

Following Jesus
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
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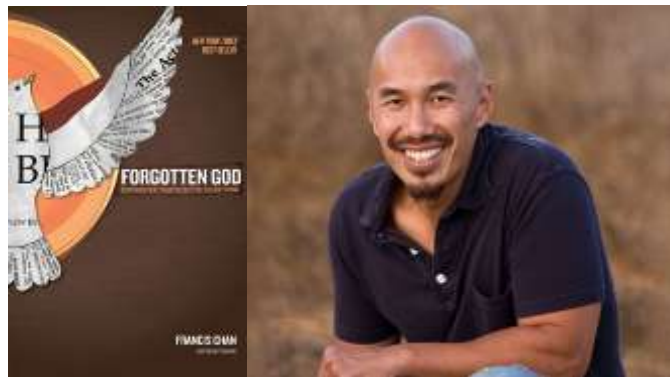
TEXT: Romans 8:1-28



Good morning, Beloved. My heart is full. I have been preparing and meditating this week on one of the greatest chapters in all of God's Word. I want to pray an extra prayer that God would welcome us into the majesty of what is before us.

Father, You know what this text has done in my own heart this week, and I ask that You would come now, Holy Spirit, and fill all of us afresh with Your presence. We ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

We are continuing this morning in our six week series called "Following Jesus: Why We Need the Holy Spirit." We have seen some remarkable things so far. We have seen that the Holy Spirit is for every believer. We have seen that this is God's end-time promise realized in us. We have seen that the Holy Spirit creates a new spiritual life in us to be born from above, to be born of the Spirit. We have seen that the Holy Spirit creates a desire for God, the things of God, and the motivation for holy living. That is what we have seen so far, and yet it's true that for many of us, the Holy Spirit can be neglected. I encourage you to obtain a



copy of Francis Chan's book *The Forgotten God*. It is a very accessible and readable work on how the Holy Spirit is sometimes forgotten or not given due weight. Francis Chan's favorite part of the book is a section of the book where he meditates on scriptural truths about the Spirit and the blessing of reflecting on these. I will highlight a couple from this group. He says this:

"The Spirit brings us life and freedom, not bondage or slavery. In our world that is plagued with death, this is a profound truth that points to real hope. By the power of the Holy Spirit we abound with hope because our God is a God of hope, who fills His children with all joy and peace."

This morning, I want to be upfront about the direction and shape of the sermon. We are going to look at Romans 8. In this majestic passage of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is prominent. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 20 times in this chapter. We are going to look at three things:

The Holy Spirit frees us.

The Holy Spirit leads us.

The Holy Spirit helps us.

That is what this whole sermon is about—these three things. Let's look at each of these together.

First, **the Holy Spirit frees us**. Romans 8 begins with this declaration in Romans 8:1:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

This is profoundly good news for those who are in Christ. We are freed from guilt. We are free from God's righteous judgment. This statement is supported by Romans 8:2:

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

I know that "freedom" is an important word in different parts of the world. It's a particularly important word here in the United States. For Christians, the word "freedom" does not mean freedom to do whatever we want to do. Freedom in Scripture means to be set free from the controlling power of sin within us. What we need to be set free from in the scriptural vision are the power and controlling desires of sin within us. That is the tyranny within. That tyranny, of course, can be manifested in public ways and large-scale ways, but the freedom of the Spirit is to be set free from the controlling power of sin.

Augustine, the great North African Christian leader, said:

"Without the Spirit man's will is not free, since it has been laid under by shackling and conquering desires."

We are set free by the Spirit, and this statement at the beginning of Romans 8 flows out of Romans 7. If you have not read Romans 7 in some time or have never read it, it is the most detailed description in all antiquity—in Christian writing, Jewish writing, and pagan writing—of the inner struggle of the human heart, when we want to do what is right, and we find we do not have the power to do it. Have you ever felt that way? That is what it's like not to be free. It's to see the good from a distance and want to go there but feel shackled and unable to get there. We need to be freed from that. How are we freed? In Romans 8:3, Paul describes the accomplishment of the cross in one verse:

“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....”

This is an amazing verse. God condemned sin in us, and that is why there is no condemnation for us only if we are in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus sin is condemned. Jesus Christ knew no sin, but our sin is laid upon Him, and God rightly judged our sin there on the cross. That's why the sky was dark for three hours on Good Friday. God's righteous judgment against the sin of the world, yours and mine, is laid on Christ, and now we are free from the controlling power of that sin.

To be free from sin is only the first part of the gospel. To be freed *from* sin leads to being freed *for* the compelling life of God's ways. In Romans 8:4, we read why God did this in Christ:

“...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.”

The life that God describes as right and good and holy and beautiful and just is fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, which is our old life apart from Christ, but according to the Spirit. The Spirit frees us for the compelling life of God. We are set free *from* sin, *for* the life of God. We get rid of the old life, and we begin to experience the joy and excitement of the new life. The power of that new life comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

We saw this in Ezekiel 36:25-27 last week in background to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey My rules.”

I think that Ezekiel 36 is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible for understanding Paul's ministry. The vision of Ezekiel 36 is, to say it again, that the Lord promises to sprinkle clean water, to cleanse you from your idolatry, to give you a new heart and a new spirit, to take out your hard stony heart and put in a heart of flesh that is responsive to God, and to put His Spirit within you. My favorite line of this passage is the last one. What does the Holy Spirit actually do in us? The Holy Spirit causes us, moves us, stirs us to walk in God's ways. These are God's ways, described in Scripture that the Holy Spirit authors. He knows the meaning, and then when He is in us, He moves us to do what God would do. We don't have to make it up. We don't have to wonder about it. If we are not walking in God's ways, then the profound simple prayer to pray is: "Lord, fill me with more of the Holy Spirit."

In college I ran track. Actually, I ran down the runway—I was a pole vaulter. My best friend, who shared Christ with me in high school, was an 800-meter runner. He did not run cross country, and we noticed together over the years that the cross country runners came into the track season with a deeper, wider foundation. My friend always ran out of gas. He would start near the front of the pack, but in the last 100 meters he would fade. I thought I would solve this for my friend. I finished pole vaulting, so I decided to position myself next to the track, and I would run next to him for the last 100 meters and pace him and cheer him on. He was keeping up with me, and it was going great, and then he looked over at me in the middle of the race and said, "You can't be here. You're going to get me disqualified." You cannot have a personal pacer come out and help you win the race.

The Holy Spirit, though, wants to come alongside you for the whole race, and He doesn't disqualify you. He will give you the power to go in God's ways. We are freed by the Spirit from sin, and I really mean that. The controlling power of our inward fallen desires that are hostile to God are sins that we need to be rescued from. I need that; you need that. We need to be set free *from* that, so we can be set free *for* the life of God. In Romans 8:5, we read:

"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."

We can be set free for setting our mind on the Spirit and the things of the Spirit. In Romans 8:11, Paul says:

"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."

Ponder that. The Spirit of the living God, who welcomed Jesus back to life, dwells in you. This is the Spirit who does away with death and brings life, and He dwells in you. He vivifies, He gives life, to our mortal bodies through His Spirit, so He sets us free. I want to challenge you to walk

in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. I have been thinking about this all week. What does the freedom of the Holy Spirit really look like? What does it look like to be set free *from* sin, to be set free *for* God? I think it means walking into a room and asking not who is noticing me, but who is unseen that I need to notice. I think it's walking into a space and seeing others and asking, "Where can I serve?" I think it means for a husband or wife who comes home from work and asks not, "How can everyone serve me now that I'm home." Rather, it means walking over the threshold of your house and saying, "How can I serve?" I think it means asking, "Who around me needs a word of encouragement right now? Who is suffering or hurting that needs my compassion?" We need the Holy Spirit so we can live the life God wants, and He will lead us in doing that. That's why we need Him. He sets us free.

Second, the Holy Spirit leads us. In Romans 8:12, Paul says:

"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."

To be in debt is usually a bad thing. Our stewardship committee at Kenwood is not into debt. Praise God, our church has no debt. There are very few people who say they love debt. There is one sense, though, in which debt is a positive thing. It's the sense in which we are indebted or obligated in a right way. When you get married, you take vows, and you become obligated to that other person. The New Testament language for that is debt. A debt is an obligation or a duty. It's what is required of you. The wonder of being filled with the Holy Spirit is that we are no longer obligated to our old lives. You don't have to do it. You are, however, duty-bound to God in a new way. The word for this appears in Romans 1:14-15, where Paul says:

"I am under obligation [literally, "I am a debtor"] both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am obligated to preach the gospel to everyone."

In Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray: *"Forgive us of our debts, as we forgive our debtors."* These are the positive actions that we must take as people of God. When we fail to do that, we rack up a failure to do what God has required of us.

The Spirit of God sets us free to live in God's ways, and for us to do that we need His leadership. In Romans 8:14, we read:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

The Holy Spirit leads us into the experience of God as Father. The Holy Spirit is not an idea or a force; it is God's personal presence. He leads us actively into the experiential knowledge that God is real and that God is our heavenly Father. In Romans 8:15, Paul says something extraordinary:

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

The word “Abba” is Aramaic. The Hebrew version is the same. It is the direct address form to God, and it's significant to notice that Paul transliterates this word, which does not exist in Greek and does not exist in Latin. Abba is a word you hear when you are in Israel. You hear kids with their families. You hear young boys and young girls who see their dads, and they say, “Abba, Abba.” “I see my dad.” It's such a tender word, and it's a word by which we cry out with our identity as sons and daughters of God. Paul knows that this word is so important that he brings it over and gives us all this foreign word. He does not leave us in the dark because he translates it right away. That's why the ESV says, “Abba! Father!” He translates for the listener, for us, what the word “Abba” means.

It is the Holy Spirit in us, who confirms that we are God's adopted children, and since we are adopted children of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that God is our Father. As Father, He is committed to us. He is leading our lives. He can be trusted. We are not alone. This experience of having God as the one leading our lives is so precious. God gives us the Holy Spirit, so we know who we are.

In the life of Jesus, right after God declares, *“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”* the Holy Spirit filled Him. What did the Holy Spirit do for the incarnate Son of God? The next thing He did was to lead Jesus out into the wilderness to face the dragon. So I want to tell you that one of the things the Holy Spirit will do in leading your life is to lead you to confront temptation, but He will lead you in a victorious confrontation with it. The Holy Spirit will lead you not into places of fear but into places where you can confront those fears by the power of the Holy Spirit and face temptation in your life. The Holy Spirit will give you victory.

The Holy Spirit will lead and direct our lives. He will lead us in knowing that, as God's children, we are heirs. In Romans 8:17, we read:

“...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

This is a staggering statement. This is one of the verses that I find myself pondering throughout my earthly life. *“Fellow heirs with Christ”*—Jesus Christ is inheriting the new heavens and new earth. Jesus Christ is remaking the world, one life at a time, and then He is adding the names of all who believe as fellow heirs with Him of this new world. Gordon Fee says:

“This final sentence spells out the further ramifications that the Spirit's presence assures us that we are God's children indeed.”

We are His heirs, which means we are fellow heirs with Christ, heirs of God's eternal glory. That is the dénouement of our story, and it staggers the imagination.

We are fellow-heirs with Christ. That means we are a pilgrimage people. Notice how Paul's thinking is consistent with the Exodus imagery of the Bible. We are set free by the power and blood of the Passover Lamb to be on a pilgrimage journey that ends with an inheritance. There is an interval between now and then, between being saved by the blood and receiving our full inheritance. So what is the shape of that pilgrimage? The last phrase in Romans 8:17 says:

"...provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

That takes us to the third reason why we need the Holy Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit because **the Holy Spirit helps us**. The Holy Spirit helps us along our pilgrimage way. The Holy Spirit helps us between that time when we are saved by grace through faith and that final ending, when we have a resurrected body, and evil is forever banished from the world. The older I get, the more I long for that—that evil would be banished in me and banished in all the world. That interval between now and then involves things that are hard, things that are difficult, sometimes things that do not seem to make sense. The Holy Spirit is there to help us. Paul says in Romans 8:18:

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Remember an earlier sermon series at Kenwood that was unforgettable for me. We spent a whole month on 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, which says:

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

God is working in us, and the Holy Spirit helps us first to hope. In Romans 8:19, we read:

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."

The creation itself is standing on tiptoes with eager longing for the apocalypse of the sons of God. We are used to hearing the word "apocalypse," or revelation, in the last book of the Bible. Here Paul uses this word "apocalypse" for the revelation of the children of God. The creation is personified in this passage as standing on tiptoes, waiting for evil to be completely removed, and that's where we are going. Do you know that evil does not win? Evil is defeated on the cross and totally eradicated in the end, and the only people who know that are people who have trusted in Jesus Christ and are reading the Scriptures. God is the creator of the world, and He is the Redeemer and Rescuer of the world, so no matter what happens in our earthly experience, no matter what injustice we see or what suffering we encounter, we are given space for lament, but the Holy Spirit births hope in us that the ultimate ending is good. The creation itself will be set free. In Romans 8:20-21, we read:

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Just as we are set free from the controlling power of sin, creation is set free from the power and consequence of sin. Creation is set free from its slavery, its bondage to corruption and decay and the consequence of sin conducted on planet Earth.

In Genesis 4, after the first murder, we are inclined to think sin is not really a big deal, but later in the chapter we have another murder. God says, *“The blood of your brother is crying out from the ground.”* God sees that, hears that, and will act. In Exodus 3, God tells Moses, *“I have heard the sound of My people crying out, and I have come down to rescue.”* The problem of evil is resolved in Scripture by the God who acts, who acts first at the cross, and then starts to remake people one by one until the final ending of redemption is complete.

We have the firstfruits of the Spirit in Romans 8:23:

“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

We groan as we await this. The New Testament, with life in Jesus, gives us space to weep, space to lament. Things are not as they one day will fully be. The Holy Spirit helps us groan, but we groan as people with a clear hope for the future.

We hope for what we do not see. We do not yet see the fulfillment of the prophetic promise. In Habakkuk 2:14, we read that one day people will know God:

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

In Jeremiah 31, we read the prophetic promise that no one will have to teach his neighbor, because we will all know the Lord. It’s the promise of a world filled with people who know and love God and treat each other like that. Can you imagine that? That’s not easy to imagine.

Christians are not cynical. Cynicism is not born of the Spirit. The Greek word “cynic” actually comes from the Greek word “dog,” just a barking dog. Diogenes was the founder of the cynic school. In a famous scene, Diogenes the cynic was outside sunning himself, and Alexander the Great came by—a noble visitor. In his active benevolence and magnanimity, Alexander the Great said to Diogenes, “What can I do for you?” Diogenes said, “You’re blocking my sun.” Diogenes surely thought, “You can’t do anything for me, you are blocking the sun, so you could just stand aside and go on with your world conquest.”

Skepticism and cynicism are not born of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces hope that the world is changing, and it's changing by God's power and God's ways and God's timing. We need the Holy Spirit to do that. We have to be people of hope, and we cannot be people of hope by our willpower. The world around us needs hope. Hope is a byproduct of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, because the Holy Spirit sees the ending, and the ending is wonderful. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness to pray. Sometimes we do not know how to pray or what to pray for, but the Holy Spirit Himself, dwelling in us, intercedes and prays with groanings too deep for words. In Romans 8:25-26, we read:

"But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

When our groaning matches the groaning of the creation itself, something is not right. "Oh, Lord, act!" We are grieved by things we see and hear about. Sometimes they touch us close to home, and we groan, and we pray. Sometimes we do not even have words. Sometimes we just groan. The groaning of the Spirit in this prayer, the ESV says, is *"too deep for words."* Paul's expression is *"inarticulate groanings."*

Can you see something of the power of sin in your own life that you wish were totally broken? You come before God, and you say, "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" That is the Holy Spirit. You may see a friend who is risking his marriage by playing around with something that has no life in it, and you groan inwardly. That's the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit can pray in and through us with a prayer language that does not match any earthly known language. In Romans 8:27, we read:

"And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

We pray in the Spirit. We pray according to God's will.

You and I are meant to have a real experience of God in our lives. Christianity is not an idea; it is not a theory. It's a relationship with a person, a living God, and God desires to dwell among us. The presence of the Holy Spirit helps us hope and helps us pray. Sometimes we do not know what to pray for, but the presence of God with us does help us know the great truth that is stated in Romans 8:28:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

That is one of the most important lines in the whole Bible. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us helps

us to know the truth that God is working in this world in your life and mine.

There is a textual variant in Romans 8:28. A textual variant may result because there are 5000 handwritten Greek copies of the New Testament. Some of those manuscripts differ in very slight ways. That's a textual variant. Some of the ESV Bibles give a footnote on this verse with a variant reading, and I think it is the correct rendering of the verse. I will show you what's at stake. The variant reading renders the verse this way:

“And we know that for those who love God, God works all things together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”

That is a small text variant and a significant theological difference. The question before us is: What is the subject, or who is the subject of the verb phrase “work together?” Is “all things” the subject, suggesting that we live in kind of an impersonal universe, and we can say glibly, “All things just work out”? Is that the New Testament? Is that faith in Jesus Christ? I don't think it is. It's not an impersonal construction. It's a personal construction, where the subject of the verb phrase “works all things together,” is our Heavenly Father. God Himself is working all things, even the hardest parts of our lives, even the disappointments in our lives. We have to trust that God is working all things. It may be the job you think you have to have, and you need the job, but you don't get this job, so where do you go. Hope does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. I am trusting God that He is working all things. Whether it's the hardships we go through or the hope deferred, it is God who works all things for good, that ultimate good **that is** to be carried out and realized in us.

Paul describes that ultimate good in the next two sentences in Romans 8:29-30:

“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”

God uses all things to make us more like Christ, to conform us to His image. The Holy Spirit is here. He is God's end-time promise for all who believe. He is present to set us free this morning, free from the controlling desires of self and free for living for God. He is here to lead your life. He wants to guide your life, to direct it in very real ways.

I remember not knowing what I would do after I graduated from college. I was working on the eighth floor of a building in downtown Washington, DC. I got into the elevator on the eighth floor, and there was one other man in the elevator, and by the time we got to the bottom floor I knew I was going to go to China. The Holy Spirit leads us. He wants to lead you, so stop letting yourself lead your life, and let the Holy Spirit lead your life. When the Holy Spirit starts leading you, just follow Him. The Holy Spirit is here to lead and guide our lives, and the Holy Spirit is

present to help us. He will help us hope if we have lost hope. If you have lost hope this morning, let the Holy Spirit produce hope in you, hope for God's future for the world, hope for His triumph over evil, hope for His will to be fully realized. The Holy Spirit is here to free us, to lead us, to help us.

Last night my wife asked me if I would flash out to the grocery store to get one thing that we were out of, and I went. It was not a great act of magnanimity. Even in the smallest things, we have the Holy Spirit in us to say, "How can I serve you? How can I help?" The Holy Spirit is leading our lives. So I went to pick up one product that we needed, and the Holy Spirit had a spectacular theological gift for me at the grocery store. I got my item and checked out, and as I was walking out, I saw a fellow pastor who was walking out at the same time. He said, "What are you preaching on tomorrow?" I said, "I'm preaching Romans 8, and my heart is so full of the work of the Spirit in us." He said that one of his teachers was a man named Gordon Fee, who was a Pentecostal New Testament scholar, on fire for the Lord, and Fee's teaching had greatly impacted his ministry. I said, "Brother, you're not going to believe this, but I've been reading through Gordon Fee's 860-page book on *God's Empowering Presence* this week." He asked if that is the book where Gordon Fee goes through all of Paul's references to the Spirit, and I said, "Yes, that's it," and I told him I was planning to quote from Gordon Fee at the end of my sermon. There we were, leaving the grocery store, celebrating Gordon Fee's description of the Spirit.

Gordon Fee spent years and years meditating on the work of the Spirit in our lives, and this is what he had to say about Romans 8:

"It seems appropriate to list the various affirmations about the Spirit in this chapter:

1. On the basis of the work of Christ, the Spirit, as the Spirit of life, sets us free from the 'law' of sin and of death.
2. As we walk in the Spirit, the righteous requirement of Torah is thereby fulfilled in us.
3. People who live in the Spirit are materially and behaviorally in a different mode of existence from those who live by the flesh. Thus the presence or absence of the Spirit is the one single distinguishing 'mark of identity' for God's people in the present age.
4. The Spirit is both the 'Spirit of Christ' and the 'the Spirit of God.' Since He indwells the believer in the present age, this is how Christ and the Father are currently present with God's people. The Trinitarian implications of this passage are thoroughgoing.
5. As the indwelling Spirit who now gives life to God's people, the Spirit is the present guarantee of the future, especially in the form of the resurrection of the body.

6. Since God's people are Spirit people, they must not live in keeping with the flesh; and it is by the Spirit that they thus 'put to death' the deeds of the flesh, that is, the sin that belongs to their past.
7. On the positive side, God's people are described as 'being led by the Spirit,' which means that He leads them in the paths of righteousness that fulfill Torah.
8. The Spirit is the certain evidence that God's people are His children, having been 'adopted as children' through the work of the Spirit and evidenced by the Abba-cry which the Spirit inspires. Indeed, the Spirit Himself bears witness with us that we are God's children.
9. The Spirit is the 'firstfruits' of the final eschatological harvest. He is the essential element of eschatological life, and His presence now in the lives of believers is both evidence that the future has begun and guarantee of its glorious consummation, wherein the children realize their inheritance.
10. But in the meantime, during our present sufferings and weaknesses, the Spirit assists us in prayer. By praying in the Spirit, believers have the assurance that the Spirit is not only appealing on their behalf before God, but is doing so according to God's own will and was thus working all things together for their good.
11. Our confidence in such praying is directly related to who the Spirit is: the Spirit of God Himself, whose mind God knows and thus guarantees that what the Spirit prays through us is heard and understood.

"Here is the wonder of grace that leads Paul to the final rhetoric of vv. 31-39 that God should do all of this for us, sinners all, who once walked in the ways of the flesh that led to death, but now by the Spirit know the love of God in Christ from which nothing can separate us. Hallelujah!"

In Jesus' Name, Amen