

Romans 8:1-8 The Holy Spirit empowered life

Introduction

Romans chapter eight is one of the best known and most quoted chapters in the whole Bible. It begins for us, as many people have noted over the centuries, with *no condemnation* (Romans 8:1) and ends with *no separation* (8:39). In between these two there is *no defeat because* of Jesus' victory on the cross *fully met* the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:4 *finished* (John 19:30)); **because** the One who empowers us to live for God is *the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead* (Romans 8:11); **because** even *the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay* (Romans 8:21) to become the new created order, that will be perfect as God's original world was intended to be; **because** we are inspired to give our all for Jesus as *we wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies* at the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Romans 8:23); **because** our prayers are powerful and effective *because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will* (Romans 8:27); **because** God has guaranteed that every true child of His whom He effectually called to faith in Christ whom *He justified* (in Christ), *He also glorified* (Romans 8:30); **because** despite the heartaches, trials and suffering His people pass through, with His divine resources *in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). No wonder there are many Bible commentators who are convinced that 'the great theme (of chapter eight) is the security of the Christian, the absolute certainty of the final perseverance of the saints, and of the ultimate, complete and entire salvation of everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 7:1-8:4 The Law: Its Function and Limits*, pp.263-264). Hallelujah for such glorious magnificent and exciting revelation from God to His children! What a wonderful assurance that despite our sinful flaws of thought and word and deed; our misguided actions or inaction; our blunders and other deeds that bring grief to His holy heart, that He has the last word, that His will cannot be defeated, but *will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10), something for which we and believers over the centuries have prayed. No wonder Romans 8 is a favourite passage to so many Christians. May God impress its glorious truths on our hearts and minds as we seek to live for Him.

1. Set free by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-4)

(a) A magnificent fact (Romans 8:1) *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...* Here is not an opinion or Paul's speculation, but a fact of revelation from God. For the genuine follower of Jesus in time and in eternity there is *no condemnation*. The devil will do his worst to seek to discourage you and cause you to despair with a view to defeating you, so that you will have no impact on other people with the good news of the Gospel. Are you feeling discouraged just now? Stop and reflect on these magnificent blessings that flow from this truth. Take time to let this glorious transformation of our circumstances to sink in. There are some key words here. (i) Condemnation This was our problem as humanity whether Jews or Gentiles, which Paul spent from Romans 1:18 to 3:20 explaining. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). It is a legal term from the court and is the outcome 'Guilty' that every defendant fears. Paul makes the same point in Romans 5:1 as in Romans 8:1, first in a positive form: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...* and now here as a negative counterpart. It is not what other people think but the verdict of the holy God before whom we will one day stand that matters. (ii) Now it is not merely a historic problem, rather it is very much a pressing reality at the present time if you have never placed your faith and

trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul expresses it in Romans 6:23: *The wages of sin is death...* Have you had that time in your life when you grasped that you were a sinner in need of a Saviour? We need to acknowledge our predicament and apply to receive the remedy. Do you need to do that today? (iii) *No Ουδεν* **No!** is the first word of Romans 8 in the original language. It is an emphatic, absolute declaration that this is the case. Similar to Jesus' emphatic declaration in Matthew 24:35: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. There is now no condemnation...* means exactly that! (iv) *In Christ Jesus There is now no condemnation...* means exactly that for you –if you have committed your life into His hands. It cannot be otherwise, but have you received God's free gift? (v) *Therefore...* On the basis of all that Paul has explained over the previous seven chapters of Romans, this is the only conclusion that can be drawn. This has huge practical implications. When we let God down and fall into sin sometimes we can condemn ourselves and refuse to accept God's forgiveness ourselves and insist on living under a self-imposed condemnation. Or we can be self-righteous and accept this forgiveness for ourselves but refuse to accept that God has forgiven someone else's sins and closed that chapter of their lives as surely as He has closed ours. Have we truly grasped what the grace of God is all about if we make ourselves a judge over other people and usurp God's place? Let this wonderful declaration hold a firm place in your heart and mind.

(b) **An amazing liberation** (Romans 8:2)² *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.* It is hugely important when we standing on the threshold of eternity. A child of God can die with the certainty of a welcome home from their heavenly Father. Death holds no fear for us –although the process of dying itself can be difficult for some people- because our eternal welcome is assured. John 14:1-3 reminds us: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.* There is nothing you can do to make God love you more and nothing you can do to make God love you less. When you are His child you are special to Him, which Paul will unpack in more detail later in Romans 8. It is no longer –am I good enough to go to heaven or can I do enough to be accepted by God, any more than as a parent our love for our children is increased or diminished on a daily basis depending on whether our children live up to our expectations or not. There is an absolute security for the child of God in His family. Some of us more than others have a low sense of self-esteem or self-worth because of our backgrounds or some other aspect of our life circumstances. In such a context it is easy to think that I need to constantly 'prove' I am worthy of God's love. This line of thought is incorrect. God loves you and me because Jesus was good enough. When He looks on believers God sees us clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, as if we were perfect like Him, as we shall be one day. Paul explains this amazing truth in II Corinthians 5:21: *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* God treats us as if we had already attained the progress in Christ-likeness that will one day be a reality beyond this life. To the Jewish follower of Jesus it is no longer following a checklist of thousands of rules that pleased God –you may still in outward terms live in a remarkably similar manner, but your motivation will be completely different. Our daily lives and service for Him is a response of living gratitude to One who first loved us. If He loves me so much then should I place limits on my love for Him? It is good to recall the words of missionary pioneer C.T. Studd, a pioneer missionary in parts of China, India and Africa: *If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him. Have you been set free-that is come to faith in Christ for the first time? Are you a Christian who has professed faith*

but not yet entered into the reality of what it means to be free in Christ? May God help you take that step of faith today.

(c) **An essential cause** (Romans 8:3) ³ *For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh.* How did this all come about? The triune God was responsible with all three persons intimately involved. In a chapter that overflows with references to the work of the Holy Spirit, this verse highlights the initiative of the Father and the work of the Son in saving us. This is a reality taught by other Scripture passages as well. John 3:16 reminds us: *God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...* Jesus in explaining His vocation on earth declared: *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). In Hebrews 9:14, in a passage explaining why Jesus' sacrifice was so much more effective than the previous animal sacrifices in obtaining atonement from our sins, states: *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* it is important to grasp throughout the Bible that any work of God involves all three persons of the Trinity who are intimately involved in everything together from the work of creation to redemption and ultimately the recreation of the heavens and the earth as God originally intended it to be. Paul highlights here: (i) **God the Father's initiative** *God did...* It is His work that He will see through to completion. Romans 8:32a makes reference to the same point in passing: *He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all ...* His motivation for this action has already been given in Romans 5:8: *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* His investment in this mission is total. He gave His very best to ensure it was successful. In life with the best of intentions some of our plans fail. Thank God that everything He begins He completes successfully, on track and on time! We have our many doubts and fears, the 'whys', because we cannot see why certain things happen as they do or why other things don't happen at all. In Romans 8, this wonderful passage of assurance, we have a reminder that God is in control of the bigger picture and we can, therefore, trust Him with the future direction of our lives. (ii) **God the Son's mission** *by sending His own Son...* I John 4:10 makes the same point: *This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* It was no panic measure in response to unforeseen circumstances. Instead, it was a considered response to our human predicament that God foresaw would be a consequence of creating us in His image with the ability to make moral choices, good or bad. What is more daunting is that our calling as Christians is to continue the work that Jesus began in His earthly ministry. On the evening of that first Easter Sunday Jesus appeared to His disconsolate followers and said these amazing words: *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* ²² *And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* (John 20:21-22). At the Last Supper Jesus went further and said these astonishing words: *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father* (John 14:12). How can this be possible when He led people to faith and carried out many miracles, including raising a few people from the dead? I think it is parallel to His comments about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11: *Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* In essence in God's kingdom the person doing God's work as He directs them in the present day is 'greater' than anyone of a previous era because the past is a closed chapter; it is the present and the future that can be changed by our obedience or disobedience with respect to His commission. (iii) **The description of Jesus' coming** *in the likeness of sinful flesh...* Jesus did not come in His heavenly glory, but was

born as a helpless human being, like any other child born into the world. His humanity was as real as ours. Paul in Philippians 2:7-8 wrote: *He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself...* There was one crucial difference to us. Jesus never sinned, despite enduring all the kinds of temptations we may experience. Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us: *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* Do you need to be encouraged to stand firm against some temptation? For some people an ethical issue in the workplace; maybe maintaining appropriate sexual boundaries in relationships for someone else; whatever it is you are struggling with Jesus understanding and will pray with you through it. (iv) The purpose of His coming to be a sin offering. To be a once for all time replacement for the numerous offerings for sins in the Jewish sacrificial system; Hebrews 7:27 explains why Jesus' sacrifice was greater than all previous ones. *Unlike the other high priests, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself.* The result –when a child of God wants to talk to our Father in heaven in prayer we have direct access because of Jesus' sacrifice for us. (v) Jesus took our condemnation *And so He condemned sin in the flesh.* This brings it back to 8:1 –our position in Christ as Christians.

(d) A practical purpose (Romans 8:4) ⁴ *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Our sinful nature is revealed by the demands of the moral law but it can never cure our problem. Only the Holy Spirit can enable to live a God-honouring life and enable us to stand firm for the Lord when the pressure is on. We are called to live holy lives as disciples of Jesus. How are you getting on? Do you need a fellow Christian to pray with you? Some Christians have one or two people of the same gender with whom they pray and support one another and to whom in a voluntary manner they are accountable. The purpose –to encourage one another to be the best man or woman we can be for Christ. Discipleship courses like Discipleship Explored or house groups can be a good place for this mutual encouragement in Christian discipleship.

2. Led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5-8)

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.* ⁷ *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* ⁸ *Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.* Here Paul moves on to contrast the way of life of a person who chooses to follow their sinful and selfish desires compared with the pattern of behaviour that should be reflected to some degree at least in the One who is following Jesus.

(a) The person who lives life without reference to God Paul gives a number of characteristics that may be exhibited by the people in these two categories. These are general statements that are true to varying degrees in different people in particular contexts. In a context like the Western Isles, for example, because of the strong Presbyterian heritage in most of the islands there will be a bias towards outward conformity to Christian standards because that has been viewed as the majority culture until fairly recently. However, if we mention a place like Brighton, which has a reputation of being significantly negative to many Christian moral standards, in particular with a very liberal attitude to sexual morality then some people will feel pressured to go along with public standards less traditional than their

own preferences. So care has to be taken with generalisations. However, in broad terms Paul's point is right. (i) Their pattern of thinking *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires...* (Romans 8:5a) In the worst cases it can be seriously depraved minds warped by endless hours on the computer looking at pornography or other inappropriate images; but it need not be the case at all; there can be decent people in our communities who live life without reference to God. So where might the distinction come in this case? It might come through in our attitude to the needy and underprivileged, whether at home or overseas. 'God helps those who help themselves' is a saying sometimes cited, but not a biblical one! Such a person might have a bigger concern with looking after 'Number One' than the person in need. Likewise criticism of continuing to help genuinely needy people overseas with international aid claiming that 'charity begins at home'; it does but not at the expense of even more vulnerable people; I do wonder how generous the vocal critics are overseas aid work are when it comes to needs in their own communities. My suspicion would be that those most interested in helping people overseas would be equally willing to assist in their local context as well. There are those people who are not good team players in the office, who are only interested in how work schedules or potential changes affect them without reference to colleagues. There are lots of possible examples of self-centredness which is often legal and permissible but not the best or most generous attitude that could be displayed. (ii) Their state *The mind governed by the flesh is death...* (Romans 8:6a). This is not a reference to physical death but a spiritual reality. This person sees a beautiful sunset or a glorious panoramic view but has no comprehension of the One who put it there. David in Psalm 19:1 could write: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.* What do you see when the beautiful Spring flowers emerge or in some other setting see something of the beauty of nature –it can lead us to well up with thanks to God for eyes to see such beautiful sights. It happens equally in hearing God's Word. William Wilberforce, the great social reformer was a close friend of William Pitt the Younger, the Prime Minister of the British Empire. Pitt, whose lifestyle was good in many respects, but sadly he did not share Wilberforce's faith, despite holding similar views on some moral issues. Wilberforce made numerous efforts to get his friend to church to hear a minister called Richard Cecil preach. One day Pitt finally agreed to join Wilberforce at a service. He was so thrilled and on the appointed day the two men sat together in church. It was an excellent service. All was to Wilberforce's satisfaction. The message was a clear and powerful challenge to follow the Lord. Afterwards Wilberforce asked Pitt what he thought of the message and got this response: 'You know, Wilberforce, I have not the slightest idea what that man has been talking about.' [D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17 The Sons of God*, pp. 9-10] We need the Holy Spirit to open our minds to see our need of Jesus. The conversion of a single person is as big a miracle as raising someone from the dead –only God can do either. This is why prayer is so important in the spiritual battle we experience both individually and collectively. (iii) Their worldview *The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*⁸ *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God* (Romans 8:7-8). It is actually a religious conflict we are experiencing in Britain between a few thousand fanatical secularists who hate with a passion the idea that anyone in the public square should have a faith of any kind or allow its values to influence the way they live. You might well ask if these people don't believe in God why do they spend their lives on social or conventional media or in books or on political action campaigns viciously attacking people of faith in the public arena? The extent of their fanaticism against people like David Robertson, in his capacity as a spokesperson for the Christian faith through the Solas Centre in Dundee, is most revealing. If a Christian leader used the kind of intemperate language David regularly experiences from these campaigners it would be all over the newspapers, but we know that this is not the way a

believer should respond to adversity. Currently people of these views have significant influence in the parliaments in both Edinburgh and London as well as a dominant place in much of the media so we have to accept that for the foreseeable future people of faith will not get a fair hearing in these quarters. However, in these places there are believers; we must pray for them as they with courage take a stand for the Gospel and our basic values and principles. Yet at the same time amongst ordinary people I have sensed a greater openness to talk about what we believe and when we live out our faith graciously and with integrity people do notice it and respect us. Talking with colleagues it has not gone unnoticed that the number of people attending good quality community events put on by churches has increased of late. Many people are searching for meaning and significance in their lives. They are very cautious about turning up at church on a Sunday, because that has not been their practice, but when Christians truly love one another and demonstrate practical unity within their congregations and show love and care to their local community it is deeply attractive as a witness to those outside our ranks. The opportunities before us have not been greater –the question is will we take them?

(b) **The person led by the Holy Spirit** (i) Their pattern of thinking ...but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5b) What is the Holy Spirit's desire? *He will bring glory to Me* Jesus said in John 16:14. What is it that would bring most glory to Jesus in my life? Our verse for the year Luke 10:27 remind us: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*”; and, *Love your neighbour as yourself.*”²⁸ “*You have answered correctly,*” Jesus replied. “*Do this and you will live.*” That which brings most glory to God is the worship offered to Him, not just in church on a Sunday but throughout the week in the good choices we make. We love God by sharing our faith by word and deed, by evangelism, church-planting and social ministries in our community. We love our neighbour as Jesus explained by helping those who seek our help even when it is inconvenient for us. Its not about me and my comfort, its about God and extending His kingdom. Decisions at Church Meetings are not about me and my preferences but about God and what most glorifies Him and will be most significant in extending His kingdom. Our concerns for our own walk with God and how we might grow in Him year by year as disciples of Jesus will be evidence of the pattern of thinking of a follower of Jesus. We have benefited from the faith steps of earlier members of this congregation –how will those that follow us benefit from ours? (ii) Their state ...but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.(Romans 8:6b) A Christian is not ‘dead’ to God and the promptings of the Spirit, but alive to make his or her priorities line with up with His. From the fishermen asked to leave their business and walk with Him through three years of earthly ministry, without knowing how the bills would be paid; from the 120 in the Upper Room commissioned to take the Gospel to the whole world who could have said there were not enough people to accomplish it; from the pioneer missionaries who brought the Gospel to this land to us today –we will only have the blessing of God ‘*life*’ and God’s *peace* when we make choices that do most to honour Him. The blessing will always come after the steps of faith have been taken first. God never gives all the details of the plans ahead of time –He invites us to walk into the future He has planned for us –will you, will I, will we as a Church model walking by faith into His future for us this year? Remember, the means to accomplish this is through the power of the Holy Spirit –will we let Him direct our paths and trust Him to provide for our needs? I hope and earnestly pray we will do so, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.