

The Gospel as it Really Is: *Romans simply Explained*
Sanctification (6) Sanctified by the Holy Spirit!
Romans 8:1-17 September 14th 2025
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The story is told of a man who bought a failing lock factory. The first thing he did was appoint a new manager. From the central office of the factory came new commands, new priorities and a new passion! Sure enough! the quality (and quantity) of the locks improved!

But alas, in spite of many improvements, this is what the new boss found: the old machines and the tired work force frustrated the efforts of the new manager! Every command was met with some resistance! Each new initiative thwarted by ageing machinery!

It's only a human analogy, but that is the teaching of Romans chapter 7. "In my inner being I delight in God's law" (verse 22) I'm under new management, I've been born again by the Spirit. But oh, at the same time, my old Velcro sinful nature, follows me round like a shadow, and lets me down so that "what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do." (verse 15)

For those who have recently joined us, we're making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans and we've arrived at the section where Paul is teaching us about sanctification.

Big word, but "sanctification" is simply the lifelong process of becoming more holy and more righteous in our thoughts and words and behaviour. Or to put it another way, becoming more like the Lord Jesus: more loving, more joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled.

And this is God's will for every believer. Over the years, slowly but surely becoming more like Jesus with every passing year, to his glory and praise. Romans chapters 6,7 and 8 are all about this process, this "sanctification", 6 sermons so far, one more to go.

The factory story, praise God, is not the whole story. Perhaps someone has been listening to these sermons on sanctification & thinking to themselves, "there must be more," "something better," "something else!"

And you'd be right. Today, in Romans 8, Paul fills in the missing sanctification piece. Did you notice in the reading of verses 1-17 a most blessed Word that appeared 14 times in chapter 8 (only once in chapter 7)? "The Holy Spirit."

Every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, and through the divine power He provides we can "put to death the misdeeds of the body and live" (v.14). In the power of the Holy Spirit we can do battle against old sins and experience real victory over sin! This is the teaching of Romans 8!

Is there a believer among us who thinks "I will never make progress against my sins. Those thoughts, that pattern of speech, this behaviour will never leave me?" I have good news for you! Today, Paul is

going to tell us that in the power the Holy Spirit provides we can conquer sin!

I'm going to share this teaching in four simple steps:

- (1) Know that you are totally forgiven
- (2) Know that the Holy Spirit lives within
- (3) Chose to be controlled by the Spirit
- (4) Fix your thoughts on what the Spirit desires

These four points, if I can put it this way, are Paul's manual for sanctification. Write them down if you like. And then live them out.

(1) Know that you are totally forgiven

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life (this is the new way of sanctification) has set you free from the law of sin and death (that is the old way of sanctification, by trying to obey the law in your own strength). 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, 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."

Let me put that simply: through the cross of Jesus Christ, all our sins, past, present and future have been paid in full and we will never suffer the penalty for them! "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are forgiven totally, completely and forever:

*"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered,
Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them." (Psalm 32:1)*

This is the foundational truth that every believer needs to hear if they are to advance in holiness.

Suppose you get to the end of a bad day. You have thought or spoken or done what is wrong. What should you do? Humbly confess your sin and KNOW, BE ASSURED, REJOICE, that all of those have been paid in full. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" Hallelujah or what?! I say it again, this is the foundational truth for living a holy life! I'm forgiven, totally, completely and eternally for everything! Without this truth we'll never be able to get back on the horse after we've taken a fall! You know what they say if you're learning to ride? Get back on—straight away! Without a clear comprehension of the scope of God's forgiveness we could easily grovel around in the graveyard of regret, guilt and remorse.

*When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there Who made an end of all my sin.*

The second truth in Paul's manual of sanctification...

(2) Know that the Holy Spirit lives within you

These verses in Romans 8 mention the Holy Spirit more often than any other passage in the whole of the New Testament. Why's that? Because the Holy Spirit's main work in a believer's life is to make them holy! It's in the title of his blessed name, he is the "HOLY Spirit." Romans 15:16, we are "sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Believer did you know, have you forgotten, that the all-powerful omnipotent Holy Spirit dwells within you?

"You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to Christ" (v.9)

"the Spirit... who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you..." (v.11)

I watched *The Lion King* on holiday—it is my favourite animated film. Do you remember the bit where hyenas Benzai and Shenzi stumble across Scar? Benzai says "Ah, we were afraid it was someone important like Mufasa" and at the mention of Mufasa's name Shenzi exclaims, "Yeah, Now that's Power!"

The power that raised Jesus from the dead! "Now that is power!" The power that took a dead body, torn and bruised beyond all human recognition, says Isaiah 52:14, and restored it into a glorious new living body, that same all-powerful Spirit lives within you:

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who lives in you." (11)

There are not two levels of Christian, some with the Holy Spirit, some without! All believers have the Spirit of God living within them, and it is by his mighty power that we become progressively made holy.

Is this not a wonderful truth? A wonderful fact? In some glorious but mysterious way, the Omnipotent, all-powerful divine Spirit of God lives within every believer, so much so that we are called "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19) How dare we sink into the despair of defeatism!

(3) Choose to be controlled by the Spirit

.. but we're not robots. We must actively choose between being controlled by the sinful nature and being controlled by the Spirit. In a moment I'll explain how we do that, for now listen to Paul (v 5-8)

"Therefore brothers and sisters v. 12. "we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it, For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die (death here and in the rest of the Bible means much more than physical death, it means sadness, guilt,

condemnation, shame—if you choose to follow your sinful nature that will be the consequence), but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live (life means which means joy and peace and power!)

Every moment of every day the choice stands before us! Who will we follow? The desires of our old sinful nature which Paul lists in Galatians 5:

“sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like” (5:19-21)

Or will we be led by what the Spirit desires, which will not only lead to holiness but, says Paul, the comforting assurance that you are a child of God:

“those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear (if you choose the path of the sinful nature guilt will make God seem to you like a distant task master) but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry “Abba Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

We are not robots, neither before conversion, nor afterwards. Are we going to be led by the sinful nature? Or be led by the Holy Spirit? You ask, how can I choose to be led by the Spirit? That's the fourth step in Paul's sanctification programme.

(4) Fix your thoughts on what the Spirit desires

Here, brothers and sisters, is where finally, the rubber hits the road. This is how you and I become holy. Every true believer this morning says “I want to live a holy life! I want to be led by the Spirit! I don't want to be led by the flesh, the sinful nature.” *But how* can I be led by the Holy Spirit? By fixing my thoughts on what the Spirit desires. That's it!

Listen to Paul, verses 5-8

“Those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on what that nature desires; but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

God has forgiven you, God has sent his Spirit to live within you, what do YOU have to do? You have to *set your mind* on what the Spirit desires. That's it. This the key. Think about what the Spirit desires, rather than what the sinful nature desires. This is the universal teaching of the New Testament: if you want to live a holy life, set your mind on what the Spirit desires:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..” (Romans 12:2)

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things..” (Colossians 3:2)

This is always a two-step movement: (1) Turning away from unhelpful thoughts, anxious thoughts, ungodly thoughts and (2) replacing them with good thoughts, upright thoughts, upward prayerful thoughts.

Our minds are a constant stream of thought. And that stream directly affects our moment-to-moment lives. What will we fix our thoughts on? You and I have to work this one out in practice. On the negative side, how shall we avoid fearful and anxious thoughts? How shall we guard the eye gate or ear gate of the mind from evil thoughts? And on the positive side, how shall we fill our minds with good thoughts, and supremely with Bible truths, for it is the Word that God uses to sanctify his people. I throw some ideas out:

- Read good books, from the church library
- Listen to good Christian podcasts and good Christian music
- Turn anxious thoughts into prayers
- Read the Scriptures every day, hide them in your heart by memorisation of you can

You’ve got to work it out! Here’s the Bible’s guidelines for thought:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things!” (Philippians 4:8)

Illustration

We had a wonderful day yesterday, at the induction of Peter Oram as assistant pastor at Three Bridges Church Crawley. Can I tell you what also encouraged my heart yesterday? On the way down to Crawley our minds were bombarded with pop song words from the 60s and 70s but on the way home we filled our minds and hearts with words of truth with songs of praise,

Conclusion

You say, “I want to live a holy life, a godly life, a life that pleases the Lord!” I say, God has done wonderful things for you. He has forgiven all your sins, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He has given you his all-powerful Holy Spirit who dwells within you. But you’re not a spiritual-robot! Every day you must choose to be led by the Spirit rather than your sinful nature! But how can I be led by the Spirit? By setting your mind, your thoughts, not on what the sinful nature desires, but on what the Spirit desires.

May God help us do that in ever increasing measure, for his glory and our good. Amen.