

Study 9: Romans Chapter 8

Introduction

Up to here it has been mostly doom and gloom. If we stopped here, we would conclude that we are condemned and everything is futile. The law condemns us, and even without the law we still can't do what is right. How can God accept us, and how can we possibly think that we have any hope before God?

Through Romans 8, the hope and assurance of the christian is given and laid out like no other passage in the New Testament.

Body of the Study

What is the state of those who are “in Christ”?

How did God bring about reconciliation?

How are Flesh and Spirit contrasted?

What is the test of whether we belong to God?

What are the consequences of having the Spirit dwelling in us?

What are the consequences of our assurance?

How does God's foreknowledge give us assurance?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Go through the chapter carefully, and write down everything that we learn about the Holy Spirit. (This will probably take a few hours).*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 9 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 9: Chapter 8

Introduction

Up to here it has been mostly doom and gloom. We are all condemned by sin (chapters 1,2 & 3), but we can be saved if we have the same kind of faith that Abraham had (chapter 4). That salvation comes neither by keeping the law, nor by being a physical descendant of Abraham, but by the reconciliation that God brought about through Jesus Christ (chapter 5). God's grace is much bigger than our sin. We should not continue to live in sin when we have died to our former lives by being buried with Jesus (chapter 6). The law that was intended to give us life, condemned us to death. The problem isn't with the law, but with the war that goes on within us. No matter how hard we try, we end up failing (chapter 7).

If we stopped there, we would conclude that we are condemned and everything is futile. The law condemns us, and even without the law we still can't do what is right. How can God accept us, and how can we possibly think that we have any hope before God?

Body of the Study

What is the state of those who are "in Christ"?

Paul has spent a good deal of the last chapter discussing the conflict between flesh and spirit – between what he really wants to do and what his weakness of the flesh ends up actually doing. Paul is not unique, and the battle that he describes applies to every one of us who would seek to live the way that God would have us to do. In the end, we always seem to fail (well, perhaps not *always*, but a lot of the time). Paul has already discussed in this context sins of commission (when we do the things that we shouldn't do), as well as sins of omission (when we don't do the things that we should do) (7:19).

The only conclusion that we can have coming out of this is that we fail miserably, and don't measure up to the mark. And whilst that is true, if we are seeking justification by law (any system of law, including by trying to live under the law of Christ) then we will fail miserably and not measure up.

But, the point is, that *we are not saved by law*. We are saved by grace. I discussed this in some detail in *Study 4 "What is the conclusion?"* God wants us to fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), but it is because it is written on our hearts, and He is our God and we are His people (Heb 10:16). In the same context, the Hebrew writer continues that God will not remember our sins any more (Heb 10:17). All of this happens because (and only *if*) we have the same kind of faith that Abraham had.

When we look at faith's hall of fame (Hebrews chapter 11), and look at the characters who are held up as the shining examples of faith, we find that they all had their weaknesses. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife, and with Sarah's permission thought that God needed a bit of help in fulfilling His promises about an heir, so he went and had a sexual relationship with Hagar. David is described as a man after God's own heart, but he had an affair with Bathsheba, then arranged for her husband to be killed, and then married two other woman as well. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (wives of a secondary nature and status, rather like a de-facto status). And the list goes on, but the point is illustrated. What put these people into a relationship with God was their faith, and their obedience to that faith. It was not that they practiced and kept the law better than anyone else. If that were the case then Jesus rather than condemning the Pharisees for their legalistic actions would have commended them. (The same commendation could possibly be said of the Essenes, but they bear no record in scripture).

So, if we walk by faith, and we have our hearts and minds turned towards God, and we have obeyed God in exactly the same way that Abraham (and the others in faith's hall of fame) did, then we are the true children of God. And like Paul, yes we sin (7:23). But God's grace more than covers our sins (5:20). That does not give us a license to sin (6:1-2), and in fact we find it rather disgusting (7:24).

But in Christ, we are free from the eternal *consequences* of sin (8:1). We are not free from its physical effects. Being a christian does not exempt us from the consequences if we are drunk and injure someone on the road (and I am not advocating christians drinking). Nor does it protect us from sexually transmitted diseases if we commit adultery / fornication, or keep us out of jail if we rob a bank. But we are *alive* to God spiritually, and we ought to have *left behind* these dead works. We *ought not* to be involved in these things. But sometimes we slip up. If we are saved by (justified by) works and by trying to keep perfectly any system of law, then we have no hope.

But our assurance is sure. We have no grounds to question it, because we have been made free from all such systems of justification by Jesus Christ (8:2).

How did God bring about reconciliation?

When God sent Jesus, He came and condemned sin in the flesh (8:3). He came to be a sin offering (NIV), so that in His sacrifice God might deal with the problem of sin once and for all time. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law (of Moses) so that we might be made righteous – that is, that God's righteousness would be applied to us, and we can be considered righteous even when we are not – because we do not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit (8:4).

We should note verses 2 & 3 together here. We have life through the Holy Spirit, and that life is only achieved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (8:2). Jesus came because He was sent as a sacrifice by Jehovah God. We have here beautifully expressed by Paul (under the guidance of inspiration) the three parts of the Godhead working together to accomplish salvation.

We are not (and never can be) righteous in and of ourselves. Like Paul, we fail miserably. But in exactly the same way as the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the door post acted as a covering (a protection) for the people in Egypt, so the blood of Christ acts for us (Ex 12:1-13). The parallels are not a coincidence. God said that when He sees the blood, he will pass-over us (and not inflict the death penalty) (Ex 12:13). In exactly the same way, when our hearts are washed in the blood of Jesus (we make contact with the blood when we are baptised into Him – 6:3-6), God passes over us and does not impute the spiritual death penalty that we deserve.

How are Flesh and Spirit contrasted?

Paul now puts in place another set of contrasts between the man who live a fleshly life, and those who live a spiritual life.

Verse	Fleshly life	Spiritual life
8:4	Walk after the flesh	Walk according to the Spirit
8:5	Live according to the flesh	Live according to the Spirit
8:5	Set their minds on fleshly things	Set our minds on Spiritual things
8:6	Carnally minded = death	Spiritually minded = life and peace
8:7	Carnal mind is at war with God	
8:7	Not in subjection to God's law	
8:8	Cannot please God	

Paul leaves us to draw the implications for ourselves in the last of these contrasts. As Christians, where we sit is obvious. Whilst we do sin, a life of sin is not who we are. Who we are is the people of God, and we have the life and peace that goes with that.

What is the test of whether we belong to God?

Paul says that the test is whether or not we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. The subject of the Holy Spirit, and how it dwells in the Christian has been one of much debate and discussion. I do not propose to even attempt to deal with it in any great depth at this place. However, Romans chapter 8 tells us more about the Holy Spirit than any other chapter in the whole of the New Testament.

We need to note the context of the whole Roman letter, which we did in study 1 – introduction to the book. We noted that Paul has not yet been to Rome, and that one of the purposes of his intended coming was that he “...*might impart unto you some spiritual gift, to establish you in the faith...*” (1:11). Unlike the church at Corinth, where any discussion of the Holy Spirit must be taken in the context of the miraculous gifts, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Roman letter is (generally – there are a few exceptions) outside of the context of the miraculous manifestations.

Some have argued that the work of the Holy Spirit was to guide the apostles, and that when those who were led by the teaching (as those in Rome were through Paul’s letter, and as we are when we read it today), then we are led by the Spirit. They argue that to have the Spirit of Christ does not mean a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but rather that we have adopted (conformed ourselves to) the *nature* of Christ. But we need to come back to how those who received the letter would have read and understood it if we are to properly interpret what Paul is saying. Whilst most of the brethren in Rome did not have the spiritual gifts (1:11), there were some who did (12:6). They most likely had obtained these gifts when they were in Jerusalem (Acts 1:10), or had been in contact with Paul (probably in Corinth or Ephesus – see notes on Introduction: “What was Paul’s association with the church?”), or perhaps one of the other apostles at some other time. In any case, the gifts came through the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:17-18).

The brethren in Rome would have recognised the miraculous gifts and what they meant. When Paul spoke about the action of the Spirit of God, the context would normally *demand* that of the Holy Spirit, not a conforming of our nature to that of God (although Paul does require that of us in chapter 12).

Now comes the interesting part. In order to be identified as Christians, it is *imperative* that we have God’s spirit dwelling in us (8:9). And just to make sure we get it, he says again in 8:9 that if we don’t have it, then we don’t belong to God!

If Paul had written this to the Corinthian church, we would understand that the ability to express the miraculous gifts is a test of whether we truly belong to God. ***BUT*** – remember that not everyone has the gifts in Rome! So, what Paul says cannot mean that the test is the miraculous gifts. But Acts 2:38-39 promises the Holy Spirit (as a gift) to everyone – not only those who were in Jerusalem at that time, but to “...*as many as the Lord our God shall call...*” The Holy Spirit and belonging to Christ are inextricably bound together throughout the New Testament. In Acts 19, Paul comes to Ephesus and finds some disciples. He asks them (my words) “...*have you come across an apostle and been given the miraculous gifts?...*” They then answered that *they didn’t know that they Holy Spirit had been given*, which then caused Paul to question their baptism. It comes right back to Acts 2:38 and the promise of the Holy Spirit to every Christian. In Paul’s letter to Titus he says:

⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, (Tit 3:5-6 NIV)

Our baptism (the washing of rebirth) and the Holy Spirit are again inextricably intertwined.

The only way that we can make sense of this, is when we understand that it is not the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit that identifies us as belonging to Christ (if that were the case, then all hope died when the apostles died), and it is not because we have some knowledge that is brought by the Spirit. Having knowledge brought by the Spirit and having the Spirit are two different things. Paul says that we are identified with Christ when we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us (8:9).

This is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the Holy Spirit. I have not intended to misrepresent the position that some brethren might take on the Holy Spirit, nor to attempt to comprehensively articulate that position. There is much more that could be written, but such will need to be undertaken in another time and place.

What are the consequences of having the Spirit dwelling in us?

Starting with 8:9, Paul identifies a list of characteristics that exemplify the work that the Holy Spirit does for us:

- We are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit,
- Our body is dead because of sin, but our spirit is life because of righteousness,
- His Spirit dwells in us and gives (spiritual) life to our mortal bodies,
- We put to death the fleshly works of our bodies and we live,
- We are led by God's Spirit.

Paul rounds off the argument by saying, "...as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God..." (8:14 NKJV)

There is a distinct and positive action of the Holy Spirit working within us "...*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*" (8:16 NKJV). If we had any doubt about whether it was the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as a person, then Paul clears it up for us here. Again we need to remember *how* the brethren in Rome would have understood what Paul had to say. It could be said that it is not a necessary conclusion that the Holy Spirit needs to dwell within us to do this work. But it is clear that Paul is describing the Holy Spirit as a person, and not some "nature" (*spirit*) of God that we might take on in a spiritual manner.

The action of the Holy Spirit is said to be one of *interaction* with our spirit. We are not told exactly how this happens. We do not understand all of the things that we should talk to God about, and very often we find it hard to express ourselves to other people. The action of the Holy Spirit here is to take on a *translator* and *intermediary* between we who want to serve God, and Jehovah God Himself. The Spirit knows the secret things of our hearts. He knows who we really are. He can testify to God that we really are His children. If we did not have the Holy Spirit within us, then how could we have the assurance that God knows who we really are? Of course, there is the argument that God is all knowing, but this verse says that *how* He puts that into action is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit also helps our weaknesses. Paul uses prayer as an example of how the Holy Spirit specifically interacts with our spirit (8:26-27).

This especially makes sense when we remember that *when* we get the Holy Spirit is *when* we are baptised into Christ (Acts 2:38-39). Up until that time we don't have the Holy Spirit, and from then, He comes and dwells in us and fulfils the role that Paul describes here.

What are the consequences of our assurance?

The Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we are indeed the children of God (8:16). In fact, He is given as a down payment against our eternal redemption (Eph 1:13,14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Rom 8:23). The description that Paul uses in 8:23 is the "firstfruits". In 4 of the 5 times that the expression is used in the NT it makes a contrast between a first event (the firstfruits) and a second event (the main harvest). In this case, the Holy Spirit is said to be the *firstfruits*, and the *main*

harvest is said to be our redemption. What Paul is saying is that we have the Holy Spirit as the assurance of our redemption. It is in exactly this context that the Holy Spirit is said to be the *earnest* (KJV) (the *down payment* or *guarantee*) that we have.

So, the assurance that we have is that we are:

- Heirs,
- Heirs of God,
- Joint heirs with Christ.

Our inheritance with God is assured. And our assurance is not just one of *being mentioned in the will*, but one of having such a pre-eminent position as being a joint heir with Christ!

When we consider the things that we suffer here in this present world, they are nothing when we compare them to the blessings that we will have as God's inheritance (8:18-23).

The assurance that we have as christians is well expressed by 8:28. God works things together in our lives for His purposes. Not everything that happens in our lives results in our good, and to make this verse say that stretches it beyond what Paul is saying. The verse best sums up the points that Paul is making – *all of (these things) work together for our good*.

How does God's foreknowledge give us assurance?

The people that Paul is talking about is us (well, it was actually the Romans – but all of those who are “...*the called according to God's purpose...*” (8:28)). Notice that Paul doesn't *say those who are called*, but those who are the called. He is describing the called out body of people – God's people – *His own special people* (1 Pet 2:9).

God foresaw, and foreknew that through Jesus we would be conformed to Him, and He planned the end of (predestined) those who would come to Him in faith.

Being God's people, we are called (*the called of God*), justified (made right), and glorified. Our assurance is sure and firm. *If God be for us, who can be against us?* (8:31)

But the assurance goes beyond that. Look at what God did – how far He went – “...*sparing not His own Son...*” (8:32).

The words of Paul need no further enhancement to describe the assurance of the christian:

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... ^{RO 8:37} No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)