



**Romans 8:1-11**  
**A Spirit-Filled Summer**  
**Freedom In The Spirit**

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For many people, the book of Romans is the single-most profound section of Scripture. To be sure, it's a book that receives a lot of admiration from Christians, and a lot of attention from scholarly types, but not much serious attention from the average Christian because it's so densely packed with high-minded theology and rhetoric, and it has a lot of Old Testament references that assume a working knowledge of those references, making it difficult to understand. Romans is much bigger than just the words on its pages. Of course, that's true about every page of the Bible...but Romans especially feels that way.

But this morning we're going to dive in to Romans. And this actually is the first of three messages in our series on the Holy Spirit that will be in Romans 8, because Romans 8 is all about the Holy Spirit. Over 20 times in Romans 8 Paul refers to the Spirit. Up through the first 7 chapters, he writes of the Spirit all of three times. So chapter 8 is like an explosion of the Spirit.

Now, as I mentioned the first Sunday of this series titled "A Spirit-Filled Summer": the Holy Spirit is probably the least understood, least preached, least taught, least acknowledged aspect of the trinity. God, three in one – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is taught in the Scriptures from the first verses of Genesis onward. Yet the Spirit is often ignored. Not here in the middle of Romans. We're given a full dose of it.

**And: The first key point of this passage is that for Christians, the Spirit is what is now in us.** When we put our faith in Jesus, the Spirit becomes part of our lives, dwelling in us. Now, in the Bible we also read of us being in the Spirit. You may have wondered: which is it? Is the Spirit in me or am I in the Spirit? Biblically, it goes both ways. The Bible speaks of both and doesn't try to differentiate between one or the other. Actually, the same thing is true about our relationship with Jesus – Scripture speaks of us being "in Christ" and of Christ being "in us."

In fact, in this passage we just read, Paul writes of being "in Christ," and that

Christ is “in you” and he writes of being “in the realm of the Spirit” and that the Spirit is “in you.” So, which is it: who is in whom? The answer is: All of the above! **On the whole, Scripture speaks more of the Spirit being “in us” and us being “in Christ.” But it’s all very interchangeable.** I don’t think we need to get caught up with “who is in whom.” It’s a little like trying to answer the question of which matters more on a football team: the offense or the defense? Actually, a better illustration is if you take your hands and interlace the fingers together, you could say the right hand is in the left...or that the left is in the right. But it doesn’t really matter: the point is that they are locked into each other and work together.

And that’s what the Bible conveys about the Spirit, for those who follow Jesus. The Spirit is in us and we are in the Spirit. The Spirit is with us. The Spirit leads us. The Spirit speaks to us. The Spirit comforts us. The Spirit inspires us. The Spirit heals us. The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to us. The Spirit bears fruit in our lives. All of those things are a result of Jesus-followers being in the Spirit and the Spirit being in them.

The second thing I want to highlight here and is really the main emphasis of the message this morning, is that the Spirit sets us free. Paul writes in 8:1-2, which are two of my favorite verses in all of Scripture: **“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 has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).** Through faith in Jesus – and that faith only means something because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. His life isn’t meaningful because we believe...we believe because His life is meaningful. Through that faith we are free from the condemnation that sin brings upon us; there is now no condemnation when we are in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit sets us free.

Now, whenever we look at a passage in Scripture, it’s important to remember that it’s not isolated by itself. It’s connected to the whole of Scripture, and particularly to those verses immediately around it. And Romans 8 is no different. If we look back just a few verses even, we see Paul asking a question of himself near the end of chapter 7: **“Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).** It’s not so much a question about after

he dies, but about the fact that as he lives, he finds himself giving in to temptation and sin, which steals life and its joys from him; it pulls Him away from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's a question that comes out of everything else he has written in the previous verses of chapter 7, and even back into chapters 5 and 6: He is deploring his own sinful self – “the ways of the flesh” as he likes to call it. For instance in 7:21, he writes, **“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Romans 7:21)**. It's like Murphy's Law: If anything can go wrong, it will. But it's an issue that we all struggle with. Sin is on the scene, and we suffer the consequences. And so Paul is led to this question near the end of chapter 7: “Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

And in the very next sentence, before we can even catch our breath, he gives us the answer, **“Thanks be to God—Through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25)**. It's not that he's giving thanks through Jesus Christ; he's answering the question of who will rescue him: Jesus Christ will.

And it is then that he launches into this great passage in Romans 8, which we read this morning. **“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 has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2)**. So Jesus and the Spirit work together to set us free from sin: free from the prison of fallen humanity, and the prison of condemnation that sin brings upon us.

That, my friends, is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. That's true freedom. It's freedom to live as God created us to. We live in a country where we have incredible freedoms. We are fortunate: we have the freedom of speech, the freedom to worship, freedom to vote, the freedom to listen to both good music and bad music and even root for the wrong sports teams like the Cowboys and Yankees...we have a lot of incredible freedoms. But it's all a shadow of the freedom from sin that God offers through the Spirit. Paul puts it plainly elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 3:17 **“...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17)**.

And unfortunately, it's pretty easy to let things hold us captive and so we

wouldn't live in the freedom that God desires. The story is told of a twelve year-old boy who accidentally killed one of his family's geese by throwing a stone. Figuring his parents wouldn't notice one of twenty-four gone he buried it. His sister saw his crime and said, "I saw what you did, and if you don't wash the dishes for me, I'll tell mom." The boy did the dishes for several days. One day, the boy said to his sister, "You do them." She replied, "I'll tell mom." The boy replied, "I already told her and she forgave me – I'm free again." It's a great illustration of how sin seeks to hold us down. It reminds me of what Paul writes in Galatians 5:1, **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery"** (Galatians 5:1).

Sin tells us we are burdened with sin when God says we can have freedom; Sin tells us we "can't" when God says we "can"; Sin tells us we're poor when God says we're rich; Sin tells us there's no future, when God says He knows our future and the plans He has for us; Sin tells us that we are alone, when God tells us He is with us; Sin sets us back, when God calls us forward. You see? Our sin seeks to hold us down and hem us in, but the Spirit gives freedom. Our part is to do exactly what the boy did: confess the sin. And the Spirit nudges us and works on our hearts to do that. So once we confess and turn to Jesus, then the Spirit moves in and gives us true freedom, freedom to be in whole and healthy relationships with the people in our lives and most importantly, with the God of the Universe who created you and loves you. Jesus makes it possible because of his death on the cross and His resurrection is the proof, and then the Spirit moves powerfully in our lives to set us free to live in relationship with God!

As we celebrate America's independence and the freedoms we have, I encourage you to consider: From what do you need to be freed? What is holding you captive? **What might the Holy Spirit be seeking to set you free from so that you might live in true and greater freedom with God?** Hold onto that question for a moment. We'll come back to it.

Paul goes on to write about the effects of living by the "flesh" as he puts it, which is essentially the opposite of living by the Spirit. He writes in verse 6 that the mind governed by flesh is death. It's not a life that has freedom or

power or true life or peace; a mind governed by the flesh isn't the way God intended us to be. Conversely, the Spirit is in us and gives us power to live as God intends: with abundant life, freedom, and so forth. The Spirit is kind of like the engine in a car: You don't see it most of the time, but without it, the car is useless. In fact, I came across an Associated Press quote from a few years ago that said, "Leslie Puckett, after struggling to start his car, lifted the hood and discovered that someone had stolen the motor."<sup>1</sup> Life without the Spirit in us is like a car without its motor: It's living by the flesh – like trying to power a car with just the frame and the sheet metal on the outside of the car. And sin tries to steal our motor and tell us that the flesh is all there is.

**But life with the Spirit of God in us is a fully powered life, free to live as God created us to live.** So for the Christian, our mind is on the Spirit and it is the Spirit that drives us and that keeps us going. Sometimes our lives are like that car without an engine, and it's like the Holy Spirit has been lifted out of us. And when that happens, we lose the freedom that the Spirit gives. We're stuck. We can't go anywhere.

Now, the Spirit is still there; it's just that we ignore it. There are so many times where I've sensed I needed to say something or do something that was the right thing to say or do, and I've gone another direction, and my life got really difficult as a result. And I could then look back on that and say, "The Holy Spirit was telling me what to do" and I ignored it. Why? Because my mind was not on the spirit, but rather: on the flesh.

And frequently in those situations, it's because we want things to be easy. At least that's my assessment of my own life. The right thing that the Spirit was leading me to do was tough, even though it would lead to freedom. God often calls us to difficult things, things that challenge us and transform us and impact others as well so they might be impacted by the love of God as well...so that they might experience true freedom also. But because they're tough, we're often tempted to go another direction.

**Jesus sets the example for us of the challenge of living in freedom.** His death, which Paul writes of in verses 3 and 4, opens the door to the freedom

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sermonillustrations.com](http://www.sermonillustrations.com)

that the Spirit gives. But that wasn't easy for Jesus. Becoming human, walking the face of the earth, interacting with sinners, taking risks for the sake of people – like yourself – who are held captive by sin, going through his so-called trial, carrying his cross, the lashings he received, being crucified...dying for you and me. Jesus takes the condemnation that should be ours. If you're wondering why Paul writes that there is "no condemnation" it's not that there is none at all; it's that for those who are "in Christ" he takes the condemnation for us. So...put it all together, and: What of that sounds easy? Would you like to trade places? I doubt it. But he was led by the Spirit every step of the way, and Jesus says, as Tom Petty sang, "No, I won't back down. You can stand me up at the gates of hell, but I won't back down." Jesus stayed true to the Spirit's leading even though it was difficult. And that is what opens the door for the freedom that the Spirit offers you and me.

So Christ died to set you free, and we experience that freedom when the Spirit of God is in us...and we are in the Spirit. When we're connected together. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free," Paul writes in that Galatians verse. He set us free so that we would stay free, and so that others would experience this freedom...So that we would be in a free and full relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It doesn't mean that this freedom that the Spirit leads us into is easy, but it is how God made you to live. So: **What might the Holy Spirit be seeking to set you free from in your life to bring about more freedom for yourself or for others?**

So with the Spirit in you, freeing you up to step out in faith, and leading you into abundant life and peace: take those further steps of faith. Live more freely for God than you ever thought you could. Open yourself up further to His Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus, giving us true freedom – in this world and the next. Today can be your own personal independence day. Independence from the bondage and slavery to sin. You can be free to live as God created you to. Let this Independence Day weekend be more than just a celebration of the freedoms we enjoy in this country. Those freedoms are amazing and undoubtedly we are grateful for them even if we struggle as a nation to live into them rightly. But there is another freedom you can experience through faith in Jesus Christ, as the Spirit sets you free to live as you were meant to, now and forever more. May you know and experience

that freedom: that comes through faith in Jesus, as the Spirit lives in you and you live in the Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.