

Life in the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 21st of October 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Life in the Spirit and is based on Romans chapter 8 verses 5 to 17.

For those visiting today, we've been preaching or I've been preaching through Romans sort of on and off for about three or four months and this is as far as we've got.

And let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you reveal yourself to us and speak to us through the words of scripture in the Bible and we pray that you may do so now, not only that we may understand these words, but then indeed you may write them on our hearts and minds by the power of your spirit so that we may find in Christ life and peace. Amen.

Someone I know well was diagnosed with cancer this week and he is scared, fearful, unsure of the future, unsure if whatever treatment he will need to have, if any, will it, whether it will work or not.

And even of course with radiotherapy or chemotherapy, waging war so to speak against cancer in a body, there's uncertainty about whether it will ultimately be effective.

[1 : 4 2] For of course with such a disease there are no guarantees, no certainty about whether medical treatment will work or not. And most of us know people who are facing or have faced the same sort of battle, some members of our congregation not least.

Cancer wages war against us and against our bodies and against medicine as well. Sometimes there's fear, though not always, but usually there is uncertainty about the outcome.

Well, last week we saw in Romans chapter 7 that sin is like a spiritual cancer that wages war in our bodies.

None of us is exempt from that. All of us struggle with failure to meet God's perfect standards, failure to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, failure to love our neighbour as ourself.

And as a result of our failure, what the Bible calls sin, our physical bodies are subjected to death. And so we saw last week the cry of frustration to an extent by St. Paul when he said at the end of chapter 7 nearly, who wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?

[3 : 0 2] We also saw that an easy response to the frustration of our sin and failure is to be fearful because we think again that we are inadequate before God and we stand under his condemnation, judgment and punishment.

And yet we also saw that despite our moral inability and our continuing in sin, we receive a resounding statement at the beginning of chapter 8, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now Paul goes on to elaborate in a sense on what we might call the spiritual therapy, not chemotherapy or radiotherapy, but spiritual therapy if you like, that God gives us to fight sin in us.

And rather than pumping us with chemicals and medicine, as the doctors do today, we are given instead God's spirit to dwell in us, as a form of spiritual therapy if you like, and in part to fight against sin waging war in our bodies of death.

But what we see in this passage, and also in the passages to come, is that the work of the spirit, unlike chemotherapy or radiotherapy, is always effective. We see also that the prognosis is always sure and certainly good.

[4 : 29] And we see that the outcome of the spiritual therapy that God gives us by his spirit in us is an outcome that is far better than any physical cure of cancer will be.

But we also see, in balance to that, that the results of the spiritual treatment of God's spirit is not, in a sense, an immediate cure of sin.

There are four things, perhaps, that we see about God's spirit in this passage. The first is that the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of life.

Something more than chemo or radiotherapy can ever offer us, the Holy Spirit offers us a guarantee of life. So see what Paul says in verses 5 and 6 initially.

Two different groups of people with two destinies.

[5 : 41] Those whose minds are set on the flesh end up in death. Those whose minds are set on the spirit end up with life and peace. But notice where, in those verses, the spirit begins to work.

In the mind. All too often, I think, we underestimate the importance of our minds. Sometimes we elevate our feelings to be more important, or our actions.

But the minds are the control center of us. And they are where God's spirit first begins to work. Consistently in the Bible. Not just here in this passage.

But right throughout the Bible, God wants our minds to be right. To think on what is good and pure and noble. To think on the things of God. The gospel and truths of God.

The things of the spirit, as it says here. For God knows that from our minds, flow our actions. Get our minds right, and we're more likely to behave right. So our mind is the place where God's spirit begins to work.

[6 : 44] And remember too, how Paul described people who were without God, way back in chapter 1, if you can cast your minds back to the end of June. He said in chapter 1, about people who are not Christians.

About the pagan world. Now we see God's treatment for that condition.

Those who are not Christians have dull minds. Senseless minds. Darkened or futile minds. Their thinking has gone astray. So God begins with his spiritual therapy by implanting his Holy Spirit in Christian people.

And begins by attacking the minds. And the darkness, the senselessness and the futility that is found in wrong thinking. He goes on in verses 7 to 8 to say, For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's law. Indeed it cannot. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. In a sense he's describing what he's described in chapter 1. People whose minds have gone astray.

[8 : 07] Indeed one of the other key verses of the whole of this letter to the Romans comes later in chapter 12. I think I'll be preaching on that in about March the way we're going. And there is in a sense a hinge point of this letter.

Up to that point Paul is in one sense saying what God is on about and what God is doing. But then comes what we should be doing in response to what God has done and is doing.

It's all part of the gospel. And there at chapter 12 verse 2 at the hinge point when Paul leads into how we should behave in response to what God does. He says firstly, Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

So the mind is the first place for God to attack with his spiritual therapy. That is the Holy Spirit that he implants or dwells in each Christian person.

It begs the question then, what are we doing with our minds? Are we setting our minds on the things of the Spirit as we're supposed to do in verses 5 and 6? Are we finding that our minds are being renewed by God's Spirit and by God's truth?

[9 : 15] Or are we filling our minds with the junk of this world? How little time it seems that we spend in studying the truths of God compared to the rubbish that we read or watch on TV.

How little we integrate our Christian faith with our minds in the way we think about and respond to the world in which we live. To what extent will your Christian faith inform the way that you vote on November the 10th?

To what extent does your Christian faith and the truths of God and the things of the Spirit affect the way you respond to the current world crisis? To what extent will your Christian faith and the things of God and the things of the flesh?

Just to think about spiritual things at all. Now in passing we ought to make a comment about the contrast here, the things of the flesh. For probably many of us think that the mind of the flesh or the things of the flesh is talking about sexual sins.

But that really is just a caricature. The flesh basically is Paul's word, if you like, to sum up fallen, sinful human nature. It is the moral inability of humanity these days to please God.

[10 : 24] Minds that are darkened and dull to the truth of God and the glory of God is the flesh. In Paul's terminology. And the outcome of that, that mindset and that behaviour that follows from that mindset, is death.

Not just physical death, we all die. But spiritual death, being cut off from God forever. The result of the Spirit though, is to see minds that are transformed.

And the result of that, or the outcome of that, is life and peace, as the end of verse 6 says. That is a sure promise for Christian people. It is a certain outcome and a guarantee by the Spirit.

He provides life. He's a life-giving Spirit. He breathes new life into God's people. And promises them, and guarantees for them, life and peace.

Unlike the uncertainty of radio or chemotherapy or other medical treatment, for that matter. The Spirit's therapy within us is guaranteed to bring us life.

[11 : 25] But the second point is to clarify the first. For the life that Paul is talking about here is not just more of the same physical life here on earth. But rather, in particular, eternal life.

Life in a relationship with God that lasts beyond the grave and for eternity. So the Holy Spirit's work in us is not an immediate cure of sin, so that we just keep on living this physical life forever and not dying.

But rather, as the next verses go on to show us, Paul has a longer term perspective on what the work of the Holy Spirit in us is on about. See what he says in verse 10. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, that is still the case note for Christian people.

The body's not suddenly come alive and will live forever because sin is gone. The Spirit is life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

See the perspective of Paul and the work of the Spirit there. It is to guarantee for us not just life now, day by day, more of this physical life, but long term, the future resurrection life.

- [12 : 39] A perfect life when finally we will rise free from the presence of sin in our bodies. Notice too that this future resurrection life is not the soul going to heaven.

When I was a kid, I was told that when you die, your soul goes to heaven as though your body just rocks in the grave and that's it. The end of it. But that's Plato.

That's Greek philosophy. It's not Christian thinking. Because actually Christianity is pro-body. It's pro-physical things. The body of Jesus rose.

The tomb was empty. And so too when we one day will rise to heaven, our old mortal bodies, these bodies of death as Paul calls it, will be transformed and renewed and will also rise.

So it will be the complete us that rises, not just some bodiless spirit that floats off into heaven. Christianity is very pro-body, pro-physical nature, unlike Greek philosophy and lots of Eastern religions as well.

- [13 : 38] So the life that the Holy Spirit guarantees for us is a life that is in a relationship with God, eternal life, a life beyond the grave, and there beyond the grave will finally be perfect and free from the presence of sin forever.

And no medical treatment, no radio chemotherapy can ever promise that. A few years ago, about four I think, one of our church members, a lady in her 50s, was dying of cancer.

And a husband who's not a Christian said to me that really the church and the words of the Bible and what I'd said to her and others had said to her was the only hope that she had received.

Because the doctors could offer her no hope. Medicine could offer her no hope. But the words of the gospel offer real hope. They don't offer hope that death can be escaped.

They don't offer hope that sin or even illness can be overcome now. For they offer real hope that beyond the grave there is perfect life forever.

- [14 : 42] That is a great hope. And that is what the Spirit within us is guaranteeing for us. That just as Jesus rose 2,000 years ago from the dead, so too will his people rise to new life, eternal life, with him perfect forever in heaven.

Worth also making an observation here. The indwelling spirit in a Christian does not mean that the indwelling sin is immediately cast out.

In a sense, both cohabit us. God's Spirit and our sin. Only at the final resurrection will sin be cast out of our bodies and lives finally.

But the other way round is reassuring to realise that our indwelling sin does not mean that the Spirit is not indwelling us also. Because sometimes we fear that because we keep on sinning, God's Spirit can't live in us.

But the truth is that God's Spirit indwells us though we are yet sinners, and we keep on sinning, but that does not exclude the indwelling Spirit. Both live within us.

- [15 : 59] Now that's actually a very important point to grasp for two reasons. One is that too many Christians have too high an expectation of the work of the Spirit too quickly in their lives.

That is, they expect that because the Spirit is in their lives, sin will end now, healing will come now, and victory, full victory, will come now in their lives.

But what Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit does and guarantees is life and peace, and in particular at the future resurrection, when after our deaths, presumably, we will rise to heaven finally.

So at the end of verse 11, he says that the work of the Spirit will give life, future tense, to our mortal bodies. Yes, there's a sense in which the Spirit is already revitalising and energising us here and now.

But that is in a sense anticipatory of the final resurrection. But on the other hand, and the second reason why this is important to grasp, is because too many Christians have too low an expectation of the work of the Spirit in their lives, and sometimes indeed don't even know or are uncertain whether He even lives in them.

[17 : 16] And therefore full of doubts and lack of assurance. So in that context, it's worth reading verse 9. Now they are words of resounding assurance for each one of us who is Christian.

It is saying that every single person who is a Christian has dwelling within them the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Himself. You see, the Holy Spirit is not a special possession for super-Christians, for the Charismatics or the Pentecostals on the extreme fringes or someone like that.

The Holy Spirit is a possession, if you like, a gift for every single Christian, without exception. If you're a Christian, God's Spirit dwells within you. If you're not a Christian, He doesn't.

If He dwells within you, then you must be a Christian. They go together. There is no incongruity. If you're a Christian, the Spirit is with you. The Holy Spirit is not a sort of later stage for mature Christians or a later blessing stage when you've suddenly reached a new plateau of Christian life.

If you're a Christian, then the Spirit dwells within you. Therefore, if you're a person who has too low an expectation of what the Spirit is doing, expect Him to be at work.

[18 : 41] Expect the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, to be renewing your mind, to be transforming your mind, to be leading you in paths of holiness and changing life and changing behavior and into godly living and so on.

So if you're a person who has too high an expectation of the Spirit and you expect too much too soon from the Spirit, then keep in mind the future resurrection perspective here. But if on the other hand, you're a person who expects too little of the Holy Spirit, then raise your expectations because the Spirit certainly dwells in you if you're a Christian.

As a result of this, Paul says by way of perhaps an implied exhortation in verses 12 and 13, So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if you live according to the flesh, you'll die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Our obligation then is not to sit back and let the Spirit work, but to actually expend our own effort and energy as well in His power.

We are to put to death the deeds of the body. That is sin in our life. Yes, it's true that the Spirit is not going to be an immediate cure for sin in our lives.

[20 : 01] We won't see the eradication of sin from our lives until the final resurrection. But, we are on the path to that. And we're on the path of putting to death sin in our lives now.

Now, if we're to do it in our own strength, we will be completely futile. As Paul had said in chapter 7, he does what he doesn't want to do and what he doesn't want to do, he does. But rather, Paul has said here in verse 13, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body.

Our obligation and response then to having the Spirit within us is that we are to work to change our lives with His power to eradicate sinful thinking, sinful speech, sinful attitudes, sinful actions in our lives.

The sense of those words, put to death the deeds of the body, is actually quite rigorous and ruthless. It is quite akin to Jesus' words that if your eye causes you to sin, cut it out.

If your arm causes you to sin, chop it off and so on. We are to be ruthless in seeing sin eradicated in our lives. Knowing that it won't happen totally until the resurrection day, but not sinning back complacently, waiting for then to happen either.

[21 : 14] So then, the Spirit is the guarantee of life, and the life that He guarantees is in particular life beyond the grave and the resurrection to heaven. In Charles Dickens' book, David Copperfield, when David Copperfield's mother remarries, David does not regain a father.

His stepfather was stern and severe and rather vicious. And David had to address him, if at all, very formally, never with intimacy.

The third thing about the Holy Spirit in this passage is that He enables us to address God and relate to God with intimacy and affection. So notice what verse 14 says.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. We belong in a family relationship with God. And he goes on to say, for you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

That is because God is a holy, heavenly God full of holiness and we're sinners, so we're afraid of Him, afraid of His judgment and His condemnation and all that sort of thing. No, not at all.

[22 : 25] We received a spirit of adoption or, in some translations, a spirit of sonship. That is, we belong in a family relationship to a holy and heavenly God. The term, and then we go on as a result of that, we cry, Abba, Father.

The Aramaic word expresses not father in the formal sense. If I was to say hello to my father and say, Father, what do you do or what have you done today or something, he'd think something was wrong and he'd expect me to say, Dad.

That's the sense of it. Not childish daddy so much as just the natural term of affection for your father. Dad, or whatever other term that you use. That is how we're to address God of all people.

The Holy Spirit enables us to call God Dad. And that is an amazing privilege. No Muslim calls Allah Dad.

No Jew calls God Dad or Father. Indeed, for Jews, they will not even use the name of God. And here, we are being told that we can call God Father, Dad.

[23 : 34] That is a great privilege. You know, when you meet somebody very important and you sort of say to them, you know, Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so, you use a sort of formal way of address and then they may give you permission to use first names.

That's a privilege. It is a sign of friendship in a way. I remember when I was living in England and helping out in our church, we came to a period of a new rector of the church.

The previous chap had retired soon after I got to England. He was a lovely man, a fine Christian minister. And everybody in the parish, without exception it seemed to me, called him rector.

Nobody called him Geoffrey at all. Rector. If everyone called me vicar, I'd go bananas, I think. The new chap came. Very different person. Gregarious sort of person.

And he said to people, call me Timothy. Christian names for Christian people was his little motto. Well, let me tell you, some of the old ladies could not cope with that. We have always called the rector rector and now we're supposed to call him Timothy.

[24 : 38] We can't do that. Now in a sense, what he was doing was extending friendship and affection and almost intimacy between Christian people.

Rightly so, in my opinion. Well, that's in a sense what God is doing and God's spirit in us enables us to call God Father, to call him Dad, to experience the intimate relationship of father to child.

One of the modern misconceptions is that all people are children of God. Sometimes you hear it said that every person is a child of God.

That's actually not true. We're all created by God but that does not make us children of God. You see, we're children of God not by being born human beings but by being reborn through faith in Christ.

The preserve of the title children of God is reserved only for Christian people or the people of God in the Old Testament. That is, we are adopted into God's family.

[25 : 42] We're not there by being human but we are adopted in through faith in Jesus Christ, God's only natural son if I can say that expression. Being adopted into God's family doesn't make us second-rate children either as we'll see in a minute.

We're there not by birth but by new birth and it is a great privilege that God has extended to us. So whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer for example or we pray any prayer and we say our Father don't presume upon that title for God.

It is a privilege to call our God Father. Well the fourth and final point about the Spirit's work builds on the previous one. If we're sons or children of God then Paul says in verse 17 we are also heirs.

And if children then heirs heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ he says in verse 17. And again Paul's perspective is future.

We are heirs of an inheritance that is yet to come to us that awaits us after our future resurrection. Not everything you see is available now fully to us as Christian people.

[26 : 54] and the inheritance of a glorious and perfect heaven awaits us in the future. Indeed right through chapter 8 of Romans Paul's perspective keeps on being future and every significant paragraph except the last keeps pushing the mind to look further and further into the future to resurrection and heaven.

So too this paragraph which looks forward to the inheritance that awaits us in the future. And again this is an extraordinary privilege. all the glory of heaven and its perfection was an inheritance that was reserved by God for Jesus.

But because we're adopted into God's family we have the full inheritance rights that Jesus has. So we are as Paul says here co-heirs with Jesus of the glorious riches of heaven.

We are on an equal footing in a sense with Jesus himself as heirs of the glory of heaven. We may be adopted but we have full inheritance rights with Jesus himself.

What a glorious privilege. So the Holy Spirit then guarantees us life. A life that is a future resurrection to perfection and heaven. He establishes or rather expresses or enables us to express an intimate relationship with God as his children and also reminds us that we are heirs of a glorious inheritance.

[28 : 28] What we see here about the work of God is the penultimate step of a sequence of steps that God has made through the Bible. When the Bible begins and God makes Adam and Eve God dwells intimately with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

There's no barriers between them. God walks in the Garden Adam and Eve are in the Garden. But when Adam and Eve sin they are expelled from the Garden. It's then guarded so that they and their successors and other human beings cannot re-enter the place of God's presence.

So the relationship between God and people is now remote and distant spoiled and marred by human sin. From then on through the Bible God makes approaches to human beings.

They can't come anywhere near him in effect. He's far too holy and they sinful. But God in his grace and love makes approaches step by step to humanity throughout the Bible.

Initially there are words spoken words of promise law dreams visions and so on. Symbols of presence like the burning bush where Moses came. Holy ground he had to take his shoes off.

[29 : 37] Symbols of fire and cloud and other appearances and so on. God coming close but certainly keeping a distance for human beings and God. The next step he took was when he gave instructions to Moses and other Israelite leaders to build a tent for God to dwell in.

There his glory would fill this tent. He would dwell in the midst of his people but there was still remoteness and distance. So there were very strict laws about who could come to the tent and when they could come and by what sacrifices they had to offer before they came and so on.

God still saying yeah I'm approaching you but keep your distance. your sin still spoils the relationship. A few hundred years later after the settlement in the land God made another step where he made in a sense that tent into a permanent temple.

Very ornate fixed building God dwelling in it but still very strict and rigorous rules about who could approach when they could approach all the sacrifices they need to make before they could approach and still God is saying I've come close but keep your distance your sin still spoils the relationship and then nearly a thousand years later God made the next step.

This time he came to earth in the form of Jesus human being God with us the New Testament tells us God making a closer step where we can now see the son of God in human form living our life here on earth but still there is a sense of distance Jesus then dying on the cross is not only God with us but God for us dying for us so that our sins will be dealt with and here now in this passage we see the next step the penultimate step of God to us now not only God with us and God for us but God in us his spirit the spirit of God the spirit of Jesus actually dwelling inside us coexisting with our own sin which remains a force within us as we saw last week and today as well but God coming even closer by the form of his spirit within us renewing our minds leading us into truth leading us into paths of godliness guaranteeing us life and future resurrection assuring us of a relationship with God that is a father-child relationship and assuring us that we are heirs of a glorious inheritance in heaven but there's one step yet to come because we're not yet in heaven and there in heaven not only God with us

[32 : 03] God for us God in us but there we'll see God face to face for there finally guaranteed by the spirit in us now our sin will be gone forever not only its penalty paid already by Jesus not only its power broken already by Jesus but finally its presence gone from our lives and there at last perfect in heaven guaranteed now by God's spirit a perfect life where we will be with God face to face for eternity the work of the spirit in us now is a pledge of the certainty of that for us there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus we will rise one day guaranteed by God's spirit to the perfection of heaven that is real hope my friends it is better than anything in this world can offer and better than any medicine can offer it is a hope of perfection with God forever it is something we're to long for as we'll see more of next week

Amen