

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

Part 1 - Romans 8:1–11 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Romans 8 is one of those chapters that requires us to slow down and offer a bit of preface teaching.

CONTEXT: Last week we observed the Law of Proportion at play — in chapter 7, Paul used the word “law” over 30 times in 25 verses. He made it clear that the Law of God is both **HOLY** and **HELPLESS**. The law itself cannot sanctify us any more than it could justify us. There must be a third variable added to the equation in order to bring balance. That third variable is the third person of the Godhead — the blessed Holy Spirit.

So many of us in modern Christianity are like those disciples of John in **Acts 19**, who had not even heard there is a Holy Spirit. If we have heard of Him, we presume He is not for us. Perhaps we are even frightened of an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

ILLUSTRATION — “The Holy Ghost”: I remember growing up at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, where the Pastor preached from the King James Version, where the Holy Spirit is called the Holy Ghost. He would say, “Friend, you just never know when the Holy Ghost is going to show up.” Now, as an 8-year-old boy, the fact that a Ghost might show up at any time brought me no comfort at all. In fact, I would lie in bed at night and pray, “God, protect me from werewolves, vampires, and the Holy Ghost.” But I discovered years later that the Holy Spirit is the best friend a Christian can have — and the only avenue by which he can walk in the power of God.

ILLUSTRATION — Walking Where Jesus Walked: Recently we had to reschedule the trip to Israel due to the unpredictable conflict with Iran. Lord willing, it will be over within the year. Occasionally someone will ask me, “Pastor, why on earth would you ever go back over there after getting caught up in the war on October 7, 2023?” I simply say, “Because I think you will be a better believer if you walk where Jesus walked.” Most people would agree it would be at least slightly better for you to visit Israel once in your life. But suppose you could do better than that — suppose you could travel back in time and witness the events of Jesus’ life. Suppose you could be on the boat when He calmed the storm. Suppose you were in the graveyard when He cast a legion of demons out of the Gerasene demoniac. Or what if you had been there when Jesus commanded Lazarus — four days dead, to the point the KJV says “he stinketh” — to come forth, and at the word of Christ even rigor mortis was eradicated? Do you suppose you would have a better quiet time, or sing more victoriously, if you had seen those things? Sure you would! Then consider the audacity of the words of Jesus:

John 16:7 (ESV)

7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

What on earth could be better than walking in the physical presence of the Lord Jesus Christ? Jesus said the presence of the Holy Spirit is actually better than walking among the Twelve and seeing the works of Jesus Himself. In fact, Jesus said, “Don’t obey my Great Commission until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

The worst thing you can possibly do is attempt to accomplish the work of God in the power of the flesh! You will be like the seven sons of Sceva, who tried to cast out a demon “in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches” — to whom the evil spirit replied, “*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*” (Acts 19:15, *ESV*).

You must walk in the power of the Spirit, or the work is doomed to failure. Not only that — it is the person and work of the Spirit who applies the work of Christ on the cross. What Jesus accomplished for your **JUSTIFICATION**, the Spirit applies for your **SANCTIFICATION**.

To understand Romans 8, there are four theological questions you must have categories for:

- What is salvation?
- What is a human?
- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

1. WHAT IS SALVATION?

When Christians use the word “saved,” we typically mean something that happened in the past. But the New Testament speaks of salvation in three tenses — past, present, and future: Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification.

Past Tense — Justification

2 Timothy 1:8–9 (ESV)

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace...

- Justification is the judicial declaration that you are righteous because of Christ.
- Justification is all of God and none of man.
- Justification happens instantly and completely.
- When you are saved, you are as justified as any Christian in all of history — Paul, Billy Graham.

- When you are saved, you are as justified as you will ever be. In heaven you will be no more justified than you are right now.

Future Tense — Glorification

Romans 5:9 (ESV)

9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Glorification speaks of the day when the wrath of God is finally poured out on sinners — but not on you, if you are saved. You will be glorified.

1 Corinthians 15:51–53 (ESV)

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Glorification is completely and totally a work of God, whereby He changes your physical body into a spiritual, eternal body.

Present Tense — Sanctification

2 Corinthians 2:15 (ESV)

15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,

Justification and glorification happen instantly and completely — they are totally God's doing. But sanctification is gradual and progressive, and it involves human cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

You must understand these tenses, because each one appears in Romans 8, and it is vital that you keep them straight.

2. WHAT IS A HUMAN?

A human being is made up of three distinct parts — body, soul, and spirit.

- Body — the material part of you.
- Soul — your mind, will, and emotions.
- Spirit — your eternal self.

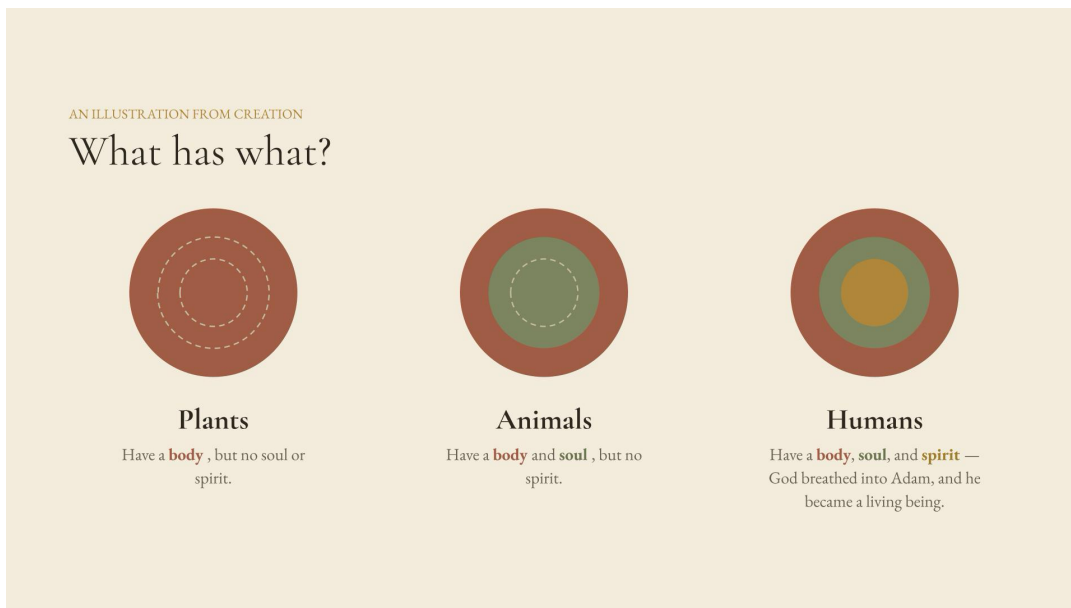
You are a spirit, which has a soul, that inhabits a body.



Paul has already established that apart from Christ you are spiritually dead in your trespasses and sins. When you are born again, you are regenerated by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

You may understand the distinction between the three parts this way:

- Plants — have a body.
- Animals — have a body and a soul.
- Humans — have a body, a soul, and a spirit.



Now take what we know about the three tenses of salvation and what we know about the three parts of a person, and combine the two:



- Your spirit HAS BEEN saved — Justification.
- Your soul IS BEING saved — Sanctification.
- Your body WILL BE saved — Glorification.

3. WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is not merely a power or an influence. He is a person — not an “it,” but a “He.”

a. The Holy Spirit Is a Person

John 16:13 (ESV)

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...

Jesus used personal pronouns for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit possesses knowledge, intelligence, will, love, and goodness. He speaks, searches, intercedes, testifies, leads, commands, calls — and He can be grieved.

b. The Holy Spirit Is God

Everything true of God is also true of the Holy Spirit.

- He is eternal (**Hebrews 9:14**) — He will never leave us through weakness, age, or death.
- He is everywhere (**Psalms 139:7–10**) — I cannot be everywhere my people need me, but the Holy Spirit is already there.
- He knows everything (**1 Corinthians 2:10–11**) — I cannot fully understand my own heart, much less someone else's, but the Holy Spirit knows everything.

Someone may complain, “That church makes too much of the Holy Spirit.” But He is God — you cannot make too much of God!

c. The Holy Spirit Has Always Been at Work

- **In creation** — the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:1–2).
- **Under the Law** — God placed His Spirit upon Joshua (Numbers 27:18).
- **Through the prophets** — the Spirit empowered people to speak God’s Word (1 Samuel 10:6).
- **In the life of Jesus** — Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, the Spirit descended on Him at His baptism, and He ministered in the Spirit’s power.
- **In the church** — at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in power.

In the Old Testament the Spirit often came upon particular people for particular tasks. Under the new covenant, He permanently indwells every believer:

John 14:16 (ESV)

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

d. The Holy Spirit Serves Believers

- **He gives new life** — Jesus said we must be born of the Spirit. The Spirit applies to us the salvation Christ purchased for us.
- **He assures us of salvation** — “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16, ESV).
- **He frees us to live a holy life** — Romans 7 describes our struggle with sin; Romans 8 gives the answer: “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2, ESV).
- **He guides us into truth** — “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13, ESV). A preacher can tell you about the wonders of Scripture, but the Holy Spirit leads you into them.

ILLUSTRATION — Mammoth Cave: It is like someone describing Mammoth Cave to you — the stalactites, stalagmites, underground streams, and crystal-covered walls. Then a guide arrives with a light and personally leads you inside. The Holy Spirit does more than describe the truth; He opens our eyes so we can see it. The same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures helps us understand the Scriptures. When you study your Bible with the Spirit’s help, you have the Author guiding you.

- **He calls and directs ministry** — the Spirit called Barnabas and Saul into missionary service (Acts 13:2–4), and directed where Paul and his companions should — and should not — go (Acts 16:6–7).

- **He empowers ministry** — “And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4, ESV). Ministry does not succeed through human talent alone.
- **He produces worship** — “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:18–19, ESV). Spirit-filled believers sing, worship, and give thanks.

The Holy Spirit is God. He lives within every believer — He gives us life, assures us, frees us, teaches us, directs us, empowers us, and moves us to worship.

4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

Ephesians 5:15–18 (ESV)

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

“Be filled” is an emphatic imperative — a command — literally, “be being kept filled with the Spirit.” It carries the idea of conscious continuation. It is not an option; you will answer to God as to whether you were filled with the Spirit.

What does it mean to “get drunk with wine”? It means to surrender your sobriety to the influence of alcohol. When you are drunk:

- You think differently.
- You respond differently.
- Your morals are altered — I’ve heard it said, “It makes your moral brake fluid leak.”
- You engage in things you never would in a sober state of mind.

The influence of alcohol is not entirely unlike the influence of the Holy Spirit. I don’t mean you stagger around uncontrollably — in fact, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. But under His influence you do think differently, you do respond differently, your morals are altered, and you engage in things you would otherwise have avoided in the flesh.

The word **FILLED** is the Greek word **plēroō (πληρόω)**, which carries a threefold idea: **pressure, permeation, and total control.**

a. Pressure

In Bible times, plēroō described a sail being filled with the wind — acted upon by an outside force and carried places it could not go in its own strength.

- Matthew records that Jesus was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (**Matthew 4:1**).
- Luke clarifies: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (**Luke 4:1**).
- Mark makes it even stronger: “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (**Mark 1:12**) — the Greek is *ekballō*.

b. Permeation

THE KOOL-AID PRINCIPLE: Drop a packet of Kool-Aid into clear water and watch as the color permeates the liquid. In the same way, the Holy Spirit will permeate literally every area of your life.

- He will permeate your thoughts.
- He will permeate your work — I’m so sick of people living a mundane life.
- He will permeate your marriage and your parenting.
- He will wage war on your idols — you can’t worship college football and be filled with the Spirit. You can enjoy it, but not worship it.

c. Total Control

To understand the influence of a Spirit-filled life, look at how *plēroō* is used elsewhere in Scripture:

- **John 16:6** — “Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.”
- **Luke 5:26** — amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe.
- **Luke 6:11** — the Jewish leaders “were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.”

We are emotional creatures. We experience a variety of emotions every day, but occasionally an experience tips the scales. You get a phone call that your best friend has passed away — sorrow dominates your life in that moment. You find out you got the job you’ve been praying for — joy fills your life. It tipped the scales.

Here is what I see in most Christians’ lives: the scales are balanced. They want a little bit of the Spirit — they like good music and emotionally appealing sermons. But they don’t go home and study the Word; they don’t allow the truth of Scripture to drive them to the prayer closet. They balance it out with sports and hobbies! To be filled is to be all-out dominated by the Spirit of God.

How Do We Become Filled with the Spirit?

- **You have to want it** — you have to reach the point where you realize God knows more about life than you do. I’ve never seen someone filled with the Spirit against his will.
- **You have to seek it:**

Luke 11:11–13 (ESV)

11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

- **You cultivate the fullness of the Spirit through the Word of God and prayer** — people want me to say, “Get up out of that seat, let me lay hands on you and anoint you with oil, and we’ll call Benny Hinn to blow on you and knock you over about three pews.” Friend, we can do all of that, but when you get up, you are still going to have to read your Bible and pray to be filled with the Spirit.

LET ME SHOW YOU — compare the two passages:

The Result	“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18)	“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16)
Teaching and singing	Eph 5:19	Col 3:16b
Giving thanks	Eph 5:20–21	Col 3:17
Proper family relationships	Eph 5:22–6:4	Col 3:18–21
Proper business relationships	Eph 6:5–9	Col 3:22–25

Letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly has the same effect as being filled with the Spirit!

INVITATION: *The question is not whether He is resident — but whether He is president.*