

“The Spirit” (The Greatest Chapter in the Bible, part 2) // Romans 8:12–18 // Romans #16

Open your Bible again to Romans 8—Romans 8, the *greatest chapter in the Bible*.

- (If you have your Romans journal, we’re on [page 50](#).)

This is a precious chapter: Vietnamese believer:

- The **Viet Cong caught and imprisoned him** in the harshest conditions.
- in addition to hard labor, they assign him communist and Marxist writings to read every day to “reprogram” him, subjecting him to the harshest labor, worst living conditions, and regular beatings if he’d simply renounce his faith. At one point he was so discouraged that he almost did so, and he said he was so angry at God that he decided not to pray anymore.
- The very next morning, he was assigned to clean the officer’s toilets. One of the toilets was overflowing with refuse, but he noticed the toilet paper in it had text written on it. It was Romans 8! He picked it up and read the verse, “For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.”
- He said that God used the verse to change him in an instant. He asked the commander if he could be permanently assigned to clean the latrines, which was an odd assignment, but he realized that some of the officers were using the Bible as toilet paper. He wanted to reassemble the Bible for himself other believers.¹

- Believers in the worst conditions ever have found this chapter to be their lifeline, their hope.

that’s how precious this chapter is.

Bible scholar N.T. Wright calls Romans 8 “*a veritable feast of Pauline themes that carries the power of the gospel in every breath*.” He says, “*If the church would hoist its sails and catch the wind of Romans 8, there’s no telling what might happen.*” **JS Bach composed a whole symphony** based off of it.

(What if you memorized it this summer--many of our students are doing so)--the Romans 8 challenge.

Well, **despite the fact that it is so beloved**, there’s some **difference of opinion among Bible scholars, however**, about what the **theme** of Romans 8 actually is.

Many say **it’s the Spirit**, since the Holy Spirit gets mentioned **17x** in this chapter.

Other scholars, however, contend that it’s all about assurance. I mean, think about the many **great verses** in Romans 8 to that end:

- **(vs. 1)** “There is no condemnation”
- And, **(vs. 16)** The Spirit of God cries out in us “Abba, Father” **assuring us** that we are the children of God
- And, **(vs. 35)** we know that in Christ nothing can separate us from the love of God and **(vs. 28)** that God is working all things together for good even when we can’t see it or feel it.
- **(Vs. 26)** In the moment of our deepest confusion and darkest despair, we can take comfort in the fact that God’s Spirit inside of us is interceding for us in ways we can’t even comprehend.

So, which is it? Is Romans 8 about the Spirit, or is it about assurance?

¹ As told by Scott Sauls, August 6, 2017, “Alive in the Holy Spirit,” from series *The Greatest Chapter Ever Written*, sermon on Romans 8:1–11.

Well, you'll get closest to the truth when you put the two together: **Assurance in the Christian life comes from intimacy with the Spirit.** The Spirit's primary role in your life is **giving you assurance**.

(And **that assurance, btw**, lets you live in the **reality we talked about** last week: **freedom**.)

So the question to ask from Romans 8 is this: *How exactly does the Spirit give us assurance?* Because that's what Romans 8 is all about.

(Listen: This is going to be so helpful for you because it will answer so many questions about how you relate to the Spirit of God!)

This chapter is **full of little phrases Christians sometimes repeat** but are not quite sure what they mean.

For example, What does it mean that the Spirit intercedes for us in groanings that cannot be uttered? Is that like whale sounds he is taking in us?

Or, vs. 16, "*The Spirit testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children.*" Christians wonder, "**How exactly does the Spirit testify to us?**"

- Does that mean real Christians hear voice inside of them whispering, '**You really are** a true Christian'? **Because...** I've never **heard that voice**. For that matter, **if there is a voice** inside of me it usually seems to be whispering the opposite: "You're not really a Christian. You've never really been saved."
- **What does it feel like for the Spirit to give you assurance?** Is Paul talking about a peaceful, easy feeling that you know just won't let you down that just **comes over you in an instant** that you can't explain... You're like "Is that **a Bible verse**, or is it the **lyrics from an Eagles** song?"
- How can you tell when the Spirit of God is moving in your life? What does that feel like?

- **I've told you about a guy I knew of** back in college **who directed a recording studio** that gave time to start-up Christian artists. "That's the reverb, ma'am."

The point is, it's easy to be confused, and so in the next seven verses of chapter 8 we're going to see (1) the necessity of the Spirit; (2) the trajectory of the Spirit; and (3) the assurance from the Spirit.

1. The Necessity of the Spirit

In verses 11–12 **Paul explains that only in the Spirit** can we escape the power of sin.

¹² **So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh,**

- "So then" points back to the point Paul made with the first 11 verses, namely that there is "no condemnation" for those in Christ Jesus. He's saying, "*Because Jesus put an end to sin through his death on the cross, we are no longer obligated to it.*"
- "not obligated" means "no longer bound" to it. We are no longer captive to obey its dictates.
- **Through his death**, Jesus released us from the penalty of sin, but Jesus also resurrected--and that life imparted to us by his Spirit releases us from the power of sin in our lives.
- Get that straight--his death releases you from the penalty of sin; his resurrection releases you from the power of sin.

¹³ **because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

- **Listen, let me give you one last warning on this** because I believe this is the last time Paul brings this up:
- Even if you are saved, sin is very much still alive in you. **And you should never forget that**. Sin is a predator that it is always on the prowl to destroy you, no matter how spiritually mature you are, how far you've gone or how much you have accomplished.

- **Paul Tripp on why Christian leaders fall:** they forget the power of indwelling sin
- No matter how much you know, how much you've accomplished, or how long you've been walking with Jesus, sin is still in there and it is looking for opportunity to destroy you.
- It's why **John Owen** says: **"You must always be killing sin or it will be killing you."**
- **Most of us flirt with sin, trying to tame it rather than killing it**
- But I told you that's like trying to make a pet out of a predatory animal. You hear these stories about someone who tries to live with some exotic wild animal that ends up one day hurting them. In fact, one of our staff members **showed me an article this week, from his hometown newspaper**, with this headline: "Pennsylvania Woman Killed by Pet Bear Named Teddy." This woman had raised the black bear from cubhood. For 9 years, there were no incidents. But then, one day, the bear mauled her. **Some of the neighbors acted surprised.** One said, "She was a good person-- she just had a strange hobby." I don't doubt she was a good person, but you and I would probably disagree: **Letting a black bear roam free in your house is not an unusual hobby.** My kids are not coming over to hang out. I **don't care if you name it Teddy** and have lived with it for 9 years. *It's still a bear. We're only doing play dates at my house. **Sooner or later, bears do what bears do, just like sin will do what sin does.***²

You have to be killing it, or it will be killing you.

And make sure you note that Paul says it's only by the Spirit you can hope to do this: "...if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, (only then) you will live."

Matt Chandler: *"Fighting sin without the spirit is like open-hand-slapping a bear--it isn't going to go well for you."*

Many of you feel defeated by sin because you've been trying to fight the impulses of sin through the powers of the flesh. You **have to fight** in the power of the Spirit.

So, you ask, **"How exactly do you fight sin in the Spirit rather than in the flesh?"** (Star Wars scene with Luke using the Force?)

Let me give you a little 5-step process that fighting sin in the Spirit always entails:

1. The first is **Humble Confession**. Most of us want to hide our sinful weakness, wanting others to think we've got it all under control. **This is a mistake.** There are certain things God can only heal when you bring them into the light, certain kinds of **moral mildew on the soul** that you can only get rid of by exposing it to the light of God's presence. The Bible says, "Confess your sins to one another and you will be healed." (James 5:16) This doesn't mean you tell EVERYONE everything, but you should tell SOMEONE. A trusted friend, a counselor, your small group.
2. **Total surrender** Because the Spirit is a person, you only get his power when you are totally surrendered to him. Most people want a negotiated compromise with God: *What do I have to do to be considered a 'good Christian'?* But **that won't work**. Only by being totally surrendered to him can you walk with him and access his power. He's **not a force to employ**; he's a person to surrender to. The moment you say no to him, even about a small thing, you cut yourself off from his power..
3. **Re-assurance in the gospel** The Spirit breaks sin's hold on you by reminding you of your full acceptance with the Father.
 - The **power of new life flows only** from assurance in the gospel.
 - This, we saw last week, is a little counter-intuitive, but it is always how Jesus changed people.
 - **He told the woman caught in adultery:** "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more." He put acceptance

² <https://www.poconorecord.com/article/20091007/NEWS/910070340>

(neither do I condemn you) before change (go and sin no more) because only through knowing she was accepted would she have the power to change.

- The Spirit assures you of your acceptance with God.
- 4. **Memorizing specific Scripture:** When Jesus fought Satan, he quoted **specific Scripture** that dealt with the temptation.
 - Paul calls the Word of God the “sword of the Spirit.” (Eph 6:17). Scripture is your weapon for battle.
 - **Trying to battle with sin without a thorough knowledge of Scripture** is like going into a gunfight without a gun.
 - **Not even Jesus** would do that. **If Jesus felt he needed** to use Scripture to fight off temptations, so should you.
 - **Listen, if this right here** [this moment of preaching] is the **only Scripture intake** you're getting in the week, then you do not have what it takes to avoid temptation. Temptations to sin come daily; your intake of Scripture should be daily as well!
- 5. **Walking in wisdom.** Most Christians walk through life trying to see how close they can get to the line of sin without crossing it. Walking with the Spirit looks different. If you are walking with the Spirit, that means you are always asking, “What do **you want** in this situation?” When you ask, **not, “What is allowed and not sinful?”** but **“What is the wisest thing to do?”** Paul says many things are lawful but they are not helpful (1 Cor 6:12). That means certain choices may not be *sinful, per se*, but they don't align you with the Spirit's will.
 - **You get the power of the Spirit when you fellowship** with the Spirit, and you fellowship with the Spirit when you seek to do what he wants in every situations.

So, those are **5 ways you can fight sin in the Spirit**.

- Listen, the **Spirit of God is not trying merely to curb** your behavior; he is trying to change your heart.
- He's **not just after obedience**; he's after a whole new kind of obedience...

- To produce that, he doesn't just say **“stop it”** to you regarding certain sins. STOP IT!
- Rather, he **spotlights the beauty of Christ** and assures you through Scripture's promises that you are God's child. **He calls to mind** verses that you have memorized to fight the temptations and the onslaughts of the devil.
- And he changes you from within. **You need him** to overcome sin.

So, that's the **necessity of the Spirit**. Next, Paul turns to:

II. The Trajectory of the Spirit

¹⁴ For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons.

- **The question to ask: Led by God where?** Is he talking about people who get *messages* from the Spirit spelled out in their Cheerios and Alphabet Soup each day?
 - **Because you say, “I don't think that happens to me.”** How do I know I'm being led by God's Spirit?
 - I knew a guy who **when he was preaching** would stop and say, “Yes, God? OK, but if i say that people will get mad. Hold on, God, you're giving me too much at once...”
 - Is that what Paul is talking about to be led by God's Spirit?
- Many Christians interpret it that way. But **look at the context**. (That's always your rule in Bible interpretation).
- **When Paul says, “led by God's Spirit,”** he means **led by the Spirit into Christlikeness**. Into the works of life.
- **If the Spirit is moving you that direction, you can have the assurance** that you are God's sons.
 - **Now, btw, ladies:** don't feel left out here by the fact that Paul said “you are God's sons” and not “you are his sons and daughters.”³ He uses “sons” because in those days “sons” got all the inheritance. It's actually better for you to be put in this category of sons because you get to have all the same

³ He's clearly writing to both genders. See vs. 12, for examples, were the CSB translates Paul's address to “brothers and sisters.”

privileges as 1st century firstborn sons! You are a **full heir** of God's whole estate!

- **Just like men are included** when Paul calls the church the "bride of Christ", so daughters are included in the analogy of "sons."

If the Spirit is leading you toward Christlikeness, you have the assurance that you are God's sons.

- BTW, this is usually a gradual process--**don't get discouraged** if it seems to be happening more slowly than you want it to? Rarely does it happen in big, dramatic, ecstasy-filled moments. It's gradual, and slow.
 - It's like watching your children grow. If you look at it day by day, you see little change. It's only when you look over several years that you see the big changes.
- And **it's painful**. God teaches you more through the pain and disappointment and humbling than he does through successes and fields of prosperity. **Anybody here that can testify to that?**

So, it's gradual, painful, and slow: but **make no mistake**--if the Spirit is really in you, **this is where he's taking you**.

- The Spirit's one, indispensable goal for you is to make you just like Jesus. **Just like him!** To love what he loves, hate what he hates, seek what he seeks, and do what he does.
- And if he's really in you, he's always moving that direction.
- BTW, **Is that what you signed up for when you became a Christian?** I ask **because it seems like a lot of people are surprised**, even scandalized, when I tell them that God's goal for them is to make them just like Jesus and he will be satisfied with nothing less.
 - They are like, "I wanted God because I thought he could make me a better person. Add some religion to my life. Help stabilize my family or fix my marriage. Get me a fire escape from hell.
 - But complete Christlikeness? This feels a little overboard.

- I **read a poem the other day** I thought captured this perfectly: *"I would like \$3 of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough of him to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make me love (my political enemies) or to (open my home to the) immigrant. I want ecstasy, not a transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack, please. I would like just \$3 worth of God, please."*⁴
- Sorry, but we **don't sell that** here.
- **The Spirit's goal is Christlikeness**, he's satisfied with nothing less--and if he's moving you toward that, you can be assured that he's in you.

Which leads us to the last thing...

III. The Assurance from the Spirit

¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

- Now, '**Abba**' here is not just the name of a hokey band from the 70's, take a chance on me!; it's the **Aramaic word for Daddy**.
- Here's **something interesting**: Virtually every language has a short repetitive word like this for father. In English: Dadda. Spanish: Pappa. Indonesian: Bapa. Turkish: baba.
- **Guess who comes up with these words?** The babies do. Humans have a **primordial desire** to reach out for a parent--to someone who loves us perfectly and can take care of us.
- That's **what we're looking for when our spirit cries out 'Abba.'**
- But here's the thing: no human being has totally fulfilled that yearning--they all fail us or let us down.
 - Even good dads do. And, they can't be with us forever.

⁴ Original from Wilbur Reece. Material between (...) is my substitutions.

- And so, we go through life looking for that fulfillment and security we first yearned for when we cried out “Dadda.”
- We search for it in romance; in reputation; in financial security.
- **Paul says, “God answers that yearning in Christ.”**
- And that releases us from **the spirit of slavery** and the accompanying spirit of fear
 - The spirit of slavery is where you feel like you have to earn your place of acceptance, and if you don’t you’ll be rejected. You have to become something so that people will approve of you; you have to obtain something in order to be satisfied. You have to meet a certain standard for God to approve you.
 - Accompanying that is always the **spirit of fear**—Have I done enough? What if I don’t make it? Will I be ruined? Will I not be approved?
 - You become fearful about your circumstances. What if things don’t turn out well for me? Is my life going to be incomplete and unfulfilling? Am I going to be miserable?
 - **You even think** that your circumstances indicate how God feels about you. Things are **not going well**--I must be cursed.
 - That’s the spirit of slavery and fear we live under.
- The **Spirit of adoption**, by which we cry out **“Abba father,”** releases us from both of those spirits.
- Because he assures us, **through the promises of Scripture**, that we are fully loved by our Father and fully protected in him.
- We’re not slaves who need to be afraid; we are sons who stand secure.
 - If you **had the blessing of having a good father**—don’t you remember **how you looked** at him? How powerful he seemed? How **safe you felt** around him?
 - It **seemed like my dad could fix anything** with a pocket knife. Didn’t matter what we were doing: hunting, or fishing, trying to remove a splinter, or working on the car, or trying to clear up the reception on the TV--out came that pocketknife and a few minutes later everything was fine. (Even today, when **my iPhone starts acting up** I’m tempted to hand it to him to see if he can fix it with that little knife.)
- And as a kid, I just wanted to be close (as long as **he was around**, I felt secure)... **I was terrified of him** or my mom dying. My dad tells the story of taking me out camping one weekend when I was like 5 and he said I slept all night with my hand on his back. The next morning he asked why, and I told him I was afraid that I’d wake up in the middle of the night and he’d be gone and I’d be left alone in the woods. (My dad hadn’t done anything that justified that fear but it was my greatest terror in life. To be stuck somewhere scary without him.)
- *Now, we’re all grown up, but **isn’t that a picture** of what we all still fear? To get left alone out in the wilderness of life?*
- Paul says, “Good news. You don’t have to be afraid.”
 - You’re a beloved son--and you can know he will never leave you or forsake you.
 - And you don’t even have to keep your hand on God—because he keeps a nail-scarred hand on you.
 - In the **Garden of Gethsemane**, leading up to the cross, we are told that Jesus cried out, “Abba, Father,” but was met with silence. He cried out Abba Father and was forsaken, so I could **cry out “Abba, Father”** with confidence.
 - He was forsaken so I could be forgiven. He was pushed away so I could have the assurance of always being drawn close.
- And **that assurance** changes my view **of everything!** I don’t have to be afraid of bad circumstances. I have an always-watching, ever-tender and omnipotent Father who promises to be with me through them all and direct them all according to good and his perfect plan.
- **I no longer need the promise of good circumstances** to have joy and security. I have that in the presence of his Spirit within me crying out ‘Abba, Father’ in all those things.
- **This is everything in Christianity.** It reminds me of this quote I love by J.I. Packer: **“If you want to judge how well a person**

understand Christianity, find out how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his whole outlook on life, he does not understand Christianity very well."

- Even if you had a bad earthly father, you can know that. What you most need is not an earthly father who responds the right way, but to know the heavenly Father.

¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children,

- So, how does he testify? Again, in context...
 - Through the evidence a changed life--you desire the fruits of the Spirit and closeness to God. You and others can see you changing
 - (And, btw, **it is often through others** that God reveals to you how your is changing. Often, usually, they can see it much better than you. One of the most memorable scenes for me from *Pilgrim's Progress* is where Christian emerges from the Interpreter's House)
 - Through the promises of the gospel. He whispers in your heart gospel promises--even when in everything in your heart doubts them!
 - Listen: I'm not talking about a calm, serene feeling that comes into your heart out of nowhere and floods your heart with peace, love and groovy vibes;
 - I'm talking about a bold declaration God makes over your heart with the words of Scripture in the midst of turmoil.
 - He might be saying it to you right now:
 - You are my beloved son...
 - There is no condemnation.
 - As far as the East is from the West
 - As high as the heavens are...
 - **Believe those things** right now, and they are yours!

Vs. 17 might be the best part: ¹⁷and if (we are really his) children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—

- In adoption, **all that belonged to the adoptive parents** becomes the possession of the child who is adopted. The child even takes the parent's name.
 - I have a friend who **adopted a couple of children** from another country—he took on health risks. Legal trouble. **Legal fees** of nearly 200K.
 - This is **what we get in Christ**. Even after you rejected him, he voluntarily took on all of your problems and gave to you the full abundance of his treasure.
 - How can we not think of Jesus' **story of the prodigal son?**...After having rejected the father and blown the inheritance, you still get all this?

And even more: "co-heirs with Christ."

- This means what Christ has coming, you now have coming. Let that sink in for a minute. You are a **co-heir** with Christ. What's coming to him is now coming to you.
 - **1 John 3:1**
 - I was at an event once where I met a guy who was the grandson of America's wealthiest businessmen. I'll admit: I just wanted to be friends. So I could eat the crumbs that fell off his table. "Here's a jet the family can't use anymore. We can't use our Super Bowl tickets this year. Want them?"
 - What if found out I'd be a co-heir with him?
 - **In Christ, you get so much more!**

—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

- Paul indicates here where he is going next. The **road ahead for Christians** is one of suffering.
- Persecution. Unpopularity.

MUSIC

- **We'll look at that in future weeks**, but for now, it's **good just to ponder this question: Is he worth it?** *If following Jesus leads you only to suffering in this life, is he worth it?*
 - **Years ago I read...** "He who takes the son takes it all."
 - This is what Paul is saying. **If you are willing to take hold of Jesus**, with all the suffering and persecution and hostility and difficulty that goes with being a follower of Jesus, you will get all his glory!
 - **Is he worth that?** Yes. 1000x yes. He who takes the son takes it all!
- And, **in the meantime, even** while you are suffering, you get to suffer with him, in the presence of his Spirit.
 - Those who **have walked with Jesus through the worst kinds** of suffering have told me that one of the sweetest thoughts that sustains them in suffering is that they get to do it with Jesus.
 - They **don't walk that road alone.** He is with them every step of the way, walking by their side at all times, feeling every heartache and crying every tear.

He who takes the Son takes it all. You willing to forsake all and follow Jesus? To **let his Spirit have his complete way** in your life?

Have you ever **given complete control to Jesus?**

- That's what salvation is. Recognizing you can't save yourself but Jesus did it all and receiving him as Savior as a free gift.
- And surrendering full control of your life--for him to have his way in your life.
- **Have you done that?** Are you sure? Do you want to do that right now?

Bow for prayer / Call for Hands Raised

Prayer Teams // Missional Blessing