

Life in the Spirit

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Holy and gracious God,
may your Holy Spirit give us
a spirit of wisdom and revelation,
so that, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened,
we may know the hope to which Christ has called us,
the riches of his glorious inheritance among us,
and the greatness of his power for those who believe.
Amen.

Background



Question: What are some of your all-time favorite chapters in the Bible? Not verses, but chapters. These are some of mine:

Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not **want**."

Genesis 1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Then there's **Ecclesiastes 3:**

"For everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die.

Maybe we stop at **Proverbs 31** for the Proverbs 31 "**Woman.**"

We keep going to the New Testament. In Matthew there's Jesus' most famous sermon—**The Sermon on the Mount.**

Jesus has (*at least*) three hits in the Top 10, with **Matthew 5, 6, & 7.**

I believe Jesus' spiritual teaching uttered here is the greatest ever preached in the history of the world. In it we find the **Beatitudes** and the **Lord's Prayer**, where we pray every Sunday at Immanuel:

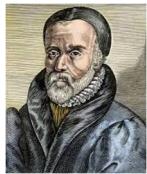
"Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy **name.**"

In my list there are two contributions that the Apostle Paul makes to The Top Ten List of Chapters in the Bible. First, the Love Chapter. *Do you remember which one that is?*

1 Corinthians 13: "And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is LOVE."

There's another Chapter of Paul's from a different book. And I believe this one rivals 1 Corinthians 13 in majesty and inspiration:

Romans 8. The Great Eight. The man's soul was on fire when he penned those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther called it "**the clearest gospel of them all.**"



William Tyndale, "The Apostle of England" who was martyred for translating the Bible into English, called it:
"the most excellent part of the New Testament."

Various NT scholars have described Romans 8 as:

"the inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith," and "the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden,"



... and then my personal stab at a memorable metaphor:
"the highest peak of the Himalayas." ☺



Pastor and author Mark Batterson calls Romans 8 “The If Chapter.” The ten “ifs” in Romans 8 add up to infinite possibilities. Batterson goes on in his wonderful book “If:”

Romans 8 is:

Michelangelo's *David*.



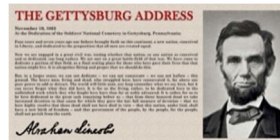
da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.



Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*.



Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*.



And in honor of our 80's Throwback Sunday at 8:30: Romans 8 is U2's “Joshua Tree”... or “Achtung Baby”... or “All That You Can't Leave Behind.”



I noticed something fascinating as I compiled my Top Ten List of Bible Chapters. Almost every single one of them is commonly read in memorial services. Romans 8 certainly is. These chapters are so powerful because they speak to us not only in our living, but in our dying. They give us hope, a living hope that survives even death.

We'll have to start a Facebook discussion about your favorite chapters of the Bible—we only mentioned eight or so here. So for the next three weeks, we're going to make our way through the Great Eight of Romans. As we listen to God's Word, pay attention to that 15x the SPIRIT is mentioned in these 17 verses. This gives us a vital clue as to how important the Holy Spirit is in

the life of the Christian. The Spirit of Christ **ASSURES** us, **ANIMATES** us, and **ACTIVATES** us to continue Jesus' life-giving ministry on earth to the glory of God.

Also, **LIFE** is another key word in Romans 8. Jesus came that we might have **LIFE** and have it to the full.

Let's hear now the Word of God from...

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:1-17 (NRSVue)

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit^[a] of life in Christ Jesus has set you^[b] free from the law of sin and of death.

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and to deal with sin,^[c] he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.^[d] ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit^[e] set their minds on the things of the Spirit.^[f] ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit^[g] is life and peace.

⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,^[h] since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit^[i] is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus^[j] from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through^[k] his Spirit that dwells in you.

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba!^[l] Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness^[m] with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – “Life in the Spirit”

Ancient Roman adoption was an involved process that had two elaborate rituals. This was done only for males.

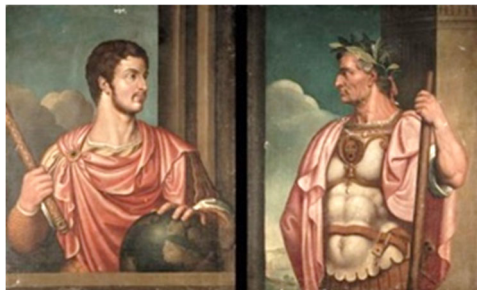
First, “mancipatio”: Three times a symbolic sale took place.

Two times the child was sold by the birth father, and two times he was bought back. But the third time, the natural father did not buy the child back—thus severing the old family ties.

Second, there was “vindicatio”: Here the adopting father went to the Roman magistrate and presented a legal case for transferring the parentage. The ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. These seven witnesses could be called upon at any time in the future to vouch in court that the adoption was genuine.

Several dramatic changes transpired after vindicatio:

- The adopted son lost ALL rights in their OLD family.
- He was regarded as a NEW PERSON entering a NEW LIFE and their past no longer had influence or authority.
- ALL DEBTS were reconciled from the adopted child’s old life.
- In the eyes of the law, the son belonged 100% to his adopted father. The child got a new Father. The adopted son became an heir to the father’s estate. He gained all the rights of a birth child in the new family.



For example, Julius Caesar named in his will Gaius Octavius Thurinus as his adopted son and heir. This adopted son became Caesar Augustus.

So it is with us. Not just for sons, but for daughters, too. As spiritual orphans, we’ve been adopted by the Spirit of God into God’s forever family. We’re now God’s sons and daughters by grace—heirs of God and co-heirs with

Christ. No longer slaves to sin or fearfully anxious about our status before God, by the Spirit of Christ we cry out affectionately as children, “*Abba Father!*”

The Aramaic word “**Abba**” was an affectionate term used by children in the home. And it’s what Jesus called God in the Garden before his death. By God’s grace we have the same close relationship with God that Jesus has with the Father—*especially* in times of suffering and hardship. So when we’re feeling accused or doubtful or unworthy of our close relationship with God, the Holy Spirit takes the witness stand on our behalf and speaks “*the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God*” that we are most assuredly adopted sons and daughters in the family of God.

There’s a saying in AA that “your addiction makes you need more and more of what’s *not* working.” In many ways sin can be likened to addiction. We try to find fulfilment in what will

never give us fulfillment. Christ our advocate intervenes and breaks the vicious cycle of addiction in our lives and gets us healthy again and on the road to recovery. Our old life, our appetite for destruction and selfish ambitions, hold no authority or grip over us anymore. But we've got to diligently cooperate with the Spirit and struggle for this reality Christ has opened for us. It takes some *Holy Sweat*. We're all simultaneously saints AND recovering sinners.

God frees us from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt saying, "*Let my people go!*" And so we're set free to serve the living God. The Spirit turns our Exile into Exodus. But *it is possible* for us to go back to our old life in Egypt to the familiar fear of slavery. And so Paul begs us, "Don't go back. Don't swim back across the Red Sea God miraculously parted and go back to Egypt. Don't go there.

Instead, we have a new story, a new script, a new strength.



The life-giving Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead...resides within us. Dwells in us. The Spirit has fanned into flame a new desire in us—to follow Christ with every ounce of our being. The indwelling Spirit empowers us to crucify our self-destructive habits and dysfunctional relational patterns. And the Spirit, God's PRESENCE and POWER on earth, assures us in our heart of hearts, that we belong to God—100%, body, mind, and soul.

The past is past. Our debts are paid. We're debt free!! And we're pulsing with life—everlasting and abundant life. Condemnation. Self-recrimination...GONE in Christ Jesus.

No more "should-ing" yourself.
No more compulsive "must-ication."

There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

Hear the good news Immanuel:

- Christ's resurrection... is our resurrection.
- Christ's rising... is our rising.
- Christ's life... is our life.

Our **IDENTITY** and our **DESTINY** are forever entwined with Christ's.

We live *in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ.*



Never forget: Christ's crucifixion... is also our crucifixion. Christ's dying is our dying. You can't have a resurrection without a crucifixion. You find life by dying first. It hurts as much as it's worth. Our faith hurts a lot, and so it's worth a lot. Here's our great hope: Having suffered with Christ, we **WILL BE** glorified with Christ. God promises us this.

Jesus, "God's YES to all his promises" says, "cross my heart, hope to die." He took more than a needle—He took nails in his hands and feet and a spear in his side for us. The good news for us is that we're NEVER alone in our suffering. Christ suffers with us. You are not alone. Our suffering has meaning. It's not wasted. Glory takes root and blossoms out of the manure and soil of suffering. Living and dying with Christ helps us resemble Christ, our older brother, more and more. In Christ, we grow up into our childhood. We're nurtured, but not coddled. We develop into thankful, respectful, and responsive children who honor thy Father in heaven. We want to please God wholeheartedly and avoid those things that would hurt God. We wouldn't dare become entitled or spoiled children.

As one of my favorite commentators C.E.B. Cranfield wrote,

"we continue to do it, and do it ever more, and more sincerely, more consistently, and resolutely."

We're free, by means of the Spirit, to daily put to death our self-centeredness and pride. The more we're like Jesus, the more we're like ourselves. In Christ, we can CHOOSE LIFE and REFUSE to live a hell on earth saying no to self-destructive and self-absorbed lives. So shake off those shackles, in Jesus' name. This is what it means to be led, guided, impelled, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit will blossom in us individually and as a community more and more.

The good news is that we can't ever earn or lose this privileged place in the family of God—it's all a gift. All grace. We have no fear of being cut out of God's will. **Perfect love casts out all fear.** We're God's beloved children and heirs for eternity. The Holy Spirit is our divine windfall, and our co-heir Christ is our PATH and our PRIZE.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *"Mosaic of Jesus Christ" on a brick wall, artist unknown*

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