

“A Spirit-Filled Mindset”
Romans 8:1-11
February 19, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

We come today to a chapter that is the favorite in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Chapter 8 is something of a climactic chapter, one that causes our hearts to soar in gratitude for all that we have been given in Christ. Paul has just spent the better part of two chapters describing the inability of God’s law to change our heart to love God and others. He spent so much time on that because our sinful nature naturally concludes that we become more holy simply by trying harder to obey God. Now that Paul has exposed the powerlessness of that approach to sanctification, he proceeds to tell us what does bring about our personal growth in holiness. More accurately, he tells us *who* brings that about, and it is the Holy Spirit. While the word “law” appears repeatedly in chapter 7, chapter 8 is dominated by the word “Spirit.” The word appears nineteen times in this chapter, fifteen of them in the first 17 verses.

In the first part of this chapter on Spirit-empowered holiness, Paul talks about the importance of the proper mindset. The word “mind(s)” appears 5 times in these verses, and each time it is accompanied by the word “set.” So we read about the importance of setting our minds on the things of the Spirit and not on the things of the flesh. We often refer to this simply as a mindset. What is a mindset? It is a conclusion you have drawn, through which you interpret everything that comes into your life. We often speak of those with an optimistic mindset or those with its opposite mindset of pessimism. The former has an outlook that puts a positive interpretation to the events and circumstances of life, while the pessimist can view the same circumstances and interpret them negatively.

I once heard about twin boys who exhibited extreme cases of optimism and pessimism. The parents were worried about the extremes of behavior and attitude and finally took the boys to see a psychologist. The psychologist observed them a while and decided to attempt an intervention by putting the boys in two completely different rooms. The pessimist was placed in a room filled with all the toys a boy could want. The other room was filled with horse manure, and the optimistic twin would be put in that room. Both boys were then observed through one-way mirrors. The pessimist looked at all the toys in his room and responded by complaining that there was no one to play with in that room. When they observed the optimist, they saw him digging through the manure. When the psychologist went into the room to ask him what he was doing, the optimistic boy replied that with all that manure, there had to be a pony somewhere in the room.

Paul knows that a Spirit-filled mindset can make a big difference in our lives, and today's passage describes three features of such a mindset.

I. **Secure – v. 1-3**

It is clear from this chapter that the most important mindset for a Christian if he or she is to grow in holiness is to be secure in the love of God. Though the theme of this chapter is clearly that of sanctification, it is significant that the chapter begins and ends with remarkable statements about the absolute security of the children of God. The chapter opens by saying that there is now no condemnation for the Christian, and closes by saying that there is no possibility of separation from God's love for the Christian.

Verse 1 reaches a conclusion based on what Paul has written in the previous five chapters. The conclusion is that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The word refers both to a guilty verdict and to the punishment for such guilt. In the original, the word "no" in the phrase "no condemnation" appears first, which is done for emphasis. In written English, we emphasize words by either bold or italic print, while in spoken English we emphasize words by pausing and increasing the volume. We are being invited to think about this word, which is exactly what Paul proceeds to do in the next two verses.

In verse 2, Paul strikingly refers to the Old Testament law as "**the law of sin and death.**" He clarifies again that this result of sin and death cannot be laid at the feet of the law, because the law is good. Rather, the law has been "**weakened by the flesh.**" But what the law could not do, God has done by sending his Son and the Holy Spirit. He sent "**his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.**" This is a reference to the incarnation. Jesus had the *likeness* of sinful flesh but had no sin himself. But he had real flesh and blood. He was sent "**for sin.**" This phrase in the Greek translation of the Old Testament commonly refers to a sin offering. These two phrases, then, refer to the incarnation and atonement brought by Jesus.

The reason we can be confident that there is now no condemnation for us is that the work of removing the condemnation is done one-hundred percent by God. Our contribution has not been required in this effort. If we insist on inserting ourselves and making some contribution, our efforts only serve to taint the perfect work of God. It would be like a three-year old picking up the artist's brush to try to improve a masterwork of art. Further, since God is the offended party with our sin, as well as the Judge of all mankind, it is of ultimate significance when he says that there is no condemnation left. It is like a creditor saying to a debtor, "there is no debt left to be paid."

Is your mindset marked by this kind of security in God's love? If so, one of the results will be the removal of shame. No longer will you live under the cloud of "I'm not good enough," or "I can't let people see who I really am." No longer will attempts to hide and cover up keep you in bondage. For, as Paul wrote, **"The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."** The one from whom you can't hide anyway, the one who sees everything about you, has declared **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Shame has no oxygen to breathe in the mindset brought about by this verse. It returns us to the paradise of Genesis 2:25. **"And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."**

II. Productive – v. 4-8

The gospel mindset that Paul has been describing is productive. According to verse 4, it produces **"the righteous requirement of the law."** I understand him to be speaking here of personal holiness rather than the righteousness of justification. It's interesting that "requirement" is singular, a likely reference to love that is the summary and fulfillment of the law. The Bible has many commands, but they are all simply commentary and explanation of what it means to love. They tell us what is involved in loving God and loving others. Only a gospel mindset can produce such love.

In these middle verses of our passage, Paul repeatedly mentions two ways of living. He speaks of the mind set on either the Spirit or the flesh, and of walking in either the Spirit or the flesh. The contrast between two ways of life is common in the Bible. The book of Proverbs speaks of the wise and the foolish. Jesus concluded his sermon on the mount by talking about two builders building on two foundations. One builds on the shaky and unstable foundation of sand, while the other on solid rock. It's much harder to build on rock, but in the end this house will endure, unlike the easier foundation built on sand.

Paul writes of three distinct stages in these two ways of life: a mindset, a lifestyle, and an outcome. Life unfolds in that order, beginning with a mindset. What is the difference between a mind set on the Spirit and one set on the flesh? The mind that is set on the Spirit is what we have just considered under our previous point. It's the gospel mindset that is secure in the fact of no more condemnation. It doesn't mean that you have to spend your days thinking about theology and the Bible every hour. Rather, it means that you have a gospel orientation that God is for you. The mind set on the flesh is described in verse 7 as **"hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."** This mindset is suspicious of God, believing deep down that God cannot be trusted. As a result, the mind set on the flesh believes "It's all up to me." This mind views God's commands as burdensome, not liberating. It believes that obedience to God will diminish and enslave, not enlarge and

liberate, that joy comes from doing what I want rather than through submission to God.

One's mindset, whether a gospel mindset or a mindset ruled by this hostility to God, involves a lifestyle. That's what Paul means in these verbs of walking and living. The process of mindset and lifestyle is bidirectional. We normally think that a mindset leads to a lifestyle, and that is certainly true. A mind that is hostile to God will not submit to God's law, as verse 7 states. But it works in the other direction too, as verse 5 states. **"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh."** The lifestyle, in this case, leads to how the person thinks. The person living a sexually promiscuous life may design a God who will hold his hand but who has no business telling him how to live his life. Listen to Tim Keller on this.

It may be that the single greatest barrier for young people when it comes to the church and Christianity has to do with issues surrounding sexuality. The basic reason for this is that our culture is heavily invested in the therapeutic identity which sees sexual expression as crucial to both freedom and authenticity.

The Bible offers a different mindset and identity. Instead of an identity based on discovering my authentic self through sexual expression, the gospel declares to us the most exalted identity imaginable as a free gift. I am a son or daughter of God Most High.

Whenever the Bible describes two ways of living, as Paul does in this passage, the description always includes statements about where that path leads. We can see the path we are walking on, but we can't see where it leads, something which God sees with perfect clarity. In the passage mentioned earlier in which Jesus describes the two foundations upon which people build their lives, he tells us the outcome of each choice. Of the one who built his house on the rock, it did not fall when the storms arose. But the house built on sand collapsed in the time of storm. Paul does the same thing here. **"For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace"** (v. 6). It's the difference between a gospel mindset and a mindset that thinks, "It's all up to me." We need God's warning about this, because the attitude of self-sufficiency just feels good to us. It feels like strength and power, while the mindset of dependence on the Spirit feels like weakness. But the one that delivers what we all want, life and peace, is the path of dependent weakness.

III. Hopeful – v. 9-11

The last three verses of our text speak of the hope we can have because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul says here, and the Bible teaches consistently, that the Holy Spirit dwells with all Christians. He states this negatively when

he says, **“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him”** (v. 9). The Bible teaches that there are special anointings and visitations of the Spirit, such as what you may have read has been happening at Asbury University over the past week. For this we rejoice and pray that it might spread. But this is different than what Paul is talking about here. He is speaking of the indwelling Spirit, which is the case for all who know Jesus. That God should use the word “dwell” to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit is staggering. To dwell means to take up residence. He doesn’t just come for a short visit, but moves in. God’s plan from the beginning has been to live with his people and they with him. This is what Eden was. What was lost by the sin of Adam is now regained by the last Adam, Jesus, as he sends the Spirit to dwell with us.

In his book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, J. I. Packer says that presence is the central trait of the Holy Spirit’s work. He then names three traits, all beginning with the letter “P”, that also are part of the Holy Spirit’s work, but which take a back seat to presence. There is power, performance, and purification. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of power, and he does give gifts that allow us to perform acts of service, and he purifies us unto obedience. But presence is the main trait. Paul points to the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within as the basis for other good gifts. If the Spirit lives within, there is an assurance of ongoing life, even after the body dies. And this life will not be a disembodied spiritual life. **“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.”** It is the presence of the Spirit within that fills us with hope.

How do you know if the Spirit dwells within? Notice that the Holy Spirit is referred to in verse 9 as the **“Spirit of God”** and then as **“the Spirit of Christ.”** These titles are given for a couple of reasons, but one is that the work of the Spirit is to glorify God the Father and God the Son. So one of the signs of the indwelling Spirit is a heart that has begun to be changed toward God the Father and toward Jesus. Have you begun to see that God is not a being to be avoided or placated, but one to be embraced and loved? Have you begun to see that God is not against you but completely for you?

CONCLUSION:

Today’s closing hymn expresses the mindset brought to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. From the dawn of the day, through the work we’re called to do, to the end of the day, the Spirit helps us to say, “May Jesus Christ be praised.” Even if “sleep her balm denies,” or “when evil thoughts molest,” the Holy Spirit brings comfort to us through the praise of Jesus. This is the path of life, joy, peace and hope.

Discussion Questions
Romans 8:1-11

1. Romans 8 begins and ends by talking about the absolute security of the child of God. It begins with a statement of no condemnation and ends with a lengthy passage on no separation. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt insecure? How was such insecurity stifling?
2. Though the theme of Romans 8 is that of sanctification or personal holiness, the chapter emphasizes the absolute security of the child of God. What is the connection between personal holiness and this security?
3. This chapter features the work of the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned repeatedly throughout. How should the Holy Spirit be featured in our daily Christian lives?
4. The word “mind” is used five times in this passage, always in the sense of a mindset. What do you think is the difference between a Spirit-given gospel mindset and a mind set on the things of the flesh?
5. Does verse 8 mean that unbelievers can never do works that are truly good?
6. What do we learn about the work of the Spirit from the fact that Paul refers to him both as “the Spirit of God” and “the Spirit of Christ” (v. 9)?
7. Should we pray for the Holy Spirit even if we are indwelled by the Spirit?
8. What is the connection between hope and the indwelling of the Spirit?