

The Law of the Spirit of Life

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[0 : 00] Space blows my mind. We just recently saw the world's first trillionaire.

! It's a ridiculous sum of money you can't wrap your head around.! We have these little kind of teaspoon measures in our house for baking.

Apparently, if you were to scoop up a teaspoon worth of neutron star and dutifully level it off, what you have on your little teaspoon would weigh more than a billion tons.

I don't get how that works. It would take Concorde two million years to fly to the next nearest star after the sun. You could go on and on. It is mind-boggling, isn't it?

You could spend every minute of your life studying all that there is and never really scratch the surface. And yet, it is also true, isn't it, that not being able to kind of fathom the full scale of space of the universe does not stop us from being able to wonder at it, to marvel at it, knowing that you will never know all there is to know, does not stop us gazing into the night sky and appreciating its beauty.

[1 : 35] We are into our third week in this short series on the Holy Spirit. In one way, we have maybe covered a lot of ground already, but God is infinite, right?

The Holy Spirit is God. Infinitely bigger than even the whole universe. So, it is no exaggeration to say that there is inexhaustible depth to the person and work of the Holy Spirit that in one sense we will never truly fathom.

And yet, it is very, very good for us to behold what we can comprehend.

Like sitting there and looking up at the night sky, to marvel at the beauty of what we can see.

Really, what we are doing over these four Sundays is almost just kind of outlining four of it, the standout constellations that shine brightly in the sky.

What shines most brightly and what we can see most clearly about the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Ben, I think, used the analogy last week of turning a diamond.

[2 : 43] We thought last time about what it meant to be, the Spirit to be our helper. The answer was lots of things. You turn the diamond a little more, you are looking at exactly the same thing, but you are seeing it from a slightly different perspective.

And so, beholding its beauty afresh. That is what we are going to do this morning, just turning the diamond a little more to see how the Spirit frees and enlivens us to obedience to God's law.

But as we kind of focus on this perspective of the Spirit's work, let me just say right at the start, don't let that distract you from all the amazing stuff we have seen in the couple of weeks so far.

This does not come over or underneath it, neither is it apart from it. It is just another perspective from which we behold the glorious work of the infinite and eternal Holy Spirit, so that, Lord willing, we are stirred to praise Him because of what we see.

We've just got three points this morning, and they're really just walking us through the passage that we read a moment ago there in Romans 8. So let's just begin with the first of those in verses 1 to 4, where we learn that the law of the Spirit sets us free from the law of sin and death.

[4 : 03] Romans 8 begins, doesn't it, with some of the most, best known, most amazing words in the Bible. If you are a Christian here this morning, these words have almost certainly been dearly treasured by you at some point, if not in every moment.

There is, therefore, now no condemnation. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, we stand cleared of our every sin and debt. There is no wrong you have done.

There is no good you have left undone that will ever be held against you.

All because of Jesus. In the passage Sky read for us earlier in Romans 6, we learn why that is the case. We have been united to Christ Jesus, united in His death to sin, united with Him in His resurrection to new life, so that there is nothing that can be held against us ever.

That is wonderful news, and a great assurance for every one of us who knows the depths of our own sin. But did you see there in verse 2 of chapter 8 how this most amazing reality becomes ours? [5 : 26] We read in Romans 6 that it is through our union with Christ, but how are we united to Christ? Verse 2 of Romans 8. There is now no condemnation in Christ, for the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

The freedom we have in Christ is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is the Spirit who unites us to Christ.

It is the Spirit of life who frees us in Christ from sin and death. Those wonderful words of verse 1 are ours not only because of what Christ has done, but also because of what the Spirit has done.

Just as we cannot know salvation apart from the work of Jesus, apart from the work of Jesus, neither can we know that wonderful gospel of being free from condemnation apart from the work of the Spirit.

But see as well there, what specific kind of perspective of the Spirit Paul highlights here in this great saving work. Verse 2 again, we are clear, don't we, of all guilt because the law of the Spirit of life has set you free.

[6 : 53] Maybe those are surprising words for us this morning. Especially given, right, that in the previous two chapters of Romans, Paul has spoken of how believers have died to the law, have been released from the law.

And now here we have the law of the Spirit of life setting us free. So what is going on?

Are we released from the law? Or are we set free through the law? Well, the answer I think is yes. Because the law can reveal either sin or righteousness.

That is why Paul speaks of it simultaneously in that verse of our law of sin and death and the law of spirit and life. In our flesh, it is a law of sin and death. That is where it leads us.

You go and take the Ten Commandments and hold up a mirror to yourself looking at them. And it exposes our guilt, doesn't it? It leaves us condemned, imprisoned under it.

[8 : 08] You are guilty, therefore condemned, therefore imprisoned. We need released from it. But the law of the Spirit of life is that the same corpus of law, to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, to love your neighbor as yourself, it is the same body of commands.

But in Christ and His Spirit, that law has revealed righteousness. In Him, in Christ, that exposes no guilt, you hold the Ten Commandments as a mirror up to Jesus and it shows Him to be perfectly clean.

It proves Him to be righteous. The law, which is death to us in our flesh because it reveals sin, is life to Christ because in His Spirit it reveals righteousness.

righteousness. And we, by the Spirit, are united, remember, to Jesus. Not standing in ourselves, but standing in Christ.

so that we are set free from the condemnation of the law under which we once lived in sin and saved through the law by the righteousness it revealed in Christ.

[9 : 33] We see that there in verse 3. Verse 3, God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. Our sinful flesh was the problem.

But in Christ, God, look at verse 3 and 4, they're a wonderful summary of the gospel, aren't they?

God has borne the condemnation we deserved in our sin and fulfilled the law so that righteousness might become ours in Him.

Now there's a lot in there to get our heads around. But before we think about where that kind of leads us next, it is, I think, just worth stopping, just for a moment, that we might give thanks to God in our hearts for what the Spirit of life has done for us.

Even if you've not fully wrapped your head around what we have just seen in those opening four verses, if we have put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Spirit has united us to Him.

But we're going to spend the rest of our time this morning thinking about what He is doing for us and with us, but do not forget about what He has already achieved. We are no longer condemned because of His work, not only Christ's work, but the work of the Spirit too.

[10 : 53] Now as we continue to kind of turn the diamond on the personal work of the Spirit, we also, we ought to praise Him because it is through Him and through Christ that those wonderful words of verse 1 are ours.

Do not overlook what the Spirit has done in your salvation. Okay, so that is something of what He has done, but where does that lead us? Our second point this morning.

The law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death so that we might live according to the Spirit.

The prisons in this country, aren't they? They're full to overflowing. So much so that earlier in this year, the government introduced some legislation that basically said that some prisoners could be released after serving just a third of their sentence.

This is not a gospel analogy, to be clear. The government sentence act is a long way from that. But here's what I think is helpful to think about just for a second. But those people who have been released, that they were justly condemned according to the law, but they have now been set free.

[12:10] But having been set free, what is their relationship to the law now? The law which once condemned them, where do they stand in relation to its now?

What kind of life do we rightly expect them to live? They've not, have they been set free from their condemnation to the law in order that they might go and ignore the law.

They've been set free in the expectation that they will now live according to the law. Freedom from condemnation leads to a right expectation of a lawful life.

Now if you're wrong, I think any other lines between that and what we've here in Romans 8, I want you to rub them out. My point is, right, that even in circumstances like that, where freedom is not paid for, it's just granted, where no change has necessarily taken place in the life of the individual, where the circumstances of release are not mercy, but necessity, even given all that, we still, don't we rightly expect people to go and live a law-fulfilling life.

That is what we want to see in them. They're not freed from the law altogether. They are freed from the condemnation of the law so they might go and keep the law.

[13:37] What does God look for in His people once He has set us free from condemnation?

Having paid the price to set us free, not just cutting the chains, but bearing the penalty Himself.

Having given up His Son in order to bury our condemnation. Having made us in His image to be like Jesus. Having renewed us by the power of His Spirit.

Having replaced our heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Having indwelt us with that same Spirit so that we might walk according to the Spirit. What should being set free cause our lives to look like? Not self-destructive lawlessness, but Christ-like law fulfillment. We have been set free so that we would no longer live the life we once lived in sin, but instead become more and more like Jesus in His righteousness.

And it is the Spirit which sets us free from the law of sin and death who now walks alongside us to help us live according to the law of life.

[15:03] To live in the Spirit is the opposite of living in sin. If you want to see one aspect of the Spirit's work in your life, this is something to look for.

A holy, righteous, godly, Christ-like life. There are different gifts the Spirit has given to different members of the body, but here is a work of the Spirit that is happening in every single one of us as believers in the Lord Jesus.

A life that is turning from sin to righteousness. That is the kind of dichotomy Paul is setting up there in verses 5 to 9 between the flesh and the Spirit.

Sin in the flesh contrasted with righteousness in the Spirit. That's why he says in verse 6, to set the mind on the flesh is death. That is the wages of sin.

But to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. That is why the mind that is on the flesh is hostile to God, cannot please God.

[16:14] What does it do, the mind that is set on the flesh? It does not submit to God's law. The inverse, isn't it? A mind that is set on the Spirit does submit to God's law.

Verse 9, you, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. In one sense, these verses are deep waters.

We could plumb them for months. But actually, I think the most important thing to take away from these verses does sit quite plainly on the surface. Because of who we are in Christ, we are to turn from the sin that we once walked in the flesh and instead walk in step with the Spirit.

He freed us so that He could continue to work in us and produce in us that which leads not to death but to life, to live a life that is not hostile to God but is at peace with Him and seeks to please Him by submitting to His law.

And we in that are called to set our minds on Him, on the Spirit, to walk according to Him. He does the work but we really do have a role to play.

[17 : 44] Our eldest son turned three a couple of weeks ago and one of his presents was a set of football goals for the garden. The goals are quite big, maybe slightly bigger than we expected them to be but that's fine.

They came because they're quite big, not ready-made but kind of disassembled in a box. Now ask our three-year-old to put those goals together himself and he would get absolutely nowhere.

He absolutely could not put those goals together on his own. He was entirely dependent on someone else to come and help him do what he could not do. Now when I came along and started to help him there were two modes he kind of flipped between in that process.

To put it in Romans 8 language, there were two things his mind was set on, making the goals and not making the goals. When his mind was set on making the goals, he was working with me.

We were step in step. I would ask him to pass me a couple of the clips for the net. He would dutifully go and get them. I would ask him to kind of hold one of the poles in place. He would do his best to hold it still. Right, when his mind was on the task, my work was going smoothly because I wasn't fighting or pushing back against anything.

[19 : 00] But then he would switch and his mind would go to not making the goals. So that instead of building goals with me, right, he kind of started trying to play shinty with a crossbar. That wasn't helpful.

At one point, he decided the spanner was required not for tightening a bolt but for fixing fin. And so because he had set his mind on something else, right, all of a sudden the whole process slowed down.

Now in both mindsets, right, I was still doing all the work. And yet what his mind was set on really did make a difference to the progress I was making.

Now as with kind of everything here on this whole topic, there's no perfect analogy. But I hope you get something of the picture here. The Spirit does all the work.

We cannot produce righteousness in ourselves. We cannot make ourselves new any more than my son could have built those goals on his own. But our action alongside the work of the Spirit really does make a difference.

[20 : 07] So I think the obvious question isn't it? What is your mind set on this morning? Is it the things of the Spirit or is it the things of the flesh?

Only the Spirit can produce righteousness in us but we can walk in step with the Spirit. By our actions we can cause the work of the Spirit to flourish in our lives or to be suffocated.

Now to set our minds in the Spirit does not mean we shouldn't kind of be thinking about work when we arrive at the office on a Monday morning but it should shape how we think about work and how we think about everything.

Are we seeking to live a Christ-like life dependent on the Spirit in all that we do? Are we seeking the glory of Christ and the building up of His people?

Is that the end goal that we are working towards? Because that is the end goal that the Spirit is working towards. To bring glory to Jesus and to bring righteous fruit in His people.

[21 : 22] to walk according to the Spirit is to have our hearts set on that goal knowing we can get there only by the power of the Spirit.

To have our lives set firmly in that direction so that every decision we make at home at work out with our friends at home on our own at uni at school has that end in view.

To live the flesh is to seek our glory and our good to not submit to God's law to not love God with all our heart soul strength and mind to not love neighbor but love ourselves.

But to set your mind on that Paul says in verse 6 is death. But one that lives in the Spirit seeks to keep God's law in all that we do that is life and peace.

A life that is pleasing to God and belongs to God and that is the Spirit at work in our lives right now. That is what He is achieving and we are to walk step in step with Him by setting our minds on Him.

[22 : 41] Let's just move on then to our third and final point this morning. What have we seen?

That the law of the Spirit sets us free from the law of sin and death so that we might live according to the Spirit and thirdly be given life in the Spirit.

Just read with me again there verses 10 and 11. Verse 10 and 11 of Romans 8. 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.

We might hear this kind of call to set our minds on the things of the Spirit to turn from sin and turn to righteousness to submit to the law and think is that strength really in us?

Can I really do that? But did you hear what Paul just said? The very same Spirit that brought Jesus Christ from lying dead in a grave to living for eternity.

that very same Spirit the one Spirit of God you right here sitting in this building this morning if your faith is in Jesus that very same Spirit is in you.

[24 : 16] The problem is not that the Spirit is weak the problem isn't it is that we so often live in ignorance of its strength. Sometimes we live the Christian life as if He isn't there at all.

Which is a bit like isn't it forgetting that you have Messi on your five-a-side team and so never passing the ball to Him. It's not just as a bit of a tactical error you go from certain victory to abject defeat but He is there.

He is always there and He is there to bring the same life to you that He has already brought to Christ. Space might be mind-blowing but is this not more mind-blowing?

I needed reminded afresh of this this week. I know many of you will too because we are so quick to forget aren't we? So quick to depend on our own strength so quick to fail in our own strength and so then very quick to think there is therefore now no victory in Christ Jesus.

But this Spirit indwells every one of us who have a living and active faith in the Lord Jesus. To set our mind on the Spirit really does enable us to live more and more unto the law of the Spirit because we have the Spirit.

[25 : 41] Now it is I think worth being clear that being indwelt by the Spirit does not make lawful living easy.

All that Paul is saying here is coming straight off the back of his kind of pained reflection of his own life at the end of chapter 7. We confess that there's our own struggle with sin earlier in the service. I do not do the good that I want but the evil that I do not want is what I keep on doing.

To live according to the Spirit is to strive for holiness in complete dependence upon him. That does not mean to live according to the Spirit will present you with ready-made righteousness.

The sin that we struggle with is not who we are but it does remain in us like an infection that continues to trouble us but does not define us that fights against us but it cannot win.

Sinclair Ferguson speaking about this tension I think helpfully used the analogy of D-Day and V-E-Day in World War II. The moment the Allies stepped back onto European soil it was a definitive decisive moment in the course of the Second World War.

[26 : 58] From that moment on things were heading only in one direction and yet every day between D-Day and the final day of victory was a battle. the fight raged on even though the course had been set.

Having been indwelt by the Spirit having been set free from the law that the outcome is definite and decisive. We have been set free things are heading in only one direction but until the last day when we are raised in glory every day is a battle.

a battle to walk according to the Spirit and not according to flesh. But we are still living in sin-polluted bodies that we need to strive to clean out.

But not only has the Spirit saved us by uniting to Christ, He, the Spirit continues to work in us, renewing us by the cleansing out of the body of sin.

And we can be unwaveringly confident that He will do that when we set our minds on Him because the very same Spirit that brought life to Jesus from His death is bringing life to us from our death.

[28 : 21] Maybe there is sin in your life that you feel helplessly tethered to. Maybe you struggle with anger, with lust, maybe you have an addiction that you feel you cannot shake.

With the Spirit in you, not only is there no more condemnation from that sin, but there really is also the strength to fight against it. And you truly do have the strength to fight its hold on you.

that's not to say you will wake up tomorrow and since pollution will have been completely cleared out your system. It is to say that if you believe in Jesus and know the power of His Spirit, if you walk in step with the Spirit, if you set your mind on the Spirit, the pollution will, it will fade little by little.

the job will never be complete in this life. But the life that God has called us to is one that lives according to the law of His Spirit, that submits to God's law.

And the Holy Spirit is there with us every single step of the way to help us do just that. The Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead, brothers and sisters, that very same Spirit is at work in you this very moment.

[29 : 59] Lean on that. Trust Him. Walk in step with Him and He will turn you day by day away from the life of sin and death in which you once lived and more and more unto the law of the Spirit of life, both for your good but most of all for His glory.

glory. Let us pray that we would set our minds on Him today and every day. Father, we do thank You and praise You for the work of Your Spirit which has united us to Christ, which has set us free from the law of sin and death in Him.

Lord, we praise You for the work He has done for us and we thank You for the work He is doing in us now as we seek to put to death the sin that remains in us and live more and more unto righteousness.

Lord, we pray that Your Spirit would continue to do that work in us. Help us to set our minds on Him, to walk according to Him, so that His work might not be suffocated but flourish in us, that we would submit to Your law today and every day, that we would love You with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, that we would love our neighbor as ourselves for the building up of Your church and the glory of Your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.