

Timeless Classic Doctrine #8: The Work of the Holy Spirit

I. He brings Jesus to you

II. He brings you to the Father

What a chapter! Romans 8 is...I don't think I can do it justice, it's so good. And we didn't even read the awesome last twelve verses. The comfort, the encouragement, the instruction—there is so much packed in there. There is good stuff the first time you read through this chapter, and when you read through it another time, and again, and an eighth time, you'll find more, you'll notice something else. And I'm supposed to cover it in one sermon, in 20 minutes. I don't know if that's possible.

You've been focusing on some timeless classic doctrines of Scripture this summer. Today's focus is the "work of the Holy Spirit." In Martin Luther's Small Catechism, which lays out the doctrines of the Bible in a simple, basic way, the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed describes the work of the Holy Spirit: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true." When I've taught catechism it takes a few weeks to get through the work of the Holy Spirit. And I'm supposed to cover it in one sermon, in 25 minutes. I don't know if that's possible.

I suppose I could start with the big church word that is used to summarize the work of the Holy Spirit: *sanctification*. To sanctify something is to make it holy—perhaps a better way to say it is to set something apart as something special or sacred. The Holy Spirit sanctifies—he sets you apart as special, holy. You are made holy because the Holy Spirit forgives your sins. The Holy Spirit sanctifies you by giving you the good desires to follow God's will and do good works and avoid sin. There's a lot involved in sanctification. There are different aspects, several ramifications. And I'm supposed to cover sanctification in one sermon, in half an hour. I don't know if that's possible.

Let's just admit that we will not and cannot exhaust this topic today. Then we can approach Romans 8:1-27 by dividing the work of the Holy Spirit into two parts: **The Work of the Holy Spirit** is to *bring Jesus to you* and to *bring you to the Father*.

This great chapter, Romans 8, starts off with a powerful, eternity-shaking statement. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What makes

this statement even more impactful is that it comes right after chapter 7. **“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing...So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”** In these verses the word “law” shows up a few times. In this context, that word might make more sense if we think of it as a truth or a principle. It’s like the law of gravity. It’s a truth, a principle, it’s there, it’s the way things work. I jump up, the law says I will come down, probably after not getting very high, for most of us. I throw a ball in the air, the law/truth/principle says it will come down. Romans 7 said, **“I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”** I can’t get away from it. I’m bound to this law, just like I’m bound to the law of gravity. I want to do good, but I do bad. How often we go to bed and cringe as we think back on the day, because I can’t believe I did it again! What was I thinking today? How could I do that? Why did I react that way and say those things?

No matter how hard you try to get around this law or overpower it, it doesn’t happen. No matter how hard you try to fly, it doesn’t happen. You can’t just pretend gravity is not there. You can’t just pretend there is no sin and that your record is clean, you can’t hope that God can’t see what you do, say, think. It doesn’t matter how good you think you are or how good you really are. It doesn’t matter how bad your bad is compared to other people’s bad. “The good I want to do I do not do, the bad I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.”--the fact that it’s bad and something you shouldn’t do, say, or think it but you do anyway puts you under this law, it binds you to this law, this principle, of sin and death, like you’re bound to gravity, and you can’t get away from it, away from the truth that your record indicates you have not satisfied God’s standards, his requirements, no matter how bad or worse you are compared to others, you haven’t met the standard of behavior and pure thought that God has for you.

We know this law. It’s implanted in us. Our conscience tells us it exists. It gives us the sense that God is going to get you at some point, get you back, give you what you deserve – some might call it a sense of karma, but really it’s this natural law implanted in us that we will face justice for our moral failures. What a way to live! Always wondering when God is going to send bad, let us have it. This is the law of sin AND death. And the fact that you know you shouldn’t be like this or do this but you do anyway is why hell is so terrifying. What’s God going to do? When is he going to do it? What does he think of me? When is he going to bring justice?

But then Paul, writing to Christians in Rome, follows it up with **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** No condemnation! That’s so surprising! We are bound by the law of gravity. How could we get out of the law of sin and death? **“because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”** There’s another law, another truth/principle!--the truth of the Spirit. **“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.”** God did what couldn’t be done any other way. He set us free from the law of

sin and death by putting his own Son Jesus under that law. When God was ready to bring condemnation against all sin, against your sin, Jesus stepped in between. Sin was paid for, sin was punished, in Jesus' body, not yours. So you are...free. Free from the punishment of sin. God is not looking to get you. He is not going to repay you for your sins. Jesus did that already for you. That means your records have been changed, to read that "this person has fully satisfied God's standards/requirements."

We're supposed to be talking about the work of the Holy Spirit. But did you notice what happened? We ended up talking about Jesus instead. Did we make a mistake, get off topic? Not at all. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit does. He points us to Jesus. He brings Jesus to you. In fact, when the Holy Spirit is doing his work, you're not thinking about or noticing him at all. It's been said that the best umpires or referees are the ones that you never notice or think about when you're watching a game. The referee is noticeable when he makes a bad call; then attention turns to him. But a good umpire or referee who makes all the right calls doesn't draw any attention to himself, so that you just sit and enjoy the game. The Holy Spirit is the same way. When he does his work, you're not noticing him or thinking about him. You don't say, "Wow, I feel the Spirit." (In fact, if you think you feel the Spirit, you're probably feeling something else, like human emotion.) The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring Jesus to you. When the Holy Spirit does his work, you're just thinking about and enjoying Jesus and the benefits Jesus brings.

What are some of those benefits? We can already talk about the peace that comes with knowing God isn't going to punish you for your sins, that he has forgiven you in Jesus. But we can skim through this chapter, Romans 8, to list more benefits the Holy Spirit brings to you when he brings you Jesus. "**Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**" (5) The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to follow God's standards, the desire and the ability to do good things for good reasons. "**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.**" (11) Just as Jesus physically rose from the dead, you will too. Your physical body will come back to life to live in a physical paradise with Jesus. "**Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.**" (14-15) The Holy Spirit makes you a child of God, someone who is cared for by a Father now and who will receive an inheritance in eternity.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring Jesus to you. He does this through the Word of God, through the gospel that is proclaimed in Word and sacraments. The Holy Spirit is attached to the gospel. In Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit is presenting Jesus to you, "Here, this is Jesus, Listen to him. Trust him." And through that presentation of God's Word, the Holy Spirit provides the trust that he calls for, he works in you that faith—a trust that simply believes that what Scripture has said about Jesus is true, and it applies to YOU.

The work of the Holy Spirit is like having a good friend who has all kinds of connections, knows everyone. Those connections mean he can help you out in two ways. He'll introduce you to someone who will benefit your career or someone you'll get along with. "This is Julie. She was in the same position you're in now. I bet she can help you." Your friend will also go talk to important people on your behalf. "I know the mayor. I'll go talk to him and see what he can do for you." The Holy Spirit brought Jesus, your Savior, to you. And then there's the other part. The Holy Spirit talks to God the Father on your behalf. He brings Jesus to you. He brings you to the Father.

He brings you to the Father. Let's move to the end. **"26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."**

The Holy Spirit brings you to the Father. These verses talk about our weaknesses. **"We do not know what we ought to pray for."** Are your prayer habits as strong as you would like them to be? This is a weakness. Our weakness isn't just frequency of prayer, but also content of prayer. We struggle knowing what we should pray for. Either we just can't think of what to say, or we're not exactly sure what we should pray for, what is in line with God's will. "Should I ask God to take the pain away or to give me the strength to endure it?" What if the things I ask for are not even good for me, and I don't know that, I don't realize or understand that?

But instead of God rolling his eyes or ignoring our bad requests or chastising us for not praying enough, the Spirit jumps in and lends us a helping hand. **"The Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."** God doesn't ignore your requests. The Spirit made you his child. He's your Father. He loves hearing from you. But what encourages us even more is that your requests are not the only ones he's hearing on your behalf. The Spirit brings you up to the Father. And when the Spirit prays for you, his prayer will be asking for exactly what the Father knows is best for us. **"The Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."**

Keep the requests coming. All kinds of requests. God promises to hear. And be glad that you're not the only one praying for you.

The Holy Spirit doesn't seem to get the attention that the Father and the Son get. That's probably ok with him. It's not about him. For him, it's all about Jesus, and it's all about you. He brings Jesus to you. He brings you to the Father. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.