

ON MORTIFYING SIN – PART 3

Romans 8

- “If the Bible were a ring, then Romans would be the gem that enhanced that ring...and Romans 8 would be the brilliant splendor that emanated from that ring.”¹
- “The turn from Romans 7 to Romans 8 is one of the most exquisite, most wonderful, most ecstatic turns in literary history. And as inspired Scripture, the hinge between Romans 7:24-25 and Romans 8:1 is nothing short of life-changing. Romans 8 is widely considered the greatest chapter in all of the Bible, and while it seems odd to set any portion of God’s inerrant word as ‘better’ than others, those who are familiar with the chapter know the spirit behind the claim...Romans 8 is a well of deep, crystalline healing water for the parched soul. Bookended by the wonderful truths that there is no condemnation for those united to Christ (8:1) and that nothing—absolutely nothing!—can separate us from God’s love (8:38-39), all of the material in between is worth studying for eons and eons.”²
- Romans 8 is “a well of deep, crystalline healing water for the parched soul” because it comes immediately on the heels of Paul’s heartfelt cry in Romans 7:24 ~ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?
- In this earnest appeal, Paul is being transparent about his struggle with indwelling sin as a believer
- Struggling against sin is normal Christianity...what is true of Paul is true of all of us...we still struggle with sin...we still fall into sin...we still give into temptation
- Paul’s point in Romans 7 is that there is nothing wrong with God’s law...it is good and perfect...the problem lies with us!
- Indwelling, remaining sin continues to bedevil us in thought, word, and deed until the day we die
- Sin is always pounding away at us...always acting...always seducing...always tempting us
- Sin never takes a vacation...never lets up...it is always looking over your shoulder, whispering in your ear
- Sin is not just a permanent houseguest...it is a meddlesome wretch
- The Christian life is a war between our new nature in Christ and the remnants of our unredeemed humanity
- Killing sin is a constant duty that will require a lifelong battle for us as believers
- When God called us to be Christians, he called us to a lifetime of struggles against sin
- We must never let up the fight...we must never wave the white flag...we must never surrender to sin
- We are never off duty when it comes to killing sin...there is no cease fire in this war!
- The Christian life is not easy...it is a battle all the way
- To mortify sin means to put to death, destroy, or to render extinct the sin in our lives...like a person would do when killing a snake...they don’t hit it once...no, they hit it repeatedly with a shovel until it’s dead...or shoot it repeatedly until it’s dead...or run it over until it’s dead...namely to cut off the lifeline
- This battle is made more difficult by
 1. A lack of knowledge of how believers are sanctified and the resources they possess for it
 2. A lack of discipline in employing the means of grace to fight sin
 3. A lack of dependence on the Lord in the fight against sin and an attempt to win the war within by our own power and strength

¹ Martin Luther

² Jared Wilson

- Thus, a key to winning the fight against indwelling sin involves understanding all the resources that are ours in Christ and leveraging those resources in the strength God supplies
- Romans 8 describes how we do this because Romans 8 is the answer to the problems of Romans 7
- Whereas Paul was preoccupied with the law in Romans 7, he is now preoccupied with the work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8
- Whereas Romans 7 detailed our battle with indwelling sin, Romans 8 details the power of the indwelling Spirit...and Paul's point is that the Spirit is our liberator from the law of sin and death
- It is through the Spirit that we have victory...the Christian life is essentially life in the Spirit, a life which is animated, sustained, directed and enriched by him

- There is no chapter that so clearly describes the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
- Whereas the Spirit was mentioned only 2 times in chapters 1-7 (Rom 1:4; 7:6), he is referred to some 20 times in Romans 8
- Without the Spirit, the Christian life would be indeed impossible because we would rely on our own resources and would, thus, fight a losing battle
- But those who belong to God possess the Spirit who enables us to do the will of God from the heart
- With the Holy Spirit, we have the power to defeat indwelling sin
- Christ dwells in us by his Spirit who infuses us with a new principle – the law of life – which is stronger than indwelling sin and sets us free from its tyranny

- Overview of Romans 8
 - vv. 1-17 – The Current Blessings of Life in the Spirit
 - vv. 18-25 – The Future Glory of Life in the Spirit
 - vv. 26-39 – The Eternal Security of Life in the Spirit

A New Identity

Romans 8:1 ~ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Paul wants us to know that, even though we still struggle with sin, we are not under its condemnation
- Even though we still find the law of sin still operating in this body of death, we are not condemned
- There is no guilty verdict, no penalty, and no accusation against us that can stand
- Our offenses have been totally wiped away and Christ is the sphere of safety for all who are identified with him by faith

- Some implications of this reality:
 1. God does not reject you when you sin – because our acceptance is based on our position “in Christ Jesus”
 2. God is not angry with you when you are inconsistent – because he understands it takes time to mature
 3. God does not punish you when you sin – because of the law of double jeopardy (no one is punished for the same crime twice)
 4. God doesn't want you to condemn yourself – because if God knows everything about you but won't condemn you, then you shouldn't either

Romans 8:2-4 ~ For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Here Paul tells us the basis of the reason we are no longer under sin's condemnation
- As believers, we have two laws or principles operating within us...the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life
- Even after becoming a believer the law of sin still dogs us (cf. Rom 7:21, 23, 25)
- Even though Christ has overthrown its rule, weakened its power, and even killed its root so we are not under its penalty...sin still is sin
- We still have residual weaknesses from our old humanness in that we still have to drag around remnants of our flesh
- But there is a new principle that operates within us called "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"
- It is through the "Spirit of life" that we have victory over the law of sin and death
- This "Spirit of life" is the Holy Spirit, given to us and implanted within us at the moment of salvation, the one who enables us to gain victory over sin in our life
- It is the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, ruling as a law or principle within our heart, that gives us victory over sin
- The law of the Spirit of life is the regulating and actuating power of the Holy Spirit
- When the Spirit comes into a person, they are liberated from bondage to evil and find a new power within, a power that causes the defeat of sin in their life
- It is the Spirit who bestows and energizes spiritual life in us as believers
- Thus, although the world, the flesh, and the devil can still cause us to stumble and falter, they can no longer control us or destroy us
- The reason we have this "Spirit of life" is because of Christ's work on our behalf (vv. 3-4)
- This is perhaps the most definitive and most succinct statement anywhere in the Bible of substitutionary atonement in the Bible
- It expresses the wondrous truth that God sent Christ in the form of a man to pay the penalty on behalf of every person who would turn from sin and trust in him as Lord and Savior
- The problem with the Law is that it provokes sin in us and condemns us for it...thus, it is unable to save us
- But what the law was unable to accomplish, God accomplished in Christ
- He sent Christ "in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh"
- Christ came as God in human flesh
- And he accomplished penal, substitutionary atonement for us...by taking on human flesh and dying as our substitute, he "condemned" sin
- Notice the relationship between v. 1 and v. 3...there is "no condemnation" for us because Christ was "condemned" in our place
- This has resulted in "the requirement of the Law [being] fulfilled in us" (v. 4) because God now looks on us as those who have kept the Law perfectly because of our union with Christ who did keep it perfectly
- As a result, we can be described as those "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (v. 4)

- We now live within the realm and sphere of the Spirit, who empowers and sanctifies us
- Every true believer begins to walk by the Spirit the moment they are saved
- This is not a command to walk in the Spirit but a statement of the fact that we do
- And when we walk and live by the power of the Spirit, we are able to mortify sin
- Our lifestyle is no longer characterized by the deeds of the flesh...we don't live the way we used to...the habits and thinking that used to characterize us as unbelievers no longer does
- We now walk according to the Spirit's influence...we have a new identity...we walk according to the new life not the old one
- We have the Spirit resident within us to confirm these realities in us
- So we can't wallow in sin anymore...we don't have to live a defeated Christian life...we don't have to succumb to your fleshly appetites anymore
- "There is one main reason why the Spirit and the new nature are given unto us – that we may have a principle within us whereby to oppose sin and lust. 'The flesh lusts against the Spirit. Well! What then? Why, 'the Spirit also lusts against the flesh'...There is a propensity in the Spirit, or spiritual new nature, to be acting against the flesh, as well as in the flesh to be acting against the Spirit. It is our participation of the divine nature that gives us an escape from the pollutions that are in the world through lust...Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin is to neglect that excellent succor which God has given us against our greatest enemy...Not to be daily mortifying sin is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has furnished us with a principle of doing it...He only [the Spirit] is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are as a thing of naught; and he is the great efficient [cause] of it – he works in us as he pleases."³

A New Mindset

Romans 8:5-8 ~ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

- Paul contrasts the mindset of an unbeliever with that of a believer
- "those who are according to the flesh" (v. 5) refers to a person's fundamental essence, bent, or disposition
- These are unbelievers Paul is referring to here because their basic disposition fleshly in that the flesh is the focus of their whole life
- They are so committed to the deeds of the flesh that Paul says they "set their minds on the things of the flesh" (v. 5)
- The problem with the unbeliever is that their minds are continually set on only their sinful interests
- Their basic disposition is to satisfy the cravings of their unredeemed flesh
- Their bent is always toward what is ungodly and what is hostile to God
- They are most deeply interested in and joyfully participate in the things pertaining to the flesh
 - ⇒ Contrast that with the mindset of a believer: v. 5 ~ but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
 - ⇒ As believers, our essential orientation to life stands in complete contrast to that of an unbeliever because we love the things of the Spirit of God

³ John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 53, 54, 57-58.

- ⇒ To use a radio analogy, those who are “according to the Spirit” have their minds tuned to the things of God and to his Spirit
- Paul again describes the mindset of an unbeliever in v. 6 ~ For the mind set on the flesh is death
 - The unsaved person is already dead spiritually which results in their minds being set on the flesh
 - It’s not the other way around...i.e. because their minds are set on the flesh that they are dead; rather, their spiritual death manifests itself in the fact that their minds are set on the flesh
 - Paul’s emphasis in this passage is on the state of death in which every unbeliever already exists
 - Even though they are physically alive and their minds are very much active, they are spiritually dead
 - They are spiritual zombies...the walking dead who do not know that they are dead
- ⇒ Contrast that with the mindset of a believer: v. 6 ~ but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace
- ⇒ Again Paul states a reality not a consequence...it’s not because your mind is set on the Spirit that you have life and peace; rather, it’s because you have life and peace through the Spirit that your mind is set on the Spirit
- ⇒ This means that your orientation and the bent of your life are going to be toward the things of the Lord
- ⇒ You will still struggle with sin; however, you have an entirely new mindset, one characterized by life and peace which results in the desire to obey the Lord, hate sin, love Christ
- ⇒ Spiritual life is produced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit
- ⇒ The Spirit brings about real change in a person’s life in that he transforms people from being sin-toleraters to sin-killers
- The mindset of the unbeliever is “hostile to God” (v. 7)
 - “It is not simply being slightly uncooperative; it is downright hostility. It means being in the opposite camp.”⁴
 - “[The mind of the flesh cherishes] a deep-seated animosity against him. It is antagonistic to his name, kingdom and will, to his day, his people and his Word, to his Son, his Spirit and his glory.”⁵
 - The mindset of the unbeliever is unable to “subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*” (v. 7)
 - “Insubjection to the law is construed as the concrete way in which enmity against God manifests itself.”⁶
 - Hostility to the Scriptures is hostility to God himself
 - The mindset of the unbeliever “cannot please God” (v. 8)
 - Because they are pleasing themselves, they are unable to please God

A New Obligation

Romans 8:9-11 ~ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But 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.

- Paul has been speaking of the distinctive characteristics of the unbeliever but now he turns away from them to the life of believers...as believers, we now possess the Spirit of God

⁴ Leon Morris

⁵ John Stott

⁶ John Murray

- What is true of unbelievers (“cannot please God” – v. 8) is not true of us...we can please God because our mindset is entirely different as believers
- That is clear because he moves from the third person in vv. 5-8 to the second person in vv. 9-13
- We are not bound by the flesh as they are...we are not dominated by the flesh as they are
- On the contrary, we are in the Spirit...we have a new orientation, a new mindset, a new disposition...there is a supernatural influence that we are now under as believers

- Believers possess the Spirit...in contrast to unbelievers who do not (v. 9)
- A Christian has the Holy Spirit living in them...they are born of the Spirit
- The hallmark of an authentic believer is the possession or indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- This is not something just reserved for a few select Christians...it applies to all believers
- “The presence of the Spirit in believers is not an interesting extra to be seen in a few unusual people...It is the normal and necessary feature of being a Christian at all.”⁷

- This reality matters in our sanctification...being a Christian is not merely a matter of adopting a particular set of intellectual or theological beliefs
- Rather, it involves a change of state which is accomplished, not by us, but by God through his Spirit
- This makes all the difference in how we live...we are not dominated by sinful lusts and pleasures
- We are dominated by the presence of the Spirit such that we want what he wants and we love what he loves
- Yes, we will still fight with ongoing sin...but the Spirit is in us as believers such that we are not dominated by the flesh anymore, we are dead to sin’s power, and we are freed from the law of sin and death
- Since we belong to Christ, we are under the direction and control of the Spirit now

- “It is not that a man just changes his beliefs and no more. No, he was in the realm of the flesh, and he is now in the realm of the Spirit. He was dominated by the flesh before, and governed by it...He is now in a realm which is governed and controlled and dominated by the Spirit.”⁸

- This results in us being alive in the Spirit (v. 10)
- Since Christ dwells in us, the life-giving force of the Spirit is brought to bear upon our very lives
- The Spirit has made us alert and alive to the things that we were dull and dead to before
- Prior to salvation, we had no interest in spiritual things, but now we are alert and alive to the Word, to a life of righteousness, to the glory of God
- Paul’s point is that this should make a massive impact in our sanctification...we have the life of the Spirit in us!

- God promises believers in whom his Spirit is living that he will also give life to our mortal bodies through the Spirit (v. 11)
- God promises not only a spiritual resurrection now through the regeneration work of the Spirit, but also a physical resurrection in the future for our mortal bodies
- The same Spirit who raised Christ will also raise us

- **Romans 8:12-13** ~ So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

- This truth about the presence and power of the Spirit has implications for how we live
- We are “under obligation” now as believers...we do not owe the old many anything

⁷ Leon Morris

⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones

- Our duty is not to live in the ways of our fleshly, sinful desires anymore
- We are obligated to not live in sin or according to the flesh anymore
- Although Paul doesn't really finish his thought in v. 12, the idea carries over to v. 13...we have an obligation to "put to death the deeds of the body"
- The freedom of the Spirit brings obligation...it is because we are free in the Spirit that we put sin to death
- Paul shows us just how significant the change that has occurred in us through the Holy Spirit is and he wants us to understand the obligations that come as a result
- We kill the flesh with lethal force...we mortify the deeds of the body by the power of the HS...it is divine supernatural power that pushes us past sin
- "We have to pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is; then you have really dealt with it."⁹
- "To mortify sin means to take away all the power of sin so that it cannot exert itself in the life of the believer."¹⁰

- Aron Ralston was climbing in Blue John Canyon, adjacent to Canyonlands National Park in SE Utah
- While climbing, an 800-pound boulder fell on him, pinning his right arm
- He tried to use his ropes and anchors to free himself, but couldn't
- 5 days after the accident he decided he had no choice but to use his pocketknife to amputate his arm
- Because his knife was not sharp enough to cut through the bone, he realized he had to first break the bone
- So he forced his arm against the boulder and broke the bone so he would be able to cut through the tissue
- He then applied a tourniquet and cut through the skin, muscle, and tendons, just below the elbow and freed himself from the boulder

A New Family

Romans 8:14-17 ~ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- Paul focuses upon the privileges believers enjoy being children of God, privileges which should motivate a life of holiness
- It is important to note the family terminology in these verses: "sons...adoption...Father...children...heirs"
- Through the Spirit, we are granted a close, personal, loving relationship with our heavenly Father, a relationship which should drive us to want to please him as a child wants to please their father
- The reason we are able to mortify the flesh is because we are children of God, who are led by the Spirit (v. 14)
- We are not led by the flesh or sin or lust or worldly desires anymore; rather, we belong to a new family, with new ambitions that result from the Spirit of God leading us
- What does the "leading of the Spirit" here refer to? → it is a leading unto godliness, sanctification, righteousness, and holiness
- It is the influence of the Spirit by which he enables us to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God's commandments

⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones

¹⁰ John Owen

- It is important to understand what it means to be “led by the Spirit” because many today are confused about it...the idea of “being led by the Spirit” has taken on a meaning today that was never intended by Paul
- Many believers today assume that the leading of the Spirit is a guiding in the decisions we make
- They use the language of “being led by the Spirit” to speak of specific guidance from God in which he opens doors or closes doors for us
- “A danger in the Christian community is that we devise and begin to use Christian jargon, and that jargon becomes the norm that defines our theology rather than the Word of God. The way in which our jargon functions, in many instances, often has little relationship to how the same words are used in Scripture. With the enormous impact of the charismatic movement during the last century came the idea of being led by the Spirit, which is why the concept figures largely into today’s Christian jargon.”¹¹
- This has led to people using a variety of strange and unbiblical means to attempt to discern the will of God for their lives like: saying God spoke to them...looking for signs from God...putting out a fleece...reading into dreams...believing that some inner impression or prompting or hunch is from the Lord
- “How can I tell whether these impressions are from God or from some other source? This is a critical question. For impressions could be produced by any number of sources: God, Satan, an angel, a demon, human emotions (such as fear or ecstasy), hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, or an upset stomach. Sinful impressions (temptations) may be exposed for what they are by the Spirit-sensitized conscience and the Word of God. But beyond that, one encounters a subjective quagmire of uncertainty. For in nonmoral areas, Scripture gives no guidelines for distinguishing the voice of the Spirit from the voice of self – or any other potential ‘voice.’”¹²
- This is what many Christians assume “being led by the Spirit means”

- John Eldredge’s *Walking with God: Talk to Him. Hear from Him. Really.* advocates an approach to being led by the Spirit that entails constant checking with God regarding the most trivial details of life
- He tells his readers to listen for God’s voice at every fork in the road
- Do I send this email or not?...Should I paint the bathroom?...If so, what color?...Should I stay at work late?...What book of the Bible should I read this morning?...Which chapter?...Should I go on a hike or go fishing?...Do you want to heal our dog?...Should we go on a family vacation?...When?...Where?...What clothes should I wear today?
- His assumption is this is what really being led by the Spirit involves

- Certainly, God leads his people where he wants them to go and into experiences that he wants them to have
- But that is not the primary meaning of being led by the Spirit that Paul has in mind here
- Paul’s point is that true children of God are led by the Spirit in paths of righteousness to holiness
- That is clear from the context...since Romans 8 has nothing to do with decision making but everything to do with having victory over sin and living a holy life
- Those who are led by the Spirit are those who put to death the deeds of the body
- That’s the role of the Spirit...to lead us out of sin and into righteousness, holiness, and godliness
- That’s what he is most interested in...the most important issues to the Holy Spirit are our sanctification, our holiness, our godliness, and our mortification of sin

¹¹ R.C. Sproul, *Romans*, 261.

¹² Gary Friessen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, 130-131.

- This fact is corroborated by the only other place in the Bible that uses the same terminology “led by the Spirit”
- Galatians 5:18 ~ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.
- The meaning of this verse is the same as in Romans 8:14 because the context of Galatians 5 is not walking in the flesh, but walking in the spirit (Gal 5:16-23)
- Being led by the Spirit confirms that we are “sons of God” (v. 14)
- This is where true assurance comes from...from seeing the work of the Spirit in your life in the area of personal holiness
- If our lives are being directed by the Spirit, it is a sure and certain sign that we are children of God, because that is what the indwelling Spirit does
- He gives us a hunger and thirst for obedience to Christ...he gives us an affection for keeping God’s commandments...he convicts of sin
- You know you belong to God when you see decreasing patterns of sin and increasing patterns of holiness
- You know you belong to God when there is growing conviction over sin and growth in godliness
- We might say this is the spiritual paternity test...you can know you are a child of God by testing to see if the Spirit of God is leading your life
- If he is, there will be evidence of it...there will be outward manifestations of the work of the Spirit in you
- This confirms that the Spirit has adopted us (v. 15)
- We used to be slaves of sin which generated fear...but now we have been adopted into God’s family
- Adoption was common in the Roman Empire...adopted sons were often chosen deliberately by the adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate
- In that sense, the adopted son was in no way inferior to a son born in the ordinary way...in fact, in many cases the adopted son sometimes had a greater prestige and privilege than the natural children
- Under Roman rule, if a father was disappointed in his natural son’s skill or character, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired
- If the boy proved himself worthy, the father would take the necessary legal steps for adoption
- Adopted sons enjoyed the same privileges as natural born sons...and at death of the father, the adopted son would often inherit the estate
- The same has happened spiritually to believers...through adoption, the Spirit, who lives in the hearts of believers, brings us into a personal, intimate relationship with the Father
- The Spirit confirms that we belong to God (v. 16)...he testifies and bears witness with and through our spirits that we belong to God...this is part of his ministry of assuring us that we are truly saved
- The HS always communicates to us by the Word, with the Word, and through the Word that we belong to God
- And he confirms the validity of our adoption by the fruit he produces in us, the fruit of the Spirit
- As such, we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (v. 17)