constant struggle as every believer should. Some believers mistakenly believe that upon their confession of faith, God removes sin and temptation. Paul posits that the desire, or temptation, to “walk... after the flesh” will abate only after believers understand and believe that in Christ they have been made new creatures. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers will want to walk in righteousness rather than in the sinful nature. That which the Law was unable to legislate—the will to live righteously—the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to do.

5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does not mysteriously hover over the heads of believers, suddenly swoop down on them, bring a short period of deliverance, and then simply vanish. The Holy Spirit is not an “act.” Rather, the Holy Spirit is the operative that empowers and enables the believer to live a godly life. While the Holy Spirit indwells in the life of every believer, the believer must choose to access that power. This, Paul makes clear, is an all-or-nothing proposition. The old self cannot be permitted to live because God has declared that it must die.

6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Paul has already established that the worldly (“carnally minded”) people cannot please God; and that through the Holy Spirit, the believer is empowered to live righteously. The notion of “carnal” and “flesh” immediately bring to mind sins of a sexual nature. We should note, however, that as it is used here, it does not only mean the body. More specifically, Paul is addressing sins that take root in our bodies. Hence, carnally minded certainly

includes obscene and lustful thoughts, but also refers to lying, jealousy, selfish ambitions, ungodly conversation, hostile and bitter feelings toward others, and perhaps the most dangerous of all, arrogance. The carnal or worldly must die so that the Spirit can reign in the life of the believer. Here, Paul makes it clear that the mind that longs for the carnal will end in death. Similarly, the spiritually minded, that is the mind of the believer empowered by the Holy Spirit, ends in life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Here, Paul pauses to provide the reason for the opposition he presented in verse 6. The answer lies in the Greek translation for the word enmity, *echthra* (EKH-thrah) meaning hatred. Paul is saying that the carnal mind hates God. Jesus Himself had taught, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). The believer, now free to choose, must decide between the old master (the sinful nature) or the new master (a spirit-filled life in Jesus Christ).

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

All of the previous verses are wrapped up neatly in this one simple sentence. A sinful man cannot please God. This is at odds with the condition of the believer, who longs to please his Creator. This verse echoes a similar teaching to the Galatian church: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit... They are in conflict with each other” (from Galatians 5:17). Now that Paul has drawn the line in the sand, he reminds the readers that they are not in the flesh. This happens through the grace of God, which provided the means of our salvation; through our justification in Christ Jesus our minds are renewed by the constant indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

The conditional clause “and if Christ” at the beginning of this verse indicates that the verse is clarifying Paul’s previous point. It also serves to protect the integrity of Paul’s Gospel against those who would attempt to weaken it by asking, “If you’re in Christ, and the penalty of sin is gone, then you can do anything you want.” Here Paul argues that this is impossible since the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of each believer. The preposition “in” carries tremendous weight in this context. The Greek word *en* (EN) functions to describe the Holy Spirit at rest and in a fixed position within us. The believer then is possessed by God, who resides at the center of our being. The clause that follows—“the body is dead”—is ironic. How can the believer be dead and alive at the same time? The Greek word rendered “dead” is *nekros* (ne-KROSE), and it describes a life that is spiritually destitute of God. Paul is using it here to support the affirmation of believers being dead to the body that would otherwise condemn us. Instead, Paul argues that our life is now a possession of the Spirit.

The Greek word for “righteousness,” *dikaiosune* (dee-kie-oh-SOO-nay), describes a condition acceptable to God. It implies correct thinking, purity of life, virtue, and integrity from God’s perspective. Paul teaches that unless the believer embraces righteousness, as given by the Spirit, then we are only left with self-righteousness. Righteousness is an important word in Scripture. It is especially significant to Paul as he uses it thirty-eight times in the book of Romans alone. It is used more in this epistle than any other time in the entire New Testament.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Paul is repeating the theme of Spirit possession here. Paul stresses that the “quickenings” is the power that raised Christ from the dead, and it is the same Holy Spirit power residing in each believer. This quickening revives us from the flesh to godly living.

The use of the word “therefore” indicates that Paul is now concluding the previous thought. This conclusion appears to be a call to action for the believers. Knowing that we are redeemed (a result of God’s unmerited favor on our behalf), knowing the price of that redemption (the intentional sacrifice of His beloved son), and knowing the benefit of our redemption (kinship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), what are we prepared to do? We are no longer enslaved to sin, Paul declares. We are free to live through the Holy Spirit for God that we might one day live and reign with Him.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

This verse and John 1:12 share a surprising similarity and continuity of theme: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” Here and in John, the emphasis is on “the power” and the title: “sons of God.” John offers that the believers are endowed with the power and the title upon their entry, or acceptance, into Christ. Here in Romans, Paul emphasizes that as the believers progress and pursue God’s plan, they affirm their right to assume both the power and the adoption of God. We should note that Holy Spirit “power” characterizes our entry and our continuation in Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Believers in Jesus Have Eternal Life
(John 5:19–24)

TUESDAY

Spirit of Christ in Our Hearts
(Galatians 4:1–7)

WEDNESDAY

The Resurrection of the Dead
(1 Corinthians 15:12–28)

THURSDAY

Seeing Others Through Christ
(2 Corinthians 5:16–21)

FRIDAY

Eager Longing
(Romans 8:18–25)

SATURDAY

Sustained and Led by the Spirit
(Romans 8:26–30)

SUNDAY

No Condemnation in Christ Jesus
(Romans 8:1–14)