



Did you know that currently, states, federal agencies, and other organizations collectively hold more than \$58 billion in unclaimed cash and benefits. That's about \$186 for every U.S. resident. The unclaimed property comes from abandoned bank accounts, stock holdings, unclaimed life insurance payouts and forgotten pension benefits. More than \$300 million in pension benefits is now owed to some 38,000 people. That's an average benefit of \$9,100. Benefits go unclaimed because people are unaware they'd accrued retirement benefits at a previous employer. Some people are owed serious cash. And unclaimed stock holding? Last year, one man claimed over \$32 million!

In the same way, many believers live the Christian life with unclaimed benefits. They're entitled to certain things but they don't know it. Today we're going to talk about what I believe is the most valuable unclaimed benefit Christians fail to claim, and that's the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in their lives. There's no chapter in the Bible that reveals more to us about this benefit than Romans chapter 8.

You might recall in Romans 7 Paul described the struggle of a sinful man trying to keep God's law. Over and over again, he says deep down he really wants to keep God's law. He agrees with it and strives to live by it. But there's another force at work within him called *the flesh*. The flesh is our sinful nature; that gravitational pull towards sin and away from God that's in all of us. It's a force so strong at the end of chapter 7 Paul cries out, "**What a wretched man I am, who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?**" Paul is struggling; he's sinking, like we all do. We have the desire to do what's right but not the ability to carry it out. Like Jesus said to his disciples, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." We experience the same problem. We have the desire to do what's right but we can't carry it out.

But this struggle leads Paul into Romans 8 where he tells us of a single unclaimed benefit that will radically impact the lifestyle of any believer who claims it for himself, and that's the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the major theme of Romans 8. Up until now, there have only been two passing references to the Spirit (Romans 1:4; 5:5). Now in chapter 8 the Spirit will be mentioned 20 times! Here, Paul will answer the question: How does the Spirit make all the difference in our struggle with sin? How can we be free from constant defeat and condemnation at the hands of God's law?

There is No Condemnation for Those in Christ Jesus

Paul begins in v. 1 with a reminder of something he's already established in the first 5 chapters of Romans:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul wants us to understand right off the bat that even as we struggle with our inward sinfulness, if we're in Christ, there's no condemnation for us. He's talking about condemnation from God. The word "condemnation" covers not just our guilt but also the resulting punishment. I recall as a boy doing something wrong and getting caught by my mom. My guilt was without question. I knew it and she knew it. But then she said, "You'll have to wait until your father gets home. He'll decide your punishment." That wasn't a good thing. Purgatory really **does** exist! But, you see, what Paul says here is both our guilt and our punishment are gone.

When Paul says there's no condemnation he means there's none at all! It's like it doesn't even exist for us. Many Christians think they're only temporarily freed from condemnation. They limit this promise to their past sins. But if they ever sin again they're immediately back under condemnation until they confess their sin. That's wrong! Paul says, quite literally, condemnation no longer exists for us; it's gone forever!

This promise is so wonderful we might wonder, how's it possible? Paul explains in verses 2-3.

... because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 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,

We have the promise of no condemnation not because we're pretty good people, or because sin is no big deal, but because God did something for us. He set us free from the law of sin and death. We no longer have to try to keep the law to be pleasing to God. All that just led to condemnation and death because the law was powerless to make us good and give us life. It didn't work. And the reason it didn't work was because of our own sinful flesh.

But how have we been set free? He says it's through "the law of the Spirit who gives life." This is the first mention of the Holy

Spirit in Romans 8. The first thing the Spirit does is free us from the law of sin and death. He does this by infusing us with new life. Don't get confused by the fact he calls this, "THE LAW of the Spirit of life." He's not replacing law with law. He's talking about law as a force or power at work in us that sets us free from sin and death, replacing it with life. How did that happen? God stepped in and did something the law couldn't do. "What the law was powerless to do...God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering." The Father offered up his Son to be condemned for us. Our condemnation became his condemnation, and that set us free from the law of sin and death. Now, a new law or power is at work in us—the Spirit who gives life. By the way, the big word for this is regeneration. Remember how Jesus talked to a Pharisee named Nicodemus about being born again? Nicodemus had no idea what that meant and so Jesus explained, *"I'm talking about being born of the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit"* (John 3:5-8). That's regeneration. That's what Paul is talking about here.

We're Free From the Penalty of Sin But Also From the Power of Sin

But Jesus didn't just die to free us from the guilt of sin, he also wants to free us from the power of sin. The law of sin and death not only keeps us under condemnation, it also keeps us powerless. But Jesus came not just for our justification but for our sanctification. Justification means being right with God. Sanctification means becoming more like God; more conformed to his image. Look what he says in v. 4 about the purpose for which we've been set free:

... in order that (here's why he set us free) the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

You see, God sent his Son, not just as an offering for sin; not just to take our condemnation; but also that something might happen **in us**; so the Law might be fulfilled **in us**. That means we become people who love and keep God's law, not perfectly, but progressively. So the struggle to do the right thing and keep the law which Paul describes in Romans 7 isn't one in which we're doomed to defeat.

By the way, this is what the Enemy would like us to think. He'd like for us to have an excuse to just give into the flesh whenever it pulls us in the direction of sin. He'd love us to think, "Well, I can't help it. It's just the way I am. I can't help it if I lose my temper. I'm Italian!" Or, "Why should I try to fight sin? I'm just going to lose anyway. At least I know in the end I'll be forgiven." So we don't even put up a fight. We just lay down. Satan would love for us to think like that. But that's a cop-out, and it reflects an incomplete understanding of all we've been promised in Christ. God

has sent you a life preserver to keep you from sinking into sin. When you cling to it, you begin to change from the inside out; you begin to reflect in your heart the very righteousness of God.

How We Live is Determined by Who We Are: Those in the Flesh

Paul goes on and explains how that works. He wants us to know how we live will always be determined by who we are. Look at verses 5-8.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

He talks about those who "live according to the flesh." This is those without Christ whose life is governed and dominated by the flesh. Later in v. 9, when he addresses believers, he says, *"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh."*

So here he's describing those who **are** in the flesh. He says they'll naturally set their minds on the things of the flesh; they have no choice but to be occupied by fleshly things; that's their nature. The idea of a "mind set" has to do with what preoccupies us; the ambitions that drive us and the concerns that engross us. If you're in the flesh you'll be absorbed in fleshly things.

What does that look like? Look around. It's the natural viewpoint of the world. It's a mind set preoccupied with self. Like earth and all the planets revolve around the sun, the mind set on the flesh revolves around self. That can express itself in many ways. Sometimes the flesh is easy to spot. We see it in the desire for money and pleasure. Modern advertising plays on this constantly. Look beneath the surface of the Super Bowl commercials next Sunday and ask, What are they really communicating in terms of values? We can also see it in the need to have fun. The world is committed to that. It takes having fun very seriously! We can spot it in the desire for fame and recognition. People are always manipulating life to be seen and known. But sometimes the flesh is harder to identify. It can look very respectable and even religious on the outside. The flesh has tremendous religious potential! There can be a great drive towards doing what's right; accomplishing much; being responsible. But, fundamentally, it's all about you; it's all **for** you. We can even come to church and sing to God, but deep down we're patting ourselves on the back and wondering how many people have noticed. All of this is the mind set on the flesh, which he says is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God; it's not even able to do so.

It's kind of like being raised here in the Bay Area as a Giant's fan. From the time I was a small boy I've hated the Dodgers. It is part

of who I am, and who I am always expresses itself in my mind set; in how I live. Even when the Dodgers have made it into the World Series, and I think I should root for them because they're in the National League West, I can't bring myself to do it. I have a basic hostility towards the Dodgers. It's part of who I am and who I am is expressed in how I live.

How We Live is Determined by Who We Are: Those in the Spirit

But this same principle—how we live is determined by who we are—applies to those who are “in the Spirit.” If you're in the realm of the Spirit you'll have your mind set on what the Spirit desires. Starting in v. 9 Paul explains this principle as it relates to believers. Look what he says in verses 9-11.

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. 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. 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.

Follow the reasoning here: First he says those “in the realm of Spirit” are not in the realm of flesh. To be in the realm of the Spirit means to have his Spirit dwelling in you. This was a promise Jesus made. On the night of his betrayal he said to his disciples, “I'm going to leave you, but don't worry, you'll be better off when I'm gone.” Why? “Because if I go I'll send you my Spirit.” When Jesus was physically present on earth, he limited himself to being in one place at a time. The only help he could offer was external. But now his Spirit is with us wherever we go. And he's not just with us, he's **in** us, working in our hearts, manifesting his life through us.

This promise of the Holy Spirit is so basic Paul says those who don't have the Spirit don't belong to him. So this isn't just for a few super Christians. It's not for those who've had some kind of “second blessing” after they become Christians. This is the mark of every true follower of Christ. It's the Spirit who causes us to be born anew. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead brings new birth to our human spirit. Not only that, one day he'll raise up our mortal bodies. Meanwhile we have this new life within us. That's who we are. We're not what we were. We're not in the flesh. We're in the Spirit.

Who you are determines how you live. Those who are in the Spirit will set their mind on the things of the Spirit. What does that look like? Does it mean you don't worry about making money, having fun and being fulfilled? That you go around reciting Scripture verses and telling people what's wrong with their

lives? No! It means in the midst of making money and having fun and doing many of the same things other people do, your primary desire is to please God. It doesn't remove you from life, it puts you right back in it, but with a different mind set. Now he's the center of your life, not yourself. His purposes are most important to you. You want to glorify him. You look at events of life from God's point of view. Your value system is changed and that impacts everything you do.

Does that mean you never sin or even struggle with sin? Of course not. But it's a different struggle than it was when we were without God's Spirit. We have a different motive now. We're not motivated by fear but love. Martin Lloyd-Jones illustrates it this way: “The difference between an unbeliever sinning and a Christian sinning is the difference between a man transgressing the laws of the State, and a husband who's done something he shouldn't do in his relationship with his wife. He's not breaking the law, he's wounding the heart of his wife — that's the difference. It's no longer a legal matter, it's a matter of personal relationship and love... In a sense it's now something much worse than a legal condemnation. I'd rather offend against a law of the land objectively outside me, than hurt someone whom I love. In that case, you've sinned, of course, but you've sinned against love. So you may and you should feel ashamed, but you shouldn't feel condemnation, because to do so is to put yourself back under the law.” Do you see the difference?

Paul goes on and says more about how we as Christians continue to struggle with sin, even with the Spirit of God living in us.

We Must Choose to Walk According to the Spirit's Desires

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 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 (verses 12-13).

Notice how the flesh is still something even those in the Spirit have to contend with. Until we get our new bodies at the resurrection, we're in a battle. But it's not a battle we're doomed to lose. We have the resources to win. Paul says three things here that are key to overcoming the flesh.

First, he says we're under obligation, not to the flesh but to the Spirit. To be under obligation means to be a debtor. The idea is we don't owe the flesh a thing. Our debt is to God. Why? Because of all he's done for us in Christ. That's why he begins with “therefore.” He just finished saying in v. 11 that God gave us new life through his Spirit and he'll also give life to our mortal bodies. **Therefore**, we're under obligation. Because of all he's done for us and all he's promised to do, we're obligated to serve him. Do you know what that means? It means we should bathe ourselves in God's grace. We should constantly be preaching mini sermons to ourselves about God's love and grace. Tim Keller writes, “Paul

is saying sin can only be cut off at the root if we expose ourselves constantly to the unimaginable love of Christ for us. That exposure stimulates a wave of gratitude and a feeling of indebtedness. Sin can only grow in the soil of self-pity and a feeling of 'owed-ness.' I'm not getting a fair shake! I'm not getting my needs met! I've had a hard life! God owes me; people owe me; I owe me! That's the heart attitude of 'owed-ness' or entitlement. But, Paul says, you must remind yourself you're a debtor. If you bathe yourself in the remembrance of the grace of God, that will loosen, weaken and kill sin at the motivational level."

The second thing Paul says to help us overcome the flesh is to employ the Spirit to put it to death. When he says, put to death the misdeeds of the body, he uses a strong word. It points to a ruthless resistance to sin; to totally reject everything we know is wrong; to declare war on attitudes and actions that are evil. We don't play games with sin. We don't coddle it. We don't try to wean ourselves off of it or even to somehow manage it. No! We kill it! We mortify it.

But notice it's not all us. Yes, we're the ones who put to death the deeds of the body, but we can only do that by means of the Spirit. He says, "by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body..." We have to cooperate with the work of the Spirit. So you're going along and you confront a temptation. Whatever it is, it's very attractive. You begin that process of rationalization in your head. The Enemy tells you it's really no big deal. God will be there to forgive you when it's all over. It wouldn't really hurt anyone. And God really does want you to be happy. After all, nobody's perfect. But then the Spirit, often times through God's Word, reminds you it's wrong. Deep down you want to please the Lord. You know you belong to him. You remember how much he loves you. Even though you know he'll forgive you, you don't want to grieve him. And so you pray, "Lord, I know I'm dead to sin. I know your Spirit lives within me. So help me to turn away from this." And he does help you. You turn away. You kill it. And you never could have done that without God's Spirit living in you.

The third thing Paul does is remind us of the results of our choices. He says if you live according to the flesh you'll die, but if you live by the Spirit you'll live. Death isn't something that comes at the end of life; it's something we can experience now. Death always

comes down to four things: fear, guilt, hostility, and emptiness. Fear can appear as worry, anxiety, dread or timidity. Guilt shows up as shame, self-hatred or perfectionism. Hostility will show itself as hate, resentment, bitterness or revenge. Emptiness shows up as loneliness, discouragement, despair and meaninglessness. These are symptoms of death. When the flesh cries out and it looks so good and seems so right, remember the result is death.

But when we walk by the Spirit the result is life and peace, the opposite of death. If death is fear, then life and peace is trust, hope, and confidence. If death is guilt, then life and peace is acceptance, security, assurance. If death is hostility, then life and peace is love, kindness, community. If death is emptiness, then life is a sense of purpose, fulfillment and excitement. Do you want life or death?

The point today is quite simple: learn to live your life filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Don't let him be an unclaimed asset.

Perhaps this will help: Here's a glove. It's a perfectly good glove. I can say to this glove, "Glove, pick up that book." It wants to but it can't because a glove, by itself, can't do anything. That is us apart from God's Spirit. We can't do what God demands of us. Have you discovered that? You can't do it, just like the glove can't pick up that book by itself.

Now you might say, "Here's the problem: the glove just needs to be taught how to do it." So I say to the glove, "Just turn your hand to get your fingers under the book with your thumb on top, and then you can pick up the book." But we can lecture the glove forever and it still won't be able to do it.

Ah, but we all know there's a way the glove can easily pick up the book. If I just insert my life into the glove, then it can do what I do.

This is the truth of God's Word—he's provided a way by which the risen life of Jesus is made available to us. Learn to live your life filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit. When his Spirit fills us and controls you, as my hand fills and controls that glove, you can do all that Jesus did. Do you believe that?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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