

Giving Thanks to the Spirit

Romans 8:1-3

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Last Sunday, I began a series on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, looking at the person of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit so that we can worship Him in the way He deserves to be worshipped. And at that time when I began the series last week, I mentioned to you that the Holy Spirit is the most— in my mind at least, the most abused member of the Trinity. There are so many people who blame the Holy Spirit for their behaviors, their words, their experiences, and the Holy Spirit has no part whatsoever.

It is a strange kind of thing to realize, having read what we did in John chapter 14, 15, and 16 about the Spirit of Truth, to see so much untruth connected to the Holy Spirit. So many lies, so many deceivers, so many deceptions are basically assigned to the Holy Spirit in order to gain necessary ground with people for those who have illegitimate desires and goals. The Holy Spirit is blamed for so many terrible things.

We are warned about that in the Bible. We are warned about the danger of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In spite of that warning, it goes on. We are warned about— and I'll say more about this next week, about insulting the Holy Spirit, we are warned about resisting the Holy Spirit, we are warned about grieving the Holy Spirit, we are warned about quenching the Holy Spirit, and all those verbs are addressed at the way we refer to the Holy Spirit Himself. But it is not just a matter of trying to avoid blasphemy and abuse and attributing to the Holy Spirit things that He would have no part of. It's more than that. We need not only to avoid certain errors regarding the Holy Spirit, but we need certainly to worship the Holy Spirit fully for what He has done and who He genuinely is.

Just last week, I was reading an article from the year 1657 and it was written by John Owen, the great English Puritan who is so prolific, who wrote volumes and volumes that enrich us in understanding of Scripture and theology. One very important treatise that John Owen wrote is an analysis of what it means to commune with God, what it means to really worship God. His title, in the sort of standard Puritan vernacular, is this: *Of Communion with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation—* that's a typical Puritan title. He also gave an alternate title— or *The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, with the Son, with the Holy Spirit Unfolded.*

In this treatise written by John Owen, he calls for the realization that we have received from, individually and specifically and particularly, each member of the Trinity certain specific benefits. And as we have received these benefits from each of the members of the Trinity, we are required to respond to those gifts to each member of the Trinity so that our Trinitarian worship is not so much blended as it is separated. There is a passage of Scripture that might help us to see this. If you look at the very last verse in the last chapter of 2 Corinthians, you would read this: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." That is a

Trinitarian benediction that sorts out the individual features of the ministry of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to us as believers. It is the love of God. Coming from God is that divine, sovereign love. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Son who provides divine, sovereign grace. And it is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. From the Father comes divine love; from the Son, divine grace; and from the Spirit, divine fellowship.

And the apostle Paul separates these individual members of the Trinity and identifies aspects of their ministry. Our communion is initiated by the love of the Father, ratified by the grace of the Son, and communicated by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And while we would agree that throughout Scripture there is overlapping in the work of the Trinity, there is still an emphasis on those specific works which each member does in some unique way.

I think for most of us who worship God in the true way, knowing that He is a triune God and who recognize that He is one essence but three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we tend to sort of blend everything together and worship Him as the triune God, and that, of course, is a legitimate way to worship God. But what Owen is calling for is for us to start separating these persons in the Trinity as to the recognition of what it is that they have provided for us and how it is that we should respond specifically to those specific provisions. In regard to the Holy Spirit, John Owen writes, “The Spirit’s ministry consists in bringing the promises of Christ to remembrance, glorifying Him in our hearts, shedding abroad the love of God in us, witnessing with us that we belong to God as to our spiritual state and condition, sealing us to the day of redemption, being the earnest or the guarantee of our final inheritance, anointing us with comfort, confirming our adoption and being present with us in our supplications.”

Then Owen responds to the work of the Spirit by saying this: “Here is the wisdom of faith, to find out and meet with the Comforter in all these things, not to lose their sweetness by lying in the dark as to their author, nor coming short of the returns which are required of us.” Each member of the Trinity, having done these specific things for us, is to be worshiped in specific response to the work that each has done.

It isn’t just that we don’t want, as believers, to quench the Holy Spirit, which believers can do. It is not only that we don’t want to grieve the Holy Spirit, which believers can do. We don’t want to resist the Holy Spirit. It isn’t just what we don’t want to do. It is that in our regular communion and our regular worship and our regular praise, we need to identify the three persons of the godhead in meditation, in prayer, and in submission. We need to dwell on the special mercy and the special ministry of each person of the Trinity toward us, and we need to make a specific response of love and submission and joy and gratitude distinctly to each member of the Trinity. This, says John Owen, is full-orbed communion with God.

Another of my favorite Puritans is Thomas Goodwin. Thomas Goodwin writes: “Our worship is sometimes with our Father, then with the Son, and then with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes our hearts are drawn out to consider the Father’s love in choosing us. Sometimes our hearts are drawn to the love of Christ in redeeming us. And sometimes the love of our hearts is drawn toward the Holy Spirit who searches the deep things of God and reveals them to us”— and then I love this line— “and takes all the pains with us.” Have you ever thought to thank the Holy Spirit for taking all the pains to work on your sanctification? “Thank You, Holy Spirit— thank You, Holy Spirit, for teaching me, thank You for warring against the flesh, thank You for interceding for me, thank You for sealing and securing me, thank You for guiding me away from the path of temptation, thank You for empowering me in the

face of sin.”

Now, that’s what Thomas Goodwin is calling for and Goodwin says, “It is only when we understand the work of each member of the Trinity distinctly that we have a true communion with God.” He says, quote, “We should never be satisfied until all three persons lie level in us.” A beautiful way to say that. So that we sit, as it were, in the midst of them while they all manifest their love to us. This is the highest experience that ever Christ promised in this life, to sit in the midst, as it were, of the Trinity and be the recipient of all the love coming from the Father, all the love coming from the Son, and all the love coming from the Spirit on our behalf. This is true worship.

We have spent a lot of time— and we do, I think, as believers— thinking about the love of the Father, the electing love, the sovereign love, thinking about the sacrifice of the Son, the grace that is given to us. There are a lot of ways to look at it. The Father initiates our salvation, the Son ratifies our salvation, the Holy Spirit communicates our salvation. The Father chooses us for life, the Son provides the sacrifice that leads to life, and the Holy Spirit gives us the life. And being able to recognize the ministry of each member of the Trinity is being able to have full-orbed worship and full-orbed communion.

So what we’re trying to do is, in this brief series, get a better understanding of the work and ministry of the blessed Holy Spirit that we might enhance and enrich our own gratitude and thanks and worship to Him. Maybe one of the most amazing verses that our Lord ever spoke or ever recorded from His lips is in John 16. I read it to you earlier. It really is a startling verse, if you stop and think about it. This is what our Lord said in John 16:7: “I tell you the truth”— as He always did— “it is to your advantage that I go away.”

And we’ll just stop right there for a minute and ask the question, “How would the disciples have received that?” Since they had been with the Lord essentially 24/7 for a period of three years, He was everything to them, absolutely everything. On one occasion, according to John 6, Jesus said after a group of people left, “Will you also go away?” and Peter, speaking for the rest, said, “To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life. We’re not about to go anywhere. Everything we want to know, everything we want to see, everything we need You have, You are.” How in the world could they handle the statement, “It’s to your advantage if I go away”? What could be better than that?

And when you think about the fact for literally millennia, people had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah and every generation of Jewish people who knew the Messiah was going to come had wished that they would be the people alive when He came, and yet when He did come, the people at that time rejected Him as we know fully. But there was a group of people, His followers and His disciples, who embraced Him, and this was the fulfillment of all of redemptive history, going all the way back to the time of the fall and the promise that one would come and bruise the serpent’s head, how wonderful that the Messiah had come, how wonderful that He was there. They didn’t want Him to go anywhere. They didn’t want Him to leave. They wanted Him to stay and set up His kingdom and that would be the end and the culmination and the fulfillment of everything.

Yet in that last evening together when they were meeting in the Upper Room before He was taken and crucified, He says to them, “I’m leaving, I’m going to go away, and you’re not going to be able to get to Me, but I’m going to tell you something, it’s to your advantage that I go away.” That’s an amazing statement. How could that be true? He says this: “If I do not go away, the helper will not

come to you. But if I go, I'll send Him to you." What is better than having Jesus? Having the Holy Spirit— having the Holy Spirit. "You mean the Holy Spirit wasn't around?" No. I also read to you from the same portion of Scripture, "He has been with you, He will be"— where?— "in you." The Holy Spirit was always around. The Holy Spirit was the Creator, He moved on the face of the waters in Genesis and created. The Holy Spirit's always been the life-giver, the Holy Spirit's always been the convictor. He's been striving with men, it says in Genesis 6.

The Holy Spirit has always been the one that brought life to spiritually dead people and all men have been dead since the fall. There would be no salvation in the Old Testament, no believing faith, no redeeming repentance, no genuine conversion apart from the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit was around to give leading and guiding. The ministry of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the Old Testament period to some degree. He is with you might be a way to understand that for those necessary things like salvation and sanctification, the Holy Spirit was required.

But here comes the Son. Isn't that a better thing? Isn't it even a more wonderful thing to be in the very presence of the incarnate Son of God? One would certainly think so. So maybe that's a step beyond what they had in the Old Testament. The Spirit was there, the Son was promised, now the Spirit is still doing His work and the Son is also there. How can Jesus say, "It's better if I go away"?

The answer to that is because the Holy Spirit brings to the believers, from the time of the founding of the church on, a ministry that has never been known before. It isn't that the Holy Spirit wasn't here, it's not a question of absent and present, it's a question of degree, extent. The best thing that could ever happen to any people, better than having Jesus Christ in their midst, is to have the Holy Spirit. And that's us. We're living in that marvelous, marvelous realization. "It's better that I go so I can send the Holy Spirit."

Boy, if that's true, then the Holy Spirit is very, very special. And indeed He is. And instead of the terrible things that are assigned to the Holy Spirit, we want to take a look at the genuine ministry of the Holy Spirit so we can worship Him and they can— all members of the Trinity, as Goodwin said, can lie level in us and receive equal praise.

Where do we go in the Word of God to get in touch with the ministry of the Holy Spirit? Well, we've chosen to look at Romans 8. So with that brief introduction, I want you to turn to Romans 8, and we're going to take a look at the ministry of the Holy Spirit that flows through this chapter. And as we go, we may digress a little bit and talk about some of the other things, but obviously we're not going to try to cover every passage in the New Testament regarding the Holy Spirit but those things are which most essential and important to us. And in Romans chapter 8, we have a great starting point for this because the ministry of the Holy Spirit is presented here with regard to salvation.

Remember, in the opening seven chapters of Romans, the themes are all salvific. It's all about salvation. It starts in chapter 1 verse 16 with the gospel. Paul's not ashamed. He preaches. It's the power of God unto salvation. Then he starts to unpack the essence of the gospel. Talks about sin and judgment and then talks about the futility of trying to achieve righteousness on your own. Talks about grace and faith, uses Abraham as an illustration. Talks about the meaning of the cross and our union with Christ, and it's all about salvation all the way up to chapter 8. And now we come into chapter 8, and we shift into a section that is the final summation of the glory of salvation. It is the final summation of what it means to be saved. Here is the ultimate good news, and it all is secured to us by the Holy Spirit— by the Holy Spirit.

Let's at least begin in verses 1 and 2, and let's see what it is that the Holy Spirit does for us. I'm going to give you kind of a grocery list of things the Holy Spirit does that flow out of this chapter. But you have to understand where it all begins. Romans 8 verse 1: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How can that be possible that there's no condemnation for sinners? How can that be possible? Answer, in verse 2: "For the law or the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." There's no condemnation to those who are in Christ because of something the Spirit of life has done. The Spirit of life is the Holy Spirit. So we meet the Holy Spirit in verse 2 and here's the first point: The Holy Spirit frees us from death by giving us life. The Holy Spirit frees us from death by giving us life. That's the first feature of a no-condemnation life.

But let's back up into that first verse and recognize the word "therefore" ties this in with everything that had come before. All that has been said about salvation in all its glory and all its beauty— he's not going back to verse 25 of 7, he's not going back just to chapter 7, he's going back all the way to chapter 1 verse 16 where he started talking about the gospel, all of that gospel teaching therefore means there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's the summation of the gospel. That's the good news. You can be before an infinitely holy God as an utterly corrupt sinner and not be condemned at all, not now, and not ever. That is the good news.

And to understand that good news, you have to understand the bad news. The bad news is that Scripture designates every human being born into this world as a child of wrath— child of wrath, Ephesians chapter 2 verse 3. You're children of wrath. You're all children of wrath. Well, that's a kind of a Hebrew way of speaking. In other words, you've inherited the nature of those who will be damned. That's what that means. If you're a son of corruption, it simply means your nature is corrupt. If you're a son of wrath, it means you are sentenced to judgment. All men are children of wrath. They are under condemnation, and it is a miserable condition.

What are the elements of this condition? Well, we're overpowered by sin. We all come short of the glory of God. We've all sinned and we've all come short of the glory of God. We're all cursed. We are dominated; we are literally overwhelmed by, overpowered by sin. Sin is a defiling disease that cripples the soul of every human being, degrades every person, disquiets every person, steals peace and joy, replacing it with trouble, pain, fear. It plants in every heart the killing principle of corruption that no man can ever overcome and no human person can ever cure.

It is even worse than that. Not only are we incurably sinful and wicked but we are controlled by Satan who is the angel of wickedness, who is the devil himself. We are members of his kingdom. We are part of his family. John 8:44: "Your father is the devil." We are the devil's children. We are ruled by the prince of the power of the air— Ephesians 2:2— the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. He's operating in all human beings who are not only corrupt in their own nature but further corrupted by the work of Satan in them. And that's why Jesus said, "His lusts you do." What he lusts for, you do.

As a result of this, we are subject to vanity, it says in Romans 8:20. What that means is that in that condition where we are overpowered by sin and dominated by Satan, we are subject to all that is bad, all that is horrible. This is the futility of life, emptiness, bitterness, sorrow, pain. We're born to trouble. We have no peace. We fear death. We're full of anxiety, hopeless. And as such, Hebrews 10:27 says there remains nothing but a fearful looking for a fiery judgment. All humanity has to look

for is hell— hell. Damned forever, according to Revelation 20 verse 14, by the second death and the Lake of Fire. That is the misery of all human beings.

And when that punishment falls, it is a just condemnation— it is a just condemnation. Romans 3 says that in verse 8 and 9, it is a just condemnation. We have broken the law of God. Galatians 3 says if you break one law, you've shattered the whole law. Our condemnation is just. Like the thief on the cross, we indeed suffer justly. That's what He said.

So as a result, you sum all that up and you have the fact that the sinner stands as a child of wrath, under the condemnation of a holy God who is offended at every sin and renders a just judgment. The inevitable end, then, is hell forever. And that's the condition of every person until the Holy Spirit arrives. And in our text, in the darkness of this picture, our text brings glorious light. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the principle or the power or the influence of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Honestly, the Bible is a very condemning book, very condemning. In the 5th chapter of Romans, it says in Adam, all died. That we all inherited the sin nature from Adam. Romans 5 says that over and over again. Second Thessalonians chapter 1 gives us a frightening picture of the final future judgment that's going to fall on all sinners when it says that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the Lord and from the glory of His power.

There are two aspects of eternal hell. One is sense; that is, real pain. The other is absence, the absence of God. That's a real hell. And you say, "Well, didn't God send His law so we'd have standards to live up to? And if you live up to those standards we're going to be okay, we're going to get to heaven?" That is the misunderstanding that is most popular in the world and equally a damning misunderstanding because as holy as the law is, and it is perfectly holy because it's simply a reflection of God, it's the ethics of God's nature codified, written out and spelled out. The law, however, can't make us holy. The law can't deal with our sin, and the law cannot give us a way to escape condemnation.

Listen to what it says in Romans 3: "Whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become accountable to God." All the law does is shut your mouth when you make any claim to goodness. "Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin." All the law does is give you the knowledge of sin. That's all God's law does, is show you sin. It is not the path to overcome sin. It is not the path to escape the condemnation that your sin produces. It cannot do that. It cannot alter your condition; it can only reveal it. And it cannot change your condemnation; it can only enforce it.

In fact, the law makes things worse because the law expands the violations. So no one by the law is going to be made right with God. Rather by the law, our guilt is increased, our sin is expanded. There is, therefore, condemnation and only condemnation to those who are under the law because the law can't save, the law can't remove condemnation, the written law. That's what verse 3 means when it says, "What the law couldn't do, weak as it was through the flesh." In other words, the law can't operate in human beings to any saving end. Condemnation here is the word *katakrima* and it focuses on the punishment after the sentencing more than just the judgment itself. There's another Greek

word that speaks about the judgment or the adjudication itself. This is a word that stretches beyond the sentencing to the actual punishment.

And what is said here is this: There is no punishment for those who are in Christ Jesus. In spite of all the violations, in spite of breaking God's law, in spite of being in a condition where condemnation would be just and righteous and holy and correct and deserved, in spite of that, in spite of our corruption, in spite of our belonging to the kingdom of darkness and Satan himself, we can be in a condition by salvation where there is no condemnation. "No" is a strong negative, a strong word. There's a lot of ways you could say no in Greek; this is a very strong one. Absolutely, unequivocally, no condemnation.

Now, let me tell you, that is the good news. That's the gospel. That as sinful as you are, there is the possibility of coming into a condition in which there is no condemnation, not any at all. What is that condition? What is that place? Being in Christ. Verse 1: "To those who are in Christ." Or verse 2: "In Christ Jesus." It's about union with Christ. What does it mean to be in Christ? It means to be in Him in a very real sense, spiritually. Go back to the 6th chapter of Romans for a minute, verse 3: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized"— or immersed— it's not talking about water baptism here but using the word to mean immersed into in a metaphoric sense— "all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death. Therefore, we've been buried with Him through that immersion into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." In other words, we literally are placed into Christ in His death and into Christ in His resurrection. We die in Him, we rise in Him.

Verse 5: "We have become united with Him in the likeness of His death and we shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. As a result, our old self was crucified with Him in order that our body of sin might be done away, terminated, and we would no longer be slaves to sin, for he who died is freed from sin. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, knowing that Christ having been raised from the dead is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him, for the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. So consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." In Christ we die, we rise again. This is our union with Christ. And that is what is being stated.

And that's all been unpacked and unfolded, as I just read in chapter 6, but all of that leading up to this point, so we don't have here a definition of what it is to be in Christ because that's all been explained. All we need to know here is: For those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation— none. Literally, we have been placed beyond the reach of condemnation— beyond the reach of condemnation. That's how the chapter begins, and it's how it ends. If you go to the end of chapter 8, what do you read? "What will separate us"— verse 35— "from the love of Christ, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword?" No. Verse 38: "I am convinced that neither death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In other words, list everything real, everything imaginable, things that are, things that are only imagined. None of them can change our condition. None of them can alter the no-condemnation status. We have been placed beyond the reach of condemnation. And this whole chapter is a long and really thrilling proof of the safety of believers. That's what it's about, it's about the safety and security of those who are in Christ from any condemnation, now or ever. Even if Satan shows up, it says later in the chapter, who is going to bring a successful accusation against us before God? No

one, ever, we are beyond the reach of condemnation. And this is all going to be attributed in a wonderful way to the Holy Spirit who does this for us. The reason we are beyond condemnation is because— verse 2 says— the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

The word “law” here is not in a biblical sense, not in a codified sense, but it’s used in the sense of a principle, a dominating power, the dominating power of the Spirit of life has set you free from the dominating power of sin, which leads to death. It’s just an amazing, clear, specific statement on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those of us who are in Christ are really in Christ. We are joined to Him.

How did we get into Christ? We literally have been placed into Him by the Holy Spirit who took us out of a condition of sin that leads to death and gave us life. That’s why He’s called the Spirit of life, the regenerating Spirit, the Spirit who is life— the life-giving Spirit. All those are used as phrases to describe the Holy Spirit.

It was Martin Luther who said, “For a man to be a Christian without having Christ is impossible and if he has Christ, he has at the same time all that is in Christ. What gives peace to the conscience is that by faith our sins are no more ours but Christ’s, upon whom God hath laid them all, and that on the other hand, all Christ’s righteousness is ours to whom God hath given it. Christ lays His hand upon us and we are healed. He casts His mantle upon us and we are clothed, for He is our glorious Savior, blessed forever.” This union that we have now with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes us out of a condition of death and puts us in the union with Christ. We are then alive in Christ.

This happens by faith. We understand that. Luther goes on to say, “Unites the soul with Christ as a spouse with her husband. Everything which Christ has becomes the property of the believing soul, everything which the soul has becomes the property of Christ. Christ possesses all blessing and eternal life. They are thenceforth the property of the soul. The soul has all its iniquities and sins, they become thereafter the property of Christ. It is then that a blessed exchange commences. Christ who is both God and man, Christ who has never sinned and His holiness is perfect, Christ the almighty and eternal, taking to Himself by His nuptial ring of faith all the sins of the believer. Those sins are lost and abolished in Him, for no sins dwell before His infinite righteousness, and thus by faith the believer’s soul is delivered from sin, is clothed with eternal righteousness, the righteousness of her bridegroom Christ.” Oh, happy union. Who does that? That is the work of the Spirit of life who removes us from the union with sin and Satan, which produces death, and gives us life. This is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. That’s what verse 2 means.

Go back again for just a moment, looking at the end of it, we have been set free from the principle, the dominating principle of sin that produces death. The condition of spiritual death as a result of sin. How are we set free? By the dominating power of the Spirit of life, and that can only refer to the blessed Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of life. And He is so designated in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. You can read through that, the law kills, the letter kills, the letter kills, the Spirit gives life, the Spirit gives life. Verse 6, verse 17, verse 18, Galatians 6:8, the life-giving Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us life.

And if you’re still wondering about that, what did Jesus say to Nicodemus? You want to enter the kingdom of God? You must be born of the water and the Spirit. You must be born from above. The Spirit is the source of life. He is the one who gives life. He is the regenerator.

Look at Titus for a moment. In Titus, there's a wonderful statement about salvation that we can see will lay some weight on what I've been saying and perhaps some clarity. But notice that we were foolish—verse 3 Titus 3:3— that we were disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts, pleasures, spending our life in malice— that's evil— envy, hateful, hating one another. That's a description of every human being. Not a pretty picture. "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared"— so here you have the kindness of God, everything starts from the love of God, works through the grace of Christ and ends up with the fellowship of the Spirit. "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us."

How did He save us? How did He rescue us from the condition of corruption and cursing? How did He rescue us from the domain of Satan? How did He rescue us from the tyranny of sin? How did He do it? "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." Okay, it wasn't by the law then. It wasn't by our goodness. "But according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewing"— by whom?— "by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." I don't know that we really know the full richness of the Holy Spirit, but we're going to work on understanding it together. How did this renewal come? How did this washing come? How did this regeneration come? How did this life come? How, by whom have we been made alive? None other than the Spirit of life.

How did He do it? Well, first I read you in John 16, He convicts us of sin and righteousness and judgment. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of convicting the sinner. Then He brought to us the gospel. The Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. God breathed, comes from the *pneuma*, the Spirit of God. Holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit, Peter says, and they wrote the Scripture. So the Spirit is the author of holy Scripture. So one, the Holy Spirit convicts the sinner. Two, the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the gospel, brings the gospel so that we're begotten again, according to James 1:18, by the Word of Truth. First Peter 1, the same thing. We're begotten by the Word of Truth. The Spirit is the convictor; the Spirit is the author of the gospel which is brought to us. The Spirit becomes our teacher, opens our minds by His regenerating power, and we believe the gospel, we turn from sin. That's all the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit who gives life, the Spirit of life.

I don't know if you've ever really spent time thanking the Holy Spirit for what He gave you, for convicting you of sin and righteousness in judgment, for writing the holy Scripture, the glorious gospel, the Word of Truth, the Spirit of truth who brought you the Word of Truth, and then who gave you life and understanding so that you heard the truth, you came alive, you repented, you believed the truth, and you literally were delivered out of a condition of sin and death into a condition of life. And now your condition in life is a condition not only of being alive, but having been clothed with the very righteousness of Christ, you are beyond the possibility of condemnation— beyond that possibility.

How could the Spirit do this? How can the Holy Spirit do this? He can do it because of the provision of verse 3, which we'll look at a little more next time, but just to introduce it to you. The law couldn't do it. It was weak because the law couldn't empower the flesh. The law couldn't make a better man. It could set the perfect standard, but it couldn't make a man that could keep it. So it was weak through the flesh. In other words, it's weak not in its own self but in the sense that flesh can't keep it. But God did what the law couldn't do and He did it through His Holy Spirit, and He did it by the sacrifice of Christ, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as an offering for sin. He

condemned sin in the flesh.

Let me show you the difference. See that last line, “He condemned sin in the flesh”? You know what the law can do? The law can condemn the sinner. The law does condemn the sinner. The cross condemned sin. See the difference? The law can’t condemn sin, only the cross condemned sin. The law sentences the sinner to death, the cross sentences sin to death. Sin dies, it’s no longer our master, it is no longer our power— a dominating force. It no longer can call for a just punishment and execution. The law condemns the sinner; the cross condemns sin.

How does it do that? Because at the cross, Jesus pays the penalty in full. Sin’s requirement, which was established by God Himself, is paid in full. That’s what it means when it says we were identified with Him in His death. When He died, all our sins were there and paid for in full. The law couldn’t do that. Believe me, the law condemns every sinner. The law can’t condemn sin, but the cross condemns sin for those who are in Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I was looking around this week for some hymns on the Holy Spirit because there are a few songs to the Holy Spirit. They’re kind of schmaltzy, syrupy, sentimental songs. But I was digging around, I figured I’ll go to a Presbyterian hymnal. A Presbyterian is usually a little more theological. And I found this, I’ve never heard it, I don’t know what— I could hum the tune but that wouldn’t help anybody. But here’s an old hymn to the Holy Spirit, it’s the only one I found, and it goes like this: “Spirit, we would worship You, crowning gift of resurrection sent from Your ascended throne, fullness of the very godhead, come to make Your life our own.” That’s exactly what the Holy Spirit did. He came to make the life of God our own life.

And then this writer— who, by the way, is Margaret Clarkson, you may know a little bit about her. The hymn goes on, and I’ve edited it a little bit, but speaking to the Holy Spirit, “You who in creation’s dawning, brooded on the lifeless deep, still across our nature’s darkness moves to wake our souls from sleep. Moves to stir, to draw, to quicken, thrusts us through with sense of sin. Brings to birth and seals and fills us, saving advocate within. You Yourself, the living author, wakes to life the sacred Word, reads with us its holy pages and reveals our risen Lord. You it is who works within us, teaching rebel hearts to pray. You whose holy intercession rises for us night and day.” That’s absolutely true, and that’s reason to give honor to the Holy Spirit. Amen?

Father, we thank You for our time this morning to think about these things, and we’re just kind of scratching the edges of these great truths, but we have so much that we already know that we can fill in to this and grasp that all that Christ did on the cross made it possible for the Holy Spirit to give us life. The fact that He had borne in His own body our sins on the tree, the fact that He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, chastisement for our peace fell on Him, by His stripes were healed, that He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, the fact that He became a curse for us. All of these great realities of the substitutionary work of Christ, the necessary provision, the necessary ratification of divine initiative make it possible for the application and communication of the Holy Spirit to give us life and give us life that puts us beyond the possibility of condemnation, knowing that Christ was fully condemned for our sins. Nothing can ever condemn us. What incredibly glorious news.

How we thank You, Father, for such initiating love. We thank You, O Christ, for such a sacrifice of grace. And we thank You, O Holy Spirit, for giving us life and sustaining that life until we see Christ face-to-face and are like Him. We worship You, our triune God, and we do so with joy and gratitude.

Amen.

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