

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Controlled by the Spirit

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Scripture:

Romans 8:3-6

³ 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, ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Transcript:

Good morning. My name's Annie Duncan. I'm the executive pastor here. It is so great to be with you and worship and good morning to those of you who are worshiping online. My mom and dad are worshiping online. My friend, Julie in Georgia, and lots of you are worshiping online, so greetings.

The scripture this morning comes from Romans 8. We're going to pick it up in verse 3. "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. Those who live according to the flesh have their mind set on what the flesh desires. But those who live according to the Spirit have their mind set with what the Spirit desires, the mind controlled by the flesh is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

So Jesus, we pray that you pour out your Spirit and help us to understand what these verses mean. God, we do want our minds to be controlled more by your Spirit than our sinful flesh. So help us understand how to do that and what that means for us today. It's in your name that we pray, amen.

Well, a couple weeks ago I was hanging out with my sister-in-law Lindsay and her and my nephew, her son, Wesley who's about three and a half years old. And she was trying to get this remote control to work so that she could get Octo-Nauts on for him. I'm pretty sure I'm pronouncing that right. It's his show that he loves to watch. So she's trying to get that on, but the remote control wasn't working. And so Wesley sitting there on the couch and he's just waiting so patiently. It was so cute. And after a couple minutes, she's still not getting it to work. And he looks up at his mom and he's like, "Mama, are you just doing your best?" And she goes, "Yeah, bud, I'm just doing my best." And he goes, "Well, good job, Mama. Good job just doing your best." It was so cute.

Well in the scripture that we just read, Paul says that us doing our best doesn't cut it. It doesn't work. And he's not talking about remote controls. He's talking about us trying to live our lives, the way that God intends it. We have the law of commands to follow, but that hasn't worked for us, but there's another way to live, Paul says, and that offers us real hope. Real hope. That's the sermon series that we are in right now, as we're walking through this chapter 8 of Romans, because in Romans and in this chapter, we see this new way of living that Paul describes. So

we're going to walk through, we're going to spend a couple minutes, first, I'm going to tell you the three points that we can draw from this scripture passage then we're going to spend a couple minutes walking through verse by verse and then end with three ways of how we can live this out practically.

So first it looks a lot like this. This scripture can be summed up in three ways that we mess up and we're stuck in sin, but then God sent his son. And we know that in the sending of Jesus, Jesus dealt with our sin once and for all, and then sent the Spirit. And the Spirit helps us as we are in this forever journey of sinning and then remembering that Jesus is taking care of our sin and knowing that we have access to the Holy Spirit.

So let's walk through verse by verse and unpack this a bit together. "For what the law was powerless to do ..." Let's stop there. Okay, the law. The law here that Paul's referring to are God's commands. God has a lot of commands and we can find them all over scripture, but there's a lot of them in the Old Testament, but check out this word law in context with the first two verses of Romans, which Scott Dudley preached on last week, because Paul's intentionally drawing out a theme here. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit, which 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."

So that's a lot of law going on there, right? And the reason Paul's drawing this out is to draw out a comparison. The law, or ways of the Spirit, is something that we have access to now because of Jesus and the law, or the ways of sin and death, is something that we've been set free from because of Jesus. And then the law, God's commands, they've been this band-aid that have been trying to hold God's people together. The law does a really good job of describing ways not to sin, but it doesn't give us a cure for sin. We know that Jesus does though. So that's the first point is we mess up and we are stuck in sin.

This is what Paul is getting at when he says, "for what the law is powerless to do." It's because we're stuck. And it's not that the law is bad. No, God's commands, they're all really good. It's just that we've got this sinful nature in us and we're not able to follow God's commands all the time. If we did, life would be pretty great, but we don't, which brings us to the second word we need to unpack. "For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh." And when Paul talks about flesh here, he's not talking about our bodies, but he's talking about our sinful flesh, our sinful nature. The reason we fail time and time again at following God's commands is because of the sin that's in us. We reject God, we reject his commands, because I'd rather do what Annie wants to do sometimes, right? So we have this gravitational pull to do evil. And that is because of the sin that's in us.

So to accomplish what neither the law, nor ourselves could ever accomplish, God sent his son. God sent his son. And if you've read through the Old Testament, you see that over 40 times, God sends something or someone to lead God's people back to God. But when God sends his son, y'all, this is something completely different. God doesn't just send someone to represent himself. But God sends his very self. Hallelujah, amen. Eugene Peterson, he nails it in his Message version of the Bible When he puts it this way. "God went for the jugular when he sent his own son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code weakened, as it always was, fractured by human nature could never done that."

Y'all, I could just read that again and stop preaching, because that is so good. Our salvation, how we are saved from the sin and evil in us, it can be summed up in four words. God sent his son. Amen. Amen. So that's the second point, is first we mess up and we're stuck in sin. Second God sent his son. Jesus became what we are, humans, and subject to sin and its power, even though Jesus never sinned, so that we might become what Jesus is, righteous and holy and filled with the Spirit, which we're going to get to. "So he, Jesus, 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, that's our sinful nature, but according to the spirit."

So what Paul's saying here is we now have the power to resist sin in our lives. We don't have to live according to our sinful nature because Jesus sent his son and Jesus took care of our sin and poured out his Spirit on us. So the same Spirit that was in Jesus, we now have access to, that's why we can resist sin. But okay, what's the Holy Spirit? What's this Spirit that Paul's talking about? The Holy Spirit is God, just as Jesus is God, because as Christians, we believe in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't act on its own. It's not like a free agent, just doing some work over here and being a spirit and all that. No, the Spirit is attached to God and Jesus. They work three in one, while Jesus was still on Earth, he alluded to the Spirit coming and he said this to his disciples. He said, "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good, that I'm going away. Unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."

And I love that word advocate because the Spirit, it advocates for us, it advocates for a certain way of living and the Spirit comes to be our helper. And that is the third point, is that we mess up and we're stuck in sin. God sent his son and the Spirit is our helper. So let's walk through these last two verses quickly because they talk a lot about our sinful nature, our flesh, and this way of walking with the Spirit. "Those who live according to the flesh, have their mind set on what the flesh is desires. But those who live according with the Spirit, have their mind set on

what the Spirit desires. The mind controlled by the flesh is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

So again, Paul is driving home a theme here. It is flesh versus Spirit, but he's not talking about flesh and Spirit as in good versus bad, or like don't do this versus do do this. No, Paul is talking about them being in completely different realms. They are like two different governing authorities. And we can either live our lives governed by our sinful flesh, our sinful nature. Or we can live our lives trying to walk with the Spirit and have our minds controlled by the Spirit. And the reason they're not on a spectrum here, but there are two different realms is because you can't do those simultaneously. You have to be in one or the other.

I mean, think about this practically, right? Can you live in death and life at the same time? No, you can't. And that is Paul's point. We can't live our sinful lives and walk with the Spirit at the same time because they're two different realms; they're two different operating systems. When my nephews were younger, I took them to a parking lot so they could practice riding their bikes. Cooper had just gotten a bike with pedals and Jack who's two years younger, he was still on that glider bike thing, which those are weird, right? You just kind of glide along. So we get to this parking lot and Cooper immediately speeds away because he's got his pedals and he's just really fast. And poor Jack is just trying to glide along and catch up with him. So I'm walking aside Jack, because I can walk as fast as he can glide. And I hear Jack saying some stuff underneath his breath and he's like, "I'm going to get you Cooper. I'm going to get that bike. I'm going to get that new bike and I'm going to break it. And I'm going to tear it to the ground. I'm going to get you, Cooper."

And I'm like, "Jack, what are you saying?" And he literally shakes his head as if he's coming out of a trance. And he goes, "Oh, I'm sorry, Auntie." And I don't know about you, but I sure can relate to Jack. Sometimes I get headed in the wrong direction with my thoughts or with my actions. And I get to the point where I literally have to like shake myself and be like, "Oh my gosh, Annie, how did you get here?" And that I think is the Spirit that is literally shaking me and saying, "Annie, how did you get here? Let's get you back on track." Which is why I think this, this graphic is so helpful. Is we sin? We're we're going to sin. We're going to sin. I usually try and start my day by saying, "Don't sin, Annie," but no, we're going to sin. We're going to mess up. But we remember that Jesus is taking care of our sin and the Holy Spirit gives us a different way to live.

So what are some practical ways that we can live with our minds controlled by the Spirit? First ask, what am I focused on? What am I focused on? Are you focused on your sin or are you focused on life and peace? And that peace meaning the way that God intends things to be, because what Paul's getting at. When he says that the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and

peace. He isn't just saying that we sit around and pray and meditate all day, but this word peace is getting at this concept of shalom. So another way, a better way, to translate this would be the mind controlled by the flesh is death. But the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and the way God intends things to be, because the truth about sin is it leads to death. It leads to division, destruction. It messes with our lives. But when we're controlled by the Spirit, it leads to a different kind of life. And one that is full of peace, meaning the way that God intends things to be.

Okay, so I've told this story before, but it's been about seven years. So chances are not all of y'all have heard it before, but when I was in my mid 20s, I was traveling internationally and I had an eight hour layover in London and I'd never been to London before. So I was like, "Yes, I'm going to go and I'm going to see the sights." All of my friends wanted to sleep. And I was like, "Nope, I'm going out there. I'm going to see the sights." So as I headed out of the airport, I saw somebody that looked official. And so I asked him, "Hey, how soon do I need to be back here if I need to catch a connecting international flight?" And he said, "One hour before your flight takes off," which sounded great to me because that meant I had seven hours to see all that I could see in London. I hit the tube and I made it to London and I crammed as much as I could into those seven hours.

But it wasn't until I got back on the tube to head back to the airport within, it was a little bit before that one hour window, where I started to wonder, "Huh? Maybe I should have been at the airport sooner." And then I started to wonder, "Who was that official looking guy anyway? What did he know?" And then my heart started to race. My palms started to get a little sweaty and I started to get very panicky thinking, "Oh no, I think I should have been back at the airport hours ago." And so I prayed because I was young. I was in my mid 20s. I was traveling with friends. I wanted to get on the same flight that they were on. And I prayed, and I immediately, now this doesn't always happen, but I immediately heard a thought that wasn't my own. And it said, "No matter what anybody tells you're going to make this flight." And I immediately was flooded with peace. Now that's weird to go from palms sweaty, heart racing, panicky to peace.

And so I took that to mean, that's God speaking to me right now. And I tried to stay in that peace. And so I get to the airport and this is back when you actually had to have printed boarding passes. So I found the counter and I said, "Yep, I'm here to check in for my flight to Seattle." And she looked at me and she's like, "That flight checked, we checked that flight in two hours ago and all the passengers are now boarded." No matter what anyone tells you're going to make this flight. So I said, "Well, I would like a boarding pass for that flight." And she said, "There's no way you were making this flight." And I said, "It would be great if you could do something so I can get on that plane." And she shook head at me like, "Stupid young person." And she said, "If you give me your passport, I'll see about getting you on the next flight."

So I gave her my passport. She went into this little back room and she was gone for what seemed like forever. But then she came back and she handed me my passport and a boarding pass. And she said, "I don't know who you know, but you are making this flight." And then a security guard escorted me all through all of the lines at Heathrow, all the way to my gate. I get on the plane. They seal the door and we are taxiing. It was crazy. The point of this story is not that I made the flight.

If you think that's the point of this story, you missed my point, so I'm going to tell you what my point actually is. The point is that I jumped between those realms that Paul is talking about. I went from being completely panicked and worried and stressed out, heart pounding to filled with peace, to having my mind controlled by the Spirit. And it was crazy powerful, y'all, because I actually deserved to miss the flight. I was irresponsible. I was careless. But that day Jesus reiterated to me that sometimes we don't get what we deserve and that is good news. And I was filled with peace. It's something I'll never forget because of how instantaneous and powerful it was. But it is something we have access to in the mundane, not just at airports when you're trying to make your flight. But when you're in a meeting and you're starting to get really angry or upset. Okay. Jesus, I want to be focused. I want my mind to be controlled by you. We get access to this kind of instantaneous power throughout our entire day.

So how do we live controlled by the Spirit? Ask what am I focused on, second embrace the process. Paul's point in Roman's 8 isn't that Christians ought to be perfect, but it's that Christians ought to be controlled by the Spirit and walk and step with the Spirit, and remember that it is a process. We are going to sin. We're going to sin, but we don't stay stuck there. I hope you got the ... Yeah, you do. You got the graphic behind you. We don't stay stuck there. If we did, then we're really, really stuck, but we're stuck in sin. We mess up. We're stuck in sin, but Jesus, while we are still sinning, he comes and he takes care of our sin and offers us a new way. The same Spirit that was in Jesus, we have access to now.

And again, Eugene Peterson, he nails this when he says, "The law always ended up being used as a band-aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for, but we could never deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling, our efforts simply embrace what the Spirit is doing." It is a process. It is a process and the more that we walk with the Spirit, the more the Spirit is going to walk us closer to Jesus. And that doesn't mean that we go through this process perfectly. Pastor Rich Viota says, "If your mind gets distracted 1,000 times in 10 minutes of prayer, it's 1,000 opportunities to come back to the loving presence of Jesus." I love that. That's so beautiful. It's acknowledging that we're in a process, but we always get to come back. The Spirit is always going to point us back to Jesus.

So the point isn't that we stop sinning but the point is that we know that there is real hope and that there is another way we've got access to power and authority through the Spirit. And that's the third point. How do we live controlled by the Spirit? Ask what I'm focused on, embrace the process, and believe in the power of the Spirit. So how many of you all believe that if I drop this pen, it's going to fall? Yeah, glad I caught it. That would've been embarrassing if I didn't. You guys believe that the pen falls because you believe in the power, or in the laws of gravity.

You've experienced the laws of gravity. But do you believe that Jesus' Spirit is in you? You were a little bit louder on the laws of gravity than you were ... But this is my point, right? And I'm with y'all in this. Sometimes I believe more in the physical world than I do in the supernatural. But because we have Jesus' Spirit in us, we have access to that supernatural and the supernatural is actually more powerful than the physical world, right? We have access to this Spirit. We know that the effects of sin, they're going to still be all around us, but we don't have to live under sin's authority. Jesus is on the throne. Jesus is on the throne and the same Spirit that was in Jesus is in us. So we need to believe that. We need to remind ourselves of that. We need to remind each other of that. Believe that the power of the Spirit is in you. And when we do that, when we walk with the Spirit, we aren't just limited then to physical solutions, to the things and questions that we're asking, but we have supernatural solutions to the questions that we're asking.

And for Paul, taking seriously, the Spirit's authority, it's not optional. Like you hear this in Romans 8. It's not optional to Paul. It is literally a matter of life and death. So I want to encourage all of us to not take do I believe in the Holy Spirit or not? To not take that as something that's optional, but to think about it as a matter of life and death. It's not optional for Christians, for people that are trying to follow Jesus. It's not optional. It is an obligation. It's an obligation that we don't just submit to our sinful desires and our flesh, but that we have a different way of living and that as walking with the spirit.

So Belle Pres, I've already given you the action items for the week. It's ask, what am I focused on? Second, embrace this process, right? And then third, believe, believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's not optional. It's an obligation. Amen. Amen. So Jesus, we want to believe in your Spirit, so pour out your Spirit on us, God. We want our minds to be controlled by you, Spirit. So Holy Spirit, flood our hearts, flood our minds. We do, Jesus, we want to walk closer with you. We want to know what it means to be more like you. So encourage us, convict us, engage us. God, we welcome it all, because we're your kids and we know that you can be trusted. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question:

- It's the first week of a new session. Let's get to know each other. Share a little bit about yourself. What is your name? Where do you live, work, play or learn? What brings you to this group or what keeps you here?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How do you know when you are walking with the Spirit? Do you have a hard time discerning the "mind controlled by flesh" versus "the mind controlled by the Spirit?"
- One of the ways that the Spirit is our Helper is that it can interrupt us to keep us from continuing to sin (in her sermon, Annie told a story about her nephew Jack literally shaking himself out of a daze of grumbling about his older brother). How have you experienced the Spirit helping you in the midst of your sin? How has the Spirit helped to point you in a different direction? What was that like? How did it feel, and what was the outcome?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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