



Sermon Transcript

May 2, 2021

50 Days of Spiritual Growth

Mind Your Spiritual P's and Q's

Romans 8:1-13

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on May 2, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Romans 8:1-13

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. **13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Introduction

There is an old and odd saying that no one quite knows for sure where it comes from. We know what the saying means, but we are not even sure how this saying came to mean this. The “saying” I am referring to is, “Mind your p’s and q’s.” My p’s and q’s? What are they? I didn’t even know I had p’s and q’s to mind! It is commonly known that this once familiar saying means to “mind your manners” or “be on your best behavior.” But it does beg the question, “What are my p’s and q’s?” And how did this saying come to stand for the need to mind my manners or to be on my best behavior?

One theory is that p’s sound a bit like “please” and q’s sound a bit like “thank you” and so saying “please” and “thank you” are basic good manners to observe. Or some think the expression comes from a day when everything was handwritten and two letters that could often be misunderstood for the other are p’s and q’s. And so, these were two letters you had to pay special attention to. But how this came to refer to minding your manners, I don’t know. All I know is that it is good to “mind your p’s and q’s.”

That is how I feel when we come to our passage this morning. At face value, I find that there is a similar intrigue and uncertainty as to what is being said. In Romans 8:5-8, Paul tells us to not mind the things of the flesh but to mind the things of the Spirit. He says in verse 5, *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”* What does it mean to “set your mind on the things of the flesh” and to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit?” A rather literal translation of this verse goes like this, “For those being according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh, but those being according to the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit.” We are to “mind” the things of the Spirit. That is more than just “to think about the Spirit.” It is stronger than that. We are to “mind” the Spirit. What does that mean? Whatever it means, I think it is the key to our spiritual growth and it is the key to understanding Romans 8.

Do you recall where we were last Sunday? We were in the ditch! Last Sunday we found ourselves resonating with the cry of Paul from Romans 7. Paul confessed what we often confess to be true about ourselves: we do what we don’t want to do and we fail to do what we know we should do. Because of the sin that still dwells within us, even though we have been raised to a new life in Christ (Romans 6) we still face an ongoing battle with indwelling sin in our lives. We often find ourselves jumping right back into the ditch. And so the message of Romans 7 is that we do not have the power in ourselves to defeat sin in our lives. But . . . that does not mean we are without power.

When we turn the page from Romans 7 to Romans 8, we discover the power we have in the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us in this passage that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, lives inside of us. He says in verse 11 that the “*Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.*” That is a lot of power living inside of us! And so Paul says that because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we are to *walk according to the Spirit*. We are to *live according to the Spirit*. We are to *set our minds on the things of the Spirit*. And then, in the final verse of our passage, verse 13, Paul says, “*by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.*” So what you are powerless to do in your own strength (Romans 7) you have power to do through Holy Spirit (Romans 8). Paul refers to the Holy Spirit nineteen times in Romans 8. So the sense you get from Romans 8 is that because of the power of the Holy Spirit, you can find yourself less often in the ditch. Through the Holy Spirit, you have power over your sin.

That all sounds good. It is definitely welcomed news coming out of the struggle of Romans 7. But it leaves me asking, “How?” How do I live and walk according to the Spirit? How do I avail myself of the power of the Holy Spirit to gain victory over my sin? The answer to that question lies in what it means to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit.” You need to “mind” the Spirit. That is how you walk and live according to the Spirit. That is how you gain power to put to death the deeds of the body. But what does that even mean? It can sound just as unclear as “minding your spiritual p’s and q’s.” What does it mean to “mind the Spirit?”

The word Paul uses here for *set your mind* or *mind the things of the Spirit* is a verb. It is an action. And one meaning of this word is “to be of the same mind, to cherish the same views, to agree together.”¹ So when we talk about “the things of the Spirit” we are talking about the things that the Spirit draws attention to. To “mind the Spirit,” Tim Keller suggests, “is to be preoccupied by the things that preoccupy the Spirit.”² In other words, our minds are focused on the things the Holy Spirit draws focus to. Our imaginations are captured by what captures the imagination of the Holy Spirit. We are preoccupied with the things that preoccupy the mind of the Holy Spirit. We are in agreement with the Spirit. We are of the same mind as the Spirit. We cherish the same things that the Holy Spirit cherishes.

What are those things that the mind of the Holy Spirit draws focus to? What is it that captures the thinking and imagination of the Holy Spirit? What preoccupies the mind of the Holy Spirit? The imagination that captures the mind of the Holy Spirit are the wonders that unfold before us in Romans 8. “*There is therefore now no*

condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . the Spirit of God dwells in you . . . The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . . And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” To mind the Spirit—to mind your spiritual p’s and q’s—is to be preoccupied with the wonders that preoccupy the mind of the Spirit.

So what Paul is saying here is that whatever you set your mind on shapes how you live. Whatever you set your mind on shapes your character. This is why each Sunday we are rehearsing these four truths highlighted in Romans 6-8. What we are actually doing is “setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.” We are minding the Spirit—minding our spiritual p’s and q’s—by rehearsing these four truths.

I am accepted in Jesus
I am free from the power of sin
I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit
I have authority over the kingdom of darkness

As we make our way through Romans 8, we are going to “mind the Spirit.” We are going to preoccupy our minds with what preoccupies the mind of the Spirit. In doing so, I want to demonstrate how this gives us power to *put to death the deeds of the body* and how to avoid jumping back in the ditch. This morning I want to “mind the Spirit” by reflecting on the wonder that *“there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . and that the Spirit of God dwells in you.”*

No Condemnation

The first wonder that preoccupies the mind of the Spirit that we are called “to mind” is this wonderful truth that *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* This is a phrase that could stand all by itself with no context and still be a source of great comfort and power. But this verse doesn’t stand all by itself. It is found in a context that makes these words all the more meaningful and powerful.

First of all, this verse comes on the heels of what we looked at last week in Romans 7. What a comfort and relief it is to know that even though I still struggle with the sin that lives inside of me . . . even though I don’t always do what I know I should do and there are many things I don’t do that I know I should do . . . even though I have this propensity to jump back into the same ditch over and over again . . . there is an answer

to the cry of Paul when he cries, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of death?*” The answer is “Jesus!” *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” With great assurance, in his very next breath he utters these incredible words, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” This brings great rest to the restless spirit of Romans 7.

But the context of this verse reaches further back into Romans than Romans 7. It reaches back to Romans 5:18. Hear Paul says, “*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for ALL men . . . For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.*” This is the *law of sin and death* Paul is referring to in our passage this morning (Romans 8:2). The *law of sin and death* is summed up in Romans 6:23, “*For the wages of sin is death.*” It is a condition we are all born under, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” That is the point of Romans 1-3. Because of sin, we are under God’s judgment. We face his *condemnation*. And like we saw last week, it does not matter whether you are deeply religious or you have no religious bone in your body . . . no one has the power in themselves to overcome *the law of sin and death*. As Paul says in Romans 3, “*None is righteous, no, not one . . . no one does good, not even one.*” And so this has led to *condemnation for all men*. And yet, into this bleak and seemingly hopeless picture comes these wonderful words from the Holy Spirit, “*There is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” How so? “*For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*”

This even takes us further back into the context of Romans. It takes us back to Romans 3:27 where Paul says that our boasting that we have a relationship with God is not found through the *law of works*. Again, that is what we saw last week. We don’t have the power in and of ourselves to make ourselves right with God. Left to ourselves, we are ditch dwellers. Paul says in Romans 8:3 that *God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do*. The reason *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* is because in Christ, God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And so Paul says in Romans 3:27-28 that our boasting is not in *the law of works* . . . but in *the law of faith*. “*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*”

That is exactly the point Paul is drawing our attention to in Romans 8:3-4. How did God set us free from *the law of sin and death*? Look what he says in verse 3, “*By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh* (the eternal Son of God, Jesus, took on human flesh and became like us). But unlike us, he kept *the righteous requirement of the law*. Jesus never sinned. But he *condemned sin in the flesh* by *fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law*—he took on the penalty for our sin by dying on the cross. Jesus

faced the condemnation we deserved. Paul says something here that is rather subtle, but profound. He says that Jesus suffered death on the cross *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled IN US*. This again, takes us back to Romans 3 where we are told that there is a righteousness that comes to us not by keeping the law—we are unable to do that—but there is a righteousness that is available to us *through faith in Jesus Christ for ALL who believe* (Romans 3:21-22). That is what it means for us to *walk according to the Spirit* (Romans 8:4). It is a walk of faith. It is putting our trust in Jesus to remove the condemnation of God against us for our sin. *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

The first thing that the Spirit calls us “to mind” so that we might have the power *by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body* is our justification. *Justification* tells us how we are made right with God. It speaks to how the perfect righteousness of Jesus is given to us through faith. That is *justification*. That is Romans 3-5. But, don’t forget where we are this morning and for these **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. We are in the section of Romans that is dealing with our *sanctification*. This describes the progress we are making in our spiritual lives as we become more and more holy in the way we live. It speaks to the change Jesus brings to our lives. So what are the things of the Spirit that we are “to mind” so that we grow in our faith? The first thing we are “to mind” is our *justification*. Richard Lovelace said, “Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon the platform: *you are accepted*.”³ Consequently he says that “only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives.”⁴ This is not just something we need in the beginning of our Christian life. But this is something we need “to mind” in every succeeding day.

On one hand, we know the promise of God. But on the other hand, we know the struggles of our hearts that cause us to question God’s promise to us. Here is the promise of God. Jesus said, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”* It is great to hear these promising words, *“and whoever comes to me I will never cast out”* . . . but then we can quickly come up with many reasons why God might be tempted to cast us out. Perhaps you can resonate this kind of conversation with God . . .

“No wait—you don’t understand. I’ve *really* messed up, in all kinds of ways.”

I know, Jesus responds.

“You know most of it, sure. Certainly more than what others see. But there’s perversity down inside of me that is hidden from everyone.”

I know it all.

“Well—the thing is, it isn’t just my past. It’s my present too.”

I understand.

“But I don’t know if I can break free of this anytime soon.”

That is the only kind of person I am here to help.

“The burden is heavy and heavier all the time.”

Then let me carry it.

“It is too much to bear.”

Not for me.

“You don’t get it. My offenses aren’t directed toward others. They’re against you.”

Then I am the most suited to forgive them.

“But the more of the ugliness in me you discover, the sooner you’ll get fed up with me.”

Whoever comes to me I will never cast out.⁵

The reason we rely on our *justification* for our *sanctification* is because this kind of grace produces within us a love and a gratitude that gives us the power to respond in obedience to God. It is the foundation of our spiritual growth and daily we need to remind ourselves that *we are accepted in Christ*. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones illustrated it this way. He said it is like the difference between breaking a law of the state and doing something as a husband that wounds the heart of your wife. In other words, as a Christian, my sin is no longer a legal matter—*there is now no condemnation*. But when I do something that wounds the heart of my wife, it may not change the fact that I am still her husband, but it grieves me that I have hurt someone I love. So when I sin now, as a follower of Jesus, I don’t feel condemnation. Rather, I sorrow over having transgressed against the very One who loves me deeply.⁶

I “mind the Spirit” when I remind myself that I am fully accepted in Christ and this is what empowers me to respond in obedience. When Jesus says *whoever comes to me* it is good to remember that “We do not come to a set of doctrines. We do not come to a church. We do not even come to the gospel. All these are vital. But most truly, we come to a person, to Christ himself.”⁷ “Mind the Spirit” this week. *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

Indwelt by the Spirit

The second wonder that preoccupies the mind of the Spirit that we are called “to mind”

is this amazing thought that we are not left alone. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. Paul says in Romans 8:9-11, *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”*

Here you are assured that the Spirit who lives inside your “body of death” is bringing life to your broken body. In Romans 7 it felt like our spirit followed the impulse of our bodies. Like Paul, we confessed to the propensity we have to follow our fleshly impulses. But here, Paul is saying that our bodies will someday catch up with our spirit. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will so transform our bodies that someday, even our bodies will be totally renewed and made eternally alive by the Spirit. Right now that transformation in me is happening little by little. It may even be hard for me to identify exactly how and where I am growing. Sometimes our growth comes in leaps and bounds and other times it is “one degree” at a time. Sometimes, we may even feel that we are taking a step backwards, but God is even at work in all of that.

But here is the confidence I have as I “mind the Spirit.” My *sanctification*, my spiritual growth, is the work of the Holy Spirit in me. He will complete what he has started. So on one hand, I find great encouragement that my spiritual growth is God’s work in me. I know it is a long chapter, but if you are looking for a chapter to memorize, Romans 8 would be a good one to memorize. It begins by telling us that *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* and it ends by affirming that there is nothing in this world that can separate you from the love of God. God is at work in our lives and we are not without the resource we need to grow in living out our faith.

And yet, there is something for us to do. We are not to live according to the flesh. Rather, we are to live *by the Spirit*. In doing so, we have the power to *put to death the deeds of the body*. But what does that look like.

I have no new revelation for you this morning. I have no “new and improved” formula to offer you. I have not unearthed a deep secret to offer you. Rather, the Spirit who dwells within us transforms us through his Word. That is why I think the daily habit of this past week is so important to the work of the Spirit in our lives: “Scripture before phone.” The whole point of this habit is that the Word of God is what shapes our identity and empowers us to live for God.

I was struck by Justin Earley's story of his dad. He remembers seeing his dad begin his day in his study reading his Bible. He now has his dad's Bible and when he opens it up he sees the dates when his dad read certain passages. When he was writing his book *The Common Rule* he opened his dad's Bible to Colossians and at the top of Colossians 1 he saw the date "January 7, 2002" and then "January 8, 2002" at the top of Colossians 2. When he saw the dates he was reminded that this was a few months after his dad lost the election to become Virginia's governor. Here he was, after that devastating loss, reading his Bible first thing in the morning.

Justin Early reflected back on that event. He recalls the next morning, after losing the election, his dad making the family pancakes for breakfast and sharing with them what he had read that morning in his Bible. As an adult now, Justin Earley looks back at his dad with great appreciation because a loss like that could devastate a person, cause him to question—*Who am I now?* But he said, his dad knew exactly who he was. He said this, "I think my dad managed to keep a stable identity through a roller coaster of work success and failures because of the habit of looking each morning to God's love before he turned to look at the world. And once you know who you are in God, you can turn to the world in love. But if you don't, you'll turn to the world looking for love."⁷

You "mind the Spirit" when you recognize that the Spirit of God lives inside of you and you take the Word of God into your life. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and he produces that change in us.

Conclusion

I am excited to spend the month of May in Romans 8. I invite you "to mind the Spirit" with me. I invite you to "mind your spiritual p's and q's" with me. Be preoccupied with the things that preoccupy the mind of the Spirit. They are transformative.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is the foundation of our sanctification. *He will no wise cast you out!* You are accepted in Jesus.

The Spirit of God lives in you. You are not alone! You are indwelt by the Spirit of God. Take the Word of God into your life and the Spirit of God will use that to transform your heart and he will be faithful to complete that.

In the coming weeks we will "mind the Spirit" by reflecting on these thoughts.

You are a child of God.
All things work together for good to those who love God.
Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

¹Strong's Concordance *pronousin* 5426

²Tim Keller *Romans 8-16 For You* (The Good Book Company, 2015) 18

³Richard Lovelace *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP) 101

⁴Ibid. 101

⁵Dane Ortland *Gentle and Lowly* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020) 63

⁶Quoted in Keller, 13-14

⁷Jusitn Earley *The Common Rule* (Downers Grove: IVP) 83-84

Sermon Title: Mind Your Spiritual P's and Q's

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Sermon Date: May 2, 2021



1. Discuss this Fact: A recent metadata study showed the chronic loneliness reduces life expectancy to the tune of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.
2. Question to Ponder: What is one time in your life where vulnerability really changed things?

Talk about how to practice Weekly Habit #1—Meaningful Conversation

3. Read Romans 8:1-13.

Do you ever feel under condemnation? What causes you to feel this way; and how will you make sure you remember “there is therefore now no condemnation” next time?

In what way(s) will knowing that Jesus’ ministry was in order to make you holy motivate you to live differently today?

What do you do with your solitude? How will you fix your thoughts on the gospel today?

Reflect on these two truths:

There is no condemnation in Christ
You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit

How do these truths empower you to live according to the Spirit?

4. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
5. Spend some time praying for each other.