

Romans 8:1–13 and God the Holy Spirit

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- How would you describe the Holy Spirit to someone unfamiliar with him and his ministries?
- Why do many self-professing Christians focus so heavily on the Holy Spirit while minimizing (or ignoring) God the Father and Jesus Christ? Why do other self-professing Christians largely minimize the Holy Spirit?

Introduction

Romans 8:1–13 describes God’s transforming work in the lives of his people—which is accomplished through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The main contrast in this passage is between *non-Christians* (who are *in* and walk *according to* the flesh, which is our sinful state and desires) and *Christians* (who are *in* and walk *according to* the Spirit).

In this passage, there is a significant focus on the Holy Spirit’s ministry in granting *life*—in the past, present, and future. *In the past*, the Spirit, who produces life in us, set us free in Christ Jesus from the power (or authority) of sin and death (v. 2). *In the present*, the Spirit’s life-giving, liberating activity continues: sin no longer has ultimate power over us, if we are in the Spirit and walk according to his leading (vv. 4–6, 9–11, 13). Instead of death, there is life, both now and throughout eternity (vv. 6, 10). *In the future*, God will raise our mortal bodies from the dead through his Spirit who lives in us (v. 11). In these ways and others, our passage does not focus exclusively on the Holy Spirit, but it teaches us about the Holy Spirit’s work *within us and for our benefit*—for all who are Christians (Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 491–492).

Our passage is part of a larger section of Romans (chapters 5 through 8) where Paul outlines the transforming power and effects of the gospel. Romans 5 emphasizes our hope of eternal life in and through Christ. Romans 6 focuses on our freedom from bondage to sin. And Romans 7 focuses on our freedom from bondage to the Mosaic law. In each of these ways, we were set free *from* something and set free *to* something. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God have set us free *from* bondage to sin, the law, and death, and we are set free *to* an eternal relationship with God and to live for his glory (Moo, vii).

We organize Romans 8:1–13 into three sections: (1) Christians are free in Christ and by the Spirit (vv. 1–4), (2) Christians are in and live according to the Spirit (vv. 5–11), and (3) Christians actively participate in the Spirit’s work (vv. 12–13). We conclude this lesson by summarizing truths about the life and ministries of the Holy Spirit.

1. Christians are free in Christ and by the Spirit.

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, 2 because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, 4 in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1–4)

“Therefore” looks back to what God accomplished in and through Christ (v. 1; 5:12–21; 7:25). There is no condemnation by God for all those in Christ Jesus (v. 1). What does it mean to be *in Christ Jesus*? All humans either stand *in the realm of Christ Jesus and in union with him* by faith—and they are declared righteous by God and will live with him forever (Rom. 5:12–21). Or they stand *in the realm of Adam and share in his penalty*, which is spiritual death. Christians are not only set free by the work of Christ, but also by the work of the Spirit. The life-giving Holy Spirit has set us free from the power of sin that produces spiritual death (v. 2; Moo, 493–499).

The Mosaic law could not rescue people from the power of sin and death, and that is precisely what God accomplished (v. 3). God condemned and overcame sin by sending his Son into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, though Jesus was not sinful himself (v. 3). The result of Jesus's work at the cross in verse four could be interpreted in one of two ways. Either (1) *we fulfill the law's requirement* by the Spirit empowering us to obey or (2) *Christ fulfilled the law's requirement* through his perfect obedience, which is credited to our account when we trust in him (which seems more likely since we cannot obey God perfectly in this life) (v. 4). We do not walk according to our sinful desires but according to the Spirit (v. 4).

- In these verses, how does the God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit contribute to our salvation?
- Assuming you are a Christian, what is an example of how you have been set free from the power of sin? What strategies do you use to put that sin to death?

2. Christians are in and live according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. 6 Now the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. 10 Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you. (Rom. 8:5–11)

Verses 5–11 contrast two categories of people: non-Christians and Christians. More specifically, they describe their state and the way they live. Non-Christians are in and live according to *the flesh*—their sinful state and desires, which are part of this world in rebellion against God. Christians have been set free from the power of sin and death, and they live in and according to *the Spirit*. There is no middle ground in this passage (Moo, 508–509).

How do these verses describe *non-Christians*? They live according to the flesh and set their minds on what the flesh desires (v. 5). Setting the mind on the flesh is death—both in this life and the life to come (v. 6). The mind that focuses on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not and cannot submit to God’s law (v. 7). Those who are *in* the flesh (as opposed to being *in* the Spirit) cannot please God (v. 8). They do not have the Spirit of Christ and do not belong to him (v. 9).

How do these verses describe *Christians*? They live according to the Spirit and set their minds on the things of the Spirit (v. 5). Setting the mind on the Spirit brings life (now and throughout eternity) and peace with God (v. 6; cf. Col. 3:1–2). They are *in* the Spirit (as opposed to being *in* the flesh), who dwells in them (v. 9). Christ is in them, and though their bodies will die in this life because of sin, the Spirit is life (now and throughout eternity), because the righteousness of Jesus is credited to their account when they trust in him (v. 10). The Spirit of the Father raised Jesus from the dead and dwells in them. When they die, God will raise their mortal bodies from the dead through the Spirit (v. 11; Naselli, *Romans*, 98–100).

- In your own words, how does this passage describe non-Christians? How does it describe Christians?
- Do you believe it is possible for someone who is truly a Christian to be *enslaved to and dominated by* their sinful desires? Why or why not?

3. Christians actively participate in the Spirit’s work.

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, 13 because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:12–13)

In light of verses 5–11, we therefore are not obligated to submit to and follow the flesh (v. 12, Moo, 492, 516). If we live according to our sinful state and desires, we will die eternally, suffering under God’s condemnation and wrath (v. 13). But if by the Spirit we put to death our sinful deeds (including rooting them out from our lives), we will live with God forever (v. 13, Naselli, 101). This process of putting our sinful deeds to death (which necessarily includes putting our sinful desires and thoughts to death as well) does not happen instantaneously; it is a process that takes a lifetime. However, all Christians put away their sinful thoughts and actions, and strive for holiness, by the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26; Col. 3:1–17). If we do not, it is a clear indication that we do not have the Spirit of God within us; we are not Christians. If we engage in this battle by faith, we will live with God forever.

- Both are true: (1) Christians are saved by grace through faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8–9) and (2) *if* we put to death the deeds of the body, *then* we will live with God eternally (Rom. 8:13). Explain how those two points fit together and don't contradict one another. Put differently, how do *faith* and *works* relate to each other?
- What does it mean to “put to death the deeds of the body” (v. 13)? Explain using an example from your own life.

Sound Doctrine: God the Holy Spirit

The God of the Bible is the one, true God, and he exists eternally as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; John 1:1; Acts 5:3–4). How does the Bible present God the Holy Spirit?

1. He is fully God in his essence, and he is a distinct person and member of the Trinity (Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor. 12:4–6). He is not an impersonal force.
2. He is the one who brings spiritually dead people to life with God (John 3:3–8; 6:63), which enables them to turn from their sins and trust in Jesus.
3. We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and he is the guarantee or down payment of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30).
4. At the moment we become Christians, he sets us apart for God and his purposes, and our character transformation begins (1 Pet. 1:2).
5. He not only convicts us about our sins, but he also empowers us to put away our sins and to live for God (John 16:8–11; Rom. 8:13; 14:17; Gal. 5:22–23).
6. He provides us with spiritual gifts to serve and encourage others in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).
7. He helps us to persevere to the end of our lives and then into eternity (Rom. 8:23).
8. The Holy Spirit points us to the Father and the Son, so that we will love and obey them—which is at the heart of the Spirit's ministry (John 4:23–24; 15:26).

The Holy Spirit, too, is worthy of our eternal love and worship. Praise be to our great triune God!

- How do these truths about God the Holy Spirit affect your life and ministry to others?
- What is one thing that you can do in response to this lesson?

Prayer