

p 51 WEEK 7: LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:1–39

The Place of the Passage

The eighth chapter of Romans is one of the most powerful passages of Scripture. Up to this point, Paul has not highlighted the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, but in this great text, perhaps the highest peak among all the spiritual heights visited in the epistle, the role of the Spirit in applying the saving work of Christ in justification and beyond begins to take vibrant shape. There are two extraordinary bookends to the chapter. Paul reveals how our union with Christ not only justifies us but provides for us the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ. Paul gives a panoramic view of the riches of Christ in our adoption, our identity, our sanctification, our strength in times of suffering and weakness, and our final destiny. Romans 8 summarizes and drives home to the human heart the implications of our salvation presented in Romans 1–7 and prepares the way for Paul to discuss the relationship between p 52 Jews and Gentiles in God's plan (Romans 9–11, 15) and the practical outworking of life in the Spirit (Romans 12–14).

The Big Picture

If we are united with Christ, adopted by God, and indwelt by the Spirit, then we are as secure as Christ himself is.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 8. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2170–2172; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Life in the Spirit (8:1–17)

What has been said prior to Romans 8:1 that leads Paul to say that believers are under no condemnation? What role does union with Christ play in this verse?

If Jesus was sinless, why does Paul say he was “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3)?

p 53 What are some practical ways to set your mind on the “things of the Spirit” (8:5–8)?

According to 8:13, is sanctification God’s work or ours? Consider also 1 Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 2:12–13; and Colossians 1:29.

What does it mean to be an heir (8:16–17)? What are the benefits of being fellow heirs with Christ?

2. The Assurance of Hope (8:18–39)

What does 8:19–22 tell us about sin?

p 54 What are some ways we might *misinterpret* Romans 8:28?

How is Romans 8:28 similar to Philippians 4:13?

What might Paul have in mind in the “all things” of 8:32?

How can those being “killed all the day long” (8:36) be “more than conquerors” (8:37)?

p 55 Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

“IN THE SPIRIT.” Romans 8:9 explains the spiritual reality of the believer’s union with Christ. If we are “in Christ,” then we live not in the flesh but “in the Spirit.” While we still sin, even as believers, we are no longer defined by the flesh—that is, by the natural, base, sinful demands of self. And if we are in the Spirit, it means that the Spirit is in *us*. The Spirit enables us to receive by faith the finished work of Christ, and then he “takes up residence” in us. Those who are born again have been consecrated by the Spirit, having become temples for his abiding presence (1 Cor. 6:19). This indwelling presence fuels our growth in godliness and in our producing the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22–23).

ASSURANCE. Is it true that once we are born again, we will not revert to a state of spiritual death? Throughout Romans 8, Paul confirms the abiding confidence believers can have in Christ and the eternal life he imparts to his people. In Romans 8:1, he says there is no condemnation for believers. Romans 8:11 says we will receive immortal resurrection life. Romans 8:28 says

everything is working toward the good for believers. Romans 8:31 reasons that God's favor is too large for any objections. And then, finally, climactically, and unequivocally, Paul says in Romans 8:35–39 that nothing can separate us from God's love, not even death and not even our own sin. God does not lie; he keeps his promises. So those who are justified will be glorified (Rom. 8:30)—not because we are faithful, but because God is. Paul puts the verb in the past tense to make the point that, being promised, it is as good as done.

DIVINE INTERCESSION. Now here is a great gospel truth! We learn in Romans 8:26–27 that the Spirit intercedes for us. We learn in Romans 8:34 that Jesus himself intercedes for us. The Spirit intercedes by articulating to the Father the groanings from deep within our soul that we are not even able to put into words. The Son intercedes by showing the Father the merits of his death and resurrection. In effect, the Spirit and Son are both praying for us. What an astonishing and compelling reason for hope and confidence!

Whole-Bible Connections

HEIRS. Paul develops an interesting theme in his exploration of the spiritual blessings we receive in Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). Because we are joined to Christ, [p 56](#) his Father becomes our Father. And since his Father is our Father, we receive the blessings of sonship, becoming co-heirs with our elder brother, Jesus. This is a crucial fulfillment of something we see throughout the Old Testament stories. Traditionally, the oldest son in a family receives the highest honor among siblings; he is the recipient of the birthright. But over and over again, the older brothers in the biblical narratives fail and fall. They are shown to be utterly incompetent and very often brutally cruel. So God, in a display of his grace, consistently uses “younger brothers,” the ones you would not expect to carry out his redemptive plans. Think of Abel, Jacob, Joseph, and David—all younger brothers who are uniquely favored by God. When we get to the New Testament, Jesus tells a parable about a younger brother who selfishly leaves his family (Luke 15:11–32). Here is another opportunity for the older brother to redeem “older brotherhood,” but the older brother in the story is cold and proud. Again we are left yearning for the good older brother. Enter Jesus. He is the perfect older brother who loves his sinful siblings, seeks their good, lays down his life for them, isn't ashamed to be united to them (Heb. 2:11), and in the end shares all the riches that are his birthright with his brothers and sisters. We are co-heirs with Jesus—of the entire earth (Matt. 5:5).

Theological Soundings

FOREKNOWLEDGE. There is a key word in Romans 8:29 that is too often and easily missed, and it is this: “whom.” A major misunderstanding of God's foreknowledge by many is that it refers to God's foreknowing who will believe in Christ and then electing them based on that decision. But the verse does not say that God foreknows *what* will happen; it says that he foreknows *who* will “happen.” It is of course true that God has foreknowledge of all future events. That is part of his omniscience. But in his eternal fatherhood and omniscience, he foreknows relationally those who are his children, which is to say, he knows them inside and out. He knows who they are and what they will be like, and he has designated that, however sinful they are, they are nevertheless *his*.

So the foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 is not factual foreknowledge so much as relational foreknowledge. In a word, it is love. We are lovingly chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3–4).

THE ORDO SALUTIS. Sometimes called the golden chain of salvation, Romans 8:30 outlines a sort of chronology of the believer’s salvation process. Theologians sometimes refer to this as the *ordo salutis*, a Latin phrase that means “order of salvation.” When God predestines someone to salvation, you can be sure he will call that person. And if he calls him, he will respond in the faith needed to be justified. And if he is justified, he will be glorified. Paul even puts the glorification of the believer in the past tense, as we saw, indicating that because it is promised and vicariously accomplished in Christ’s resurrection and ascension, it is already secured. It is a foregone conclusion.

p 57 THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS. “Behold, I am making all things new,” Jesus proclaims in Revelation 21:5. God’s ultimate plan is not to scrap the earth and throw it into the waste bin like a crumpled piece of paper. He is renewing and will renew it. His plan is for the earth—this earth—to be covered with his glory “as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Every nook and cranny will be filled with his glory. When Adam sinned, the land was cursed too. That’s how serious and consequential human sin is. But God will not let our sin conquer his plan for creation. Romans 8:19–23 shows this. The creation groans under its curse, but not in death throes; rather, in birth pangs. The whole cosmos is ripe with its future self. It is groaning for release. And one day, when Christ returns, we will receive with our King his dominion over a new heaven and a new earth. Just as Adam’s sin and our inheritance of it infected the entire created order, so too does Christ’s atoning work and our reception of it restore the entire created order.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 8 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 58 3. Theological Soundings

4. Romans 8:1-39

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Romans. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.