

Introduction

Today, I begin a sermon series from Romans 8 titled *The Helper*. I was going to title it *The Contact* but, for a reason I'll explain later, changed it to *The Helper*. That is the subject of Romans 8. Look at the word "Spirit," which is used 17 times in its 39 verses. It's capitalized and should be because Paul's talking about the Holy Spirit. Referring to what Jesus said in John 16:7, that's who the Holy Spirit is. He's the Helper and that's what Romans 8 and this sermon series are about - how He helps disciples and friends of Jesus and what their part in that is.

The Holy Spirit as Helper

Before we go to chapter 8, I need to explain who the Holy Spirit is. He is the Third Person of God. God is what C.S. Lewis called "superpersonal." He is one being, one substance, with three persons. The Holy Spirit is one of those three. The First person is God the Father. The Second is God the Son, Jesus. And the Third is God the Holy Spirit.

That He's the Third person though doesn't mean that He's inferior to the Father and Son. He is just as much God as they are. You realize of course what that means. When we talk about the competence and character of God, we're talking about the competence and character of the Holy Spirit. He's eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, loving, holy, just, and so on, just as the Father and Son are.

But while the Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and Son, He does have a different role or function than they do. He's the contact point between God and man, between heaven and earth. Or as Jesus explained it in John 14:16-17 and 16:5-15, He is the Helper. He is the One who works in, through, to, and for disciples and friends of Jesus to help them.

I'm preaching this sermon series, for instance, because God told me to. He also told me to change the title from *The Contact* to *The Helper*. He put the ideas in my mind to do both of those things and clarified to me that they were His ideas were not mine. Richard Thomas has an

astonishing food ministry to the poor in Mexico. I say "astonishing" because God regularly multiplies food in that ministry just as He did when Jesus fed the 5000 with fives loaves and two fish.

Notice what I said. God put the ideas in my mind and multiplies the food. But when I say God, I mean specifically the Holy Spirit because that's His role. He is the One who works in, through, to, and for us to help us as we live our everyday lives on earth.

That's where Romans 8 comes it. It reveals not all but some of the ways He helps us - which you'll discover as I preach through the chapter.

The Significance of the Holy Spirit as Helper

Before I begin doing that though, I need to explain the significance of the Holy Spirit's help. You will then know why I need to preach this sermon series and why you need to hear, understand, and live it out.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11, Solomon declares about human beings that God **"has set eternity in their heart."** Because He has, we all crave a supernatural life with God, one that takes us beyond the bounds of what is earthly and fleshly. But the fact is many of us don't have it. On the contrary, we're dissatisfied with the quality of our spiritual lives. We desperately want something more, something deeper, than what we're experiencing now. It's what Francis Schaeffer called "the problem of reality." We long for the transcendent kind of life that the Bible describes but don't have it.

There's a primary reason for that problem. It's that churches today focus almost exclusively on the "historical Jesus." Their primary emphasis is what He did 2000 years ago, His "finished work." He came in the flesh, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead. Don't get me wrong. We absolutely positively must preach and teach that because it's vital and true. But at the same time, it's only half the gospel. The other half is the contemporary Jesus. He isn't just historical; He's contemporary as well. Yes, there is His "finished work," but there's His "continuing work" as well. And it's that

work that gives us the transcendent kind of life that the Bible describes.

Which explains why I'm preaching this sermon series. It's that you might know about and experience the "continuing work" of Jesus, also called the "now work" of Jesus.

But what does Romans 8 have to do with that work? Quite simply, it's the Holy Spirit who does it. Jesus Himself told us just that in John 14:16-17 and 16:5-15. He does His "now work" through the Holy Spirit who helps us and that's what we're going to be examining in this sermon series – the "now work" of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Freed from the Guilt that's Real

So let's begin. The first way that the Holy Spirit helps us is found in verses 1-4. He frees us from the guilt that we feel.

I once counseled a husband whose wife left him for another man. Before she left him though, she went to a secular therapist for advice. She told her therapist that she wanted to leave him but couldn't because she'd feel too guilty about it if she did. Whereupon the therapist helped her overcome her guilt by reciting and getting her to believe a little jingle that he himself wrote, "**Guilt isn't real; it's something we feel.**"

That \$100 an hour therapist (back in the 80's) didn't know what he was talking about. Guilt isn't just something we feel. According to verses 1-4, it's something that's real as well.

Paul mentions "the Law" in verses 3 and 4. Specifically, that refers to God's commandments in the five books Moses wrote, Genesis through Deuteronomy. Generally, it refers to all His commandments in the Bible.

Now, notice what Paul calls that Law in verse 2, "**the law of sin and death.**" He calls it that because it is what makes sin possible. James 4:17 defines what sin is. It's knowing what is right and not doing it or knowing what is wrong and doing it. But according to Paul in Romans 4:15, we wouldn't know what is right and wrong if the Law hadn't told us. It, therefore, is what makes sin possible.

Once sin is possible so is the condemnation of verse 1. When a

person sins by violating God's law, that person is guilty before Him, just as a criminal is guilty before the state. And just as the state must punish the criminal, so God must punish the sinner. That punishment is physical death (being cut off from life) and spiritual death (being cut off from the goodness and joy of God and His kingdom). Sin, in other words, makes us actually and objectively guilty and, therefore, condemned.

But according to verse 2, Father God addressed that guilt of ours. First, He sent God the Son, Jesus, to earth in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was a real human being with a nature like ours. Second, He also sent Him as an offering for sin. He took our sins into Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for them so that we wouldn't have to.

Verse 4 reveals the result of that. All the requirements of the Law are fulfilled in us. Let me ask you. Have you ever gossiped? Have you ever lusted? Have you ever lost your temper? Have you ever lied? If we were honest, we'd answer, "Yes," to all of those. But suppose that I were able to ask Father God those same questions about you. Has _____ ever gossiped, lusted, lost his/her temper, or lied? If you're "in Christ," He'd answer, "No," to all of those. Because Jesus did what He did, Father God sees those in Christ as having fulfilled all the requirements of the Law – as having always done what is right and never what is wrong.

Wow, that is an spectacular thing and it's calling is clear. Using Paul's terminology in verse 1, be "in Christ." We are "in Christ" when we are disciples of His. So become that. Make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. According to verse 1, you'll no longer be guilty and condemned if you do.

Freed from the Guilt that We Feel

Now that we've examined the guilt that is real, let's look at the guilt that we feel, which is where the Holy Spirit comes in.

Going back to verse 2, the commandments of God are a law of sin and death for another reason. The standard they set is so high that they sometimes make us feel guilty even when we aren't. We try and train the

best we can to keep them and when we don't, confess it to God and ask Him to forgive us. He does of course and we aren't objectively guilty. But the Law's standard is so high that we still feel guilty even though we aren't. That in turn makes us feel like failures, suffer low self-esteem, get depressed, feel like throwing in the towel, or even experience suicidal tendencies. You may think I'm exaggerating in saying that but I'm just telling you what I know from years of experience counseling people.

Jonathon Edward was one of the greatest preachers in American history. But listen to what he wrote 20 years after his conversion to Jesus: **"I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness, very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping . . . I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness and the baldness of my heart than ever I had before my conversion."** In light of those words, it isn't surprising to learn that Edwards suffered from frequent and serious bouts of depression.

Is that you today? Are feelings of guilt that isn't real disturbing or even ruining your life? If so, look to the Holy Spirit for help and He'll give it. Notice the phrase in verse 2, **"the law of the Spirit of life,"** which contains two genitives. That means there are two laws, a law of the Spirit and a law of life, and they're the same. Paul's point is that the Holy Spirit gives us life. The next line reveals one aspect of the life He gives us. It sets us free from the law of sin and death. It sets us free, in other words, from the guilt we feel that isn't real.

There is in counseling what is called the principle of transference. A counselor meets with a client and becomes so emotionally empathetic that he begins to feel what the client feels. He feels the client's pain so deeply that, little by little, he absorbs it. By the end of the session, the client is likely to feel much better but the counselor much worse. That's because the pain and suffering that was a burden to the client has been subjectively transferred to the counselor.

Well, Jesus is the Ultimate Counselor, the only One who can free us from the guilt we feel. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. He

links us with Jesus and causes a transfer to take place. Our evil, ugliness, or pain is drained from us and transferred to Jesus. We then, as a result of that, no longer feel guilty and condemned.

That's what the Holy Spirit does but we have to cooperate with Him if He's to do it. We cooperate with Him in two ways.

First, we develop a right way of thinking about human sin and divine forgiveness. Wrong ideas about those things oppose the Holy Spirit's help. Right ideas support it. So, develop right ideas by studying and learning what the Bible say about those things. I've provided a handout that's a good place to start in doing that.

We cooperate with the Holy Spirit in a second way. We surrender to what He wants to do for us. By surrender, I mean purposely and correctly engage Him so that He can free us from the guilt we feel. The primary means for engaging Him are study, solitude, silence, fasting, worship, and prayer. Here's a suggestion in that regard. While fasting, withdraw from people and noise and get alone with the Holy Spirit. Begin by worshipping Him. Once you've done that, actually invite Him to work in your mental, emotional, and volitional processes, as He wills. After that, confess to Him the failures, shortcomings, or sins that are wracking you with guilt. Then ask Him to link you to Jesus, the Ultimate Counselor, and transfer all of those failures, shortcomings, or sins to Him. At that point, continue being alone with Him, waiting expectantly for Him to do what you've asked. And when He does, you're set free.

Conclusion

I close with two questions. First, is your guilt something that's real? If so, decide to be a disciple of Jesus. Or second, is your guilt just something that you feel? If so, think rightly about sin and forgiveness and surrender to what the Holy Spirit wants to do for you. You won't **be** guilty if you do the first. And you won't **feel** guilty if you do the second. What Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17 really is true, **"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."**