

The Spirit of the Gospel

Rich Nathan

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Romans: The Gospel of God Series

Romans 8:1-17

I want to begin by asking you a question: In your opinion, do you think most people in America aspire to be good people, or to be successful people? Again, here is the question. I am not asking what you are like or what you want. I am thinking about other people. As you think about people in our country, do you think most people want to be good, or do you think most people want to be successful? How many of you think most people want to be good? Raise your hands. How many of you think most people want to be successful?

Here is one objective measure. There are 25x more books written about how to become a success compared to the number of books written about how to be good. Amazon lists over 182,000 books on how to succeed. Consider some of these titles:

[Mob Rules: What the Mafia Can Teach the Legitimate Businessman](#)

Or how about this one,

[The Rule of Three: How to be Successful in Life Without Being Famous, Rich, Good-Looking, Well-Connected, Talented or Nice](#)

Or how about this book:

[How to be Richer, Smarter, and Better-Looking Than Your Parents](#)

Then there are all the how-to books on succeeding in certain activities. For example,

[The Manly Art of Knitting](#)

Or this:

[How to Avoid Huge Ships](#)

Or how about this practical book:

[How to Bomb-Proof Your Horse](#)

Finally, your quest for success is not complete unless you read:

How to Become Pope: What To Do and Where To Go Once You're In the Vatican

One of the goals of the Christian life is to become a good person. But what does it mean to be “good?” How do we define goodness? The Bible defines goodness as Christ-likeness.

Goodness = Christ-likeness

The Bible teaches that to be a Christian, or Christ-follower, is to aspire to be like Jesus in your speech, your behavior, your attitudes, and your values. But how does this happen? How do you begin to think like Jesus thinks, forgives like Jesus forgives, act like Jesus acts, love like Jesus loves?

Certainly, we can read about Jesus in the Bible. And certainly, we can try as best we can to implement Jesus' teachings in our lives. And we can try to imitate Jesus' example. But is there anything else, other than reading about Jesus, obeying his teachings, imitating his example – is there anything else that will help us to be more like Christ?

According to the Bible, there is a secret ingredient to becoming a good person, or what the Bible would call a Christ-like person. The Bible teaches that unlike every other great moral teacher, or great philosopher, or great religious leader in history, Jesus doesn't just teach his followers what to do and say, “Do that.” Jesus didn't just live a certain kind of life and say, “Imitate my life.” Unlike every other great moral teacher in history, Jesus put something of himself inside of every person, who asks him to.

Here is the absolutely unique thing about Jesus as a teacher and a leader. Jesus shares his own Spirit with those who want to become like him. The secret ingredient of the Christian life is that Jesus places his own Spirit, part of himself, inside of every one of his followers so that they become good – not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

I've been doing a series all fall from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul lived back in the 1st century. He became a follower of Christ shortly after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. He wrote this letter to Christians living in Rome. As we continue our study in this book, I've called today's message, “The Spirit of the Gospel.” Let's pray.

Romans 8:1–4 (NIV)

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. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order

that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For many Christians, Romans 8 is considered the Mt. Everest of the Bible. It is the highest peak in a range of mountains. Some people have called Romans 8 the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden of Eden; the inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith. Romans 8 is all about the Holy Spirit. Many Bible commentators have pointed out that in the Book of Romans we move from the realm of law in Romans 7 to the realm of the Spirit in Romans 8. In Romans 7 God's law is mentioned 31 times. The Holy Spirit is mentioned one time. In Romans 8, God's Spirit is mentioned 19 times in the first 27 verses. Romans 7 is all about the weakness of the law as the result of indwelling sin to make anyone good. Romans 8 is all about God replacing the power of indwelling sin in a person's life with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we look more like Christ.

Romans 8 is a chapter about life in the Spirit. In Romans 8:1-4 we read about the Spirit of freedom.

The Spirit of freedom

Now, in v. 2 the Apostle Paul says this:

Romans 8:2 (NIV)

...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

FF Bruce was a great New Testament scholar and an ancient historian, whose specialty was the Apostle Paul and Paul's writings. After 50 years of studying the Apostle Paul, FF Bruce wrote my favorite book on Paul titled:

Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free by FF Bruce

After 50 years of study, he said that Paul's message can be summarized this way:

Jesus will set you free.

Free from what? Free from God's condemnation and judgment. That's what Paul writes in v. 1.

Romans 8:1 (NIV)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

No condemnation is another way of saying that you are justified, that you are in the right, that you are accepted by God just the way you are. No condemnation means that God will never accept you or love you more than he does right now – no matter what you do, no matter how much you improve. What the Apostle Paul is saying is that if you are a Christian, you've been transported outside of the realm of God's condemnation. You're done forever with condemnation. That's not the world you live in anymore. You've been transported to a new world, to a new environment. If you are a Christian, you have nothing to do with God's condemnation. There is no condemnation for you now, and there never will be condemnation for you in the future.

I think a lot of people approach God's love the way middle-school girls approach cute guys when I was back in the 7th grade. You know the game that middle-school girls used to play, or at least the game they played in my generation. They picked a daisy and plucked off the petals: He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me. So when people have a good day they say, "God loves me today." But when you scream at someone in traffic, you say, "God loves me not." When you put money in the poor boxes at church, "He loves me." And when you don't help someone out that you should be helping, "He loves me not." You do well on a test, "He loves me." If you don't study and fail the test, "He loves me not."

If you are in Christ Jesus, meaning you have joined yourself to Christ, you've trusted in him and turned control of your life over to Christ, you are no longer running your life, you are surrendered to Christ, you belong to him, then you should never say, "God loves me; he loves me not." Rather you should say, "God loves me. God loves me. God loves me."

Now how is recognizing that you are not condemned by God, but are, in fact, eternally in the right with God, help you to become a good person? How does believing that you are not condemned by God now, and you will not be condemned by God ever again in the future, help you to become a good person, a Christ-like person?

SLIDE

Our response: accept your acceptance

Think of all the ways that you and I engage in unhealthy, neurotic and downright sinful behavior in order to make ourselves feel OK.

We brag and boast in order to make sure that everyone around us notices our accomplishments. We exaggerate the good things about ourselves or the good things from which we derive our identity again to feel better about ourselves. We engage in people pleasing, bending who we are, trading in our stated convictions – we co-dependently try to meet everyone else's needs, looking to others for acceptance to feel OK about ourselves.

Friends, think about how many unhealthy, neurotic and downright sinful behaviors you and I have engaged in simply to feel OK about ourselves.

How many women engage in sex with a man not particularly because she wants to, but simply because she craves male acceptance. Going along with the crowd; conforming ourselves to what everyone else thinks. What if we lived life every day from a foundation of believing that we are OK with the only one whose opinion ultimately counts – Almighty God? What if we started every day by accepting our acceptance, by believing that we are free from condemnation, that we are in the right with God, not because of what we have done, but by virtue of the sinless life, the sacrificial death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do you see that accepting our acceptance calms down our flesh and cuts the nerve of so many of our sinful behaviors?

So becoming a good person, in other words, becoming a Christ-like person comes about by accepting our acceptance. And it is the Holy Spirit that assists us to do that. Let's look at Romans 8:4:

Romans 8:4 (NIV)

...in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Greek word that is translated “live” in the NIV is the word peripatousin.

SLIDE

Peripatousin = walk

It is where we get the English word “peripatetic” which means to travel from place to place; to walkabout. There was actually a school of philosophers in ancient Greece called “the Peripatetu”. They were followers of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, of whom it was said that he used to walk around when he taught.

I now have justification for the way that I teach and the way that I speak on the phone. I walk while I talk. I can say I'm simply following in the footsteps of the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle.

We read here about:

The Spirit of empowered walking

Walking is Paul's most common word for the practice of Christian ethics and the practice of the Christian life. The Apostle Paul actually uses walking to describe the Christian life 17 times in his letters. Christians are people who more and more walk in the way of God.

We read in Galatians 5:16:

Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Now, it is very helpful, I believe, to think about your Christian life as a walk because walking speaks to us about a journey with a destination. Being a Christian is not just lying down or sitting in a certain place. Being a Christian is a journey; it's a walk towards a certain destination – the destination is, of course, Christ-likeness.

Our response: walk in dependence on the Spirit

I have mentioned this before in a prior sermon, but it is so helpful that the Bible describes the Christian life as a walk. It is not a pole vault or a long jump. We don't leap into radical life change. Go to our 10-week financial counseling class called Dave Ramsey's Peace University. Stop going to Starbucks everyday for your caramel no whip macchiato with 2 shots for \$4.50 a cup. We become more and more like Jesus as we walk step by step, right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot.

Folks are always coming up to pastors saying, "Pastor, listen, I'm sinking in debt. I'm about to be thrown out of my home. Do you have an answer for me to pay off all of my bills? I want to pole vault into a solution for my debt problem." Maybe buy a lottery ticket which I told God, "If I win the lottery, I would tithe on my winnings."

The Bible says that that is not the way life works. There are these unspectacular, slow, boring, mundane, repeated actions – left foot, right foot, little things you do every day to change your purchasing habits. Spend a little less; earn a little more; spend a little less; earn a little more; cut up your credit cards, stop eating out, stop shopping for clothes, as you walk left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot.

Pastor, my marriage is falling apart. My wife says she wants to leave. Do you have a quick fix for my wife? Maybe you will meet with her in a counseling session. Can you preach a sermon on why wives should not leave their husbands.

The Bible says that is not the way it works. If you want to have a great marriage, Monday morning wake up and be kind to your wife or husband. Tuesday morning wake up and be kind to your wife or husband. Wednesday morning wake up and be kind to your spouse. Left foot, right foot, left foot. Date night, serve each other; dinner together – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. And over time you will have a great marriage. You will get to the Promised Land.

Likewise, if you want to become a more giving person, or if you say, "I want to teach my child to become more giving. I'm really concerned. My child is being raised in such a

materialistic culture; the only thing they think about is more, more, more for themselves – the latest iPhone, the latest iPad, the newest video game console. I don't want to raise that kind of child. I want to raise a child who thinks about others and gives to others. How do I do that? How do I raise a good child?"

Next Saturday, get up early and go to one of Vineyard's food pantries. Here are the locations of our food pantries:

Fruit of the Vine Food Pantry: 181 E. 5th Avenue
Northside Food Pantry: 4664 Cleveland Avenue

Go...and you and your child help out at a food pantry. You don't need to be a member of the church to volunteer. You don't need to be a Christian to volunteer. Just help hand out groceries.

And the following Saturday, get up early and go to the food pantry at 8:30 a.m. and hand out groceries. And do the same thing the following week, and make giving away groceries on Saturday mornings a part of your life routine – left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot.

Now the thing about walking is that it is slow and it seems like the journey is going to take forever. That's why I love the title of Nelson Mandela's autobiography, soon to be movie:

Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela

Eugene Peterson, the great spiritual writer and author of The Message Version of the Bible, titled his book on being a Christian this way:

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society by Eugene Peterson

A long walk to freedom – that's a great way to think about the Christian life. A long obedience in the same direction – left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. That's the Christian life.

But we get discouraged, don't we, because the journey is long; change is painfully slow, and walking gets tiring. We're tempted to give up. We can begin to believe that we'll never arrive; that we'll never change; that an area in our lives will never be overcome. Our marriage will never improve. We'll never lose weight, or get back in shape. We'll never dig ourselves out of the hole that we've created. We're tempted to throw in the towel. That's why we need the empowering of the Holy Spirit. We are not asked to walk in our own strength; to make changes as the result of our own willpower. We need the strength that the Holy Spirit provides.

Listen to this Bible promise when you are worn out from trying to make something happen in your life, trying to see some change.

Isaiah 40:28–31 (NIV)

28 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
31 but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Or as the Apostle Paul puts it in his classic memorable phrase:

Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

I can do all things through him who gives me strength. When you are tempted to quit, to throw in the towel, call upon the Holy Spirit and speak Philippians 4:13 over your life. I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

How do we become good, that is Christ-like, people? Through the Spirit of freedom; through the Spirit of empowered walking and through:

The Spirit of life

Now, as I mentioned in an earlier sermon, flesh and spirit stand over against each other not as parts of a person so that there is a part of you that's flesh and another part of you that is spirit. That's not what Paul is saying. He is not even talking about two impulses or powers inside of you, fighting with one another, although it certainly feels that way. He is talking about two governments, two realms, two reigns. Listen to what one New Testament scholar, Doug Moo, says regarding the flesh:

To walk according to the flesh, then, is to have one's life determined and directed by the values of "this world," of the world in rebellion against God. It is the

lifestyle that is purely “human” in its orientation. To “walk according to the Spirit,” on the other hand, is to live under the control, and according to the values, of the “New Age,” created and dominated by God’s Spirit as his [end-time] gift.

When Paul is contrasting flesh and spirit, he is talking about two powers that dominate two realms. To become a Christian means to be transferred from the realm dominated by the flesh, by the values of this world that is in rebellion to God, and to be transferred to a new realm, a realm dominated by God’s Holy Spirit.

So what’s our response to this notion that God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, introduced a whole new government, a new realm, a new reign, a new power in this world? That you don’t have to live according to the value system of every one around you. That you can come under the power, the control of God, who has a totally different value system from the values of everyone in your neighborhood, or your workplace, or, perhaps, even in your own family. What ought our response to be to this introduction of a whole new way of living, living under the domination and control of the Holy Spirit?

Our response: set your mind

Here is what Paul writes:

Romans 8:5–7 (NIV)

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. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.

Five times the Apostle Paul talks about the set of the mind – your mindset. He is talking about how you think about life, how you think about the world. A good life reflects a good mindset. John Stott said that the major secret of holy living lies in the mind. My friend, Simon Ponsonby, put it this way:

It is often said that “you are what you eat,” but the Bible says “you are what you think.”

Let’s look at v. 9-10 and think about what this means for change in your life.

Romans 8:9–10 (NIV)

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. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 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.

In other words because we who are followers of Christ have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, we have the ability to set our minds on what the Spirit desires. There's an order to this. Because we have been made a certain way, because we have been changed, liberated from the power of our cravings, we now can choose to set our minds on what the Spirit wants. Because you have been remade in Christ, because you are a new creation, you can choose to set your mind on the things consistent with your new creation. You don't have to act or think like the old creation. You can act and think like the new creation which you are. Thinking and doing comes out of your being.

Paul says your inner being has been changed by the Spirit. Now, think in accordance with that change. And if you do, you will become more Christ-like. Let me bring this down.

We become like whatever we focus our hearts and minds on. Focus your heart and mind on money and we become greedy. Focus our hearts and minds on success and we become ambitious. Focus on someone else's possessions or position and become covetous or envious. Focus your heart and mind on sex and we become lustful. Focus your heart and mind on Christ and you become Christ-like.

Instead of focusing our minds on what activates and energizes our flesh, we can choose to focus our minds on Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us how to engage in our struggle against sin. Here is what he says:

Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Simon Ponsonby made this profound statement:

What you are like shows what you are looking at.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 says this:

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

As you direct your attention towards Christ; as you think on him; as you look at Christ in God's Word; as you reflect on Christ's life, as you consider Christ's Words and his example, on what Christ did; as you allow yourself to experience Christ's love for you, as you meditate on Christ hanging on the cross; as you draw your heart close to Christ, who is right now being worshipped by millions upon millions of angels, you become Christ-like. We look like what we look at.

Because of the time, I'm going to skip vv. 10-13. I could have preached upon the Spirit of mortification, how the Spirit helps us to put sin to death. But I want to make one last point and finish with one of my favorite texts in the whole Bible.

Romans 8:14–17 (NIV)

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The 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." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Here we read about:

The Spirit of adoption

No other major religion in the world teaches its followers to call God, Father, other than Christianity. In Hinduism, despite the fact that there are tens of millions of gods, none is specifically called Father. And the supreme Creator and God-source, Brahma, is impersonal and never worshipped as Father. Islam has 99 noble names for Allah, but no mention of God as Father. In fact, there is a wonderful book written by a Muslim-background believer in Jesus titled:

I Dared To Call Him Father by Belquis Sheikh

And this Muslim-background woman speaks about the extraordinary discovery that she made in life of being able to have such an intimate relationship with God through Jesus that she could now call God, Father. She described her whole conversion in terms of being able to call God, Father.

An important 20th century scholar, Joachim Jeremias, studied the Fatherhood of God in ancient Judaism. He looked through all of the literature, not only the Hebrew Bible that we call the Old Testament, but also the Talmudic writings, the writings of the rabbis, and every single major Jewish text that survived to the 20th century, to examine whether in ancient Judaism the title, Father, was attributed to God. And Jeremias' conclusion was that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible, or in any of the rabbinical writings could he find a

Jewish person addressing God in prayer directly as Father. God in the Hebrew Bible was the Father of the Nation of Israel. He is spoken of metaphorically as the Father of the King of Israel. But Jeremias said that nowhere do we find a Jewish person ever addressing God directly as Father before the 10th century AD, one-thousand years after Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

So this amazingly revolutionary thing that Jesus taught about God is something that we frequently overlook because of our over-familiarity with it. Jesus, so far as we know, is the first major religious teacher to ever personally call God, Father, in his own prayer, and is the first major religious teacher who taught his followers to relate to God as Father. 175 times in the gospels, Jesus calls God, Father. There is only one time in prayer that Jesus called God anything other than Father and that is when he hung on the cross dying for our sins and he quoted from Psalm 22 the words:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Now, listening to Jesus in prayer calling God, Father, Abba, hearing Jesus call God “Abba” is the affectionate term that children use in Judaism to refer to their fathers. It could mean “daddy” or “dad.”

Abba = Daddy

But hearing Jesus use that term Abba, daddy, dad, when speaking to God left such a powerful impression that a generation later when the Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Rome, he retains this ancient Aramaic term.

Romans 8:15

The 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.”

So what is our response?

Our response: Call upon God, your Father

Romans 8:15–16 (NIV)

The 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.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Let me share with you a little picture in closing. This image has stuck with me for the past 20 years. Some years ago my wife and I were in California and we were stopped at a red light. There was this little girl, who was holding her father’s hand as she crossed

the street in front of our car. She was this chubby little girl, just the cutest little girl, maybe 3-4 years old; and, she was all dressed up. She had on tights, a little dress and little patent leather shoes. She was dressed to the hilt. And she's holding her father's hand in one hand and with the other hand she's holding a bag of French fries from McDonald's. And I will tell you – when you are 3-4 years old, it doesn't get any better than this – one hand is in your daddy's hand; and in the other hand you've got a bag of McDonald's French fries. She's walking across the street.

Apparently, her dad saw a bus coming that they needed to catch. And so he starts to run towards the bus while he is holding his little girl's hand. Her little legs couldn't keep up with him and she falls splat on the ground and her French fries spill out on the street. She's laying down in the crosswalk right by my car and I see her cry out, "Daddy!" He immediately turns around and scoops up his daughter.

Now, this is the picture that the Apostle Paul is painting for us. We cry out "Daddy" when we fall and the Spirit scoops us up and says, "My child."

And Paul is saying here that that cry that comes out of you when you are under pressure and you are in a tough place, that cry "Abba" "Daddy" is a witness to you that you are a child of God. Let me ask you a question, what do you do when you are under pressure? When you are being tried? When things are going terribly? Is it your tendency to just throw in the towel, to quit and walk away and curse God and die like Job's wife told him to do? Or do you find inside this continual crying out to God? "Lord, help me. I am going through a terrible time. Lord, help me. God, my Father, Abba." The heart cry.

Let me ask you a few questions in closing today. Do you know God as your loving Father? When you are in trouble, are you easily able to look up to God and say, "Abba, Father, Daddy, help me. I need you. I'm overwhelmed right now with anxiety. I'm tossing and turning in bed. Abba, Father, I'm worn out. I'm tired. I lack peace. I feel like I'm sinking like a stone." Friends, are you able to easily look up to God and say, "Abba, Father, Daddy, I was just horribly treated. I can't believe that that person said this to me. I can't believe what's happening to me at my job, or what my sister did, or what my brother did, or what my mother did." Can you easily say, "Abba, Father, the situation I'm in is so pressurized and I feel like I'm going to implode."

Do you know God as your Abba, Father? As your loving Daddy? This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit Jesus shares with his followers.

The gospel writer, John, who was a very dear friend of Jesus', wrote this in the first chapter of his gospel.

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Let's pray.

The Spirit of the Gospel

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December 7-8, 2013

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