

## Prayers

### To God

Lord Jesus, meet us today wherever we are and wherever we go; may we recognise Your voice, feel Your touch and be warmed in our hearts. Help us therefore to make a conscious effort to do what is right; not because You might condemn us for what goes wrong, but because You have already given us the power and authority to do what is right and to do it well. Thank You Lord Jesus, for the help you give us, every day. AMEN

### For Self

*Ask the Lord for courage;*

*Courage to do what is right when things seem hard*

*Courage to love when it seems easier to hate*

*Courage to have faith when the evidence appears to say the opposite*

*Courage to rest in the love and protection of Almighty God*

### For others

*Pray for your neighbours. Pray for those you do not know as well as those you do know. Wait on the Lord to see if there is anything you can or should be doing for the people Jesus has told you to 'love', as in 'love your neighbour'.*

## Meditation

This is what our God will do within us, if we let Him

He guides the heart to follow His ways,

and removes all inner desire

to parade gifts and graces for personal merit.

He stirs up the heart to offer love and care,

and removes all inner desire

to make an easy life at the expense of others.

He inspires the heart to speak of justice,

And removes all inner desire

to act with self righteousness, and hypocrisy.

He rouses the heart to see good and hate evil,

and removes all inner desire

to avoid hard decisions out of fear of others.

He stirs the heart to stand firm in faith,

and removes all inner desire

to do wrong, and He turns all life's trials to glory.

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## Bible Passage

### **Romans 8:9-17**

<sup>9</sup> Now you are not *'in the flesh'* but *'in the Spirit'*, if the Spirit of God really does dwell in you, and anyone who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, then the Spirit is life because you have been made right with God. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

<sup>12</sup> So then, friends, we have an obligation, but it is not to *'the flesh'*, or to live by what this means. <sup>13</sup> Now if you live according to *'the flesh'*, you will certainly die, but if you put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, you have not received a spirit of bondage to fall back again into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. So when we cry, "*Abba! Father!*" <sup>16</sup> the Spirit Himself bears witness with our own spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if we are children, then we are heirs, that is, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ! That is, if we suffer with him so that we may share His glory!

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## Bible study Review

This is profoundly moving passage. It begins by describing how the saved sinner may be filled with the *'Spirit of Christ'* (8:9) and be raised to *'new life'* (8:9-11), and ends with a glorious picture of the privileges of those who live *'in the Spirit'* and are the true children of God (8:15-17). This is where Paul first explains the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, here in Romans.

Now, in the early church, just as today, many wondered why the Holy Spirit was necessary, (as we see in Acts 19:1-7); people knew about Jesus and the Gospel, but they did not always understand the Spirit. Also, they knew from the Scriptures that the Spirit was the power of God working in the world, but had never connected this with the message of the Gospel.

Here, Paul answers these problems. He says that the Holy Spirit is indeed the same *'Spirit of God'* (8:9) identified throughout Scripture as God working through Creation (Gen 1:2), in Israel (1 Sam 10:10) and through prophets (Ezekiel 11:24). He explains that when Christ is accepted, the Spirit of God enters the life of the believer, and effects real change. The Christian's privilege is to live *'in the Spirit'*, which is not a spiritual characteristic; it is God's gracious gift of new life! Genesis tells us that the Spirit creates all life (Genesis 2:7), so the new life given through Jesus' resurrection can only come from the Spirit. As Paul says; *'if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in You'* (8:11)!

There is a clear distinction between those who live according to natural personal desires, meaning *'in the flesh'*, and those who live *'in the Spirit'* (8:12). After reading about Paul's angst over the earthly power of sin (7:14-25), we find here that the answer lies in the indwelling Spirit. But the Spirit must be allowed to do His work, and it is no good doubting the Spirit and seeking God's blessing at the same time! Just like Christ and indeed God Himself, the Spirit is either accepted by faith or rejected. There can be no halfway house of interested scepticism.

This perhaps, is why Paul warns about not accepting the indwelling of the Spirit (8:12-14). He says that those who give priority to their own inclinations reap the reward of all self-centredness, which is death, which is a fact of life not a threat! But Paul goes on to introduce a new theme, by describing those who are *'led by the Spirit'* as the true *'children of God'* (8:14). This is revolutionary, for God's true children are not just a race of people (the Jews), they are people in whom God dwells by His Spirit (8:10, 14f.)! All who believe in Jesus and in whom the Spirit dwells are God's children, and they receive His inheritance.

Now, elsewhere in Romans, the inheritance of God's people is identified as eternal life (6:22,23), but here, Paul describes the inheritance benefits available in this life. Stunningly, he describes the response of the human heart to God's mercy in granting 'adoption' into His family. For God is not just the Father of our *'Lord Jesus Christ'*, He responds to all who cry out, *'Abba! Father'* (8:15)! Just as any parent and child know the depth of their bond, so we may know this depth to our relationship with God! There is nothing else quite like this in Scripture. The saved soul finds rest in the Father's heart, like an orphaned child that finds a true Father, and is accepted, loved and given all the benefits of the Kingdom! The journey of suffering to reach this place of peace is replaced by the glory of God presence (8:17)!

There seems to be no end to the blessings and treasures of this passage. As we have read, we have moved from detailed descriptions of the Spirit (8:9-14), to deep spiritual matters concerning our intimate relationship with God (8:15-17). As we will see, Romans 8 continues with more memorable and deeply spiritual passages; there is more to come!

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## Going Deeper

### ***The work of Christ and the work of the Spirit***

Everything Paul has carefully explained about the Gospel contains detailed arguments about Jesus Christ. So how does the Holy Spirit fit into this? He was the one in whom God had placed His trust to be His Son and do the work of salvation; and He did this for all people through His death and resurrection. The Gospel Paul explained in famous passages of Romans such as in 1:16,17 and 3:20-26 requires our response by faith, and this faith in Jesus opens the door to our 'peace with God' (5:1) and the consequences of our 'being right with God'. However, the experience of real Christians after the first New Testament day of Pentecost was that they were empowered to live as Christians both individually and collectively, by the Holy Spirit. The life of faith was therefore a combination of the Christian's response of faith to Jesus and God's response which was firstly to grant salvation (as we have already seen) and also to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable the believer to put faith in action, as commanded by Christ.

The Holy Spirit was not new to the disciples. The Spirit was observed to come on Jesus 'as a dove' at his baptism (Matt 3:16), and John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptise not with water but with the 'Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matt 3:11). So after the great day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in the same way to the disciples (Acts 2:3), it was entirely natural that they should equate baptism not just with becoming a Christian through repentance and by faith in Christ, but with God's gift of the Holy Spirit. This was nothing abstract, but something to be experienced by the gracious giving by God of specific spiritual gifts. A form of the gift of tongues was given on the first day of Pentecost, but the New Testament has several well-known lists of other gifts that were observed in the lives of early Christians (Romans 12:6f., 1 Cor 12:4f., Eph 4:11f.).

### ***Living in the Spirit***

The early Christian community, including Paul, were deeply conscious of living 'in the Spirit'; it was their real experience, and Paul links with this experience by what he says in verses 9 to 11 of our passage. Verse 9 states what was the obvious to them; for to be a Christian was to make the decision to turn away from living 'in the flesh' like everyone else in the world, and to know with full assurance that they belonged to Christ because of the 'Spirit of Christ' they knew to be within them. The Holy Spirit was no 'new' thing, but the Spirit of God who was previously present with Christ, now present with them. Paul's words about the Holy Spirit were not driven by the kind of deep thinking which surrounds his description of the saving work of Jesus, as in 3:21-26, they were a description of what a real Christian could expect to know.

In verses 10 and 11, Paul effectively summarises everything he previously said about sin and its consequences and the alternative of believing in Jesus. He repeats this, but this time, he introduces the Spirit, so whereas 'the body is dead to sin' because of 'Christ ... in you', the righteousness of being 'made right with God' is described as 'life' in the 'Spirit' (8:10). Paul then closely relates the Spirit to the resurrection of Jesus and the new life this gives the believer; 'He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life ... through His Spirit, who lives in you.' (8:11). You can see that everywhere, there is a strong connection between the life of the believer and the Spirit, because for Paul, the two are inseparable.

### ***The 'added value' of the Holy Spirit***

The big question is this. What kind of life does God want His people to have? It is all very well to say that the Christian life must be devoid of everything that is associated with a worldly life of sin, but what does this say about what a Christian should be like, and what a Christian should do? How can a Christian live within a fallen world and do so in a way that is personally fulfilling? Paul's answer is to live 'by the Spirit of God' (8:13/14). This fits what happened to the disciples and was also true of Paul's personal experience. It was only when the Spirit came in power that they had a life to live that was distinctly Christian (see Acts 2:43-47) and in which they had something to do for God.

As Paul begins to speak about the life of a Christian, he moves away from his previous theological points which were all about comparing the life of 'the flesh' and the new life of the 'Spirit'. In verse 14, He speaks about being 'children of God'. Much has been made of the fact that Paul does not use the Greek word for a small child, but a word that may refer to a child who has reached an age of maturity, at which they are given responsibility and begin to take on work that contributes to a household. The debate about the Greek word is not as clear as we would like, but the text of this Scripture is clear. To be a child of God is a real human

experience because it involves a two-way relationship with God, in which we have privileges as well as duties, and God is a Father to be loved as well as obeyed.

### ***Adoption as children of God***

God has graciously accepted us through our faith in His Son Jesus. He therefore accepts us as by 'adoption' (8:15), but for all Paul's previous talk about being a slave to 'righteousness' instead of being a slave to sin (6:16-19), he tells us that the new life is not intended by God to be one form of fearsome slavery in exchange for another. A real relationship with God is one of love, and Paul indicates this not by writing it down in so many words, but by announcing the right of a Christian to call God 'Abba'. This is the word used by a young child for a father, and was famously used by Jesus on the night before He died whilst in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36), where He called out to God in agony; 'Abba, Father!' This is a powerful word, and for all people, it evokes many personal pictures relating to parents. Of course, most people's experience of their fathers and mothers are good, and the passage appeals to this. It is the job of every expositor and preacher to make sure that when the text is explained, those who do not have a good experience of parenthood should be safeguarded, wherever possible, through the use of judicious words.

Then in a sentence which neatly describes the deep empathy that exists between a real parent and child, Paul says 'the Spirit Himself bears witness with our own spirit that we are children of God.' (8:16) The nature of human relationships is well understood, but why should we suppose that it is like our relationship with God, especially when there are many people who experience great difficulty in their relationships? The truth is this; Scripture constantly teaches us that our relationship with God is like human relationships, for example, Jesus is described variously as our 'prophet', 'priest' and 'king', and God is described as a 'warrior', and a 'comforter', amongst many other examples. In the midst of the Biblical record, it would seem almost inconceivable that the deepest and most meaningful of relationships, that of parent and child, should not be used to describe the human relationship with God. This passage of Scripture goes further than any other in this respect.

The passage concludes by building on the implications of the relationship between God and His 'children'. It reminds us that the Christian inherits a right under God to claim the heritage of God's glory, insofar as we have shared in the sufferings of Christ. This is a reminder to all that the new life in the Spirit is exactly the same as the resurrection life, it is different descriptions of the same thing. The disciples were called to follow the path Jesus trod, which included suffering and persecution 'for the sake of the Kingdom' (Matt 5:10 etc.), and this is the pathway that leads, through baptism and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to the glories of Heaven.

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## **Application**

### ***Discipleship issues***

This life of faith is characterised by an inner knowledge of the 'fatherhood' of God and it is a relationship that relies on truthfulness and trust. Above all, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not something accidental or humanly unconscious. The believer knows faith, knows Jesus and is aware of the presence of God by His Holy Spirit. This can be summed up in the word 'assurance'. It is also what John Wesley, the great evangelist, meant when he preached about the 'assurance' of faith, which has now been summarised in this famous fourfold description of salvation:

1. All need to be saved
2. All can be saved
3. All can know they are saved
4. All can know they are saved completely.

It would be inconceivable to Paul (and to Wesley!) that people would call themselves Christians and yet doubt that they knew the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, or had the kind of assurance of faith and confidence in their relationship with God which lies at the heart of our passage today. It would be inconceivable to him that people might regard the Holy Spirit as some kind of 'optional extra' for people in the church who call themselves 'charismatic', or 'pentecostal', for example. In the same way, for us today, the new life lived by all disciples of Jesus and all Christians, however described, is the life of the Spirit! All who profess faith in Christ, and are baptised and taught the faith, are expected to receive the Holy Spirit, not simply in some general sense, but in the specific sense of knowing with certainty that they have a father and child relationship with Almighty God! This is the true heritage and right of all by faith, and God intends nothing less for anyone.

I am well aware that there are many who are wary even of the words 'Holy Spirit'. Organisers of courses such as 'Alpha' testify that a significant number of participant churches 'miss out the Holy Spirit bit' as they regard it as optional, however much the course organisers insist that it is essential and cannot be left out! However, I can conclude nothing else from this passage of Scripture except this: unless the Holy Spirit is openly at the heart of the life of God's people, both personally and collectively, then what we are dealing with is but a mere shadow of true faith in the believer and the true church of God. Why be happy with anything less than the full benefits of faith and the true liberty of the children of God? We will read more about this tomorrow!

### ***Things to do***

- Reflect on whether you have ever called out to God 'heart to heart' about any important matter. What was this about, and why did this happen. Do you think it fair to say that your soul cried out to God in the way described here in this passage? If not, then ask yourself whether you are experiencing Christian faith in the way that God has intended it for you.
- If you do not know the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, then go to a friend at church in whom you can confide, and ask him or her to pray for you, that you may know in your heart that which you feel to be missing

### ***Questions for groups***

1. *What do the first three verses of our passage tell us about the life of faith? Where can we go in Scripture to read anything else that confirms this?*
2. *Discuss in your group how you know that the Holy Spirit is real and present both in your own life and in that of your church community.*
3. *What does it mean to you to be an 'heir' of God, and to share in His glory?*

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## **Final Prayer**

**You have called each of us to our home, our families, our places of work and our places of worship. May we honour You by respecting all who share these blessings, and by fulfilling Your command to 'love one another'. Hear this our prayer, Lord Jesus, and establish Your Kingdom in our midst. AMEN**