

Sermon: **At the Crossroads of Life: whom should I call?**

Songs: Spirit Song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWEDBaFy0SI>

No longer a slave to fear <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8TkUMJtK5k>

[Romans 8:26-39](#) from The Message

What role does the Holy Spirit play in my life? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life?

The Holy Trinity: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have just recited the words of the Apostles creed. I believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ His Son and I believe in the Holy Spirit.

But growing up I heard very little about the Holy Spirit. In fact, as a Sunday School child sitting some 5 metres below the minister in the raised pulpit at St Andrews I was baffled and a little scared of the references to the Holy Ghost. It was a concept that I could not understand.

And there was very little teaching on the nature, and the work, of the Holy Ghost either at that time or since then.

The use of the term Holy Spirit helped me a little towards a better understanding.

In the 1980s, two theologians even wrote a book called *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity*.¹ Is the Holy Spirit really the “shy member of the Trinity”? Maybe the neglected member of the Trinity? Or the member less understood?

Can you relate to my experience? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life?

It is a vital question as you travel along your journey of faith. At all times as you respond to the gospel message and especially when you reach crossroads in your life.

What did Jesus say about the role of the Holy Spirit²

16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengthenener, Standby), to be with you forever—

Our passage this morning from Romans chapter 8 is a good starting point to lead us to a better understanding.

We read for example:

“Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it doesn’t matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans.”

To understand this passage, we need a helicopter view of the chapters 1-8 of the book of Romans.

Many of you may know this book well. It was written by the apostle Paul and was directed to the church in Rome.

Paul had never been there, but we read in Acts³ and in Romans 1⁴ that he had made plans to visit but his plans had been thwarted.

¹ https://www.amazon.com/Frederick-Dale-Bruner/e/B001KCIVNK/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1

² John 14:16 from the Amplified Bible

³ Acts 19:21

⁴ Romans 1:10-13

This book was written by Paul from Corinth in AD 57 at a time when the infant church in Rome was experiencing a time of relative peace. Nero had not yet commenced persecuting the Christians. He started doing this in AD 64, making them scapegoats after the great fire in Rome.

Paul, not able to get there in person, wanted to set out the Gospel message in detail for the believers in Rome. Although he had not been there, he had heard of several of the believers and in chapter 16 he sends greetings to some 26 persons by name. Starting with Priscilla⁵ and her husband Aquila⁶, and the church meeting in Rome in their home.

Had Paul got to Rome we might never have had letter to the Romans which stands as the clearest and most systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in all the Scriptures.⁷

Paul lays out the theme of this book in chapter 1:⁸

“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk. 2:4).”

At the time Corinth was a “hot bed of immorality and idol worship”. So, when Paul wrote to those in Rome about the sinfulness of humanity and the power of God’s grace to change lives miraculously and completely, he wrote about what he observed every day.

Paul starts with what was as easily observable in his world as it is in ours today: the sinfulness of humanity.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁹

All condemned due to rebellion against God. All separated from God and unable to bridge this gap through their own efforts.¹⁰

However, God in His grace offers us justification by faith in His Son, Jesus.¹¹

“Christ Took Our Punishment

21 But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, ... 22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. 23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.¹²

Paul goes further to show how we, as Christ followers, are to live dead to sin and alive to Christ.¹³

“Sin’s Power Is Broken. 6 Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

⁵ Acts 18:2,18,19, 1 Corinthians 16:19

⁶ As for note 5 but also Colossians 4:15

⁷ [Book of Romans Overview - Insight for Living Ministries](#)

⁸ Romans 1:16-17

⁹ Romans 3:23

¹⁰ Romans chapter 1 – 3:20

¹¹ Romans chapters 4 and 5.

¹² Romans 3:21-24 New Living Translation

¹³ Romans chapters 6 and 7

But he reminds us that the struggle with sin continues as we strive to live as followers of Jesus.

Paul cries out:

“19 I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.”

In the Lord’s prayer as forgiven sinners we pray

“Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.”

And this brings us to chapter 8, a chapter that a writer¹⁴ describes as:

“The 9-1-1 of every Christian believer because the entire chapter is indeed a prayer template, one to be used at any given moment by all those who believe in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.”

Under the heading in my Bible of “Life through the Spirit” Paul starts with these words:

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

Pause and consider the power of these words. There is no condemnation! Acquitted, pardoned, set free, the chains are off. No matter what we have done, or left undone there is to be no looking back. No listening to that nagging voice saying “Is that really so? Remember when you did this or that.”

There is no condemnation. Set free. The slate has been wiped clean. If we could all hold onto only this one truth, then this morning’s message will have achieved much.

And back this up with verses 15 and 16:

“15 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.”

At this point Paul points out that since we are God’s children, we are his heirs and together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering in this world.

And this means living in this world with all that is good and all that is bad. Being a follower of Jesus does not mean that we are excused from difficulties and challenges of all kinds.

Jesus warned his disciples, and us, of this.

John recorded:¹⁵

“33 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

Here on this earth, we will have many trials and sorrows.

But these sufferings, says Paul, are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.¹⁶

¹⁴ [Commentary on Romans 8:26-39 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

¹⁵ John 16:33

¹⁶ Romans 8:18

Our horizon is too low if we look only at what has happened, and is happening, in our world. Through the blood of Jesus, we have eternal life, life beyond our limited years on this earth. That is our assured hope.

And Paul emphasises this in detail. He confirms that all that happens in this life works for the good of those who love God. A passage that I have often struggled to understand when really bad things happen to good people. But I struggle only when my horizon is limited to our lives here on earth.

Paul writes that it was God's plan from the beginning of time to shape the lives of all men and women who love Him along the same lines of the life of Jesus. To conform them to the likeness of Jesus so that Jesus would be the first in line of humanity restored. How would this be done in a world where sin prevailed, and none could break the separation from God in their own strength?

By sending Jesus to die the death that we deserved. Taking on himself the sin of the world as he lived among us living and teaching the gospel message before his crucifixion and resurrection.

By assuring eternal life to all who were called by the gospel to confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. To break the separation from God and to be made righteous – to be placed in a right relationship with God. By grace through faith. Moving us from:

- Sinner.
- To forgiven sinner.
- To dependent.
- To disciple.
- to subject in God's kingdom.
- To worshipper.
- To daughters and sons of God.

To continue living in this fallen world but now "more than conquerors"!! What a statement. Fighting in a war where victory has already been won. Paul poses five questions to reinforce this statement.

- If God is for us, who can be against us?
- How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.
- Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.
- Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.
- Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No-one and no thing!

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷

That is our assured hope even as we, and creation groan at this time as we wait.

Paul uses the analogy of child birth with creation personified as a woman in labour waiting for the birth of her child.

¹⁷ John 3:16

Listen to verses 22-25 paraphrased in The Message:

“22-25 All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.”

Waiting for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.¹⁸ A time when the physical universe is renewed and living things will no longer be subject to death and decay, as they are today.

How are we to cope in the meantime with the challenges of this life?

On whom do we call when we stand at the crossroads of life as we journey in faith?

This is when we need to read and reread verses 26-39 of Romans 8 to understand the assurance that we have eternal life and that we are not alone.

“26 In the same way the Spirit [comes to us and] helps us in our weakness. We do not know what prayer to offer or how to offer it as we should, but the Spirit Himself [knows our need and at the right time] intercedes on our behalf with sighs and groanings too deep for words. 27 And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes [before God] on behalf of God’s people in accordance with God’s will.

The Holy Spirit: God with us. You and I are not alone.

Before I come back to these verses, we need to understand two truths about the Holy Spirit:

The **first truth** is that the Holy Spirit is a person not an impersonal force. In John 14 the words of Jesus guide us.

Verse 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—

Jesus promises ‘another’ advocate, comforter to be with you forever. The use of the word ‘another’ means another person like Jesus. A **person** not some ethereal impersonal force.

Verse 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and is in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

Here Jesus says while the world does not know **him** you do, because **he** lives with you. He lives with you (and in you) just as I have been living with you. I will not leave you alone as orphans. I will come to you in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The Holy Spirit sent by the Father in Jesus’ name will be a person who teaches. *John 16:13 says that the Spirit first hears and then teaches: “He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.” The Spirit is treated not as a force, or influence, or activity of another person, but as a person in his own right, hearing from the Father and the Son, and teaching and bearing witness to men.*¹⁹

¹⁸ [Revelation 21: 1-4](#)

¹⁹ John Piper in this article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-holy-spirit-he-is-god>

The **second truth** is that the Holy Spirit as the third member of the Trinity is God and is not a creation of God. The Holy Spirit there from the beginning of creation. In Genesis 1:2 we read about "... the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters".

John Piper wrote²⁰:

*"Before Christ's coming . . . the prominence of God the Father;
during the days of Christ's earthly life . . . the prominence of God the Son;
and since the ascension of the Son . . . the prominence of God the Holy Spirit.
Therefore, we live in a unique, climactic period of redemptive history, the days of the Spirit."*

We need to see the Holy Spirit not as the shy member of the Trinity but as the member of the Trinity present and available to each of us here and now. God with us.

And the Holy Spirit here to guide you and me in our journey of faith. Through times of joy and times of sorrow and pain.

I asked at the beginning what role the Holy Spirit plays in your life, in my life.

Follow Jesus: let the Holy Spirit be your Helper, Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor, Counselor, Strengthener, and Standby. You are not alone.

You will have troubles in this world. There will be times of joy but also many times of doubt, division, decisions, depression, and death.

When you stand at the crossroads: look and ask for the ancient paths and ask where the good way is so that you can walk in it. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, and to encourage you.

Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your weakness. If you don't know what to pray ask the Holy Spirit to pray and to intercede on your behalf, to convey your sighs and groans to God in prayer.

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²⁰ See footnote 19.