

In the Spirit, Indwelt by God

Romans 8.9-11

The words “autopsy” and “mortuary” are not pleasant words. But they are the banner over a part of this best of all chapters, Romans 8.

We saw last week in 5-8 the worst kind of death imaginable – spiritual death, dead to God.

This worst kind of death is simply called being ‘in the flesh’. All who are wrapped in this coat of guilt and power of sin, are in the flesh.

In the first two verses – being in the flesh is seen in the thoughts of a man, the heart of a man, and the way of a man. There is no true life or peace for such a one; his life is set on things below and so upon earthly, sinful, satanic and deadly things.

In the last two verses, the focus is on his relationship to God – such a man is opposed to God, rebellious to his laws, and displeasing to the Lord.

But gladly, this mortuary is now exchanged for the maternity ward at the hospital, where new life comes into being. What a new place do we find in verses 9-11!

Man’s greatest need is to be born again; and to be born again, man must be saved from being in the flesh to being in the Spirit. To be in the flesh is to be apart from God; to be in the Spirit is to be inhabited by God Himself; to be owned by God; alive to God; and risen now and in the future by the Lord Jesus Christ.

See two main things in this passage:

One, the Spirit's indwelling – it begins on that note, 9a; and ends on that note, 11b. To be *in the Spirit* is for the Spirit to be in you, to dwell in you. God is on the outside of those in the flesh; He is out of doors. He does not inhabit the hearts or lives of those who are not under the blood of Jesus His Son.

Two, the Spirit's work in saving us is in a two-stage method – *first*, the Spirit is in our souls and our body is dead; *second*, the Spirit is in both our spirits and our bodies when raised from death to life.

God must first enter the dead life of a sinner and transform that dead life to be new life to our souls; and God will raise them up to life eternal in a resurrection like the Lord's.

See each Person of the Trinity at work here, aiming at nothing less than the full salvation of our lives – body and soul!

Our **first point** then is how we are in the Spirit by the Spirit being in us.

See how Paul stacks up several phrases to define and detail this glorious indwelling –

1. To be in the Spirit and indwelt by Him is to have the Spirit, and so belong to him.
2. To be indwelt means the Spirit is life to us and the body now is dead because of sin – not an easy verse!
3. To be indwelt by the Spirit is to have the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, and who will give life to your bodies too!

Let us begin then with how it is God Himself restoring his creation, man to be inhabitable for himself. God made man for himself, made you for Himself, but sin made us a dump, made us homeless, and uninhabitable.

So to restore and resuscitate and regenerate – all is of God! All by His Spirit; the Spirit of Christ! This further establishes the dead state of man in sin, as Eph. 2:1 teaches simply and powerfully.

There is nothing of cooperation here of man to operate on his own dead self; God must do it – and indeed he does!

Now see a richer feature still. Yes – it is God who regenerates, and it is the Spirit who is central in the application of life to the dead in the flesh. But the *whole triune God* has shown up in this supernatural moment; the Father and the Son come to us and make their abode by the Spirit, the Comforter.

Yes, it is the Spirit's power that gives mouth to mouth to the dead life. But see how he is not the Holy Spirit but the Spirit of God; that is, the Spirit of the Father. And He is the Spirit of the One who raised up Jesus from the dead – 11 – who will give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit!

We can begin to see where Paul is going with your adoption and being made sons of God, heirs of God, because of the Father's Spirit.

Moreover He is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus. See how it is not only the Spirit in you but Christ as well – verse 10 – “if Christ is in you!”

So each person of the Trinity is involved. The work of salvation from beginning to end is divinely indivisible.

The Father is the surgeon at the table, coming in wisdom and love to those he would bring home to be with him in his house; the Spirit is His hand, His sovereign agent who does all things mightily, giving life to the dead. The Father removes the heart of stone. Man in the flesh, has a spiritually dead heart. The Father by the Spirit put a new heart in his newly formed child. But who is the heart-donor? It comes from Jesus Himself! Christ gives his heart, his life, his blood, in a powerful transplant!

You are His body. You belong to him now. There is not just a heart-transplant but a shared union with Him. He doesn't just own you like a piece of property but as his very own self! The Spirit who is put in the renewed life is the Spirit of Christ. I am not only crucified with Christ, but I am now risen in Him, and He is in me. He is my very life!

There is only one great heart in the mystical body of Christ, the Church. We live by Him in us by the Spirit. And if you are thinking to yourself right about now that this something really big, really permanent, really intimate and really unbreakable – well, Paul thought the same thing. To the Ephesians he spoke in this way:

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints

what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ even to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14-19)

Now one more item must not be overlooked of what it means to be in the Spirit, to be indwelt by the triune God.

If anyone has not the Spirit he is not a Christian, and does not belong to him.

This reverses being in the flesh in 5-8. Being in the flesh brought a certain mind with it; so does being in the Spirit. The mind of Christ is in us now; His Spirit, His heart, His life is mine.

This is life and peace that I am not my own, but bought with a price and owned by Him! I am rescued from death; I am not hostile toward God any longer, but his friend. This is to be at peace with him, a beloved child of God, by His love and presence.

I have his law on me too, not as a covenant of works but the rule of my Father's house. His law is written on my heart, and His Spirit enables me to be humble, to accept his ways above mine. I am not displeasing to him, but able to please him in Christ's Spirit.

Instead of inability to please God, instead of depravity resulting in sin, and instead of enmity to God, there is enmity rather to the old nature, the old Adam, with sin. The Christian can be reconciled with anything except for sin! Why? Because God is holy, you are his temple, and he is jealous over you as a pure bride!

This is going to lead into the Spirit-controlled life in verses 12-14.

As once I was controlled by the flesh, the world, and the devil – having a heart of sin in me; so now I am made new by God the Spirit!

Now that brings us to our **second point** regarding the Spirit's regeneration, in verses 10-11. The spirit is alive, and my body will be raised.

Verse 11 is without controversy. The one indwelt by the Spirit of the Father and the Lord Jesus, must in time be raised like Christ! These mortal bodies will be given life, will be raised up like His body, will be resurrected, at the last day, when the trumpet sounds and death will be swallowed up in victory.

A regenerated body is as necessary to live in a new heavens and earth, as a regenerated soul! Christian redemption does not bypass the body.

What a wonderful truth – the triune God is united to the believer both body and soul. Your souls one day will be separated from your bodies – to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But that does not mean that the Lord is absent from our bodies! Our bodies are united to Christ as well as our souls. And they will be reunited gloriously at the end. In the meantime our physical bodies are said to sleep in Jesus, to rest in certain hope of the resurrection.

Now that should be noncontroversial! As Thomas Watson put it, 'Christian, you should be more assured of rising from the dead than rising from your beds tomorrow morning!' Why? Because you have a promise for the one but not the other! God, who cannot lie; who has sworn by Himself, and has shown you what He will do in your very own head Jesus, has said so!

We come to the 10th verse. Does Paul make a contrast between body and soul, or is it a contrast between the body and the Holy Spirit. Good men line up on either side.

That the ‘body is dead because of sin’ could be talking about the spiritual death that resides in man. Paul spoke in Romans 6 of the body of sin, in which sin reigns, and in Romans 7 of this body of death from which he longed to be delivered. ‘There are three deaths,’ said Haldane, ‘one in this life, one at the end of this life, and one after this life.’

Paul says later in 8.13 – the deeds of the body need to be mortified, put to death.

So it is possible to take spirit here of the human spirit, or the soul. In my body is this weak control which sin and death have over me until the resurrection; but in my spirit I serve the Lord.

But another reading is possible and is the more likely of the two.

The contrast is between the body of the believer and the Spirit given by Jesus which is life, in spite of the mortality of our bodies.

This fits better in several ways:

1. Paul is about to speak of the mortality of the body of the Christian, as we just saw in verse 11.
2. The word ‘spirit’ is the same word translated Holy Spirit in the 5 other instances in 9-11.
3. Lastly, it is really hard to see how the redeemed human spirit is life! Again, all the direction is toward what the Spirit does from Christ, and not we do.

The Spirit of Christ indwelling you, His heart implanted within, His presence taking up his home in you – that new life finds what opposes it still in you – your body that is still mortal, still needs resurrection, and sin in some way still has it until the Lord says, ‘Enough!’

But that same new life, new heart, new presence, finds life by the Spirit because of righteousness.

When you became a Christian, did your body and physical existence become a Garden of Eden? As you are growing in the Lord, is your body getting stronger and stronger by His might? No. In fact the Bible says the opposite: the outward man is perishing! But the inner person is renewed.

That’s what is going on here. Think of it in medical terms. Your new heart is alien to you as a child of Adam. But now by the presence of God, He has and will overcome all things in due time – but all in its order. In you, that is, in your body, dwells no good thing that helps forward this work of God. You have not rejected the new heart, but there is still opposition within you against the Spirit! This new life is fed by the two-fold righteousness of Christ – His being your substitute as your righteousness in justification, and His being your purifier and indweller in sanctification.

And this is where Paul is going in 12ff. While the remnants of the old fleshly nature still abide, sin still indwells, and the law seeks to imprison still. But there is a more powerful nature, inhabitant and law. And we must see ourselves obligated to Christ and His Spirit, and put to death the deeds of the body in a new and living way, led as the sons of God.

What a glorious work – indwelt by the Spirit of the triune God. Let us not take our eyes off of what the Lord has done! To do that, let me close with three ‘eyes’, taken in modified form from Derek Thomas:

1. First, look at your lives differently if you have been born again. You have been awesomely and wonderfully remade. Something high, holy, and heavenly is at work in you. This is something to set before you every day of your life. God lives in you! That should more than make a difference; that should change everything! How do you view things! You are to live as those who are alive from the dead!
2. Second, look at your bodies as does the Lord – He calls them His temple. Yes, you await your resurrection. You are not yet what you shall be. But you called to be sanctified body and spirit. That begins inside but must show itself outwardly too. Guard your hearts; so discipline your lives, guarding your eyes, ears, lips, hands and feet. The duality of body and soul does not result in perfectionism or in loose living.

‘You are going to sin in your bodies! But there is mercy to forgive and wash you.

‘You should not sin in your bodies! There is grace to keep you and make you obedient. Learn both!

3. Lastly, what does this say then to how we treat one another? How we are even to be kind to our enemies. But think here of your brothers and sisters in the Lord. Thomas says this:

“In this union with Christ by the Spirit there can be no prejudice according to race, color, education or economic circumstance. These differences cannot affect my relationship with fellow

believers in the gospel. ‘In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’” (pages 36-37).

The church should be a very welcoming place. Not a place for being judgmental but a place of love and holiness and growth in the Lord Jesus by His Spirit.

How do we do that? That is where verse 12 is taking us.