

## Romans 8:1-14

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] What's unique about Christianity? What is it that sets Christianity apart from the world of religions?! I wonder what you'd come up with to that question. You might come up with the person of Jesus Christ. Certainly he alone claims to be the son of God who has entered our world.

Maybe it's the work of Christ. It's true that the cross alone provides a way for God alone to forgive sins justly without turning a blind eye to sin. Maybe he'd say it's under the way of salvation. Well the gospel is unique isn't it? It's unique in saying it's not through things that we do but rather through accepting what Christ has done for us that we are put right with God.

All those things are true. But it seems to me that Romans 8 teaches that what sets Christianity apart from those things is Christian experience. Christian experience is unique because of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is not just about holding to a certain set of beliefs.

It's not about seeking to live your life primarily in a certain way. The Christian life at its heart is an experience at which God is at work within us by his Holy Spirit.

And the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is what sets Christianity, sets Christian experience apart as unique. And we live in an age, don't we, where people are all over authentic experiences.

[ 1 : 33 ] They want to go from one high to the next. Maybe you are such a person. If it's not bungee jumping or big wave, surfing, clubbing, extreme ironing, drink, drugs.

Well, they are all experiences that people go from one to the other. Well, God offers you the ultimate experience. It is the experience of God the Holy Spirit himself at work in us.

I'm not saying that you can dispense with doctrine. Far from it. This experience comes through believing certain truths. But what it is saying is there is much more to Christian experience than just signing up to a creed.

There is a vital, dynamic experience of God at work in you. And for those of us who are Christians, we do appreciate, I hope, how blessed we are through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

When a marriage gets into difficulties, a common reflection is this. We started taking each other for granted. And perhaps, as Christians, we can too easily take for granted all that the Holy Spirit has done and will be doing in our lives.

[ 2 : 40 ] At work, maybe, we take colleagues for granted. We think, what on earth do they do? But it's not until we actually sit down and find out what they are up to during the week in the office, that we stop taking them for granted.

And do we realise what the Holy Spirit is up to in our lives and the difference he is making? In the passage I read to you, there are 15 references to the Holy Spirit. That is as many references as there are in the rest of the book of Romans.

This passage is all about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The privilege that we, as believers in Christ, enjoy through his work in our lives. And so if I'm in danger of taking him for granted, Romans 8 is a great place to have my eyes opened.

And if I'm someone who's chasing experience in this life, well there's no better place to come than Romans 8. Four aspects of the Spirit's work. Number one, the Spirit has set us free.

The Spirit has set us free. There is therefore, verse 1, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And that sums up, chapter 1-7. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

[ 3 : 51 ] We are no longer under his wrath. We are no longer heading for judgment. The judgment of God eternally. The hymn says, no condemnation, now I dread.

Jesus and all in him is mine. If I'm a Christian, I will often feel convicted of sin in my life. And guilt.

Days will go by when I feel that very heavily. But I am not condemned by God for that. And there is a world of difference between those two things.

No condemnation is the privilege of those who are in Christ Jesus. So what does the Spirit of God got to do with it? Look at verses 1-2.

There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. God has done what the law which is weakened by the flesh could not do.

[ 4 : 52 ] God the Father has sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And for sin he condemned sin in the flesh. Verse 4.

In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. How have we been set free? Do you see what it says?

We have been set free through the law of the Spirit of life. The UK road network is plagued, isn't it, by roadworks. And the British road work scene, you see it in cartoons of you.

There is normally one guy digging a hole and there is four guys around watching what is going on. There are more road cones, twice as many road cones in the UK as there are human beings.

But notice in our salvation how the three members of the Godhead are at work, including the Holy Spirit. Just imagine you are in a hole in Thailand, you are languishing in a jail in Thailand somewhere and you thought you had been forgotten and you were left to rot.

[ 5 : 55 ] And then one day you are set free and you discover that Theresa May and Barack Obama and the Queen personally have stepped in and intervened to secure your release.

Imagine that such powerful people are interested in the Lord May. But in our salvation, if I can put it like this, the most powerful trio in the universe, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have intervened to secure our release.

Isn't that astonishing? God the Father is the prime mover. He says God, verse 3, for God, that is God the Father, has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

We have seen, haven't we, there was nothing wrong with the law, Romans 7. The law of Moses, nothing wrong with it. But there was plenty wrong with us. So the law could not save anyone, but God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

How has he done that? By sending his son, his own son, in the likeness of sinful flesh. And for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. So Jesus, in Jesus, the Son of God, shared our humanity.

[ 7 : 03 ] And he died for our sins. As an offering for my sin, in my place, condemned, he stood. Seems, doesn't it, that the Father and Son have got everything wrapped up.

I mean, what is there left for the Spirit to do? Well, look at verse 2. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

It's through the Spirit we are actually set free. The term in law, in verse 2, has the sense of a principle or a power. So that the power of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the power of sin and death.

Remember, what we've learned, we were condemned, we were under the law of sin and death, but now we've been set free. By a greater power of the Spirit of life.

Things on this planet are subject to the law of gravity, aren't they? And because of this law of gravity, people and things stay on the ground.

[ 8 : 10 ] But when you go to the airport, it's because of the law of gravity that's at work that you see these great huge airliners taxiing around on the tarmac. But when you get into one of those planes, and those planes set off down the runway at a certain speed, there's another law at work.

The law of aerodynamics. And it takes over. And you are suddenly free in that plane from the law of gravity, as you soar up through the sky into the world of sunshine that's always up there, beyond the clouds.

And as human beings, we are subject to the law of sin and death, which binds us to this world. And there's nothing that we can do to counter it, to be set free.

We need to be in Christ. If you like, in the plane. Christ is that plane. But for that plane, with us, sitting in it, to get airborne, we need the power and the work of the Holy Spirit.

And without that, we are left on the runway going nowhere. You see, one of the roles of the Spirit is to apply the atoning work of Christ in our life. So what happened in history becomes a present reality for you.

[ 9 : 26 ] For us, through the work of the Spirit. And if it wasn't for the work of the Holy Spirit, what happened 2,000 years ago would remain as an event in history. People sometimes think, how can what happened 2,000 years ago, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first century, how can that possibly have an impact on my life now, today?

Well, because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides the link. He provides the connection. In AD 34, the Romans constructed a three-tier aqueduct, beginning in Nîmes in the south of France, and it ran for 260 miles.

In AD 33, the year before, the Romans executed someone called Jesus Christ. The Jesus event would have no more impact than that aqueduct in our lives today if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Historically interesting. But no more transforming power. But the Spirit, this is saying, has set us free from the law of sin and death by applying the work of Christ to our lives.

The lives of all those who are in Him. But notice this liberation has got a particular destination in view. Look at verse 4. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

[ 10 : 47 ] Who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. So you go back to the airport illustration. Once that plane in the air is in the air, it's not just circling around the airport.

It's heading for destination. And when you look at the departure board, you see that the destination is new life. The purpose of this liberation is that we might have a new life.

Fulfilling the requirements of the law. The requirement of the law, that is to say, God's law revealed to Moses and summarized in the Ten Commandments. And Paul will unpack that in chapter 13, verse 8 to 10.

He says that, oh no man anything. Except to love each other. To the one who loves one another, they fulfill the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

That's the destination. A common misconception and an objection to the Christian message is this. Surely if you know that you are no longer condemned by God anymore, you'll just live as you want.

[ 11 : 47 ] And nothing could be further than from the truth. Defying the law of gravity, the plane is now heading to a destination. A life lived according to God's law.

And you might be thinking, how is that possible? The law cannot save us. Weakened as it were by the sinful nature. How can we possibly now begin to keep it?

Well because of the second aspect of the spirit. The spirit has transformed our mindset. Verse 5 to 8. Paul says for those who live according to the flesh, those whose minds are set on the things of the flesh.

But those who live according to the spirit, they set their minds on the things of the spirit. Now the ESV translates it as set their minds on. I think it would be better to go with what the NIV says where it says, would be have their minds set on.

You see Romans 8 isn't actually telling you to do something. I think that's quite important. It's not telling you to set your mind on this or that. It is describing the mindset of the two people.

[ 12 : 53 ] You've got those who live according to the flesh, the sinful nature. That is the person who is not a Christian. And you've got those who live according to the spirit. That is the Christian. And those two types of people are contrasted by different mindsets.

Let's take the old one first. Verse 5. For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds or have their minds set on or are preoccupied by the things of the flesh.

The mindset of the person who is outside of Christ is oriented to the sinful nature. To the self, to the things of this world. And by nature that is true of all of us. The sinful human machine since the fall has been programmed to think of self.

We naturally put our own interests first. We are preoccupied by our own sinful nature. And one outworking of this sinful mindset is that human beings have an innate hostility towards God and God's demands.

Look at 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. In every person there is a deep seated hostility towards God.

[ 14 : 11 ] And the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. We resent his rule. And we will not submit to it. We rebel against his claim over our lives. Like those citizens in Luke chapter 19.

We say we have hated God. We do not want this man to reign over us. For hostility towards God and his law is there in every single person. In some people it is very plain isn't it?

But in other people, in British people, there is a kind of veneer of niceness isn't there? But actually once you start to begin to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ and of heaven and of hell and of the demands of Jesus Christ.

You just have to scratch a little bit beneath the veneer. And nice people when the gospel is raised, you don't have to scratch much of the paint off to see the hostility underneath.

And although this rejection of God is a mindset that is hard wired into all of us by human nature, we express this rejection of God in different ways.

[15:14] In 1941 in the city of Kovno in Lithuania there was a German army photographer who witnessed a man beat to death 45 to 50 people, one by one with a crowbar.

It took about 45 minutes. There was a great crowd of onlookers, including women and children who stood watching and they clapped and when he finished they sang along as he played the national anthem on an accordion.

In their different ways all the people there were guilty of rejecting those victims. From the man with the crowbar to the women and children who were clapping to those who were just watching to the man with the camera.

And our hostility to God and his law is expressed in different ways. But the Bible says we are guilty of it and the consequences are serious. Look at verse 8. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit.

For if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you, anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.

[16:20] Sorry, I should have read verse 6 not verse 9. Verse 6, can you see it? For the second mind on the flesh is death. It results in spiritual death. And eternal death in the age to come.

Now what can a person do about that? What can you do about that? Nothing. You are no more able to perform brain surgery and heart surgery on yourself.

But what we cannot do, the wonderful thing is the Holy Spirit has done for us. Over verse 5. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. But those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit.

That is saying when we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit gives us a new mind. Through the Holy Spirit, new software is downloaded and installed on the hard drive of your inner person.

It is one of the miracles of the new birth that all of a sudden you find that you want to please God.

And you want to live him and you want to obey him. Romans 7, 22, Paul says, for I delight in the law of God in my inner being.

[17:22] Where has all this come from? It's come from the Holy Spirit. Romans chapter 12, verse 2, Paul says, the renewal of your mind. That is through the work of the Holy Spirit. And the result is in verse 6.

It is to set your mind on the spirit, which is life and peace. Peace with God and peace in our hearts. Some say, don't they, there's very little difference between how a Christian believes and how somebody who lives with high moral standards.

Your life seems the same as other people's. But I want to say to you, it's actually the difference between a Christmas tree, a plastic Christmas tree, that's got shiny baubles hanging on it, and an apple tree that has got fruit growing on the branches.

It's that sort of difference. The fruit tree is living and the life is within it, and it is producing the fruit. The Christmas tree is lifeless. There's no inner transformation.

It's just shiny on the outside. And are you someone here today who longs to live a life which is more pleasing to God? Do you wish that your life was more Christ-like?

[18:27] Do you feel convicted when you disobey God? When you read God's word? Do you approve of it? And though you struggle to obey it, you think, that is what I want. But if you do, take heart.

Because that is not natural. It is a sign that the Holy Spirit has been given to you, and you have this new mindset. And that is something to give thanks for.

And if you've been a Christian for a while, it's very easy to take it for granted. These sort of attitudes, they just said that they were normal. They're not normal at all. They are abnormal.

They are supernatural. And they are evidence that the Spirit is at work. But this work of the Spirit is not just that of a spiritual surgeon who is standing over a patient performing a skilled operation.

The verses that follow reveal that God's Spirit has actually come to live within us. I've got no chance of finishing the rest of this talk in the next eight minutes.  
[ 19 : 27 ] So I'm going to pray.