

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

Part 2 — Romans 8:1–17 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Last time, in Part 1, we did the preface work — we laid the theological foundation. Today we roll up our sleeves and walk through the text itself. Notice the bookends of the pericope: **Verse 1 opens in a courtroom — the gavel comes down, and the verdict is no condemnation.** Verse 15 ends in a **living room — a child climbing up into his Father’s lap, crying, “Abba! Father!”**

From acquitted criminal to adopted son. And the Person who walks you down that hallway is the Person of the **Holy Spirit**.

CONTEXT: Remember last week, we answered four questions you must have categories for before this chapter opens up:

- **What is salvation?** — past, present, and future tense: justification, sanctification, glorification.
- **What is a human?** — body, soul, and spirit: your spirit has been saved, your soul is being saved, your body will be saved.
- **Who is the Holy Spirit?** — not an “it,” not a force, but the third person of the Godhead.
- And **what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?** — pressure, permeation, total control; not whether He is resident, but whether He is president.

And remember what we observed about the **Law of Proportion**: in chapter six, describing the war within, Paul never mentions the Spirit. In chapter seven, once. In chapter eight — twenty-one times.



The chapters that diagnose the war are nearly silent about the Spirit; the chapter that wins the war can hardly stop talking about Him.

Today, we have four works of the Spirit in seventeen verses — *His Perfect Pardon, His Provided Potential, His Promised Power, and His Paternal Privilege.*

1. THE SPIRIT’S PERFECT PARDON (ROMANS 8:1–4)

Romans 8:1–4 (ESV)

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

V1. Everybody say “**now.**” Not later. Not when you clean yourself up. Not when you finally get consistent in your quiet time.

Now condemnation does not simply evaporate – where did it go? A holy God cannot sweep sin under the rug of the universe and pretend the mess isn’t there. If there is no condemnation for me, then somewhere, somehow, condemnation must have landed on someone else.

Look at verse 3: God “*condemned sin in the flesh.*” That is the flesh of Christ on the Cross.

GREEK NOTE: The word in verse 1 is the noun *kata-krima* (κατάκριμα) — not just a guilty verdict, but the sentence *and* the punishment that follows it. The word in verse 3 is the verb *katé-krinen* (κατέκρινεν) — “he condemned.” Same root. Same courtroom.

Paul is showing you where your condemnation went: the noun of your condemnation in verse 1 disappears from your record because the verb happened in verse 3. At the cross, God did not ignore your sin; He executed it, in the flesh of His own Son.

Paul stated it similarly in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

ILLUSTRATION: On July 29, 2026, **Dr. Anthony Fauci** sat before a Senate Hearing and pled the 5th - 111 times. Why?? Because the pardon that was granted to him by President Biden no longer applied to his testimony before the Senate. The sweeping power of a Presidential Pardon is powerful – but it is nothing compared to the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ. ***You see, the Judge did not dismiss your case; He didn’t simply issue a Pardon — He actually served your sentence.*** A Presidential pardon excuses a crime; the cross exhausts the penalty.

This is why we believe that you are eternally secure in Jesus Christ. There is nothing left over you to suffer — no verdict, no sentence, no prison — because there was nothing left of your offenses after Calvary.

Well, which sins did he pay for? Just the ones prior to conversion? No – all sin you will ever commit. Think of it – all of your sin was in the future when Jesus died on the cross.

V2. Look at verse 2, because Paul speaks of two laws: “*the law of the Spirit of life has set you free ... from the law of sin and death.*”

He is not talking about the Ten Commandments in this verse. He is using “law” the way we speak of a **principle** - a fixed operating principle, a force that works on you whether you believe in it or not. The principle of sin and death are null and void as it pertains to you.

ILLUSTRATION — The Higher Law: The principle of **gravity** says a hunk of aluminum weighing hundreds of thousands of pounds will not float in the air – it’s sentenced to the ground. And yet nearly every day I can look up over Fernandina Beach and watch a jet draw a white line across the sky. Did the principle of gravity get repealed? Not for one

second — gravity is pulling on that aircraft the whole time. But a higher principle — the principle of **aerodynamics**, the law of lift — has *overcome* the law of gravity.

So it is with you, Christian. The law of sin and death is still down there, still pulling — you will feel its tug until the day you see Jesus. But you are not governed by it anymore. A higher law has taken over: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

The secret of the Christian life is not to fight gravity harder — it is to walk in the Spirit, abide in Christ, and the higher law carries you.

V3. And notice what **verse 3** says about the law of Moses — it was “weakened by the flesh.” There is nothing wrong with the law; there is something wrong with us.

The law is like a mirror. A mirror can show you the dirt on your face, but no man has ever washed his face with a mirror. The law diagnoses; it cannot cure. So God did what the law could not do: He sent His own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh” — real flesh, yet without sin — and dealt with sin at its root.

V4. Verse 4 says the righteous requirement of the law is now “fulfilled in us” — not **by** us, **in** us. That little passive verb is the gospel in miniature.

You are not the **engine** of righteousness; you are the **theater** of righteousness. The Spirit is the engine.

The GOAL is to be YOU full of HIM. You see, the goal isn't to erase you. God made you who you are for a reason. The goal isn't to make you me — the world only needs one of me.
The GOAL is to be YOU full of HIM.

The Spirit's perfect pardon...secondly...

2. THE SPIRIT'S PIVOT POINT (ROMANS 8:5–8)

Note my emphasis - Romans 8:5–8 (ESV)

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their **minds** on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the **mind** on the flesh is death, but to set the **mind** on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the **mind** that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

There is that word again — **5 times in 3 verses**.

We have met Paul's word *phro-nēma* before: not a stray, passing thought, but the settled bent of the mind — which way it leans when you let go of the wheel. Have you ever had a car that pulls to the right? Where does your mind pull? That's the word here.

Where does your mind go when it is off the leash?

When your head hits the pillow, when you're standing in line at Publix with nothing to scroll — where does your mind *drift*? To a grudge you keep re-litigating? To something sensual?

To money? To the ballgame? Your default setting is telling you which power is at work in you. ***The tilt of the mind reveals the state of the man.***

ILLUSTRATION — The Sunflower: We have a neighbor that planted sunflowers all over his yard earlier this year. When I drive past his yard on the way to work, the flowers are all facing and open toward the EAST. When I return in the evening, they are all facing the WEST. All day long, without a single lesson in botany, those flowers track the sun across the sky — scientists call it **heliotropism**. Nobody straps them down and forces them; nobody sends them to sunflower school. They turn because it is their *nature* to turn.

That is what Paul means by setting the mind. A person made alive by the Spirit becomes heliotropic — all day long, the face keeps swinging back toward the Son. S-O-N.

But understand the sobering flip side: **the flesh is heliotropic too**. The mind set on the flesh tracks sin and temptation all day without ever being taught — nobody has to send your flesh to school. The question is not *whether* your mind tracks something. The question is what sun it follows.

APPLY: Have you ever looked at other Christians and thought — why do the things that tug on me not seem to tug on them? Listen, 9 times out of 10, it's because they start their day differently than you. They sit down, open a bible, and fix their face like flint toward the SON. Then throughout the day, they listen to sermons, books, worship music, tracking the SON across the sky.

Listen, that's not a good way to live; it's the only way to make it. Notice what the text says - The mind of the flesh is ***"hostile to God"*** — not neutral toward God, not casually uninterested in God — hostile. It ***"does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."***

And verse 8 closes the coffin lid: ***"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*** Not ***"do not."*** **Cannot.**



LISTEN: A man cannot consistently perform in a way that is inconsistent with his mindset.

Later Paul will say it this way - **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

Why do I call the SOUL (Mind, Will, Emotions) the Spirit's Pivot Point? Let me illustrate:

Not only the Spirit's perfect pardon...the Spirit's Pivot Point...

3. THE SPIRIT'S PROMISED POWER (ROMANS 8:9–11)

Romans 8:9–11 (ESV)

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

“You, however.” For four verses Paul has been describing *them* — the mind of the flesh, hostile, unable. Then he turns and looks the Roman believers full in the face: you, however, are not in the flesh.

And that little word “if” — “if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” — as we have seen before, is a first-class condition in the Greek: “if, and it is so.” You could fairly read it **since**.

GREEK NOTE: The verb “dwells” is *oikei* (οἰκεῖ), from *oikos* — a house, a home. It means to take up residence, to settle down, to be *at home*. **This is not hotel language; it is homestead language.** The Spirit of God did not check into you for the weekend with His bags still packed. He moved in. He hung His pictures on the walls.

Notice too that verse 9: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” What makes a Christian a Christian is not a denominational label, a baptismal certificate, or a grandmother who prayed — it is the indwelling Spirit of God.

V10. Then verse 10 tells the truth about your body: it is “dead because of sin” — dying, decaying, headed for the grave. You do not need me to prove that verse; your body preaches it to you every morning when you climb out of bed. Knees testify. Backs testify. The only remedy for your body is resurrection.

V11. But verse 11 answers with a promise: the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, and He will one day give resurrection life to that mortal body of yours — that is your glorification, guarantee.

And in the meantime, that same resurrection power is not lying dormant until the last trumpet. He animates you *now* — power to resist temptation, power to put sin to death, power to live for God.

ILLUSTRATION — Living by Flashlight: Living in Florida, we know what happens when a hurricane rolls through, the lines come down, and for days the whole neighborhood is dark. Then the crews from the power company do their work — and the moment comes when the line is repaired, the grid is live, and the current is humming through the walls of your house.

Now imagine walking into a den that evening and finding the family huddled around a flashlight, eating cold pork and beans out of the can. You’d say, **“Folks — the power is on. It was restored this afternoon. All you have to do is flip the switch.”**

I fear that describes an enormous amount of Christian living. The line was repaired at an

empty tomb outside Jerusalem. The power was turned on at Pentecost. The current is in the walls — the very power that raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in your body right now. And some of us are living by flashlight: white-knuckled willpower.

When you give in to temptation, hear me say it again — it is never for lack of Holy Spirit power; it is for lack of willpower to flip the switch. Walk over to the wall. Ask Him. Yield to Him. The power is already on.

Not only the Spirit's perfect pardon...the Spirit's pivot point...the Spirit's promised power...

4. THE SPIRIT'S PATERNAL PRESENCE (ROMANS 8:12–17)

Romans 8:12–17 (ESV)

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

You Owe the Flesh Nothing (vv. 12–13) **GREEK NOTE:** “We are debtors” is *ophe-i-lé-tai* (ὀφειλέται) — people under financial obligation, people who owe. We are debtors — *not* to the flesh. Some of us live as if we owe a debt to the flesh; we report to it in the mornings, return to it throughout the day.

What exactly has your flesh ever done for you that you should keep making payments on it? The flesh never pardoned you, never empowered you, never raised anybody from the dead. The flesh only enslaves you. You owe it nothing. It has no authority over you.

ILLUSTRATION: CAN I CONFESS SOMETHING? I really don't like HOA's. Or better stated, they don't seem to like me. I don't play well with others sometimes. I'm a redneck, just not the ideal client for an HOA. I used to skin deer in my backyard. They said, “You can't do that”. I said, show me in the HOA rules and regulations where it says anything about skinning deer in your back yard. Well, when I moved to FL, I received a letter from my HOA about a property I no longer owned. It was one of the greatest pleasures of my life to write back explaining to them what they could do with their rules and regulations.

Listen, some of you need to write a letter to your flesh, reminding it that it has not authority over you anymore.

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Now watch how Paul explains sonship — by contrast. He compares the **Spirit of adoption** to a **spirit of slavery**, and the slave's atmosphere is fear.

GREEK NOTE: “Fear” is *phóbos* (φόβος). Its oldest sense was “flight” — the terror that makes a creature run. It is the emotion that seized Adam when he heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden — and he ran and hid in the trees.

As a rabbit bolts from the presence of a man, fallen man bolts from the presence of God.

And this is the atmosphere of every works-based religion on earth: behave well, and you creep hopefully toward the King; behave badly, and you run and hide from the One you've offended, with a dark cloud of doubt trailing you everywhere.

That is life before adoption. ***But perfect love casts out that kind of fear.*** "Adoption" means to be legally placed as a son — installed with the full standing of an adult son in the family.

ILLUSTRATION — Out of the Sewer: In the first-century Roman world, a father held the power of life and death over his newborn. Children who were unwanted — the weak, the sickly, many baby girls — were routinely "exposed": carried out and left in a field, or worse, dropped into the sewer. The idea was, if the gods had a plan for the child, let the gods come save it.

We even have a letter, dated 1 B.C., from a husband named Hilarion to his expectant wife: *"If — good luck to you! — you bear offspring: if it is a male, let it live; if it is a female, expose it."* He wrote that the way you'd leave instructions about the groceries.

Archaeologists excavating one Roman site found the remains of nearly a hundred infants — not buried, not mourned — cast into a sewer that ran beneath a brothel. That was the world into which Christianity was born. And something possessed those early Christians to rebel against the whole culture: they went to the fields and the drains, lifted the children out, washed them off, and adopted them as their own. Why? It was not a financial motivation — an heir kept the estate together; a foundling added nothing. It was a **theological** motivation.

They knew their own story. Scripture calls Adam a *"son of God"* (Luke 3:38), but Jesus told Adam's fallen children, *"You are of your father the devil"* (John 8:44). Apart from grace we were not merely godless; we were anti-God — not just non-Christian, but of the spirit of antichrist. And what would the High and Holy King of Glory do with a band of rebels like us? He would have been fully within the realm of justice to leave us in the sewer we chose. No angel would have blamed Him.

Yet far from that — He sent His only begotten Son down into the filth to pay our penalty; He declared us justified; He imputed to us the very righteousness of Christ; and then He did what **J. I. Packer** calls the highest privilege the gospel offers — higher even than justification: He climbed down, lifted us out, washed us in the blood of His Son, and adopted us as His own. ***The child of the enemy, adopted as a son, given every right of a son.***

And understand what standing adoption conferred. Roman adoption did not make you a ward of the house; it made you an heir with the **full rights of an adult son.**

A newborn cannot walk, speak, sign documents, or draw on the family wealth — but the believer can do all of these the moment he is adopted.

And the proof of your adoption is that you have this Spirit, is a cry: “Abba! Father!”

Abba appears only three times in the whole New Testament — here, in Galatians 4:6, and once on the lips of Jesus Himself.

It is not the babyish “da-da” it is sometimes made out to be; in its ancient usage it was a word of deep reverence *and* deep intimacy — the address of a son who honors his father’s authority and trusts his father’s heart, both at once.

Verse 16: *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”*— The Holy Spirit testifying alongside your Human spirit, in the courtroom of your heart: *this one belongs to the Father.*

And then verse 17 draws the staggering conclusion — say it with the logic of an estate lawyer: if children, *then heirs*.

GREEK NOTE: “Heirs” is *klēro-nó-moi* (κληρονόμοι) — and then Paul stacks a compound on top of it: *syn-klēro-nómoi* (συγκληρονόμοι), **fellow heirs with Christ**.

Not heirs competing for shares, each getting a sliver of the estate — co-heirs, jointly inheriting everything the Son inherits. Whatever glory the Father has appointed for Jesus, you are written into the will alongside Him.

All of the spiritual promises of God to His people are promises to you, child of God. And when did the Father decide to do this? Listen:

Ephesians 1:4–5 (ESV)

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

Before the foundation of the world. Before Adam ever took a bite of that fruit. Knowing every sin you would ever commit, knowing all of your unbelief, for no reason within yourself, God set His affection on you and said, “You will be My child.”

But Paul will not let us skip the last clause of verse 17: “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Why is there suffering between adoption and inheritance?

ILLUSTRATION: You see in the first century, adoption came in two parts: first the legally binding agreement, and later the public ceremonial declaration, when the son was presented to the world. Our adoption has the same two beats. The papers are signed — verse 15. The public ceremony is still ahead:

Romans 8:22–23 (ESV)

22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Already adopted — not yet presented. And between the signing and the ceremony, there is groaning. There is suffering.

CONCLUSION / INVITATION: So gather it up — four works of the one Spirit in seventeen verses.

- His **Perfect Pardon:** no condemnation, because the condemnation fell on Christ.
- His **Pivot Point:** a mind that can tilt toward God and a life that can finally please Him.
- His **Promised Power:** the Spirit of the empty tomb at home in your body — the current is in the walls.
- And His **Paternal Privilege:** lifted from the sewer, placed as a son, given the family cry and the family fortune.

Now someone here is asking the only question left: ***“How can I get into God’s family? How can I get Him to adopt me?”***

I read a story this week - Two young men from New England were called into the service of their country in World War I — one the son of a very **wealthy** family, the other a **poor** boy whose widowed mother was all he had in the world. Placed in the same company, they became inseparable friends.

One day a letter reached the poor boy: his mother had died. He was alone in the world now, and his wealthy friend consoled him and stuck closer than ever. They went through several battles together — until one night in France, the rich young man fell, seriously wounded, dying on the battlefield. His friend crawled to him and held him in his arms.

And the dying man said, “Take my blood-soaked shirt off my body. When you get home — if God lets you live through all of this — you go to my father. You give him this bloody shirt, and you tell him it is my dying request that you be adopted as his son, and become an heir to all my wealth.”

Months later the war ended, and that poor soldier walked reluctantly up to the door of a mansion. A butler looked him over and said, “We don’t accept people like you here. Since his son was killed, this man will see nobody.” The young man said, “Would you please tell him I have a message from his son?” Immediately he was ushered in. He stood before that grieving father, told him of his son’s dying request, handed him the bloodstained shirt — and waited. The father looked at the shirt, grabbed that young man, embraced him, and said, *“From now on, you are my son.”*

I tell you today — it is through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that you can go to God and be received into the family and adopted as a son. You do not come to the Father’s door on your own merits; you come bearing the blood-soaked righteousness of His Son,

who died and rose again — and the Father who has been watching that door will not turn you away.

He will embrace you and say, “***From now on, you are Mine.***” You did not receive the spirit of slavery today, to go on falling back into fear. The Spirit of adoption is here. Come to Christ — come now. THE BLOOD SPEAKS A BETTER WORD than the blood of Abel.