

Romans 1:1-11

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[0:00] Please do turn back in to page 944 of your Bibles. Tonight we're starting a mini-series just in Romans chapter 8.

! So we'll be in this for the next few weeks. And it needs to be said, Romans 8 is one of just the most glorious chapters of the Bible. When I was in seminary, we had to read through the whole Bible just over the span of a few terms. So you had to read it pretty quickly.

But Romans 8 would just stop you in your tracks, as you read. One of the great preachers, Martin Lloyd-Jones, he said, If the Bible was like a pile of gems, the book of Romans would be the brightest cluster, and chapter 8 is the brightest gem in the cluster.

Throughout the generations, this chapter is just so well-loved and so well-known, isn't it? And it's almost like one of those films where you could just quote every line, and every line is a masterpiece.

It's like watching Lord of the Rings. You'll probably recognize some of them. Just look at verse 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[1:10] Verse 15. Verse 28. Verse 35.

Verse 37. It's such a bright gem, isn't it?

But why does this gem shine so bright? Well, I think it is so glorious because in the Christian life, we can so easily feel weak and vulnerable, and we can wonder, what is God doing in my life right now? We can feel like this is all just too much. How can I face tomorrow? And all this can just seem insignificant and hopeless. And we often wonder, is this Christian life all really worth it?

That is so often our experience. But against that bleakness, Romans 8 is this shining gem, just showing us this detailed and vibrant picture of the powerful work God is doing in our life.

[2:23] In contrast to our weakness and our doubts, Romans 8 just has this triumphant note throughout. It is all about the power and life and joy and security and victory of the Christian life.

So just think of those quotes again. No condemnation. No condemnation. Full adoption. Loved by God. Never ever being separated from Christ.

More than conquerors. And so this chapter is rightly to be treasured because it speaks into our weakness and our worries, and it says God is triumphant in your life.

And you may not see it, but beneath the surface, he is doing something far greater than we may realize. And it all comes down to his spirit in your life.

The Holy Spirit is key to understanding this chapter. In Romans 8, Paul is opening our eyes to see this glorious picture of what God, but in particular, what the spirit of God is doing in this world and in the church and in our lives every single day.

[3:44] And he wants us to see the spirit's work, it is bigger than you might realize. And it is a work deeper than we can see. So you might be here today wondering, why bother with all this Christianity stuff?

From the outside, this all may just seem weak and fragile and insignificant. Well, under the surface, there is something triumphant and indestructible going on.

The divine spirit is at work. That shine of the gem, that is the spirit shining. And so I just want us to jump into these first 11 verses.

And straight away, we see something glorious about the spirit's work in our life. We see the spirit sets us free. The spirit sets us free.

This opens on amazing words, doesn't it? It's those words that we cling to in the darkest of days.

Verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[4:53] Now the word therefore, do you see that? It's referring back to all that Paul has said, basically from chapter 5 onwards. Everything about Christ. Since Christ has come down and shed

his blood and died and been buried and raised and you are united with him.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation. And he's opening up the reality of the Christian life with that word, now.

For those in Christ right here, right now, there is no condemnation from God in your life. And then, Paul gives a specific reason why this is the case.

Why is there no condemnation? Verse 2. There is no condemnation because the spirit has set you free.

And if you just stop and think about that for a second, that should surprise us. Because we might expect to hear there is no condemnation because Christ has died and taken away your sin.

[6:15] Or there's no condemnation because Christ has paid the debt of your sin. We would expect the reason to be outside of ourselves. Because Christ has done something for us out there.

But instead, it says, there is no condemnation because God has done something in you. The spirit has set you free.

And Paul gives this reason because he means something specific by no condemnation. He's not talking about the guilt of sin, although it's related to the guilt of sin.

But specifically, he's talking about the power of sin. So it's like when you commit a crime and you're sentenced by a judge.

There are two things that happen to you. Firstly, you're found guilty. You have the verdict and status of guilty. But also, you then face the prison sentence that arises from that guilty verdict.

[7:21] You are then condemned to prison. Well, that is just like sin. Sin involves guilt and imprisonment. Sin makes us guilty before God and it also captures us.

Sin is a real power over our hearts and lives and desires. And it enslaves and rules us.

Sin is a real power over our hearts and rules us. And so ever since the fall, the iron bars went up around humanity. The cage of sin surrounded us, and we were condemned to this prison sentence.

And that's what Paul is talking about here. There is now no condemnation for the Christian, no prison sentence, because God has burst open the prison cells.

The Christian life is a life free from sin's power ruling over your heart. And how did God do that?

Verse 2, the law of the spirit of life has set you free.

[8:33] And this is how we can understand what he means by law here. So he's not talking about the law like the Ten Commandments. No, by law he means principle or power, right?

The principle and power of the spirit has overcome the principle and power of sin in your life.

And so you're set free. Sinclair Ferguson, he just has a great illustration that really captures this. He says, it's like the laws, the principles at work when a plane flies.

So when a plane cruises at 33,000 feet, the law of gravity hasn't disappeared, but the law of aerodynamics is now at work causing that plane to take off and to fly.

The law, the power of aerodynamics has overcome the law, the power of gravity, and set the plane free to fly. Well, that is the Christian life.

[9:39] We were held down by sin, trapped and caged, but Christ sent his spirit into our life and set us free. Now, sin hasn't disappeared, but its power has been overcome.

When his spirit came to you and gave you faith and entered your heart and changed it from stone to flesh, that was the spirit taking charge of your life and setting you free.

And this freedom is so needed because look what the law of sin and death does when it rules, verse 7. It makes us hostile to God, not submitting to God's law, no obedience.

It's like a gravitational pull, keeping our hearts and our minds down to the ground and away from God, sin pulling toward more sin, disobedience, a life revolving around ourselves, not God.

It's the prison cell of selfishness. But the law of the spirit of life is the complete opposite. It's the spirit ruling our lives to take us in the opposite direction.

[10:53] Verse 4, it's righteousness. A life fulfilling the law, doing the law, holiness. It's a life looking upward toward God.

It's like if your heart is a car, before sin was in the driving seat. Driving full speed away from God, into ditches, crashing the car, heading toward death.

But in Christ, the spirit comes into the car, takes over the driving seat, throws sin out of the driving seat, takes over your heart and turns it 180 toward God.

And so Christian, that obedience that you have, however small, however fragile, that is not insignificant.

That is the spirit of life having set you free. When you say no to that gossip at lunch, that is the spirit of life at work in you.

[12:01] When you close that internet tab before you go any further, that's the spirit's power right there. Working at your marriage, forgiving and forbearing day after day when it's easier just to give up, but you do it all for the sake of your God.

That is you, freed by the spirit. Being here, hearing God speak, singing his praises, and then going out into this week to live the ordinary Christian life, working hard for the Lord, raising your children in the faith, it may all just seem small, even insignificant, but in reality, that is all spirit-given freedom.

That is the iron bars destroyed in your life. No condemnation. And so Paul is giving a very black and white picture of the world here.

And he's saying that there are two ways to exist in this world. Either we are ruled by sin, or we are ruled by the spirit. Condemned or free.

But looking at our lives, and looking at everyone around us, we may not realize that. Looking at the church, and then looking at the world, you can compare two people, and on the surface, they appear the same.

[13:30] Same school, same job, same postcode. But underneath the surface, deep in the heart, there is a drastic and glorious difference.

When you look at the Christian, you see a heart set free. You see the divine spirit, in the driving seat, and powerfully at work.

The prison bars shattered. A life transformed by the grace of God. But we may not always see it, but beneath the surface, you see a person who owns these words, no condemnation.

And that is because our sin was all condemned in Christ. Look at verse 3. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do, by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Sin's power, you cannot overcome just by trying hard, or living a good life, or just trying to grab the steering wheel for yourself.

[14:43] No, the law cannot do that for us. Our flesh is too weak. We can't overcome the gravity. The world is, it's trapped in this cell.

And so what has God done instead? He sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Not sinful, but in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Truly human. Flesh in all our frailty, but without sin. And on that cross, God laid our sins on him, and God condemned our sin in the frail, mortal flesh of his own son.

Our sin was judged, punished, and sentenced in his wounds. He took his last breath, and the prison bars shattered in your life.

And when the guilt goes, so does the sentence. On the cross, the Son of God, he only heard condemnation, so that today, we can hear the words, no condemnation.

[15:57] The whole purpose of God sending his Son, the incarnation, the suffering, the crucifixion, it was all to release you from the prison. So that you can be free to live.

Live for God. Look at verse 4. Christ died in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

Not that we perfectly fulfill the law. Sin still exists in us. Gravity still exists as the plane flies. But it's been overcome. And Christ came to overcome that power of sin in your life.

To take the driving seat and rule your heart. Which is what he's doing right now. And we can't take that for granted. We can't miss how drastic this freedom is.

Because Paul then goes on to highlight just what it means to not have this freedom. And this is the next thing I want us to see. Without the Spirit, we are dead.

[17:05] Without the Spirit, we're dead. These next few verses are just describing what unbelief is like. What it's like to not have God's Spirit in your life and just ruled by the flesh instead.

And flesh meaning just everything sinful in this age. Sin in the driving seat. And it's quite shocking in hard words to hear. Verse 5. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

Now to set your mind on the flesh, it doesn't just mean that you think about sinful things. It would include that. But it's not just that. No, the mind here means the whole life.

It's our mindset. Without the Spirit, our whole life, our ambitions, our desires, our values, morals, cares, all our time and energy, without the Spirit, it is all set on the flesh. On the sinful way of this world. Driving in that direction. Not toward God. Not set on the Spirit. but with our backs to God. And so how does that person relate to God?

[18:21] Verse 7. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Without the Spirit, there is not only a refusal to live for God, but an inability. Without the Spirit, do you see, you cannot obey God.

Without the Spirit, you cannot follow God or love God or trust God or submit to God. It's impossible. Because we are too set on sin, too trapped in this cage, living for ourselves, my values, my morals, driving in that direction.

And so if we cannot submit to God, we cannot please God. He's not happy. Now, this isn't saying we are as bad as we possibly could be without the Spirit.

No, mercifully, God doesn't let our sin get out of hand as bad as it could be. But we are set against God. And we may not realize it, but without the Spirit, we are hostile to God.

[19:46] And this is why we see such wicked things not only being tolerated, but being celebrated in our world.

And we can just see it and wonder, how are you saying that's a good thing? How has the world got here? Well, it's because without the Spirit, that's where the human heart will go, set on the flesh. It's why MPs can be challenged about the end-of-life bill, the arguments made very, very clear to them, laid out perfectly, but they just won't budge. In some ways, it shouldn't be a surprise to us because the mind is set on the flesh.

It's why when we share the good news of Christ with our friends and our family, but the light just doesn't come on and we just want to cry out, can you not see the truth of the gospel?

Can you not see how empty that lifestyle is you're living and how Christ can just meet your every single needs, but they just don't see it because the mind is set on the flesh.

[21:00] Without the spirit, we're dead, powerless, trapped in this mindset and we cannot argue someone out of this prison. We cannot bring life to the dead and so what is our only hope?

What is this world in desperate need of? We need the spirit of God. we need the divine spirit to descend upon dead hearts and bring life and peace.

We need the law of the spirit of life to transform lives and set our minds on the things of the spirit and to bring freedom. And that is the only way to be right with God, the only way to please him.

And so we really, we really need to pray, don't we? In all our ministries, in all that we do as a church, in all our preaching, in all our conversations, we really, really need to pray.

Pray that the spirit would work because we can try as hard as we like. We can try to preach our socks off and have the best arguments and put all the energy in but we are nothing without the spirit.

[22:17] And what's more, he is able to set any, any captive free. The hardest heart, the most hostile, whoever you think right now and you think of them and you just think it is impossible for them to believe, the spirit can set that person free.

And I realize if you aren't a Christian here tonight, you may hear these words and just think this language is a bit too strong. You might think, well I live a pretty normal life, I'm a fairly respectable person, this all sounds just a bit too much.

But the whole purpose of this chapter is to get us to see what we don't realize. This language, it is strong and it's meant to make us feel uncomfortable because this is meant to be a wake up call.

It is telling us living a nice life or a respectable life, it is not enough. That life ultimately doesn't please God.

Trying harder in life and just thinking we are good, it doesn't please God. No, what pleases God is when he sets you free by the spirit.

[23:35] Trusting in Christ and receiving his spirit. And I hope we all realize this is not Christians thinking that we are just better than everyone else. Thinking that, well, we've just come to our senses.

No. We, of all people, have no right to brag because we are only here by God's grace and by his spirit. And we know our hearts, we know where we would be without the spirit of God.

We are no better, no more deserving than anyone else. But the spirit of God has changed everything for us. which is why Paul now turns to the Christian and says, that's what life in the flesh is like, but that's not you anymore.

You now live in the spirit. That's my third and final point. We now live in the spirit. Look at verse 9. 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. Paul, he's now coming back to the victory and triumph of the Christian life.

[24 : 50] And look what he says about the spirit. And notice the names here. We're not in the flesh because the spirit of God dwells in every believer.

From now on, we never exist on our own in this world. But we now live with the actual presence of the spirit in our lives every day.

Him in the driving seat. But then notice, he says we have the spirit of Christ. So it's the spirit of God, but it's also the spirit of Christ.

And we can even say, look at verse 10. Christ himself is in you in the driving seat. when you have the spirit in your life, you have the whole trinity in your life.

When you go on the tube, when you're in your flat, when you go back home tonight, the holy trinity never leaves you. But something else never leaves you.

[25 : 55] Resurrection life. Look at verse 11. The spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you. The same spirit that raised Jesus on that first Easter Sunday, the spirit who began creation at the very beginning and began that new creation on Easter, for every single believer here today, the same spirit, that same spirit dwells in you and rules over your heart.

Which means there is resurrection life inside of you right now. Now, our bodies aren't raised yet.

That will come, but it will come because that life is already at work inside of you.

You have, you could say, resurrection life pumping through your veins right now. They're beating in your heart. And so, the Christian life, it may seem ordinary, but maybe even weak and insignificant, but there is something victorious below the surface.

Indestructible resurrection life. And as you go into this week and as you face those struggles and temptations and worries, whatever is on your mind right now and burdening you, you do not go alone.

And you do not go helpless. No, you go with the spirit of resurrection inside of you. So, whatever that struggle may be, it isn't hopeless.

[27 : 36] If you are right now worrying about the future and it is just overwhelming you and it is a real burden, you have the spirit to bring you peace.

if you are struggling to forgive right now, you have the spirit of life. If you are battling with that sin again and again, that impatience, that anger, that lust, you have the spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

And so, he will help you in the fight. Now, that isn't to say the sin will disappear, that the pull will be there inside of us, this side of heaven.

But with the spirit, it is overcome. Sin will not win and you are not alone. And so, in your need, in your weakness, when you may wonder, what is the point in all of this?

realize there is something glorious, something glorious going on beneath the surface. In the spirit, you are free.

[28 : 46] You have life. And there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You go out here tonight belonging to the Son and the Father always with you.

and the spirit dwelling inside of you. And so, you go out tonight free. And so, let's live for God and let's enjoy that freedom.

Let's pray.