

Comfort in the Spirit of Life

Psalm 109:30-31; Romans 8:1-17

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • September 5, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: In 1990, at his regular broadcast on Trinity Broadcasting Network, televangelist Benny Hinn threatened an unnamed pastor, “Sometimes I wish God would give me a Holy Ghost machine gun, I’d blow your head off.” This threat was directed to John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in southern California. MacArthur has been a long-time critic of the charismatic-Pentecostal movement, especially the prosperity gospel teachers on television.

What are MacArthur’s criticisms of the charismatic-Pentecostal movement? There are several, and many other sound pastors and theologians have the same criticisms. First, they distinguish between Spirit-filled Christians and non-Spirit-filled Christians. Spirit-filled Christians speak in tongues, perform signs and wonders such as healing—even raising people from the dead—and able to prophesy. If you do not have these gifts, you are second-class Christians, or even worse, you do not even have the Spirit of God. So, if a Pentecostal pastor is your pastor in this church, you are all second-class Christians without the Spirit.

Second, they believe in direct communication with God without the aid of the Bible. A common declaration by Pentecostals is, “God told me this thing or that thing,” and these declarations are equal to God’s word being inerrant, infallible and inspired by the Spirit. Third, prosperity gospelers among them teach that God promises material prosperity to all Christians who give generously to their churches. These are but a few of their false teachings and heresies that are contrary to the Bible.

Our text today completely disagrees with these Pentecostal prosperity gospel heretics. Here, Paul describes all true believers as those who are not condemned by God to eternal death but have the Spirit of life. True Christians are also indwelt by the Spirit, therefore, their life is guided by the Spirit. And because they are saved by Jesus the Son of God, they also become children of God. Therefore, they are heirs of God’s promise of all blessings in the heavenly places.

Last Sunday, we began a three-part study of Romans Chapter 8: verses 1-17, verses 18-25, and verses 26-39. But I preached on verses 18-25 last Sunday to encourage everyone in our sufferings and afflictions with the comfort of the Spirit. So today, we will meditate on the theme, **Comfort in the Spirit of Life**, under three points: first, **No Condemnation in Christ** (verses 1-4); second, **God Dwells in You** (verses 5-11); and third, **Children and Heirs of God** (verses 12-17).

No Condemnation in Christ

One of the most popular programs on TV is a crime story, how investigators solve the crime, the trial of the suspect, the verdict and sentence, and the aftermath in the life of the criminal and the loved ones of the victim. The most suspenseful scene is the courtroom scene when the

foreman of the jury declares, “On the charge of murder in the first degree, we find the defendant...” And there is a long pause, with the camera scanning the faces of the family, the accused, and the lawyers shown, before the foreman says, “Guilty” or “Not guilty.” A guilty verdict condemns the criminal to prison or to death. A not-guilty verdict acquits the accused of any wrongdoing, and he walks free.

What if, on Judgment Day, you were standing before God the Judge in his heavenly courtroom, and he declares his verdict on you, “Guilty!” That would be the most horrible moment of your life, because the sentence is condemnation to eternal punishment in hell. But if you have trusted and embraced Christ as your Savior, he is your Advocate by your side, and God will declare, “Not guilty!” You are acquitted of all the charges against you as a sinner. God declares you acquitted, because all your sins have been transferred to Jesus your Advocate. He therefore was condemned to death on the cross as the eternal penalty for all your sins. And you walk free of any wrongdoing.

This is what verses 1 and 2 of our text says declares to us, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”* When you repented of your sin and believed in Christ as Savior, it was the Holy Spirit who changed your heart and mind to repent and believe. Therefore, the Spirit is called “Spirit of life,” because he has caused you to inherit eternal life in Christ.

Why does Paul call the law *“the law of sin and death”*? All mankind is condemned to death all sin, all violate God’s law. Through Adam’s one sin against God’s law, sin came into the world because he was the covenant head of all mankind. Everyone is conceived and born with a sinful nature, which Paul calls the “flesh.” When Christ came in human flesh and blood and sacrificed himself on the cross for all the sins of all his people, he condemned sin in our sinful nature. How did he do this? He was able to do this because he lived a perfectly sinless, righteous life, from birth to death. He did this *“in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”*

This is why he often told his disciples that he came to do his Father’s will, his Father’s commandments, as he declared in Matthew 5:17–18, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”* He fulfilled every single commandment of the Law that his Father required of his people Israel.

Romans 5:1 and 8:1 say the same thing. In Romans 5:1, Paul has a positive comfort for us, *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In Romans 8:1, he has a negative assurance, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Justification and condemnation are opposites. To be justified before God is to be declared “Not guilty!” by God. To be condemned before God is to be pronounced “Guilty!” by God. What words can be sweeter to our ears than to hear God declare, “You have been justified by faith; therefore, you are now my friends, not my enemies.” How sweet and comforting is that?

God Dwells in You

In verse 9, Paul assures us, *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”* This is our second point: God dwells in all of us believers the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. What does God dwelling with us mean? The Greek word literally means “to reside or dwell in a place” Paul uses the same word in verse 11, where he says that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit who dwells in us. Also, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”* Since the Spirit of God dwells in us, then we as God’s people are also God’s temple.

God dwelling in us and with us is a major theme in the Bible. God dwelt with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He dwelt with the Israelites in the tabernacle (Exo 29:45) in the wilderness and in the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:13). Jesus came down from heaven as the Word who became flesh and dwelt among his people (John 1:14). And in the coming new heaven and new earth, God will dwell with his people forever, *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God”* (Rev 21:3).

And what are the implications of God dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit? Paul explains three implications in verses 5-11. First, those who are indwelt by the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. This is why Paul exhorts us in Colossians 3:1–2, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”* But unbelievers who do not have the indwelling Spirit set their minds on the things of the flesh, earthly and temporal things that do not have any value in eternity. Therefore, they are consigned to eternal death under the wrath of God. In total contrast to unrepentant sinners, the Spirit gives life and peace to us who repent and believe in Christ.

And then in verses 7-8, Paul says something that is most troubling even to faithful Christians, *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* Those who do not have the Spirit of God are hostile to God and have no regard for God’s law. They willfully and rebelliously violate God’s law. They do not want to have anything to do with God because God will choke their ungodly passions and desires. Just a casual glance at the culture, politics and movements around us confirms the truthfulness of God’s assessment of these shameless, wicked people.

Furthermore, Paul not only says that they are *unwilling* and have no desire to obey God’s laws. They are also *unable* to obey God’s laws, *“they cannot.”* Unwilling and unable to obey God: this is the state of all unrepentant people. Why are they unable to obey God? Why do they not have the capacity to obey God? Because Scriptures say that they are dead in their sins (Eph 2:1). Can dead people respond to a call or command? Of course not. Why are they dead in their sins? Because the Spirit of God does not dwell in them, so there is no change in their minds and hearts. They continue to be wicked, evil, unrighteous, unholy and rebellious against God. Jesus says of them, *“Unless they are born of the Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). If they do not have the Spirit of Christ, then they are not Christians and they do not belong to Christ.

Therefore, when a Christian says he was saved by his own free-will decision to accept Jesus as Savior, he is wrong. No human being understands God and seeks for God, *not even one* (Rom 3:10-11). 1 Corinthians 2:14, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* One who is not indwelt by the Spirit is the “natural person.” What are the characteristics of this person? First, he rejects the things of the Spirit as foolishness. Second, he has no ability to understand them because Satan has blinded them. The Spirit first opens the mind and heart of a person. When the Spirit has illumined that person’s mind and heart, he is able to understand the things of God and to also accept them. This is how a person is saved. Regeneration before faith: that is how God saves a person.

The second implication of the Spirit indwelling us is the promise of a new life today and for eternity. In verse 4, Paul says that true believers *“walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* And in verse 13, they *“put to death the deeds of the body,”* sinful deeds. Their behavior, decisions, and priorities are according to God’s law through the power of the Spirit. They love the word of God by regularly attending worship services and Bible studies. They long for the Holy Communion when it is not administered because of Covid because they love communing with Christ. They love fellowshiping with the people of God. This is not true for almost seven out of ten Americans who claim to be Christians but rarely or never attend church (2018 Pew Research).

Jesus himself tells us, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* And how are we wretched sinners able to obey him? Jesus assures us, *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth”* (John 14:15-17). On the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed to his Father for us, *“They have kept your word... For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me”* (John 17:6, 8). A true believer understands, accepts and obeys God’s word and believes in Jesus the Son of God whom God sent to save us from our sins.

The third implication of the Spirit indwelling us is that we will also be raised to eternal life on the last day. In verses 10 and 11, we read that even when we are physically alive, our bodies are dead because of sin. But the indwelling Spirit is the Spirit of life who gives our souls the perfect obedience of Christ. Through the work of the Spirit, our dead hearts are made alive, transferred from death into life in Christ. Since the Holy Spirit gives life (Psa 104:30), he also raised our Lord from death. And on the last day, this same life-giving Spirit will awaken our dead bodies from the grave to be immortal and incorruptible bodies, never to die again. He will then reunite our renewed bodies and souls together in the new heaven and new earth.

Children and Heirs of God

The fourth and last implication of the Spirit indwelling us is that we are children of God, therefore, God is our Father in heaven. In verses 14-17, Paul affirms that true believers are children of God. Before we were saved, we were slaves of sin and the devil. As Spirit-indwelt people, we are now adopted children of God, because only Jesus is the true divine Son of God.

But even adopted children have all the rights and privileges and inheritance of the true Son of God. And what is our inheritance? We have the inheritance of the new heaven and new earth. We will have new and perfect bodies and souls. We will dwell forever with God. We will forever with all of God's Spirit-indwelt people. We will forever have joy and peace because all sin and sufferings and death will pass away. In other words, our inheritance is eternal life.

And what is our guarantee of this inheritance as children of God? Paul answers in Ephesians 1:13–14 that we *“were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* Through the indwelling Spirit, God seals his decree that we are his children, like a king who certifies his decrees with his own personal seal and signature. Therefore, God protects and preserves us until we acquire our inheritance in heaven.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, our comfort in this life and the next is the Holy Spirit who gives us eternal life. How are we sure of this? We have God's promises and assurances in his word. But we also have the assurance of the Spirit who *“himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”* Internally, in our hearts and minds, the Spirit assures us that we God's children with an inheritance.

Therefore, when we come to God's throne of grace in prayer, we have the right and privilege to address him as “Our Father in heaven,” just as our Lord Jesus Christ addresses his Father. The word “Abba” is a term of endearment, so we also call him, “Our dear heavenly Father.” Our communion with him is deep and personal because the indwelling Spirit endears us to him.