Lesson 10
November 8, 2026

Life in the Spirit:

The Holy Spirit frees us from the law of sin and death.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

In Romans 7:14 through 8:11, Paul addressed the inability of human effort to obtain righteousness, the gift of victory in Jesus, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. These verses explore the tension between the Law and human weakness, as well as the futility of relying on the flesh to overcome sin. This struggle leads to a cry for deliverance, answered through the freedom found in Christ, who removes all condemnation for those who belong to Him. The lesson then examines life in the Spirit, contrasting the mindsets of the flesh and the Spirit, and focusing on the Spirit's power to bring life and righteousness to us as believers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The words flesh, carnal, and body are used in this lesson. In Biblical Greek, these terms originate from two words: sarx, meaning "flesh" and "carnal," and soma, meaning "body." Sarx literally means "meat," but Paul typically used it to refer to fallen human nature, characterized by sensual desires. The word soma refers to a body, such as the literal "body of Christe" (Romans 7:4), but Paul also used the word figuratively to refer to the church as "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), or to fallen humanity as a dead body (Romans 8:10). However, victory over the flesh and a resurrected body are promised only to those in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. **STRUGGLES WITH SIN: Romans 7:14-23.**
    - A. The Law and Human Weakness, (14-19)
    - B. The Futility of the Flesh, (20-23)
2. **NO CONDEMNATION: Romans 7:24-8:4.**
    - A. Sin and the Cry for Deliverance, (7:24-25)
    - B. Freedom in Christ, (8:1-4)
3. **THE INDWELLING SPIRIT: Romans 8:5-11.**
    - A. The Contrast Between Flesh and Spirit, (5-8)
    - B. The Spirit's Transforming Power, (9-11)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. STRUGGLES WITH SIN: Romans 7:14-23.

A. The Law and Human Weakness, Romans 7:14-19.

Given all that Paul said regarding being dead to the Law and alive in Christ, Paul called the Law "spiritual" in verse 14. The Law came from God to enable a covenant relationship between Himself and Israel. There was nothing inherently wrong with the Law, the problem, as Paul pointed out, was personal: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (v. 14). The problem is not that the Law is bad; the problem is that humanity is sinful. The Law revealed sin, but did not empower people to overcome sin. This is because one of the purposes of the Law was to awaken the realization that we need a savior. We cannot save ourselves, not even with the Law.

In verses 15-20, Paul passionately portrayed humanity's struggle to live according to the Law, yet without the power to consistently maintain its standards. These verses do not depict the struggle of a Christian; they represent the futile struggle of a person trying to obtain righteousness under the Law. Through powerful language, using the first-person present tense, Paul effectively illustrates this struggle. Such a person known what is right, and in their spirit they desire to do right, but the flesh is sinful, so "I want to do what is right, but I can't" (v. 18 NLT). They want to do good, but evil prevails, and they do not do what they know they should do (v. 19).

B. The Futility of the Flesh, Romans 7:20-23.

Paul said that through faith in Christ, the believer is dead to sin and free from sin (Romans 6:5-14), so it would be inconsistent for this passage to represent a carnal Christian. A person who is dead to sin and "freed from sin" (v. 7) would not then say, "sin … dwelleth in me" (7:20), or "I see another law … bringing me into captivity to the law of sin" (v. 23). Those who were endeavoring to obtain and maintain righteousness through the Mosaic Law struggled with this conflict between flesh and mind. Jews memorized the Law and had it firmly fixed in their minds. They knew what to do, but lacked the power of life in Christ to fulfill all the requirements of the Law faithfully. Before becoming a Christian, Paul himself had toiled under this burden, and the memory of this futility resonates in his words.

Often, the devil will try to convince people that they need to clean up their lives before they become followers of Jesus Christ. This is almost always impossible, leading to frustration and failure. Instead, Jesus invites us to bring all our burdens to Him to find rest and victory. Through God's grace and the indwelling presence of the Spirit, we find the ability to triumph over sin. The strength to overcome sin is not a matter of willpower, because our willpower is weak in the face of fleshly desires. It is only through the regenerating power of the Gospel that we die to sin and find new life in Christ.

2. NO CONDEMNATION: Romans 7:24-8:4.

A. Sin and the Cry for Deliverance, Romans 7:24-25.

The Law takes us to the cross, but only faith in God's grace can unleash the liberating flow of Christ's blood in our lives. What Paul says in verse 24 reflects the struggle of anyone trying to live according to the letter of the Law: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul was not conceding that flesh and sin were winning in his life, so there was no hope. Instead, the message is that our hope is not in the Law, nor in our best efforts to live right and do right. In this flesh, we can never do enough to be righteous. As Isaiah 64:6 says, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (NIV). That leaves us at Romans 7:25, which begins, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ."

In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul wrote, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (NKJV). By the power of human will or good intentions, we cannot overcome, but in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do "all things" (Philippians 4:13). Where work fails, faith prevails. Where the letter kills, the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

All are wretched without Jesus. That's why John Newton wrote about "amazing grace … that saved a wretch like me." In the flesh, under the Law, we are stranded in that no-man's land of knowing what we should do, but being unable to do it. In the body of death, we find ourselves as frustrated failures. We find ourselves crying out, "O wretched man that I am!" But Romans 7 does not leave us in failure; we can press on and thank God for victory in Jesus. Paul changed his tune from "a wretch like me" to "Victory in Jesus"!

B. Freedom in Christ, Romans 8:1-4.

Because of the victory we as Christians have in Christ, we are no longer under condemnation. The word "condemnation" (v. 1) refers to a verdict of guilt laid down by a judge or magistrate. In this case, God is the judge. The verdict of guilty is certainly deserved. However, God does not issue the verdict because of His dear Son. The phrase "to them which are in Christ Jesus" sets forth the reason believers stand uncondemned. The work of Christ's shed blood is so complete and fully adequate that there is no mention of the verdict which was already on the sinner. The Law brought about an awareness of sin and the associated condemnation of failing to live up to the Law's standards, but it offered no ability to prevail over the weakness of the flesh. However, the struggle between flesh and mind is resolved as we "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (v. 1). By receiving the gift of salvation through Christ, we are no longer wretched; we are "free from the law of sin and death" (v. 2).

The struggle described in 7:15-24 was due to the ineffectiveness of the Law, stemming from the weakness of fallen human nature. Therefore, in love, God sent His One and only Son, who came in "the likeness of sinful flesh;" yet remaining sinless, He "condemned sin in the flesh" (8:3). The righteousness of the Law was fulfilled in Christ, and is also fulfilled in us when we put our faith in Him and "do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (v. 4 HCSB). Jesus came as "the door" (John 10:9), providing the path to righteousness that we can walk when we walk in the Spirit by faith.

"In saying Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (v. 3), Paul avoided two doctrinal errors: (1) the docetic teaching which denies that Christ had a physical body and (2) the erroneous view

that Christ had "sinful flesh." Jesus Christ fully identified Himself with humankind, except that He was without sin. God's Son came as a man; and during His sojourn on the earth, He broke the power of sin and remained untainted by it. His precise purpose for coming was 'on account of sin' (v. 3); that is, to deal with the entire problem of sin by offering Himself as a sacrifice for it." – French L. Arrington.

3. THE INDWELLING SPIRIT: Romans 8:5-11.

A. The Contrast Between Flesh and Spirit, Romans 8:5-8.

The word "mind" (v. 5) in the Greek text means "to set one's mind or heart on someone or something." It indicates a total commitment of the person. Mere logic is not the only area of commitment. A complete commitment of every facet of a person's life is indicated.

When someone puts their trust in Jesus, there is a radical shift in how they think and act. Prior to accepting Christ, they thought, walked, and lived "according to the flesh" (v. 5 NKJV). This means being driven by "carnal" desires. Both flesh and carnal are used in the Bible to depict human nature that is focused on selfish desires and sinful pleasures, rather than godly desires or pleasing God. Anyone who has not put their faith in the grace of God through Jesus Christ will, by nature, be focused on fulfilling the desires of the flesh. However, the redeemed of the Lord are "spiritually minded," which lead to "life and peace" (v. 6).

A mind focused on carnal things will be hostile toward God and refuse to yield "to the law of God" (v. 7). Those focused on pleasing themselves cannot also please God or surrender to His will and plans for their lives. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24 NKJV). We cannot walk in the flesh and in the Spirit at the same time. We cannot focus on pleasing the desires of the flesh and God at the same time. We cannot live in sin and death while also living in righteousness and life. A radical shift takes place, a transformation so dramatic that is referred to as being "born-again" (John 3:3). Thankfully, through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are born again into new life.

B. The Spirit's Transforming Power, Romans 8:9-11.

If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to Christ (v. 9). You may hear the Lord's name and may try to look like a Christian, but if you are not indwelt by the Spirit, which is evidenced by His holy fruit (Galatians 5:22-23), you are not His. However, if you are a believer, "Christ is in you" (Romans 8:20a NKJV), even though you live in a natural body that will eventually die. "Your spirit is alive because of righteousness [which He provided]" (v. 10 AMP).

The Holy Spirit who lives withing us as believers is the same Spirit who "raised up Christ form the dead" (v. 11a). He will exert all the resurrection power He put forth in raising Jesus on our behalf. If the Spirit of Him who resurrected Jesus dwells in us, we shall experience the same resurrection as that of the Lord. Even though our natural body yields to "the last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26) and "return[s] unto the ground" (Genesis 3:19), it will yet breaths again. "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11b NKJV).

A young artist was trying to copy Raphael's "Madonna and Child," one of the most beautiful paintings in the world. He went to Florence and gazed on it, then got his easel. Sitting down in front of it, he began to copy it. As he looked at it, his picture became a thing of beauty, too. But suppose that instead of only copying, the spirit of Raphael could have come upon that young man: What a difference it would have made!

When we come to the Lord Jesus, He gives us His Holy Spirit to help us live as He would have us live, and the more the Holy Spirit controls our lives, the more like Him we grow.

Faith in Jesus transforms lives by reshaping mindsets. Before knowing Him, people pursue selfish desires disconnected from God's will. Paul describes this "carnal" attitude as self-centered, but faith shifts believers to a spiritual perspective, fostering peace and righteousness. Writing to Christians in Rome, he assured them that God's Spirit would empower them to overcome sin and embrace renewal despite living in a broken world. The Spirit who raised Jesus also promises life and resurrection, reminding us that walking in the Spirit leads to a new, Christ-centered life.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Followers of Jesus live by the teachings of Jesus, and by God's grace, we are empowered to do all that He commanded (Matthew 28:20). It's not legalistic code, but a new way of life.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Churches should encourage members to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This includes allowing the gifts and fruit of the Spirit to operate for church health and edification.

Life in the Spirit in the Old Testament

Romans chapter 8 is about life in the Spirit; that is, it is about obedience to Christ by believers in Christ, made possible by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The following are examples of people in Old Testament times who were enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's will for their lives.

Gentile rulers (Pharaoh and Babylonians) recognized the presence of the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) in the life of Joseph (Genesis 41:38), and in the life of Daniel the prophet (Daniel 4:8-9, 18; 5:11, 14).

God stated emphatically of Bezalel the artisan, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God" (Exodus 31:3; see 35:30-35) to do and to oversee the work of building the tabernacle of the Lord (a portable tent used as a temple by Israel).

The Book of Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30 tells that seventy elders of Israel, chosen to assist Moses in governing Israel, received the Spirit of God that was on Moses to equip them for this service.

The Book of Judges tells of Judges of Israel who were empowered by the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit of the Lord") to deliver Israel from oppressive nations: Othniel (3:9-10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:24-25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

The First Book of Samuel tells that the first two kings of Israel (Saul and David) were empowered by the Holy Spirit for their service to God as rulers of God's people, Israel (10:6, 10-11; 11:6; 16:13). (Also see 2 Samuel 23:1-2).

At a time when the people of Judah were in grave danger from an army of enemy nations, "the Spirit of the Lord" came upon Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, and he prophesied that the Lord would defeat the army coming against Judah. And Jahaziel's prophecy came true (2 Chronicles 20:14-18, 22-23, 27-30).

The prophet Ezekiel, a captive Jew in Babylon (592-570 BC), more than any other person mentioned in the Old Testament, testified of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in his life (Ezekiel 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1, 5, 24: 37:1; 43:5).

WORKSHEET

A New Walk

1. **In Romans 7:14, how does Paul describe his dilemma before he became a Christian?**

2. **Why do some people try to fix themselves before they come to Christ, and why is this a mistake?**

3. **What did Paul ask in Romans 7:24?**

4. **How did Paul answer his own question in the next verse?**

5. **Explain the phrase "no condemnation" (8:1)?**

6. **If we live "according to the Spirit" (vv. 4-5), what can we do? Why is this important?**

7. **Describe the difference between the carnally minded person and the spiritually minded person (vv. 5-8).**