

The Holy Spirit and Power

by Stewart Ruch

The goal of life is not to become better, but to be in the Holy Spirit, who gives us the power to overcome the flesh and live a life that is full of God.

Duration: 29:06

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, Romans 7:7, Romans 8:1-3, Romans 8:9, Romans 8:13

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the power of the Holy Spirit and its role in helping believers overcome the flesh. The sermon is divided into two main sections: the power of better and the power of the Holy Spirit. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of the law and how it relates to the power of the Holy Spirit. He explains that the law is not inherently bad, but it is limited in its ability to bring about true transformation. The sermon encourages believers to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the constant striving for self-improvement and instead seek a life of spiritual growth and dependence on God.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruck. Cath and I were sitting out on a beautiful veranda.

It was a beautiful night. It was in a beautiful global city a few years ago. And we were sitting in this beautiful couple's beautiful home with them.

They were a remarkable couple. They had really given their lives and sought to better themselves in impressive ways. They had gone to some of the best schools in America.

They had sought to become better and better in their work and their jobs. And their high-ranking government position reflected how they'd focused on that and grown in that. They were not arrogant or outlandish.

Indeed, they were humble and yet urbane. They were engaging and yet sophisticated. They were clear about not having a serious walk with Jesus.

And they were focused on not only bettering themselves, but they wanted to make other people's lives better. And if I were not a serious Christian, or actually even as a serious Christian on that night, I started

thinking, I want to be like them. I would like this better house.

I would like their better looks. I would like their better achievements. It was really enchanting to be with them.

Even this summer I had engagements with other people very similar who have very disciplined lives whereby they have sought to become better and better and then help others to have better lives as well. And it really raises a very important question, one that the Apostle Paul is going to address in this chapter in the book of Romans that he wrote. And here's the question.

Is the goal of life to become better? Is that what we're going after? Is the goal of life to become better and improve ourselves and have better jobs and have better homes so that we can help the betterment of others? We often tell ourselves, and we may even sincerely mean, is that the goal of life? Or is Paul, who will again and again make us think in a completely different way about God, who will make you think in a completely different way about what's called the kingdom of God, is Paul actually saying the goal of life is not to become better, but to be in the Holy Spirit. The goal of life is not to become a better person, better educated, to pursue betterment. The goal of life is not the power of better, it's the power of the Holy Spirit.

Do not set your mind on becoming better, Paul is saying essentially, and I'll explain why. I think that's an interpretation of what Paul is saying. Set your mind, Paul says, on the Spirit.

Could it actually be that becoming better is a kind of deception whereby we think as Christians, and you can apply this in different ways, and we'll talk about the flesh and what that means in the book, but it could be that we've actually fallen into a thing where we think, I thought that Christian life was about becoming better. I mean, didn't Jesus say, become perfect? Maybe some of you, you don't all know the Bible, which is expected, and you're learning the Bible. So maybe you're thinking, well, wait a second, didn't Jesus say, become perfect? As my Father in heaven is perfect, it's in the fifth chapter of a book called Matthew.

Well, what's meant by that? Isn't that becoming better? I'll touch on that, but I'm going to put the question in front of you. What's the goal of your life? The power of better? The power of the Spirit? Paul draws a stark contrast. Turn with me.

If you have a Rev's Bible, it's page 944 that we'll work out of. If you brought a Bible, the book of Romans is about two-thirds in, so you'll find it about two-thirds in or so to your Bibles. Romans chapter 8, written by Paul.

Chapter 8 is in many ways one of the key centers of the book of Romans, so we're going to the heart of the book of Romans, and many would say that the book of Romans is kind of the heart of Paul's thinking. So we're at the heart of the heart. Thirteen verses.

I did not expect that. As it was read this morning, you went, I totally get those verses. I got it.

I don't expect that. They're really hard. It's hard work.

So I'm going to break it down into two main sections, okay? So if you're an outline taker or a note taker, this might help. The power of better, verses 1 to 8. The power of the Holy Spirit, verses 9 to 13. Now, we're starting a series on the Holy Spirit.

So I'm starting with Romans 8 very intentionally. We're going to get into areas that may have to do with more kind of spectacular ministries of the Holy Spirit. For example, we'll talk about prophecy.

We'll teach on what that is. We'll teach on what that is. We'll talk about revival and how do you think biblically about revival and the Holy Spirit.

But this is fundamental to who the Holy Spirit is, not just what He does, although it's also about what He does. This is fundamental to understand that the power of the Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome the flesh, which is to say the power of seeking a life only of becoming better. Okay, now, this is what preachers do, right? We set up things like this, all right? And that's what I'm doing.

So let me be clear. I mean, becoming a better Christian is not a bad thing, all right? So the word better is not a bad word. What I'm trying to get after, and I'll get this in just a moment, is an application of what Paul means by the flesh, particularly for our crowd, our culture.

As your pastor, I'm trying to speak specifically about how might you struggle with the reality of the flesh. Becoming a better Christian is a good thing unless better is your means to become a better Christian, unless better is what you have your mind on all the time. Well, then we've got what Paul would call death.

Okay, let's work on it together. The power of better, verses 1 to 8. Okay, verse 1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When you read that right away, you just read that, you go, why is he saying that? Because then he goes into the spirit of life versus the law of sin and death.

It seems like verse 1 doesn't fit. Verse 1 is going to fit. I'm going to show you how it fits, but it doesn't fit quite yet, okay? So we're going to go to verses 2 through 5 first.

As we understand the power of better, we have to understand what he means by the law. This is a sermon series in itself, but you need to say a little bit about what he means by the law. For he says, the law of the spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

But God has, for God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, we'll explain that in a moment, could not do. Okay, you might be tempted to think, as we even begin to read this, the law is bad. That is not what Paul says.

As a matter of fact, in a chapter earlier, in Romans chapter 7, verse 7, he'll say the law is not sin. He knows it's kind of complicated, so he's helping us. The law is not sin.

As a matter of fact, the Bible says we love the law. Oh, how I love your law, oh Lord. But Paul wants to be really clear, you are not saved by the law, but for the law.

You're not saved by the law. The law can't save you. Jesus, you see Jesus here? Look at verse 4. Here's Jesus.

Sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Okay, that's talking about the incarnation of Jesus. He was fully incarnated, fully human.

Condemned sin in the flesh. Talking about the cross there. So what Paul is wanting to say is the law is good.

The law is beautiful. You are saved for the law. You're not saved by the law.

But if you understand you're saved by Jesus and his Holy Spirit, then the law is a blessing. The law is a strength. The law is an encouragement.

But if you don't understand that, and you're living life for the better, and your focus is on becoming better, the law will be an accomplice to the flesh and make your life miserable. It cannot do what God can do. So you must understand the law in that way.

Now we understand the flesh. So verse 2 to 5 about the law. Then he moves into an explanation of the flesh.

Verses 6 to 8. 5, excuse me, 5 to 8. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. For those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death.

To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. Okay, so we need to understand what the flesh is.

Because it's hostile to God. We love God. We love the Father.

He's always good. We don't want to be hostile to God. Indeed, the flesh cannot please God.

Verse 8. Okay. First of all, understanding verse 1. What Paul is doing in 1 and 8. Okay, so look at 1 and 8. This is important as you read your Bible. You understand this.

You read a sentence like 1, you go, it doesn't fit. Well, actually you need to read it because sometimes Paul will take an opening sentence and a concluding sentence and a section and he'll relate those to each other. Okay, so actually 1 and 8 are related to each other.

Are you tracking with me? This is really important to understand when you read your Bibles. So you got 1 and 8. So what we have is a contrast. There's no condemnation for those in Jesus.

But those who are in the flesh, they're condemned. They can't see God. It's called a chiasm.

That doesn't matter so much. As you understand, Paul likes to do this with his writing. 1 and 8 are actually related to each other.

And all the stuff in the middle will explain why that's so important. All right. Now we look at the flesh.

What is the flesh? It might be confusing if you've been around Rez for a while because you've heard me say this and I promise you you'll hear me say it again. Matter matters. Oh, he just said it.

He always says that. I always say it because the Bible always says it. The Bible says that primarily in the incarnation of Jesus, matter matters.

It matters. Jesus became a full human being. So you may think, wait a second, I thought flesh and body was good.

You taught me that it was good. There's two different words going on here. Body is one word in the original language.

Flesh is another word. The word flesh almost always, not every single time, but almost always, refers to being controlled by your sinful nature. Or as 16th century Christian thinker Martin Luther said, being curved in on yourself.

So when you read flesh, it's being curved in on yourself. It's being controlled by yourself and not controlled by the Holy Spirit. Well, to be controlled by yourself is to say, I have to live a life that's better.

Now, the flesh can also look like indulgent, sinful behavior. That can be living in the flesh, too, and that may be often what we think of first. And that is part of it.

There's ways to apply the reality of the flesh in different ways. But I think that what's really important, broad context especially, where so many of you are trying so hard to live really good lives, is to understand that the better life is actually very likely a fleshly life, where you're curved in on yourself. You're trying to improve yourself.

You're trying to do better for yourself. You're trying to do better for others. And Paul says, you will never please God in that way.

Now, this gets really confusing because Christians think, be ye perfect as my Father and heaven is perfect. What's being said there? Well, the word perfect in Matthew 5 connects with this teaching, which is the fullness. Be ye full.

Be ye whole. Be ye whole would be a way to translate what Jesus is saying there. As my Father in heaven is full.

He's the fullness of God himself. He is God. So as the Father in heaven is full, so we are full of God.

We are full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was not saying, be ye perfect by focusing on being better all the time. He doesn't say, be ye perfect as you're trying to be perfect.

Be ye perfect as my Father, who is full of God, is whole and full. And we as Christians think, wait, I thought the Christian life was about always getting better. I thought that was the Christian life.

That would be a cruel life. That would be a cruel life. And God is never cruel.

He's never unjust. He's a Father. He loves you.

He empowers you to live the life He casts a vision to live. It would be cruel to say, be better, be better, be better. And yet if you try to be better, have you noticed? It doesn't work.

It's futile. It's impossible just to get better. You might have a better season where you're like, I'm getting better.

And then it gets really clear, you're not better. And you go from perfectionism into shame. I'll explain that in just a moment.

So Paul is saying, don't get confused. Life is not about being better. It's not about getting better.

The power of better is futile. As a matter of fact, it will create hostility to God. Okay, let me explain this a little bit more.

It's a great illustration from Pastor Tim Keller out of New York City. This is how he puts it. Imagine you have a very good government.

It's an excellent government. And a rebel force forms against that government. The top of that government, the good government.

And in a rebel force, you have soldiers and officers. And in those relationships, some of those guys, they're heroic. And they do heroic things.

And there's collegiality. And they actually sacrifice themselves for each other. But at the end of the day, they're sacrificing themselves for a rebel cause.

For something that is actually wrong. And this is so many who think they're walking as Christians. They're living the life of betterment.

And driven by becoming better. And they're even doing some good things along the way. But ultimately, they're in rebellion against the Spirit of God.

Who wants to simply fill them. And empower them. And give them the resurrection.

The resurrection is so much better than the life of better. The resurrection is so much better than the life of better. This is often how the reality of the flesh works itself out.

Okay, what does this look like? What does the power of better often look like? It often starts for many of us with perfectionism. If you've got to struggle with perfectionism, it's very likely that you're being influenced by the power of better. That somehow you're thinking, my life's about always getting better.

And so I'm scrutinizing my life constantly to see, was that better, was that better, was that better? Was that conversation with that person better? How am I being perceived in my social media world? Am I being perceived as better? I'm getting better. I just did better. No one noticed I got better.

Now I'm mad that nobody noticed I got better. Because my life's about better. What happens in perfectionism is that for a while you may think you're actually accomplishing it.

You're actually, because you think you're better than many people around you. You know that many of you think that way. You do.

Right? Yeah. I want to see some nodding heads. Come on, let's get real.

So some of you are going, I don't know, it's kind of working. I mean, I am better than a lot of people. It'll kill you.

It'll crush you, perfectionism. Your Father in Heaven would never want you to live that way, ever. Now for some perfectionists, they're not succeeding.

What happens there? That's where shame comes in. So you think you're trying to live perfect, but the fact of the matter is, it will ultimately, you'll be exposed for not being perfect. By the way, like family life, roommate life, this is really helpful for that.

Because you can kind of keep a perfectionistic thing going with some people for a while, but you live with somebody and it becomes really clear. So this is how it works in my, well, I said I'm a pastor. I've heard

people describe shame.

I don't know. But I will do something that's obviously not perfect. I will do something out of my sin nature that is driven by myself.

And I will be gently corrected in my family life. And my response is not, oh, thank you for correcting me because now I can live in the power of the Spirit. I'm like, no, I didn't say that in a critical way.

No, I didn't. I'm ashamed. And now I'm exposed.

So shame is a response to perfectionism when it's not working. That's where often shame comes in. It's not working.

I can't do it. So you may be thinking, I don't live a life of betterment. I gave up on better a long time ago.

You're still being ruled by better? It's still the authority in your life? You're just not succeeding at it. So now you're ashamed. Perfectionism and shame are very connected in relationship to the flesh that Paul is teaching about.

A critical spirit. A critical spirit happens during those seasons when you think you're doing better and you realize no one else around you is much better. Spirit or attitude, you can say attitude.

So you become critical of others all the time because they're not actually doing what they should be doing. And you find yourself setting your mind. This is what it means to set your mind on the flesh.

Setting your mind on the flesh isn't like, oh, I'm looking at my arm all the time. I'm setting my mind on the flesh. That's not what it means.

It's that person isn't what they should be like, and I don't like it, and someone's got to tell them. So I will. Huge struggle for me.

Critical attitude. I hate that about myself. I'm going to do what I don't want to do, like Paul says in Romans 7. Self-scrutiny that I already mentioned will often accompany a power of better life where you're just always looking at yourself, thinking about yourself, worried about yourself.

Parenting. Some of us as parents thought that parenting was about making better kids. And we really thought it with the best intentions.

Our kids are going to be better than we were. Kids have better school opportunities than we did. I'm going to raise better kids.

And if I'm honest, I'm going to raise better kids than other kids, which is where the critical attitude comes in among parents. And when you see critical attitude, look at parents' real hearts about other parents. Or is parenting about raising children who are full of the Spirit? Spirit of love, hope, faith.

What if that's parenting? That doesn't mean that we're not looking for certain behaviors in children. We are. But how do you get there? We can't do to children what our Father in Heaven doesn't do to us.

Let's get to the power of the Spirit. Aren't you ready? Verse 9, it switches. You, however.

You. Paul wants to speak personally to you. You, however, are not in the power of better.

You're not in the flesh. You're not in the controlled sinful nature. You're in the Spirit.

In fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you. If you had given your life to Jesus and you're following him, you have the power of the Holy Spirit, which means what? That a resurrected one lives in you. For the mind, excuse me, if the Spirit of him, verse 11, who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies.

The resurrected one indwells you. He lives in you. This is what controls you.

You're not bent in on yourself. You're opened up to the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me teach you a six-word prayer.

I taught you a form of it before, and it's really helpful. And it's embodied. Your matter matters, right? So I take my hand sometimes, and I put my hand right here, and I just say, the resurrected one lives in me.

That's what the Bible teaches. The resurrecting Father. That's the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead.

The resurrecting Father. The resurrected Son. The Holy Spirit of the resurrection.

The resurrected one lives in me. You know, put your hand if you're comfortable. If you're not, it's fine.

Just put your hand here. And you can just say it to yourself. I'm just going to say it out loud.

You say it to yourself. The resurrected one lives in me. That's the goal of life.

That's how you get to peace. That's how you get to life. It's the difference between a train and a toddler.

Okay, let me explain that. There's a place where I run regularly, and there's a beautiful West Chicago meadow, but next to the meadow is a train track. And as I thought about that image of the meadow and the train track, I thought about the difference between living in the power of better and the power of the Spirit.

So a train has to be on a track. If a train isn't on a track, it can't go anywhere or do anything else. It's a very limited, a very powerful mechanized reality.

It's a very limited mechanized reality. It goes on a track. It's very, very heavy.

So for example, when I see this train going down this track and I see this meadow, I thought to myself, wow, that train can never go in that meadow. It can't get in there. It can't move around in it.

It can't experience it. It just goes by the meadow, by the meadow. Every single day, a train goes down those tracks by the meadow.

It's too heavy. It's not equipped for that. It does one thing.

I do the tracks. I do the tracks. That's like the betterment life.

This is all that I do. Don't for a moment think that the world has creativity and that the world and the sinful nature is the place where you can be free. It's the opposite.

It's the train tracks. That's all you do. Life in the flesh.

Chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka. Same thing every day. I gotta get better.

I gotta get better. I'm not better. I know I'm not better.

I'm in despair. I can't get better. I wanna get better.

They're all getting better and I'm not getting better. Chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka. Now imagine, and parents, it's gonna be okay, but imagine a toddler on that train just for fun.

And the train slows down a lot. And the toddler jumps off the train. Well, the toddler can go into the field.

Well, toddlers are gonna go into fields because they see butterflies and they see flowers. And so they're gonna run into the fields. Woo-hoo-hoo-hoo! I'm in the field.

This is an amazing field. I'm equipped to be in this field. I can pick up flowers.

I can grab garter snakes that won't bite me. Don't worry, Mom or Dad. I'm fighting frogs.

I'm in the field. The train, oh, there's the train. It's stuck there in the power of better.

But I'm not stuck. I can lie down on my back and just take in the sun. It's the toddler way.

You know what Jesus said? You must become like a toddler to enter the kingdom of God. Life in the Spirit, the freedom of the Spirit. Don't think for a moment, oh, the Spirit, that's the charismatic thing.

Oh, you're doing the charismatic thing. For crying out loud, don't divide the church that way. This is Bible.

This is just Bible. Life in the Spirit is Bible. I don't care what your tradition is.

I don't care if you don't have a Christian tradition. You need to know this. You need to understand this.

You can live in the power of better and be constrained and on a pair of tracks and ultimately find yourself hostile to God, or you can live in the power of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection power of Jesus, and you can be like a toddler and enter the kingdom of God. What does this look like? I witnessed this two months ago in our very community, a beautiful witness of what it looks like to be a toddler rather than a train. Some of you know that we had to change our budget.

We had a fiscal year starting on July 1st, and the budget, we had budget challenges, we had some financial challenges, and we realized we have to cut 6% out of our budget going into the new fiscal year, July 1st. So we realized to do that, we had to cut a full-time staff position. And as I looked at all the options and met with my team, I realized I had to cut the position, not because of any performance issue whatsoever, of the pastor, the executive pastor of General Ossian Operations, Dan Easley's position.

So I called Dan in. I said, hey, Dan, I got to cut your full-time position. Now, Dan had left a Fortune 50 company to come help Resurrection three years prior to this, and now I was going to have to cut your position.

My heart was pounding. I cried. Dan took it in.

He wasn't cold. He was listening. He was reflective.

I said, okay, well, I understand this. As a matter of fact, I even recommended that my position might be a position that should be cut. I get it.

I just need to think about it and pray about it. And I said, great, of course. The next day, we had a staff retreat, and I've done a lot of these where after you do this, it gets very awkward, very tension-filled between the person that you've had to, whose position you've had to cut.

Dan and his wife, Lois, were both on the retreat, and this is what they said. It's the Lord. No, the Lord wants his position cut.

It's for Res, but it's more than that, Stuart. It's for us. As a matter of fact, we feel like we've been called to something new.

As a matter of fact, we are now considering, and they now have decided, we're going to move in their 60s from the Wheaton area to Madison, Wisconsin, to help plant a church for resurrection, Christ Church Madison. Can you see the toddler? Do you see it happening? You see how the train would have worked? How dare you fire me? How dare you cut this position? I'm better than this. I could have a better job than this.

I could have a better salary than this. I'm ashamed that now I'm a failure, and I'm going to react in a different shameful way. Do you see how this could have gone? 50 different power of better ways, and do you see another Christian, Lois and Dan, who actually had the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

They were actually full of the resurrection power of God and said, what does God have? God loves us. The Father's not cruel. Huh, let's jump off the train and go into the field.

That's what it looks like. That's how it's left. Final piece in verse 13 before I conclude.

You can put to death, you can put to death sin. Verse 13. You can put these things to death.

Because you have the power of the resurrection and life, you can put the flesh, the sinful nature to death. Here are a few ways how. You've got to get prayer for this.

You have to have people lay hands on you, that's in Hebrews chapter six, and pray for you, for the filling of Jesus' life. You cannot do this by yourself. It's fine to go home and reflect on this and what was taught, was it biblical? That's all good, but you can't get to the freedom of the Spirit and setting your mind on the Spirit by yourself.

Well, I trained prayer ministers along these walls. Get prayer. Get prayer.

I was thinking about our students, some of them starting their college careers in the next week. Wouldn't it be great to start with prayer to be free from the power of the flesh and your college career be marked by the power of the Holy Spirit? How about four years of toddler? Don't tell your parents I described your college career that way. Oh, your parents are here.

Oh, well. Second, fast. This is the kind of ministry, you need fasting.

Fasting simply creates a human hunger or a habit hunger, you start being a habit. It creates a hunger to get in touch with the hunger of God. That's all that fasting is about.

It gets you in touch with the hunger that you have for God by not eating a certain food or foods, not doing a certain habit. I consider a two-day fast out of hunger for the Holy Spirit. Hunger to see where you have been deceived by the power of better.

Finally and simply, as you see there you've been deceived, as you see your perfectionism or your shame, your self scrutiny, repent. Repent. And choose the way of the Holy Spirit.

Become who you are. You've been given the Holy Spirit by the power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrected one lives in you.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thanks for listening.

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