

Led by the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Now many of you have probably heard this famous quote before, often attributed to Benjamin Franklin. There are only two certainties in life, death and taxes.

But if you ask the Apostle Paul, 1,700 years before Benjamin Franklin was born, he probably would have put it slightly differently. There are only two certainties in life, he would say, sin and death. We sin and we die. That's true of every single human being on this earth. Just consider an average day in your life.

Your alarm rings and you're immediately faced with all sorts of decisions to make. Should you reach for your Bible or your phone? Say something pleasant to your spouse or something grumpy? Help her with the cleaning or just read the newspaper? On your way to work, stuck in traffic, do you feel annoyed by that slow driver?

[1 : 05] Or do you overlook his nails' pace? At work, do you dive straight into your current project? Or do you procrastinate while making excuses?

Do you join in the latest exaggerated complaining session with your fellow co-workers? Or acknowledge that not every complaint made is legitimate? It's simply to make you feel good. Or at school, do you just join in in giving the silent treatment to that awkward classmate of yours? Or do you try to be kind to him or her? Or if you're retired, do you intentionally think about how you can use your extra time for God's kingdom?

Or do you default to your long-established personal habits and hobbies that only benefit yourself? What choices do you make? Sometimes we think of life as a few big decisions.

What job to take? Who to marry? Where to live? When in reality, Life is actually a series of hundreds of little decisions we make each and every day.

[2 : 14] And of those hundreds of little decisions that we make every day, we will get some of them wrong. We'll choose what is not right. We sin.

That's reality number one. Now we might be so used to this reality that we don't think much of it. It doesn't make an impression on us. But Paul confronts us with these words from the first half of Romans 8, verse 13.

If you live according to the flesh, that is, if you sin, you will die. That's a very direct and blunt statement, isn't it?

I doubt that we think of that angry word we said to our spouse or the decision not to reach out to your excluded classmate as deadly. But that's what Paul says.

We sin, and sin leads to death. That's reality number two. One commentator puts it this way. The consequence is necessary and certain since it is a holy God's judgment.

[3 : 28] Now if I just stop here, the Apostle Paul would probably strangle me. Because although what I said is undoubtedly true, it's not the entire story.

I've just quoted from part of a verse in Romans 8, but that is not what Romans 8 is all about.

Because what Paul wants to do in today's passage is to encourage everyone who truly trusts in Jesus.

He's not here to say, oh, we all miserable sinners are all going to die, bad luck to us. Instead, he wants to give us real hope in the face of sin and death.

For just look at verse 14. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Now what does that mean?

Well, notice that verses 13 and 14 go together. Verse 14 starts with the word for or because. And so verse 14 is giving the basis or explanation for verse 13.

[4 : 41] I've tried to show that connection on your handout visually. So verse 14, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit? Well, it's now to be able to fight sin.

That's verse 13. And what does it mean to be the children of God? Verse 14. Well, it means you will live. Verse 13. And in other words, here is what Paul is saying.

Sin leads you to death, but the Spirit leads you to life. The Holy Spirit is the difference maker.

And he does so by enabling you to fight the very thing that causes your very death. Sin. And so that's what Romans chapter 8, verse 1 to 17 is all about.

Today we're coming to the end of our sermon series on the Holy Spirit. And I truly hope that we've all gotten to know him better. Not in the way that we get to know a textbook better, but in the way we get to know another person better.

[5 : 45] That would make me really happy. But perhaps one of the questions we still have is, so, day to day, what difference does the Holy Spirit make?

And today's passage is the answer. He leads us to fight sin so that we would live and know we are God's children. He leads us to fight sin so we would live and know we are God's children.

And that's what it means to be Spirit-led, biblically speaking. So keep your Bibles open to Romans chapter 8, and I'll just unpack that in three points.

So firstly, the Holy Spirit liberates us to fulfill the law. Now before we dive into this passage, I just want you to imagine something.

I want you to imagine that I'm a smoker. Don't worry, this is just a thought experiment. But to relax, just imagine that I like to head down to my favourite kopi tiam at Padungan.

[6 : 52] I have a kopi ore, and I like to light up a Marlboro Red or Benson & Hedges. It's been a habit of mine for years, and I haven't really thought much about it. But earlier this month, to my dismay, I suddenly noticed that my favourite kopi tiam has been putting up the Dilarang Merococ signs.

So it even tells me that I will get fined 10,000 ringgit or put in jail for two years for breaking the law. But I really need that Marlboro with kopi ore.

So it's been my routine forever. So do I obey the law? Okay, sometimes I might, rather grudgingly. But often I still light up.

Only now I try to do so discreetly, because I know that I'm crossing boundaries. So I don't necessarily disagree with the law. I say, oh yeah, yeah, the law is a good law. But I just need to have that path.

So I still take my seat, I look to my left and to my right to see that no one's watching, and then I willingly break the law.

[7 : 57] And in Romans 7, right before our passage, Paul has been talking about something similar. He's brought up the law of Moses, and he says it's good stuff.

It's there to protect us. After all, who can disagree with laws such as don't murder and don't tell lies? And it's applicable to everybody.

But the problem is, just like the no smoking laws only expose my smoking addiction and simply turn me into a lawbreaker, and so the law of Moses does the same thing.

It exposes me as someone who doesn't mind telling a lie once in a while, or someone who's capable of throwing a murderous look in anger at someone else.

It highlights my sinful nature, and it turns me into a lawbreaker. And the punishment, remember, it's not just 10,000 ringgit, it's death.

[9 : 03] And so that's why Paul says at the end of verse 2, we are under the law of sin and death. But the law doesn't reform me.

And that's why verse 3, Paul says the law is actually powerless. The law tells you about what is right, but it doesn't help you do what's right. The Dilarang Merocot sign can tell me that smoking is bad, but it doesn't help me stop smoking.

It's like a fire alarm. A fire alarm can alert you to the presence of fire, but it doesn't do anything to extinguish the fire.

Or alternatively, it's like a kitchen knife. Now, when you're trying to cut papayas in your kitchen, the kitchen knife works fine. But now, imagine using it to cut diamonds.

Well, it's not going to do the job, is it? After all, diamonds are one of nature's hardest substances. And so the law is like the knife when faced with our hardened hearts.

[10 : 11] It cannot cut our hearts into the right shape. In fact, it won't cut at all. And so in itself, the law has no power to change people, Christians or non-Christians.

bare rules and regulations do nothing, absolutely nothing, to reshape our hearts. And in fact, it might even fool us into thinking that moralistic behavioral change is enough.

If Christians are taught, do this, and you won't be punished, or don't do that, and God will favor you, well, it's true, our behavior might change.

We might sacrifice time and money to help the poor or love our family, since that's what we're told to do. But secretly, we might do so because we want to win God's blessing or earn his favor, or so that we can pat ourselves on the back for being a good Christian.

And so at the level of the heart, sin is still happening. We're simply using God to get what we want. We don't actually love God.

[11 : 30] And so we're actually still self-centered, even though outwardly we don't look selfish because we're doing all this good stuff for others. And the law cannot challenge these deep workings of our hearts, although it might change the surface workings of our behavior.

Our sinful nature is still there. And so how? I clearly can't change myself, and the law can't change me. It's a kitchen knife trying to cut a diamond.

Well, here's the good news. What the law is powerless to do, God can do. And he did it, first of all, verse 3, by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

And so he became like us, fully human, sharing our human nature. He knows every temptation. He feels every trial.

But he didn't come as we are into this world, as a sinful man. And therefore, because he's fully human and yet perfectly sinless, Jesus could offer himself as a sin offering, the perfect one taking the place of imperfect ones like us.

[12 : 57] But God didn't just work through his son. He works through the Holy Spirit. How does he work? Well, think of a criminal.

What happens when a criminal receives a pardon? Well, he's set free from prison. And that's what the Holy Spirit does for us. Verse 2.

Because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. And so the Holy Spirit has set us free from the sin and death that imprison us.

He takes the righteousness that belongs to Jesus and credits it to our bank account. And so we now possess his righteousness. And therefore, the verdict now comes in.

Not guilty. No condemnation. Set free. But he doesn't just liberate us. Well, think of that criminal again.

[13 : 57] If he is pardoned, he is not merely set free from prison. He is set free for a purpose to live as a reformed member of society.

And it's the same with us. Just look at verse 4. And so he condemns 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.

And so we have been set free from sin and death for a life shaped by the Spirit. And the Spirit is able to rehabilitate us in a way that no human rehabilitation program can.

Think again of that diamond. So our hearts are like that diamond completely hardened and the law is like a kitchen knife unable to cut it. But the Holy Spirit is like a proper diamond cutter who can now cut our hearts into a particular shape.

And so he cuts us in such a way to ensure that we shine as brightly as possible. He polishes us in such a way that we begin to reflect God's love.

[15 : 16] For as Romans chapter 13 verse 8 to 10 will say later on, love is the fulfillment of the law. And that's what the Spirit does. He liberates us for this purpose that we might fulfill the law as we show love to others and as we love God.

But the Holy Spirit is not like a prison warden who congratulates you on your freedom, gives you a high five, and then completely ignores you and leaves you alone to live the Christian life from now on.

For secondly, the Holy Spirit leads us to walk in the way of life. He becomes our tour guide. He begins to steer you and me like a boat in the right way.

And to make that clear, Paul now draws out a fundamental contrast between spirit and flesh in verses 5 to 8. Now he is not talking about the physical versus the non-physical here.

He is not talking about the body versus soul. Flesh here is simply shorthand for a life where sin is your boss, not God.

[16 : 34] I think that's why the older NIV translates it as sinful nature. So he's simply talking about those without the Holy Spirit versus those who have. And so in other words, Paul is simply contrasting the non-Christian with the Christian.

he's saying when you were in the realm of the flesh, when you were still a non-Christian, this is what you were like. In verse 5, he describes our minds.

Our minds here is not merely referring to our rational minds, but to what we love. And so he says, verse 5, our minds were dead set on our sinful desires.

you want what you want. And so it's headed for death, verse 6. Why? Because, verse 7, what you want is hostile to God.

Your mindset is ultimately displeasing to God, verse 8. But now Paul says, this has now fundamentally changed.

[17 : 42] When you move into the realm of the Spirit, that is when you become a Christian, you start developing new desires. You begin to want what God wants.

Your heart is changing. You're beginning to walk down the path that leads to life, not death. You're beginning to follow the Spirit of holiness. You want to please God.

If you're trusting in Jesus today, that's you. Well, isn't that encouraging? For if you're truly a Christian, you will be on the Spirit's side.

Look at verse 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.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. So you can't have one foot in the side of the flesh and one foot in the side of the Spirit.

[18 : 44] Think of a football club player. You're either a player of Manchester United or a player of Liverpool. You can't be half Liverpool, half Manchester United.

You're either playing for one club or the other. You're either playing for Jurgen Klopp, Liverpool's manager, or Ole Gunnar Socher, Manchester United's manager.

That's the idea. You're either living for Jesus or for sin. That doesn't mean, of course, that there is no battle. During World War II, if you're on Team Britain, you know very well that Team Germany under Hitler is an active enemy.

And you know that even though you are on British soil, it's war time, not peace time, and so there will be bombs coming your way. And so although we live in the realm of the Spirit, because it's still war time, there will be conflict with our sinful desires.

And that's why we reach for our phone rather than for our Bibles and to pray. And that's why we prefer to think bad thoughts about the other person rather than good ones.

[20 : 01] And that's why we prefer not to care too much about God's precious creation rather than be more deliberate in thinking what we can do. we live in war time.

There's a fight going on inside of us. Peace time only comes when Jesus comes back. But if you're feeling the pressure, if you sense the conflict within you, well, that's a good thing.

That indicates you're on the side of the Spirit. You see the sin as the enemy. And you see Jesus as your current boss and you want to please him.

That's why Paul writes verse 12. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it.

Now, imagine you got a call from your old place of work. It's your ex-boss on the phone. And he says to you, I really need that report from you on my desk tomorrow.

[21 : 11] By the way, please make sure that you book my flight to KL tonight. Now, how would you respond? It's possible for you to say, yes, sir, okay, sir, but actually you no longer have an obligation to him.

He's not your boss any longer. You can say, sorry, boss, I think you got the wrong number. I don't work for you anymore. And so it is with sin.

Sin used to be our boss, but no longer. Jesus is. And so we can say no to our old boss. Now, we could forget that he's no longer our boss, so that's why we still say yes to him.

We think that we are still a member of his staff, and so we do what he wants. But although we can act as if he's still the boss, God says that's no longer the reality.

If the spirit is in you, you don't have to walk sin's way any longer. You belong to Christ. He's the one holding your hand. And so that's why the Holy Spirit keeps shining the spotlight on Jesus.

[22 : 27] You see, sin is like that ex-girlfriend always calling us back. And dressing up in ways to seduce us. But the Holy Spirit says to us, hang on, you're in a new relationship now.

It's a better one with someone who never abuses us, but loves us dearly. And he says to us, spend time with Jesus.

Keep getting to know him more. And if you do, I'll show you more and more his best qualities. And when you see more and more how incredible Jesus is, you will find your ex-girlfriend less and less attractive.

And so the Spirit says, come and read my words, the Bible. And that's where you will know Jesus. Now just before we move on, there might very well be one question that bothers us.

frankly speaking, sometimes we say, it seems like the non-Christians are better than the Christians. Sometimes I feel like my non-Christians are less sinful and more godly than me.

[23 : 45] So in light of Romans 8, how do we account for the difference? Well, let's think about that a little. And here are three things to remember. number one, remember not to mistake surface behavior for change in the heart.

After all, a person who believes that good moral behavior is how he earns his way to heaven, would look very good and moral on the outside. Don't forget the rich young man that Jesus encounters.

He had very high ethical standards. outwardly speaking, if you were to compare him with Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, well, you might think of that rich young man as being more godly.

He wasn't a traitorous tax collector after all. And yet, Jesus did not regard him at that point as being in the kingdom of God.

The spirit has not yet worked in his heart. For such people have not yet accepted that the way to receive God's favor is based on our trust in Jesus, not on what we do.

[24 : 58] And so it's actually our attitude to Jesus that is the fundamental dividing line, not our outward moral behavior. And there could very well be people amongst us this morning who also need to hear that.

Do you think Christianity is primarily about moral behavior, or Jesus as your savior? if you think it's the former, then you could very well have misunderstood the Christian faith.

And you are in serious danger. So make sure that you actually understand Christianity for yourself. After Easter, we'll be running the Christianity Explore course again, and it's a great chance to reacquaint yourself with the fundamental message of the Christian faith.

And if you are unsure about where you stand, why not come to that? Number two, remember that those who come to new life in the spirit, do not start their new life from the same place.

Let me explain. So some people come from very broken homes, some come with zero positive role models, some have certain scars in their mental and emotional lives that leave certain imprints on their personalities.

[26 : 22] And if that is true, well, it wouldn't be surprising if, let's say, these people become Christians, but they would still look worse than non-Christians who come from well-adjusted homes or who have been brought up to be very good moral people because they have started off in a very broken place.

people. And those in the realm of the spirit, remember, are at different stages of the Christian life. Some are new young Christians like the ones I've just described.

Others are mature Christians who have become more attuned to the Holy Spirit after years of allowing themselves to be refined by him. And so what we need to see is not just where a person is at currently, but what direction he's heading in, is he slowly but surely making progress in the right direction?

Now that would look different from person to person, but if he is headed towards Jesus, towards Christ likeness, and not away from him, well that's the important thing.

Far better for a broken person to be headed in the right direction than a moral person who is heading in the wrong one. Number three.

[27 : 40] It could certainly be true that a professing Christian is not acting in line with the way the Holy Spirit wants him or her to act. And if so, it might be that God could be prompting you to lovingly mention your concern to him or her.

You might very well be the instrument that God uses to help that person to get back in step with the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps, you could very well be the instrument that God uses to help that person realize that he was never a Christian in the first place, even though he thought he was.

We don't want to be critical or judgmental, but neither do we want to be indifferent and apathetic. The Holy Spirit could very well be leading you so that the other person can be led to put to death sin in his or her life and live for Jesus.

So don't think you're being pushy if you raise your concern with someone. You could very well be doing God's will. You're helping him to live for Jesus. A person who is truly on the side of the Spirit would ultimately appreciate that correction.

For such a person is a child who wants to please his heavenly Father. And that brings us to our final point this morning. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit lets us know that we have the privileges of sonship.

[29 : 08] That's a precious truth, isn't it? In today's world, self-identification is in. So nowadays, anyone can identify as anything.

And no one can dispute that. So in theory, I could go on my social media profile and self-identify as a transgender person of colour. Because that's how I feel about myself.

But of course, to simply identify as a transgender person of colour doesn't actually make me one.

And simply self-identifying as a child of God because that's how I feel doesn't necessarily make me one either.

But, as we begin to experience the new life, as we begin to slowly but surely battle sin, well, we can be confident of who we are.

For we don't just have our own self-identification, we have the Spirit's own testimony. Just look at verse 16. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

[30 : 21] Those who are led by the Spirit of God, those who fight sin, are the children of God. That's the indicator. For the Holy Spirit is the spirit of adoption.

He ensures that this is an objective legal reality. He says to you, as you live my way, well, you can be sure you belong not just to the Son, but to the Father.

For as we are led by him, he also brings to us the subjective emotional reality of being God's children. Just look at verse 15.

the spirit you receive does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again. Rather, the spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship, and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

And when we don't fear God, like a slave fears his master, but love God as a son does his father, well, we can actually fight sin better, because we fight for who we love.

[31 : 28] And as the spirit leads us to walk the way of life as God's children, he will bring us to our final destination. Look at verses 10 and 11.

But if Christ is in you, that even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the spirit gives life because of righteousness. 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.

So he's saying we have Christ in us now, and one day we will have the same glorious bodies as Christ. As we keep being led by the spirit to walk the way of life, well, the road might be long, but it won't be endless.

It leads somewhere. And this is where it leads to. resurrection. Or to put it another way, it leads us to an inheritance of glory, as verse 17 puts it.

And so my brothers and sisters, keep following the leading of the spirit to reach our destination.

Many of us in this congregation are in the second half of our lives.

[32 : 49] and it can be so easy to stop walking with Jesus at this point. We get tired, it's time to stop, we say. We might even slowly, without realizing it, begin to deviate from the right path.

We let our minds drift not to Christ, but to the things that this world treasures. Leisurely retirement, children whom we can boast in, traveling the world.

And we begin to assert our own preferences, rather than consider the interests of others because we feel we might have earned it. Well, Paul says, let the spirit keep leading you to fight your sinful tendencies.

Recently, somebody in our congregation, a veteran of the Christian faith, came to me to apologize because he believed that he said something hurtful to me earlier. And that was so encouraging to me.

This is a sign of somebody still wanting to be led by the spirit, to walk with him, to be convicted by him, all the way to the end, despite the person's advancing years.

[34 : 06] And it encourages me, somebody who is further back in the journey, to also do the same. God's holy spirit, and so that's where we will end our sermon series on the Holy Spirit, with an encouragement to be led by the spirit, to fight sin each and every day, and through him, to enjoy knowing God as our father.

Once again, I hope that this sermon series has really helped you to know the Holy Spirit better, to clear up many misconceptions about him, and to relate to him in a proper way.

And as I said before, I'm really keen to hear from you what you've learned and what you've taken away from this series, so feel free to come and chat to me at the refreshments time, or if not, maybe drop a comment in the Q&A; box.

But as we end, well, let me just read to you some words from this hymn, and I think these words will make an appropriate prayer.

O breath of life, come sweeping through us, revive your church with life and power. O breath of life, come cleanse, renew us, and fit your church to meet this hour.

[35 : 27] O breath of love, come breathe within, renewing thought and will and heart. Come love of Christ, afresh to win, revive your church in every part.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, will you in raise your chair for your vide and hal of you to