

Introducing . . . the Holy Spirit

The War Within – Part VI

Romans 8:2-4

Introduction

My three girls and I went to the State Fair this past week. My daughters were excited about all the terrifying rides – and they went on all of them.

Marsha and I were not interested in that, of course. We can no longer go around in a circle at forty-five miles an hour, flip upside down, come racing towards what seems like a collision with the ground, and call that fun. I guess we have changed. You know you are getting old when you go to the fair and want to see the cows and the sheep.

I did go on one ride with my nine year old, Charity. We went on the haunted house ride. We had been on it in the past – and we were having a lot of fun not really being scared as we rode in our cart through the haunted house. Only this year, unbeknownst to me, they had added a live human being who came up behind me and whispered in my ear, “It’s time to die.” I felt him brush up behind me and I turned to see, running behind us, someone wearing a white mask with holes in it. I literally thought, for a split second, that some lunatic had gotten in there and I was going to die! At that moment, we rode out of the haunted house and I hollered, “Whoa, that was scary.” People kind of looked at me as if they were thinking, “He doesn’t get out very much!”

I did, however, have something on my mind at the fair. I had been given some exciting news! I had been told that there was something new to eat at the fair – and I wanted to try it. Do you know what it was? It was a deep fried – now, listen to this – a deep fried Twinkie! Last year I had eaten a deep fried

Snickers bar, but this year I wanted to try the deep fried Twinkie.

I watched them make it. Those skilled professionals took that Twinkie, put a stick in it, dipped it in thick batter, and then, put it in the deep fryer. When it was done, they took it out of the fryer, hot and crispy, then covered it with powdered sugar. Oh man, was it good! It was a years allotment of sugar on one stick. In fact, it was too good . . . it stayed with me for the next forty-eight hours. Next year I am going to try the deep fried Oreo cookies . . . no more Twinkies for me.

While we were at the fair, we ran into a lot of people from our church, including a group of college students. One of the young ladies that I had not realized had literally grown up since the last time I saw her, held out her hand and showed me her diamond ring.

She was getting married. Someone very special had come into her life and had taken her heart away. She was a bride-to-be. Her smile stretched all the way from the Sponge Bob water pistol game to the Farris Wheel.

There is nothing quite like telling your world that someone special has come into your life. That is truly exciting news!

A Special Introduction of the Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul is about to make that kind of introduction. He is about to tell us about Someone who is extremely special and who has come into our

lives and stolen our hearts away. And, everything else in life seems less important than this Person.

Only twice before, rather subtly, has Paul said anything about Him in the book of Romans. But now, at this perfect moment, Paul makes a very special introduction. It is found in chapter 8, verse 2.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

We have just been introduced to the Divine Being who has taken our hearts away. He is called a number of things in the New Testament. In this introductory verse, He is referred to with the magnificent title, “the Spirit of Life”.

So far in the book of Romans, Paul has referred to the Holy Spirit two times, but in chapter 8, He will make reference to Him twenty times. We will spend a lot of time in future studies addressing Who He is and what He does, but for now, we will at least know that we are talking about a real Person. He is not a force; not a subjective power; not an experience; not mystical air, but a Person. The Holy Spirit:

- can be resisted, as Stephen said in Acts 7:51;
- can be grieved, as Paul warned in Ephesians 4:30;
- can be quenched or stymied, as we are told in I Thessalonians 5:19;
- can be obeyed, as recorded in I Corinthians 6:19-20;
- can be lied to, as we see in Peter’s challenge to church members named Ananias and Sapphira, when he asked, in Acts 5:9, paraphrased, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?”
- can be insulted and outraged, as the writer of Hebrews warns the unbeliever who disregards the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in Hebrews 10:29.

The Holy Spirit is a real person; a divine member of the Trinity. And in our text, Paul introduces Him with the title, “the Spirit of life”.

The Holy Spirit – “the Spirit of Life”

What a great expression for the Holy Spirit – “the Spirit of Life”! *The Holy Spirit tends to do just that, by the way – He bring things to life!*

The Holy Spirit played a role in bringing to life the universe

1. First, the Holy Spirit played a role in bringing to life the universe!

He moved across the face of a world that He was involved in bringing to life. We read in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 2b,

. . . the Spirit of God was moving across the surface of the waters.

The Holy Spirit plays a role in bringing to life the heart and soul of a person who is regenerated

2. Secondly, the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in bringing to life the heart and soul of a person who is regenerated.

We are informed in the Bible that the spirit of fallen man is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). However, we are also told that at the moment of conversion to faith in Christ, that immortal essence of every one of us comes to life by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John, chapter 6, verse 63a,

It is the Spirit who gives life . . .

In other words, as one man wrote,

the Holy Spirit bestows and energizes spiritual life in the person who comes to Christ . . . He brings spiritual life to a heart that is spiritually dead.¹

The Holy Spirit brings to life spiritual discernment

3. Another enlivening work of the Holy Spirit is that He brings spiritual discernment to life.

He literally brings the words of God to life as He brings to life the mind of a Christian. Paul had that in mind when he wrote, in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verses 11 through 14,

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and

he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised [discerned].

In other words, you can only try to explain just so much to an unbeliever. They just cannot get it, unless the Spirit of God awakens their conscience and gives sight to their spiritual eyes and insight to their spiritually closed minds.

The Holy Spirit – “has set you free from the law of sin and of death”

Now, in Romans, chapter 8, verse 2, we read specifically that,

. . . the . . . Spirit . . . has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

You might ask, “But doesn’t that contradict Romans, chapter 7? I thought we were still bound to the flesh; still bound to the possibility of sin and the presence of sin and the corruption of our sinful desires. Did we misinterpret chapter 7?”

No. As a matter of fact, we have the fuller picture now. Yes, I am still bound to the presence of sin and the lure of sin, so that the possibility of sin finds me performing sin. Yet at the same time, I am free, through the Spirit of Christ; for although Satan would try to keep me from ever doing what is right, he cannot consistently stop me.

Satan cannot keep me from going to the Father in prayer; cannot keep me from rejoicing in Christ; cannot chain me so that I cannot serve in the cause of Christ; cannot prevent me from experiencing the peace of God and the victory of Christ and the hope of heaven; cannot rob me of God’s presence and the filling of my heart with the word of God. Why today, he could not even keep us from singing at the top of our lungs to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. How he must hate it!

With that said, all you need to do is to take a close look at verse 2, and you will discover that the verse says all of that anyway. Paul does not say, “the Spirit of life has set you free from sin and death,” but,

. . . the . . . Spirit of Life . . . has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Is a believer set free from the experience of sin? No, and Paul does not say that in that verse. Does the Christian not experience physical death? Paul did not write that either. Paul wrote,

. . . the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

What does Paul mean, to be “set free from the law of sin and death”?

Every one of us today, are experiencing the law of gravity. You have not had to tie yourself down to your chair to keep yourself from floating upward. The law of gravity keeps you down.

I could hold up my Bible and then let it fall, and it would fall down. I could do it a million times, and a million times, it would fall down. I never need to wonder whether, on the three millionth try, the law of gravity would reverse itself and instead of my Bible falling, it would fly up and get stuck on the ceiling. It is going to fall every time I let it go. That is the law of gravity.

However, if I interrupt that law by introducing something else, like my hand, and if I caught the Bible, then the law of gravity would be, in a way, superceded. The strength in my arm allows me to raise my hand and the strength in my hand allows me to catch the Bible, so that the law of gravity is outdone by the law of my life and my strength.

In the same way, it is the life of the Spirit and the strength of the Spirit that interrupts the gravitation of the law of sin and death. His hand has caught us; the law of sin has been superceded by the law of the Spirit.

When did this new law take effect?

A Simple Explanation of the Holy Spirit

Following Paul’s special introduction of the Holy Spirit, is a simple explanation. Look at chapter 8, verse 3 of Romans, chapter 8.

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,

The first phrase is, “For what the Law could not do . . .”. What could the Law not do? Justify you . . . clean you up? The Law cannot do that – it can only reveal how dirty you are.

Only God can clean you up. Only God can redeem you and reconcile you to Himself. And He did what the Law could not do, as Paul says,

. . . God . . . [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . .

Notice that Paul did not say, “And God sent His own Son in the likeness of flesh.” That would mean that Jesus was not fully man; He only seemed to be a

man. Nor did Paul write, “God sent His own Son in sinful flesh.” That would mean Jesus was a sinner; that He had a sin nature.

Notice Paul’s careful description of the incarnation,

. . . God . . . [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . as an offering for sin . . .

Jesus Christ took a body so that He could be crucified; so that He could experience what God cannot experience – death. The atoning work of Christ involved death so that we could have life. Punishment and wrath was meted out on Him, so that we would be saved from the wrath of God forever.

This was the innocent One giving His life for the guilty. And the moment you accepted that Lamb as your substitute; as soon as you exercised faith in that Savior alone, the Spirit of Life brought your spirit to life!

The Significant Application of the Holy Spirit

Now, on the heels of Paul’s special introduction and simple explanation of the Holy Spirit, is a significant application. In fact, Paul will come back to it several times in this eighth chapter of Romans. Notice verse 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.

Now do not make the common mistake of misunderstanding who Paul is talking about in this verse. Paul is not contrasting two kinds of Christians – one kind of Christian who walks according to the flesh and the other kind of Christian who walks after the Spirit. That is not what he is talking about.

The verse begins,

so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us . . .

This is passive. In other words, the requirement of the Law is not something fulfilled *by* us, but, Paul writes, “. . . the Law might be fulfilled *in* us . . .”. The fulfilling of the Law is not something we can do, it is something God has done for us.

And who are the “us” Paul has in mind? Believers! And how do you know who the believers are who have experienced the work of God within them? The last part of the verse tells us who “us” are – those,

. . . who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Aren’t there verses that tell the believer to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh? Yes!

That leads me to say that there are two sides to sanctification; two sides to walking with the Spirit. It is both passive and active. It is something that God does in us and something we choose.

Walking after the Spirit is something every believer will do; that is, every true believer, though he will fall and fail. He will not be content unless he pleases the Father.

Walking according to the Spirit has to do with our position and our practice. Walking in the Spirit has to do with our eternal standing and our current surrender.

Let me say it this way: *When you surrender to walk with Him, you discover that He has planned your walk already.*

By the way, many experiences in the Christian life have these same two sides to them.

John MacArthur wrote,

Everything that is a spiritual reality is also a spiritual responsibility. A genuine Christian will commune with his heavenly father in prayer, but he also has the responsibility to pray. A Christian is taught by the Holy Spirit, but he is also obligated to seek the Spirit’s guidance and help. The Holy Spirit will produce spiritual fruit in a believer’s life, but the believer is also admonished to bear fruit. [You are told to receive the gospel and accept the Savior and yet, you are told that God has already chosen you for Christ.] Those truths are part of the amazing and seemingly paradoxical tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s will. But they are clearly taught in God’s word.ⁱⁱ

In Romans, chapter 8, verse 4, Paul deals with our position. Well, what does it mean to practice our walk according to the Spirit?

I’m going to begin answering that in our next discussion. For now, however, understand that the word “walk” refers to the daily events of life.

You surrender to the Spirit . . . and you rest in the Spirit’s direction. And it is not all bells and whistles; it is not one “mountain top” experience after another. Walking according to the Spirit takes place in the common events and duties and responsibilities of life,

where you seek to honor and please the heart of Christ.

By the way, one of the responsibilities of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Christ, right? Jesus said in John, chapter 16, verse 13 through 14a,

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me . . .

Since that is true, you can be assured that you are walking in the Spirit when you also exalt and honor and glorify Christ.

Robertson McQuilkin imagined this truth in this way, when he wrote,

Imagine the President of the United States coming to speak at your local high school auditorium and the band strikes up, "Hail to the Chief" as the president strides to the microphone. The spotlight follows his every step. Suddenly the crowd, as one, rises and – what's this? They turn their backs to the stage and pointing to the balcony, erupt in applause for the fine performance of the spotlight operator! Absurd? Of course, but it illustrates a truth about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit glorifies – shines the spotlight on the word of the Son . . . He points mankind to the Redeemer and highlights the work of Christ on their behalf.ⁱⁱⁱ

Those movements that exalt the Spirit and focus on the Spirit and magnify the Spirit have missed it. They are applauding the spotlight operator, whose job is to illumine and magnify the ministry and person of our Redeemer.

For the believer who wants to know if he is walking in the Spirit, all he has to ask is whether or not his life is focused on and bringing attention to Christ.

You don't have to have it all figured out. Paul said we "walk in the Spirit." Walking is not panicked running here and there. It is not a frantic pace, it is a daily walk . . . one step at a time!

I was on the phone last night, with my friend, Charlie Murphy. Charlie is a man I am incredibly proud of for his testimony and walk with Christ. Let me tell you why.

Charlie has recently been released from prison for what is called "white collar crimes," or crimes of

financial illegalities. He landed in prison with a sentence to serve around four years, but God was at work in bringing about spiritual freedom almost as soon as he donned his inmate clothing.

His first night in prison, he called his sister, who is a member of our church. They talked for an hour and Ginny shared the gospel with her brother. After an hour, with tears streaming down his cheeks, Charlie placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

Charlie's first night, now as a believer, he was not sure what life held for him; not sure where his path would take him. But God was already at work. The Spirit of God had already marked out his path.

That first night in his cell, Charlie read a Bible that had been given to him. The next morning at breakfast, another inmate who had seen him reading the Bible, came up to him and said, "We should start a Bible study."

Charlie said, "Yes, you should, and I'll be happy to come."

"No," the man insisted, "you need to lead it."

Charlie said, "I just got my first Bible . . . I don't know much about it . . . I can't lead a Bible study, but I'll be happy to come."

After supper that night, the inmate approached Charlie and said, "It's time for our Bible study. We're waiting for you."

They walked toward an area where a dozen inmates were waiting. Charlie said, "I have no idea what to say . . ."

The man said, "Here's a *Daily Bread* . . . just read from that."

Half of the men in the Bible study could not read. So, Charlie turned in the *Daily Bread* to the reading for that day and his eyes fell on the bottom thought in bold letters and he read it. The men seemed to want more, so he began at the top and read the verse and the story. The devotional for that day had to do with giving your heart to Jesus Christ. When Charlie finished reading, several of the men said, "We want to do that."

Charlie asked, "What?"

They said, "We want to be saved. How do we do that?"

Charlie said he remembered praying, "Holy Spirit, work with me here."

At that moment, Charlie was paged to come meet the nurse in the front. He excused himself, promising to come back. While meeting with the nurse, he was

approached by another inmate who had been cleaning out his room, preparing to be released, and he said, “Hey, you could probably use this bookmark.”

The bookmark was produced by the Gideon’s, and at the top of it, the words read, “How To Be Saved”. Below, the steps on how to trust Christ for salvation were printed. Charlie walked back to his Bible study, armed with the answer! He read the bookmark, “number one – admit you are a sinner . . .” to the final step, “pray to ask Christ into your life as your own personal Savior” and four inmates prayed to receive Christ.

Charlie was walking in the Spirit.

You do not have to know everything, you just have to know Him . . . and desire to exalt Him and honor Him and glorify Him. That kind of desire comes, not from you, but from the Spirit within you. That kind of Spirit-led desire seeks to shine the spotlight on our Redeemer who came in the likeness of sinful flesh to die on our behalf, so that we would be liberated from the law of sin and death.

The one who walks in the Spirit will testify to that truth, and so exalt and glorify the Savior.

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ⁱ John MacArthur Jr., Romans, Volume One (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1991), p. 404.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 412.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robertson McQuilkin quoted by Robert J. Morgan in Stories, Illustrations & Quotes (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 438.