

Romans 8:9-14 The Spirit controlled life

Introduction

In mid-February 2014 in Ukraine the tense standoff between the authoritarian Russian backed President and the majority of the citizens entered a new phase. The street protests in the capital Kiev which had drawn large crowds of people led to violent repression by the authorities with some paramilitary forces using snipers to execute key protest leaders in the square. Burning barricades and a hail of any thing that could be thrown was tossed in the direction of the police forces in front of them. In the midst of the chaos a simple video plea was filmed of an intelligent young adult who in good English asked her viewers to tell the story she outlined of a people longing to be free of a repressive regime; of corrupt courts and legal system; who wish simply to enjoy the freedom to be a civilised nation. The video on UTube has been a huge hit with several million people viewing it and most probably being sympathetic to her appeal. The general news story of the struggles in Ukraine has been in the media for a long time, but the story when it gains a face, a name and articulates a personal dimension to the struggle people connect in a more powerful way than before.

In Romans 8:1-8 Paul has been explaining some wonderful truths about the significance of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. However, and quite understandably, he has been speaking in general terms. But this changes in verse nine and from writing in the third person plural *'those who...'* the apostle switches to the second person *'You'*. It is true that what he describes affects Christians in general, but that is because it first of all impacts each one of us individually and personally. The Gospel is true whether I individually make a response to it or not; the issue then is that I miss out on its blessings if I decline to heed God's call on my life. I am not a Christian because I was born into a Christian family or in a country with a Christian heritage, but because I personally took a step of faith and identified myself with Jesus and what He accomplished for sinners on the cross two thousand years ago. In these next verses what Paul says is very personal as it challenges his hearers and readers to ask the question: on what basis am I a Christian?

1. How do I know if I am a Christian? (Romans 8:9-11)

In Romans 8:9-11 the apostle Paul gives some evidence of God at work in the lives of those individuals who have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus and who have the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. It is appropriate to ask if we are claiming to be Christians is there evidence that God is at work within us?

(a) **A Call for self-examination** In II Corinthians 13:5-6 the apostle Paul issued this challenge to Christians in the Church at Corinth. *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? ⁶ And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.* The context of these words must be understood in order to grasp what Paul is seeking to communicate in this passage. There were individuals who claimed to be great Christians who could do mighty miracles and who were strong believers who had constant victory in their service for God; in contrast to weak Christians like Paul who had all these struggles and setbacks and difficulties in accomplishing his work! (See II Corinthians 11-13) The question to ask is this: were these 'super apostles' genuine Christians or people promoting a false gospel that bore no relation to the apostolic teaching passed on from Jesus. It is no different today with some of the so-called television evangelists with their outrageous claims and questionable lifestyles—who is genuine in following the way of Jesus and who is leading other people astray by their false claims? In addition, as in the early centuries of Christianity there are various sects and cults

claiming to be genuinely following God's way; they cannot all be right! Remember Jesus' story of the wise and foolish virgins who wished to take part in the wedding celebrations. On the outside to observers they all looked the part and had received invitations to the wedding, or they would not have been dressed for the occasion. So all were part of that faith and cultural community; all of them were apparently excited at the prospect of honouring the bridegroom and his bride by their participation in the celebration. All were waiting for his coming with a sense of expectancy concerning the coming. Yet all fell asleep when the coming was delayed as often happened – a bit like a bride being 'late' for a wedding today. In the story recorded in Matthew 25:1-13 there were five that were admitted to the wedding and five excluded. Why was that? The ones admitted had oil in their lamps so that their lamps burned brightly enabling them to carry out the function of a bridesmaid at a wedding in that setting. The ones that were excluded did not have oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came. After the celebrations had begun they turned up, but the door to the premises had been locked and they were refused admission. *I tell you the truth, I don't know you,* said the bridegroom (Matthew 25:12). Oil in the Bible is often the symbol of the Holy Spirit. They had the outward form but something crucial was missing. There are good people who may attend church and live quality lives, but have yet to commit their lives to follow Jesus and thereby receive the Holy Spirit into their lives. Do you need to take this step of faith today? Paul indicates here that there are practical tests that a person can use to examine their own lives to see if they are following Jesus in line with the Bible. The first thing he speaks about is:

(b) **The Christian's Past** (Romans 8:9) *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.* What changes when we become a Christian? The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. We have an awareness of God and of wanting to live lives pleasing to Him. We are more conscious of making right choices and more sensitive to potential sin whether in speech or conduct. Our perspective on a range of things in life begins to change, often gradually over time, but little by little we are conscious of the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit about the way our lives should go. We are making choices about our patterns of thinking, speaking and acting, but there is an acknowledgement that there is more to it than that – the Holy Spirit is at work within us beginning that process of transformation to make us more like Jesus. Being a Christian is not just using a particular forms of words to express our convictions; it is more than attending church on a Sunday; it is more than an ethical code by which we relate to other people in the whole range of life situations; it is a life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit who graciously and patiently encourages us to become the woman or man God created us to be. A person who is a Christian is aware that changes have begun, that God is at work within them. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here!*¹⁸ *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation* (II Corinthians 5:17-18). Is there evidence of God the Holy Spirit at work in your life? It is not a dramatic presence but a quiet gentle influence in your conscience prompting you in the direction your life ought to go?

(c) **The Christian's Present** (Romans 8:10)¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.* In what way as a Christian do I have *life* in a form that is different from my pre-conversion life? (i) **Alive to God** Prior to the Holy Spirit opening our minds and hearts to see our need of Jesus we were *dead in...transgressions and sins* (Ephesians 2:1), that is spiritually unreceptive to any overtures from God or to those from Christians on earth who sought to communicate something of their faith in Jesus. What changed? Paul, in Ephesians 2:4-5 states: *But because*

of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Prior to trusting Jesus we had no sense of God’s presence with us; maybe we had no concern about grieving Him when we said or did things of which with hindsight we are not proud. Before we were converted we never thought to pray for guidance that we might make the best choices in our lives at home, in the family or in the workplace. Yet as a follower of Jesus we recognised the wisdom of seeking His divine assistance when difficult times arose. Now there are times when we sense His presence or are aware that He has helped us through some difficult times. It does not mean that life becomes easy or everything clear to understand. On the contrary, we are sometimes even more puzzled as to why things are the way they are when an all powerful and all loving God reigns over His creation. Yet when all that is said we have a sense of peace and security in His love, despite at times the hardship we have to go through. In his final surviving letter the apostle Paul wrote these words to Timothy, the young pastor at Ephesus: *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.* ¹² *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day* (II Timothy 1:11-12). My future is secure in His hands when I am alive to God.

(ii) Alive to God’s Word There are many books that we read once and enjoy but will not have time or the inclination to read again. There are other works we wish to read and the pile of books ‘to read’ may be growing in your house as in mine! However, for the Christian the Bible is different. It is not just a library of sixty-six books contained within its covers, written by many authors’ centuries earlier, but it is also the Word of God. It is the revelation of Almighty God to us as His people communicating a message for our lives today. How important did Jesus view it for His followers? In the Sermon on the Mount He said this: *For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.* ¹⁹ *Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:18-19). The classic passage is II Timothy 3:16-17: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* For our belief and behaviour the Bible is our guidebook for life which comes alive to us through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is natural to read it, often with helpful Daily Bible reading notes to ensure we have a balanced pattern of reading from different parts of the Bible. Beware it is powerful! God can use His word to speak directly into our lives. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us of this: *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

(iii) Alive to God’s People God has placed us in church families to love and care for one another. We are never called to solo discipleship. We worship together, pray together, serve together and support one another through the tough times of life. Naturally we will want to pray for each other and look out for each other. Romans 8:16 states: *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.* What is more, there are times when you just ‘know’ another person who may be a total stranger is a Christian. The Holy Spirit prompts you to recognise a fellow believer without either of you having expressly stated your faith to the other. When we recognise fellow members of God’s family we will want to show that practical love and support that Jesus modelled for us. It is the test of our claims to be Christians. John 13:34-35 is a solemn challenge to every church: *‘A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.’* ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.’* Can the people of our community see Jesus in us through our practical love and care for each other?

(d) The Christian’s Future (Romans 8:11) *And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies*

because of His Spirit who lives in you. One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian is knowing that the moment we become a part of God's family through faith in Jesus we receive life that is eternal, extending beyond this short life into eternity. We have a vision that is part of a bigger picture of God and who we are created in His image, in His purposes for His created order. Paul will address this subject in more detail later in this chapter. Easter is the defining focus of our faith where evil was seen at its worst on Good Friday and the triumph of good and God was seen at its best on Easter Sunday. It reminds us forcefully that no person or situation is totally hopeless, even though we have our doubts and at times even despair but the joy of new life and resurrection is around the corner! God will always have the last word and the victory. Once again the triune God Father Son and Holy Spirit are as one in accomplishing this work. Verse 11 focuses on the Holy Spirit, but verse nine has referred to Him as the *Spirit of God* [the Father]; in the next sentence He is *the Spirit of Christ*. Harry Ironside (1876-1951), the well-known former pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, was once travelling on a train in southern California. A gypsy lady got on the train and sat next to him. She offered, for a certain sum of money to read his fortune and promised to tell him his past present and future. After questioning her capability to do any such thing, because she persisted, Ironside indicated that someone had already provided that information for him and he had this information written down in a book which he had with him on the journey. He proceeded to expound Ephesians 2:1-10 and explained that he didn't have to pay a penny for it, because someone else had paid the price in full on his behalf! By the time he got to invite the lady to consider her future she decided to look for another seat! [J.M. Boice, *Romans*, Vol.2, pp 819-820]. Praise God that because we are in His family we can know the future – and read it in His book the Bible.

2. **The choice we have to make** (Romans 8:12-13)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live* (Romans 8:12-13).

(a) **Which diet plan should I go for?** At this time of year many people have been discussing this issue in earnest as they resolve to loose a few pounds in weight after Christmas. Yet the endless variety of diet plans in existence indicates that a lot of people are less than satisfied by existing options on the menu! In the same way there is no one simple method to living the Christian life that fits every person in each cultural and social setting. God deals with each of His children in a personal way. It is good and a helpful spiritual discipline to read the Bible daily, but whether we read and reflect on it alone or with the assistance of the many varieties of Bible reading notes is very much a personal choice. Over a lifetime many Christians will vary their practice so as to keep fresh in their endeavour to grow in their faith rather than get stuck in exactly the same routine for the next fifty years! In our personal prayer life we may use lists of various kinds or use a prayer diary to ensure we cover the range of things we wish to pray for, or use some other approach altogether. The key thing is that we pray not whether we use one approach rather than another in our relationship with the Lord. We are called to a disciplined personal life, but we are not called to be carbon copies of one another like new recruits into the North Korean Army. God wants each one of us to be the best that we can be for Him with the personality, temperament and gifting he has given us. To recognise this truth is to liberate us from seeking to create clones of ourselves or for us to be clones of someone else. You must aspire with the help of the Holy Spirit to be the person God created you to be to live life in its fullness (John 10:10). A church family where this conviction has

been grasped will inevitably over time be an exciting and attractive place to be, because God the Holy Spirit will be at work!

(b) **An obligation to follow** *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation...* There are some people who can work hard and appear incredibly diligent when the boss or the manager is in the office, but when they are absent it is another picture altogether. In living the Christian life we are entrusted with the personal responsibility of seeking to conduct our lives in a way that pleases God here on earth not just when we stand before Him one day in heaven. In his final letter to Timothy used three images to convey something of what it means to follow Jesus. ³ *Join with me in suffering [enduring hardship], like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* ⁴ *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.* ⁵ *Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.* ⁶ *The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.* ⁷ *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this (II Timothy 2:3-5).* (i) **The first image was of a Roman soldier** who had signed on for his twenty-five years of military service. It was a tough life, even though in Paul's day they won all their wars. Endurance of physical pain and suffering; coping with contrasting climates and conditions was all part and parcel of regimental life. Following Jesus will not be a bed of roses, implies Paul, there will be many blessings and moments of joy, but also disappointments, heartaches and tears; will we keep on keeping on for the full term –in our case until our home-call to heaven? There are many who are keen and enthusiastic for a few years when the going is easy, but less stand firm through the storms and trials of life within and without the church of Jesus Christ. Can God count on you to stand firm? (ii) **The second image of an Olympic athlete** It is more than just being there from now to the end of life, but we must train ourselves to be the most effective disciples we can be in His service. There may be courses of study or books to read, but walking alongside a fellow Christian who can model the progress we seek to make will all assist us in becoming the person God would want us to be. The training aspect of athletics, and similarly in our Christian lives, is hidden from public view by necessity, but its impact is obvious to observers when we seek to exercise our calling in daily living. Are you motivated to be the best you can be for the Lord? Maybe the new Pathway Discipleship programme would be helpful for you? Or some other approach to growing as a Christian; but this second image challenges us to push on to be the best we can be, to make the most we can of the limited time and opportunities we have to live for God in this life. (iii) **The third image of the hardworking farmer** the image here is of an arable farmer, but without the machinery that has transformed that sector of agriculture. With the uncertainty of the weather and the quality of seed it could take a lot of effort to produce an adequate or an excellent harvest at the right time in the season. Paul challenged his readers in southern Turkey with these words: *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.* ⁸ *Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* ⁹ *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up* (Galatians 6:7-9). What kind of spiritual harvest will you and I reap both individually, in our family circle and in this congregation collectively? May God help us keep focussed on the calling entrusted to us to produce a great spiritual harvest for His glory!

(c) **The consequences of our actions** ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live* here the particular challenge concerns whether we are trusting Jesus at all or not, as this determines whether there is any spiritual vitality in us at all. However, there are plenty of biblical passages where application is made to Christians and the choices we make. In I Corinthians 11:27-32, at the end of the words of institution in the communion service it states: *So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the*

Lord.²⁸ *Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.*
²⁹ *For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.*
³⁰ *That is why many among you are weak and ill, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*
³¹ *But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.*
³² *Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.* Each Sunday when we come to the Lord's Table we have those few moments of honest reflection before the Lord to consider our progress with Him. With the help of His Spirit we can resolve to keep working on our lives and in our service for Him to be more like Jesus, because supremely it is for Him that we do what we do, not primarily for the approval of other people.

3. **Developing family characteristics** (Romans 8:14)

¹⁴ *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* (Romans 8:14).

(a) **Who is your father?** All human beings are created in the image of God, but only those who truly put their faith in Him through Jesus. The former is acknowledged by the Greek poets Paul quoted in his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:28) but the latter point is one we have to face. Jesus challenged a hostile crowd with these words in John 8:39b-42, 47: *'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do what Abraham did.'*⁴⁰ *As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.*⁴¹ *You are doing the works of your own father.'* *'We are not illegitimate children,' they protested. 'The only Father we have is God himself.'*⁴² *Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God...'*⁴⁷ *Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.* Am I / Are you reflecting our heavenly Father in the attitudes we display, in the priorities we choose and in the lifestyles we adopt? Would there be enough evidence to convict you or me in a court of law if under a hostile regime we were charged with being a Christian? Think of the church down south last year that temporarily lost its charitable status because the secular body considered it (correctly!) wasn't taking Jesus' claims about mission and outreach seriously enough! How embarrassing is that!

(b) **What is special about this relationship?** (i) **It has a new beginning** In John 3 Jesus had an amazing conversation with the premier theologian in Israel Nicodemus. To this astonished man Jesus declared: ⁵ *Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.'*⁶ *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*⁷ *You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again"* (John 3:5-7). Have you had that new beginning in your spiritual journey? Has there been a conscious choice to follow Jesus? The details of the route to conversion differ from person to person, but each child of God has been called by His Spirit and responds by faith to His gracious invitation to us. (ii) **It involves supernatural empowerment** *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God* (Romans 8:14). You and I don't do it in our strength alone but in His resources. Praise God for that. Therefore, we are enabled to say with Paul: *I can do everything through Him who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:13). That is everything He asks us to do for Him. (iii) **It has extraordinary significance** (Romans 8:17) suffering yes but also glory with Christ.

(c) **What difference does it make?** (i) **He renews our minds** Romans 12:2: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (ii) **He directs our daily lives** Ephesians 2:10: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* May God help each of us to be the best we can be for Him, through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

