

The Presence & Promises of the Holy Spirit – Part 1

Romans 8:9-13

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells IN YOU”

Introduction: If you ever have a desire to give away your hard earned money for the opportunity to see how mature you are in Christ, I’d suggest taking up the game of golf. For those who have done so, you know exactly what I’m referring to, but for those who’ve never had the privilege, let me try to explain it. Golf seems exceptionally easy: a stationary ball is struck down a grass field into a small cup in the ground. They allow you different clubs with different uses, and the goal is to hit it straight in a certain number of shots. There are no defenders, no contact, and no need for padding. It seems like someone could learn to hit the ball and thus master the game in no time...but that is the furthest thing from reality. There is actually a large amount of **nuance and strategy one must possess to truly thrive**. Sure, one can hit the ball pure and far on their first hit, and take an exorbitant amount of swings the rest of the way. I’ve played since I was 12 years old, and I still will shank the ball, slice it like summer watermelon, and top it, with the result of it dribbling down the grass fairway, laughing at me along the way. For the last 3 decades, there has not been much improvement in my game, but there has been a lot of frustration with shots I’ve hit and rounds I’ve played. The only way to truly improve is to spend both **time and effort in practicing the right techniques and refining a repeatable swing**. Spending little time results in lackluster results.

What does golf have to do with the gospel and Romans? In so many ways, the gospel is **simple**: God created man in perfection, but mankind sinned, meaning we all are born sinners and thus separate from God and deserving of judgement. The only way back to God was through Jesus, a perfect sacrifice who died in our place and took God’s wrath, so that when we believe **by faith**, we get His righteousness accounted to us, and are reconciled with God. God ---- man ----- sin ----- Jesus ----- salvation. Again, this message is so simple that a child can understand and believe, but a message that even angels marveled to look at (1 Pet. 1:12). Yes, the gospel is simple but all the facets of the gospel shine beautifully, and it deals with the **complexities of life**. We are called to obey out of love, but life is full of distractions, temptations, circumstances, and responsibilities. We get tired with the pace of life, so responding in joy and patience is hard, and irritability is easier. People do not respond the way we think they should, so we get angry and defensive. We want to honor the Lord, but desires in our heart betray us, sometimes driving us to do things we never thought we would.

Paul wrote Romans not only to unite the church of Rome with him for a evangelistic hope of Spain, but that the believers would understand the breadth, depth, and length of the effect of the gospel in their life. In the next few weeks we will be able to answer questions in our life like: *Am I really a child of God, how do I actually deal with my sin, and what hope or motivation is there for us in the midst of suffering in this world?* The answers all are sourced in the beautiful, vast, assuring gospel that brings salvation to all who would believe.

Before answering those questions, particularly around the **indwelling of the Spirit**, it would be helpful to see the **argument flow** of Paul starting from chapter 1 into chapter 8:

*“For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (1:16-17)***

Like any good teacher or lawyer, Paul provided a clear **thesis** for the argument he'd make in the rest of the letter to the Romans. This is the crux of what he will go on to explain in detail, that the cosmic tension of every person in terms of the **righteousness of God** is NOT solved by anything that mankind can DO, but is an act of God on our behalf. The good news, or gospel, is the power needed, from God, to save mankind from God. This is received by **faith alone**, which sets the tone for the rest of the book but is also revealed in the entirety of redemptive history. God revealing His righteousness AND having sinful man belong to Him is the question that Paul unfurls through argumentation, logic, and Scripture itself in the rest of Romans 1-8.

1:18-3:20 – Paul lays out the **universal problem of sin for all people**, regardless of ethnic background or interaction with the Law. All of mankind has known there is a God without a doubt, has chosen to rebel, has created idols, and exchanged the truth of God for a lie. The result is that God gave us over to our sin, so we are not only abject sinners, but we absolutely LOVE OUR SIN.

3:9-11 *“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, **are under sin**,¹⁰ as it is written:*

*“**None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.***

*¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; **no one does good, not even one.**”*

Sin is all inclusive and all extensive. We are born sinners and lack righteousness, which is what is needed to have a relationship with God. We are born under sin with no way out in ourselves.

3:19-20 *“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, **and the whole world may be held accountable to God.** 20 **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight**, since through the law comes knowledge of sin”*

Sin is not merely personal (as long as I'm not hurting anyone) or neutral, but demands that we are accountable to God. This accountability leaves us in shambles, since we cannot justify, or make ourselves righteous, by keeping the law, but merely by understanding that we are sinners. **Why does Paul start with this facet of the gospel?** Almost every person who has lived thinks they are **better than they actually are**, and everyone must come to grips with the fact that they have offended a holy God, deserve wrath, and can do nothing about it in and of themselves.

3:21-5:21 – Salvation is the solution, and justification comes by faith in the life and death of Jesus Christ alone.

Perhaps one of the clearest, most straightforward, glorious descriptions of the gospel in terms of God upholding His righteousness while welcoming back sinful man is found in Romans 3:21-26:

*But now the **righteousness of God** has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the **righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ** for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are **justified by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is **in Christ Jesus**, 25 whom God put forward as a **propitiation by his blood**, to be **received by faith**. This was to show **God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show **his righteousness at the present time**, so that he might be **just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus***

If you get this passage, you get the gospel and the entirety of Paul's argument. *How did God uphold His righteousness while simultaneously bring sinful mankind to Himself?* **The answer is stunning:** Sinful man

is justified, or declared righteous, **by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ!** How did Christ uphold that justice? He became a **propitiation**, one through whom God had satisfaction for all sin ever committed by those who believe. On the cross, God treated Christ like He should have treated us so that we could have a **foreign righteousness** given or imputed to us that we could never earn. When God sees those who have believed in Christ, He sees **Christ's righteousness, not ours**, so He can welcome us in to belonging. This puts stress or emphasis on two fundamentally important parts: **the work of Christ, and the gift of grace to believe**. It is Christ alone, not our contribution or addition, that allows us to be justified. It is **faith alone**, not ANY WORK, that is required, and even that faith is NOT a work but a gift of grace.

Chapter 4 reinforces this same issue from the OT and life of Abraham, who believed God's promise by faith and it was *counted* to him as righteousness, NOT the keeping of the law or the sign of circumcision. Salvation depended on **faith so that the promise would rest on grace for himself and offspring** (4:15)

Chapter 5 is a preview of chapter 8 in that it tells us that those who have been **justified by faith** have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (5:1), which gives us assurance, joy, and hope in the midst of suffering and death. Chapter 5 helps every believer answer the question of **death and suffering**, and find its ultimate expression through the fact that the failure of Adam lead to death, but the triumph of the second Adam lead to life.

6:1-8:11 – The justified life will lead to a sanctified, or progressing in faith driven holiness, life. Sin no longer has dominion over us (6:12), and where we used to be slaves of sin, we are now slaves of righteousness (6:18) which means our life is no longer our own. If **chapter 6 brings confidence, chapter 7 brings a dose of humility as Paul's struggle with sin is real, ongoing, and current**. BUT, chapter 7 gives hope to those who struggle and battle with sin (which is the plight of all in this world), reminding us that we **belong to Christ** (7:4) and serve in the new way of the Spirit (7:6). Where do we find solace when we understand the war is being waged in our soul (7:22) and need deliverance (7:24). We give thanks to God, since:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (8:1)

The focus now is life in the Spirit, rather than the flesh. **Chapter 8** fleshes out the **new identity we have in the Spirit before explaining our new responsibility**. We are set free IN CHRIST JESUS through the Spirit from the law of sin and death, and our goal in life is to no longer to **walk IN THE FLESH but walk IN THE SPIRIT!** Why is this so important? **"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God"** (8:8) We want to please, honor, and glorify God in Christ with our life, and we can only do that when our minds are on the Spirit and we walk according to the Spirit. **But what does that actually mean?** That is what we want to look at this morning.

The Presence of the Indwelling Spirit

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God **dwells** in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is **in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, the **Spirit is life** because of righteousness. 11 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*

Whenever we have an opportunity to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, there is typically both **mystery and confusion**, with a type of wonder and intrigue attached to vast

misunderstanding. Here, Paul seeks to clarify and assure his readers of the reality of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

1. **The reality of the Spirit is given in personal terms, not general cautions** – There is a distinct shift in verse 9 from a 3rd person plural to a 2nd person plural, meaning in verse 9 Paul begins to address the Roman believers directly. He gives *conditional clauses* begun by the word ‘if’, but these are not meant to leave the outcome in doubt but rather assumed the outcome to remind of a reality that is already settled, which is permanent residence. The believers in Rome (and ALL believers) have the Spirit and thus are NOT in the flesh.
2. **The INDWELLING, or residence, of the Spirit is the differentiating mark for believers and unbelievers** – *How do I know if I’m saved?* Do I have the Spirit! Anyone who does NOT HAVE the Spirit DOES NOT belong to Christ....they are unbelievers and still in the flesh. That means that people can be in a church, can do all the things that a believer does, but NOT have the Spirit, and thus are not truly saved. ALL TRUE BELIEVERS POSSESS THE SPIRIT IN THEM!!!
3. **NOTICE how the Spirit dwelling in us is described** – He’s the ‘Spirit of God’ (9), ‘Christ in you’ (10), and the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32) dwells in you (11). This means that the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are **inseparable**...you have One, you have the other. They are inseparable but not **identical**, since each has unique roles and functions. But this means that the Holy Spirit is not like the *force* in Star Wars or some mystical feeling or thing. **HE IS a Person**, with emotions, intellect, and will (Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 1 Cor. 12:11). When we possess the Spirit, Christ is in us!
4. **Jesus promised it was to our ADVANTAGE that the Spirit came** – Jesus said if/when He left the earth, He would send a HELPER in His place, the Spirit of truth, to be **known, to dwell, and be in His disciples** (John 14:16-18). He would **teach** and **bring to remembrance** all the things Jesus taught (John 14:26), **guide in the truth** (16:13), and **bear witness of Christ** (15:26).
5. **The Spirit brings many things, but presence through indwelling is the core** – This was the conclusion of J.I. Packer in his work “*Keep in step with the Spirit*”, where he pointed out that the Spirit brings **power** (Acts 1:8), **performance** (through the gifts – 1 Cor. 12:4-11), **purification** (Rom. 6:17, Gal. 5:16). But just like God promised that He’d be with Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Israel, and us (Gen. 39:3; Ex. 3:12; Josh 1:5-9; Is. 43:2-5; Heb. 13:5), the Spirit is the one who **mediates the presence of Jesus in us**, which gives us both **boldness and assurance, proactivity and dependency on Him**.
6. **The Spirit brings AND promises LIFE** – We live in the conundrum today that we are BOTH **dead and alive** if we are in Christ. Look at verse 10 --- “*though the body is dead because of sin*” --- this means that sin has affected our mortal bodies and we are marching toward death. We are ALSO engaging, every day, with the battle of our OLD SELVES, our flesh, which we once WERE dead in. So the promise of the Spirit of life and to bring life is two fold: **He strengthens us to battle our sin today, AND He promises that He will bring life, one day, to our mortal bodies facing death**. These two realities will shape the rest of the chapter, and sets the tone for the next section of verses.

It's important that we pause for a beat here. If you are here and you do not have or do not know if you have the Holy Spirit, today is a day to make it clear. The Spirit indwells anyone who, by faith, believes in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ on the cross, who paid for our sin --- not in general but MY sin in particular --- and bears the wrath of God on Himself, so that He could give me His righteousness. Faith in Jesus after seeing our sin and the fact that we have offended God, will produce a desire for **forgiveness and repentance**, both asking and turning from, to follow Jesus with our whole heart and life. This is NOT something we can give you, but only the work of the Spirit in you.

The Promises to the Indwelt by the Spirit

*So then, brothers, we are **debtors**, not to the flesh, to **live** according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you **put to death** the deeds of the body, you will **live**.*

After clarifying the reality of the indwelling of the Spirit, he now lays out several **implications or responsibilities we have in light of it**. The two are these: **we are now NO LONGER DEBTORS but we ARE WARRIORS**.

DEBTORS – This word means “obligation”, the same word Paul used in 1:14 and his obligation to reach Greeks and barbarians. The language of debt and obligation is cautionary, since we want to make sure that our motivations to obey or deal with sin is NOT out of a check the box, you-did-this-for-me-so-I-should-do-this-for-you mindset. Notice in the language of verse 13, there is what **Thomas Schreiner** calls a “*provocative absence*”, in that he says we are debtors “not to the flesh”, but he does NOT finish the thought ---- you ARE debtors to the Spirit. Paul is majoring on a fact that is true of all believers, not just a quality of life that we're trying to attain. The argument is like this:

My daughter worked this summer at Chik-fil-a, under new management, and completed her time before heading back to college. When she was on payroll, she was scheduled to work shifts but often called to fill in for others. Being a good worker who wanted a good paycheck, she would often agree to work longer or extra shifts, creating overtime pay. However, if her boss from the summer would call her **now**, she is under NO OBLIGATION, no debt, to say yes. She got paid for the work agreed to, but now owes the company nothing. Sin **was our former master, one that had mastery and exercised dominion over us, and one that we owed an immeasurable debt**. BUT, in Christ and with the Spirit, we are NO LONGER BOUND to live according to the flesh, no longer have to say ‘yes’ to its temptations, and to whom we owe nothing since our debt has been completely satisfied.

WARRIORS – The key phrase in verse 13 is “put to death”, a violent word that is used for ‘murder’ or ‘causing the death’ of someone. It does not seem like a word Christians today use very much, but for Paul, it was of utmost importance (used again in Col. 3:5). The object of murder in our life are the **deeds of the body/flesh**, and the verb used is in the **present tense**, meaning it is an ongoing reality. The verb is NOT an imperative ---- meaning not a command --- but rather in the **indicative**, which means a state of reality (though the imperative can overlap here). The Puritans popularized the phrase “Mortification of Sin”, and **John Owen** famously said:

*“Do you **mortify**; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; **be killing sin or it will be killing you**.”*

What does this mean? **Mortification** means to harness and summon their wills to overcome sin, which desires to manifest itself in bodily actions (Schreiner). It means we seek to **starve sin at its root**, cutting

off the oxygen supply, and **replacing sin with better promises and reliance on Christ**. It demands active, ruthless, persistent action, since our sin does not play fair, has no rules, and is doggedly determined to take us down. But we must remember that fighting our sin is NOT an act of sheer will power, but is rooted in the reality of our **justification by faith, our assurance of security in the future, and a key phrase in this verse: BY THE SPIRIT!!!** What does that mean? It means we exercise our will out of a new identity and presence of the indwelling Spirit.

There must be **proactive effort** in killing sin, but it cannot be done by **willpower alone**. How many have tried diets this way? You try to cut out sugar by willing yourself not to eat it, but it only lasts so long before you succumb to that gloriously glazed donut, and once you're off the wagon, you begin to indulge again. Unless you have a **plan, replace sugar with something better/more healthy, and have help around you**, your plan will certainly fail.

Willpower to try to fight sin will fail as well. It goes like this: You set out to kill sin driven by **fear, guilt, pride, or a desire to maintain an image of yourself**. It feels right and good to start, but it will largely be done by yourself. When there is **success**, it produces pride, more self-sufficiency, and creates a judgmental attitude toward others who have not figured it out yet. When there is **failure**, it creates shame, desire to hide, or give up entirely. The **reality** is that willpower alone seeks to control the **external factors, symptoms, and behaviors** rather than addressing the root cause and move toward transformation. Willpower mortification leads to pharisaical legalism, setting up rules to keep and standards that no one can fulfill, since it is NOT done by faith, but works of the law.

But mortifying sin by the Spirit is completely different. It is born out of a **love for God**, since we love because He first loved us. It is out of a desire to **please Him** (Rom. 8:8; Heb. 11:6 – 'without faith it is impossible to please God'), **honor and glorify God**. It is born out of sheer dependency on His empowerment, and moves forward in decisions anchored in Him. Victory over sin breeds **humility, growing dependence, and compassion toward others**. When there is failure, we fight to believe the assuring promises of God and respond out of conviction, quickly repenting, and run toward God by **grace alone**. The goal is not merely external conformity but continued heart transformation from a true, dependent love of God.

John Piper reminds us that **'by the Spirit'** means that we must "set our minds on the Spirit" (Romans 8:5-6), rather than the flesh. The battle begins in our thinking and moves to our desires, and that is where the fight rages. The only way to set our minds on the things of the Spirit is to set our minds on the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:13-14), and using the **Sword of the Spirit** (Eph. 6:17). There are NO shortcuts in this. And the only way to sever the root of sin is to put our trust in better promises by the **hearing with faith, not the works of the law** (Gal. 3:5).

There is a battle raging each day in our minds and hearts, and the worst thing that can happen to any of us is if we think it is merely peacetime. We get lax, thinking it's no big deal to neglect our Bible's, or prayer, or hearing the Word preached, or having true, intimate fellowship with other Spirit filled believers. If you are a believer, you **have the Spirit, and if you have the Spirit, you CAN kill your sin, but you must engage in the process by faith**. We are either killing sin, or sin is killing us. We are NOT debtors, but we are Warriors, but fight with the power of the One that dwells in us.