

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on April 10, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb on Romans 8:5-17.

Series: Greatness
Today's Focus: Great Power

“You’re Not in This Fight Alone...God’s Spirit Lives in You!”

Last week we began our journey into this great, go-to chapter of the Bible, Romans chapter 8, by unpacking this extraordinary truth: In Christ, You Can Have a Clear Conscience! I encouraged you all to take a highlighter to that first verse and make this a go-to verse for the rest of your lives. Remember that verse that we talked about last week: **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)**. Did you do that? Did any of you think about that verse this week or share that verse with someone in your life? I know a couple of you shared posts from our church’s Facebook page about it this week. That is awesome. Way to go in sharing the good news about the great peace we have in Jesus.

And I’ve got some more good news. Last week during the first service we gave away all the Bibles that I had ordered...and so this week I ordered more. So if you don’t have your own Bible or if you don’t have a Bible you feel you can write in, please raise your hand and we’re going to give you one along with a yellow highlighter. We’re starting on page 786 today if you want to follow along in Romans 8 and highlight verses as we go through this. You have my permission to bring your Bible with you to church by the way every Sunday. And please remember that this book, the Bible, is yours to open up, mark up, to read. And the beautiful thing is that you can start with just a couple verses from the book of Romans. What is God trying to tell you today? Here’s the one big thing I want to communicate today as we continue with Romans 8:5-17.... “You’re not in this fight alone...God’s Spirit lives in you!”

You see that’s what our verses today are about. It’s first of all about our struggle, our fight against what the Bible calls our “flesh.” “Flesh” is sort of a technical term in the New Testament for what we sometimes call our sinful nature. The flesh is that part of us that we all have that doesn’t want to have anything to do with the Spirit of God who gives us faith. It wants only to resist God and rebel against his word. In fact until the day we die our flesh resists the Spirit of God and tries to sabotage our soul. We’re going to read today about our flesh that it’s hostile to God and it makes us want to fight against at God. It’s the reason nobody by nature can choose to love God or have a relationship with him in the first place.

And I know this is true because every time I have a text like this before me it’s a struggle for me to put the sermon together. It’s almost as if the last thing the devil wants is for me to make you aware of what he’s up to. The devil would much prefer to have me keep my mouth shut about this. He’d like you to think that there shouldn’t be any struggle against sinful desires and thoughts in your life since after all that’s one of the pretty big lies that he’s got most of our society believing. He’d like you to think that once you’ve heard the message, “There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” that this means you’re free now to do whatever you want. He’d like you just to become comfortable with your flesh and its desires so that you stay away from or fall away from God.

But just as deceptive, the devil would like you to feel so overwhelmed at this prospect of falling away that you feel like you're all alone, that you feel like you can't win—that all you can do is sin because look how bad you've screwed up before, that you're worthless, and that you might as well just give in or give up. So friends that's why I want you to take out your highlighter today because there is yet a great promise here for us in Romans 8 today that God wants to share with you. It's a promise of great power. You and I are not alone in this fight...because God's Spirit lives in you! Here's what the Apostle Paul says:

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. So there are two mindsets being described here—the mindset of the flesh and the mindset of the Spirit. In other words there are two very different ways of approaching life, two opposite mindsets with opposing values and virtues and each one leads to two very different, eternal outcomes. The mind governed by the flesh leads to the outcome of eternal death. The mind governed by the Spirit leads to the outcome of eternal life and peace. Which mindset governs you?

Are you governed by the Spirit with the result that you're so grateful for what Jesus has done for you that you want nothing more than to submit to God's will for your life? Or are you governed by your flesh so that you think, "I don't really care what God's Word says I should be doing, Pastor Ben, because I'm just gonna do what I want to do regardless." Which mindset characterizes you? The mindset of the Spirit? Or the mindset of the flesh? The good news friends is that if you are in the midst of this struggle, this fight and you lament how often you fall into following the desires of the flesh and you are looking to Jesus as the only source of full and free forgiveness, then the Apostle Paul wants to share this truth with you today: You are not alone in this fight...God's Spirit lives in you!

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. In other words Paul's saying, "I'm not trying to beat you guys up here. I'm not trying to bully you. I'm trying to encourage you. I'm trying to love you with the truth of God's you because remember I'm just like you. The good I want to do, this I don't always do (remember Romans 7!). And the bad I don't want to do, this I keep on doing. How frustrating! But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has won the victory for us. At the cross and empty tomb of Jesus, the war against sin and death has already been won. So in this fight that you and I are still in...You're not alone in this fight. Friends, God's Spirit lives in you!"

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Now I don't know about you but when I hear the word "if" my first reaction is that this can sound like it's not a sure thing, like it's "iffy". But this isn't what the Apostle Paul is doing here. He's using these "ifs" to draw our attention to some key assumptions that we know are true. This is often how the word "if"

functions in the Greek language of the New Testament. In other words Paul's not trying to make things "iffy." He's saying, "If it's true that...and of course it's true...well then here's what is also true!"

⁹You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. [And he does!] And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you [And he is!], then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you [And he is!], he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. So not only will your soul go to heaven the moment when you die where you will begin enjoying the eternal pleasures of paradise but also the resurrection and glorification of your body is guaranteed as well. Christ rose from the dead on Easter. He paved the way to glory. And the same power that raised Jesus from the grave, that same power, lives also in us! We sang about that in our opening song this morning as you were coming in. God, the Holy Spirit, the giver of life now lives in each of us who call Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

So what does this mean? Friends, it means You are not in this fight alone...God's Spirit lives in you! Listen: **¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.** Right now I'll bet each of you can think of one area of your life where there is a battle going on and perhaps it is particularly fierce, right? What is that for you? Where is the battle for control of your life going to be fought...and won? Where are you being tempted to cozy up to sin in your life and get comfortable with your flesh? With your temper? With your gossiping or lying tongue? With drinking too much or doing drugs? With porn? With your sexual impurity? Listen, in the most recent Barna poll more people listed "not recycling" and "significant consumption of electricity" as being "more immoral" than viewing pornography. Friends, we cannot let the world shape our thinking instead of God's Word. **¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.** Friends, how can we possibly do this? Because remember God's great promise to you today... You are not alone in this fight...God's Spirit lives in you! Because at the end of each day, who are you? Who are you really? You are dearly loved children of God! That is who you are. Listen to these final verses:

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings [and we will!] in order that we may also share in his glory.

On Easter I got to talk about this reality: You have an eternal inheritance. No matter how fierce the fight, no matter what God allows us to suffer through in this life...we have an inheritance stored up for us in heaven! And do you remember what's true about that inheritance? Peter said, **"It can never perish,**

spoil, or fade” (1 Pe. 1:4). Well these verses today remind us how we poor sinners are able to receive such an incredible inheritance. It purely by God’s grace because the Holy Spirit has marked us as eternal beneficiaries of everything that Christ possesses and has earned as the true Son of God. So by the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts, we are no longer hostile to God. We have been reconciled to God as friends. Even more, God himself has become our dear Heavenly Father. He delights to have us call out to him just as Jesus taught us to do in the Lord’s Prayer—“Our Father”. “Abba” is Aramaic for Father. It’s a word Jesus himself used when he addressed his Father in prayer. It conveys childlike intimacy and confidence and this is how we can address God too because we are children of God by faith, co-heirs with Christ. And just as Christ finally entered “into his glory” so shall we. There is eternal glory at the end of our present sufferings here on earth!

Friends, listen again to what it says: **the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.** Do you have any idea how amazing this is!? It means you’ve been made a child of God so that all the rights of privileges of the firstborn son, in this case, Jesus himself, have become yours. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. He brought about your *adoption to sonship*. At your baptism when God placed his name on you he adopted you into his family along with all the rights and privileges and inheritance of Christ.

Finally there’s one more aspect of this that I want to share with you today. Because God has adopted us into his family we now have a personal and special relationship with him. And what this means is he loves each of us fully and equally without reservation. We are pleasing to him. And so everything we do in faith, God sees through the lens of our relationship with him. For example, I’ve got three daughters and I love each of them every bit as much as the next and I tell them at night before they go to bed, “Girls, I will never stop loving you.” And one of the neatest things about being a dad is that from early on my daughters would draw me a picture and they would say, “Here you go, Dad. I made this just for you.” And I would admire it even when it was a bunch of scribbles, and you know what I’d do then? I’d proudly put it up there on the refrigerator. Many of you have probably done that too, haven’t you?

But I’m guessing that not every picture you put up on the fridge would be considered a masterpiece work of art, would it? Not every crayon colored kid drawing would be considered worthy for display at the Milwaukee Art museum, right? But in my house, everything made for me out of love has more value to me than anything hanging on the walls of the art museum. Why? Because I see it through my Daddy eyes of love. And friends, that’s how God sees us and our efforts to please him too because we’ve been adopted into his family. We are dearly loved children of our Abba Father. So yes we’re in a fight against sin until the day God call us home...but we’re not in this fight alone!

So whether your earthly father was absent or angry, friends, each of you has a Heavenly Father who loves you, whose Spirit now lives in you, and who empowers you and strengthens you. So don’t get discouraged. Don’t give in to the devil. And don’t give up. Even if you feel like you’ve been fighting the same old battles against your flesh...keep pressing on. You are not alone in this fight...God’s Spirit Lives in You! The God who claimed you as his own at your baptism will make good on his promise to bring you home to eternal life to receive your eternal inheritance. Amen.

Take Home and Apply

Think: The same power that raised Jesus from grave is at work in us because God the Holy Spirit lives in us!

Share: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

Challenge: Where is the battle for control of your life going to be fought...and won? Pray God’s promises in Romans 8:5-17 back to him asking for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your struggle against temptation. Remember that through holy baptism you are a dearly loved child of God, able now to please your Heavenly Father.