Studies on the Holy Spirit, Lesson 7

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US LIFE AND GOVERNS OUR MINDS

Romans 8:1–17,22–27

Key Verse: 8:2

“…because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

In this passage Paul tells how the Holy Spirit gives us life. Mainly he changes the way we think. When we receive him, we think differently about our relationship with God, about the law, about our flesh and about suffering. Through this study may God help us allow the Spirit to change our minds, so that we can live as God's children.

**First**, no condemnation (1–3). Look at verse 1. Paul wrote this after describing his battle with sin in chapter 7. Even Apostle Paul couldn't control his sinful flesh, though he really wanted to. This made him feel wretched, helpless and condemned. But in Christ he found the solution. In Christ there's now no condemnation for anyone who believes in him. It isn’t theoretical, but very real. How does it work? Read verse 2. Through faith in Christ we’re set free from condemnation, and from the law of sin and death that cause it. It happens when we receive the Spirit who gives life. When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who gives us new life and sets us free from our bondage to sin and death by giving us the power to resist. Paul also adds that the condemnation we deserve because of our sins was actually put on Jesus. Look at verse 3. Paul teaches in Romans that God’s law is good. God’s law teaches what sin is and reveals God’s righteous standards. But when we study it, often we feel condemned because we can’t keep it. Our flesh, meaning our sinful nature and its desires, is too strong. So God provided a way out for us. He sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. Jesus was fully human, but without sin, and when he died on the cross, he took all the condemnation that by law we deserve. Even though we may know all this, we still feel a sense of condemnation. We can’t forgive ourselves because of how we’ve lived. We may not be able to talk about it with anyone. How can we be convinced that there is now no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus? It's the work of the Holy Spirit. In the movie *The Mission*, the slave trader who joined the Christian community couldn’t overcome his sense of condemnation over his past evil deeds of cruelty, rape and murder. But when he carried a large burden of junk up a high cliff and the priest finally cut it loose, the Holy Spirit worked in him to help him realize the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. Likewise, when we receive the Holy Spirit, he helps us realize that what Jesus suffered on the cross was enough condemnation to pay for all our sins, and thus he sets us free from any nagging sense of guilt and condemnation. May God help each of us to experience, through the work of the Holy Spirit, that there is now no more condemnation for us in Christ Jesus.

**Second**, a new attitude toward God’s law (4,7). Read verse 4. This verse describes the radical change that takes place in us when we repent, believe in Jesus and receive the Spirit. We not only receive the Spirit, we begin to live according to the Spirit. And in verse 4 Paul explains what it means to live according to the Spirit. It doesn’t mean to be totally free from God’s law. Instead, the Spirit leads us to fully meet the righteous requirements of the law. Look at verse 7. Without the Spirit, we're hostile both to God and to his law. When we encounter God’s law, in our flesh we don’t want to obey; we want to break it and rebel against it. It’s like the saying, “I wanted to do that, but because you say so, I won’t.” We want to do just the bare minimum and are always looking for loopholes for what we have to do for God. But by the indwelling of the Spirit, our attitude toward God’s law completely changes. We begin not only to love God’s law in our minds, but in our wills we want to obey it fully. The Spirit helps us give our whole hearts to God’s law and be loyal and faithful to it. Paul wrote back in 6:17: “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.” This change of heart toward God’s law is mentioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:26–27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

**Third**, a mind set on what the Spirit desires (5–8). Read verse 5. Here Paul describes two kinds of people: those who live according to the flesh, and those who live in accordance with the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh are people who put priority on pleasing their flesh. Over time, doing this produces a mindset. Such people’s minds become set on what the flesh desires. Those who live in accordance with the Spirit are those who listen to the inner promptings of the Spirit throughout the day. They pray and strive to do what pleases the Spirit, and they try to keep in step with what the Spirit is teaching and how the Spirit is leading. Over time, this produces a mindset as well. Such people’s minds become set on what the Spirit desires. Obviously this isn’t an instant process—it’s gradual, and it requires that we struggle to make right decisions. Each day, and in all kinds of opportunities and uses of our time, we can choose to please our flesh, or choose to please the Spirit. It may start with small choices, like whether to pray or give in to sleep. And it definitely goes on to the larger choices in life, such as what career path to take, where to live, and who to marry. In the times of Noah, the sons of God chose to marry beautiful women who had no spiritual life. This led to them having a mind set on pleasing their flesh only. Genesis 6:5 says, “The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” We call this a “dirty mind” or a “worldly mind.” It also can be an “unspiritual mind” puffed up with idle notions (Col2:18). It’s a mind obsessed with human concerns (Mk8:33). It’s a mindset that makes us enemies of the cross of Christ, a mindset that makes us gluttons, hedonists and even perverts (Php3:18). In our natural selves we all have this mind that totally shuts God and his Spirit out. In Genesis 6, this mindset caused God to decide to withdraw his Spirit from humans (Ge6:3). Look at verse 8. When we live only in the flesh, with our minds focused on the flesh, we can’t please God.

Today many people like to think that their inner thought world is their own private space, where they can think or imagine whatever they want. But when we allow our thoughts to wander to the flesh and to the things of this world and the vanities and worries they produce, we're resisting the Spirit and grieving the Spirit. So Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” To really do this, we need to be vigilant about our inner thought world, and we need to cooperate with the Spirit’s promptings moment by moment. The spiritual battle starts with our minds. What does it mean to have a mind set on what the Spirit desires? It’s a mind that’s determined to seek God himself (Ps42:1–2; 63:1). It’s a mind set on our heavenly hope, and on the second coming of Jesus (Php3:19–20; Col3:1–4). With the reality of the Risen Christ, the hope of heaven and his second coming governing our minds, we live very differently from day to day.

 Paul goes on to describe two very different outcomes. Read verse 6. Here the word “governed” in Greek literally means to have a general outlook or mindset. When our mindset or general outlook is focused on the flesh, Paul says we experience death. This “death” may mean that our spiritual life dies. It also seems to mean to taste condemnation and be full of hopelessness, anxieties, worries and guilt all the time. On the other hand, when our mindset or general outlook is focused on the Spirit, we experience life and peace. Life is the abundant life of God in our souls. Peace is peace of mind, and it’s one of the fruits of the Spirit. So many people want peace of mind. So they try yoga and meditation, or they take anti-anxiety drugs or try to withdraw from the world. But peace of mind comes when our mindset is controlled by the Spirit (6b; Php4:7).

**Fourth**, spiritually alive (9–11). Read verse 9. Here Paul makes it clear that there are only two kinds of people—those who belong to Christ, and those who don’t. The evidence that we belong to Christ is that we have his Spirit living in us and controlling us. Without being in Christ, we can’t have the Spirit, and we can’t develop a mind focused on pleasing the Spirit. But when we're in Christ, we can begin this wonderful journey. It’s because through his death and resurrection we die to sin and begin to live for righteousness, and his Spirit begins to control us. Of course, after we're made alive in Christ, we still have to live in the flesh. It means we still have the demands of our bodies and of our sinful nature. But the new reality is that we also have the Spirit of Christ living within us.

 What does it mean to have the Spirit of Christ within? Read verse 10. According to this verse, to have the Spirit of Christ within means to have Christ himself living in us (Gal2:20; Jn14:20,23; Rev3:20). He clothes us with his righteousness; we experience righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; we become filled with the fruit of righteousness (1Co1:30; Ro14:17; Php1:11). Though we live in bodies subject to death because of sin, as Christ’s righteousness grows in us through the indwelling of the Spirit, we experience life more and more. Read verse 11. This is a twofold promise: a promise of life that starts now, and a promise of one day being given a glorious risen body like that of Christ. When the Spirit comes to dwell in us, he makes us alive with this hope.

**Fifth**, no obligation to the flesh (12–13). Paul tells us of another change in our minds that the Spirit gives us. Read verses 12–13. Most of us who’ve lived with a chronic sinful nature and the chronic demands of our flesh develop the idea that we have an “obligation” to our flesh. We think we *have* to give in. But the Spirit gives us a new mindset—that we have no obligation to our flesh. Instead, we have a new obligation—to put to death the misdeeds of our body by the help of the Spirit. The Spirit gives us God’s power to overcome our sinful tendencies. So we should take advantage of that and stop making excuses for ourselves.

**Sixth**, a new identity as a child of God (14–16). In verses 14–16 we see another change of mind the Holy Spirit brings us. He helps us get out of our habitual and nagging fears. He gives us the personal conviction that we're children of God. He also changes our idea about God. Before we thought that God was remote and that we could never really please him. But by the indwelling of the Spirit we realize that God really does love us because he’s our dear heavenly Father. By the indwelling of the Spirit, we can begin to call on God in a most intimate way. This new identity and intimate relationship with God may be one of the best effects of the Spirit’s taking control of our minds.

**Seventh**, a new attitude toward suffering (17,22–27). According to verse 17, another effect of the Spirit’s indwelling is a new idea about suffering. Without the Spirit, when we suffer, we complain or despair. Without the Spirit we’re constantly trying to avoid suffering. But with the Spirit, we realize that suffering is a privilege. We begin to embrace suffering for Jesus’ sake. And in verses 22–27 we learn that the Spirit helps us to pray in the midst of suffering. Sometimes, our sufferings are so severe that we don’t even know how to pray. But the Spirit helps us even to groan to God.

 In today’s passage we learned that through the Spirit’s indwelling, we gain a new mindset. We have no more condemnation, we have a new heart that genuinely wants to fulfill God’s laws, we constantly think about pleasing the Spirit, we’re spiritually alive with a living hope in Christ, we no longer think we’re obligated to our flesh, we have a new intimate relationship with God, and we’re able to embrace our sufferings and pray. May the Spirit's indwelling set each of us free from the law of sin and death and rule us with life and peace.