



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dr. Ian Hamilton

Romans 8: 12-17

Jan. 2025

"The Leading of the Holy Spirit"

TRANSCRIPT

Dan Duncan: Good morning. As I think most of you know we have a guest speaker this morning, and I think most of you are familiar with Dr. Ian Hamilton, if not from his books, then from his visit last year. But for those of you who may not be familiar with him, let me just give a few words of introduction.

He is Professor of Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary, UK. He is Adjunct Professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. He served as minister of Cambridge Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, England for a number of years, I think 17 years—and in a church in Scotland, I think some 20 years before that.

Also, he is Trustee of the Banner of Truth Trust. Many of you have read books published by Banner of Truth; and among the books that he's written are *The Letters of John*, and *The Faith Shaped Life*. His wife, Joanne, is with us again this morning, and they have come to us from their home in Inverness, Scotland, via Oklahoma City, where Dr. Hamilton spoke at the George Whitefield Society conference.

So Ian, it's a great pleasure to have you back with us, and I'll turn it over to you.

Dr. Ian Hamilton: Well, thank you very, very much for your kind welcome introduction. It's a pleasure and a privilege to be with you. We remember our time with you at last

May with great fondness; not least, the warmth of your welcome, so thank you very, very much.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Romans, to the 8th chapter, I'm sure one of the most familiar passages in the Word of God for Christian believers. Romans chapter 8, and we'll read from the 12th verse;

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, (*that is, if you live according to the unrenewed, unregenerate nature*), you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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.

Romans 8: 12-17 (ESV)

Well, let us pray for a moment.

LORD, as we come together as Your children, as we come to sit under the ministry of Your Word, quickened we trust and pray by Your Holy Spirit, we ask that You will open our eyes to behold wonderful things out of Your law, that You will open our hearts to receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save our souls. We pray, gracious God, our Father in heaven, that the Word of Your truth will shape us and style us into the image and likeness of Your Son, our great and dear Savior, Jesus Christ.

LORD, meet with us, we pray. And we ask it in His name, Amen.

(Message) I wondered if you've ever thought to yourself, "Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been there when Jesus was teaching? Wouldn't it have been wonderful, remarkable, exciting, exhilarating to hear from the lips of Jesus, God the Son in our flesh, the teaching of the living God?"

Well I'm sure there would be times when it would have been exhilarating, profoundly moving, overwhelming. But other times His teaching would have been deeply dismantling. I often think of the great crowds who gathered to hear the Lord Jesus 'at speak', Matthew 5 thru 7, 'the Sermon on the Mount'.; and He speaks of what true blessedness is in the sight of God—and that must have been dismantling for them. And you remember how, in those chapters, (5 and 6 in particular), Jesus speaks penetratingly about the spirituality of the Law of God—the Law of God, the instruction of Yahweh, speaks into the very recesses of our being.

And I've often wondered what the people in the crowd must have felt as they heard Jesus say, 'If your eye offends you, pluck it out, throw it away.' And then, 'If your hand offends you, cut it off. Better to enter life maimed than to be cast into hell.' (Mat 5:29-30). It must have been sobering...what could Jesus possibly be meaning!?

Well, the Lord Jesus is speaking about how radical true Christian believers must be in their relationship to sin. We know, that by the grace of God in the Gospel, by the blood shedding of Christ on Calvary cross, sin's guilt has been forever dealt with, sin's prevailing power has been forever broken...but sin yet remains to trouble us, to humble us, to bring disgrace and dishonor to the Savior we love.

Sin remains; and Jesus is saying to the crowds, 'You need to be radical in your attitude to indwelling or remaining sin.' And that's what the apostle Paul is addressing, particularly in verses 13 and 14 in Romans chapter 8.

Now Romans 8 is one of the great climatic moments in biblical revelation; it's the 'Mount Everest' of New Covenant Scripture. 15 times in the first 17 verses Paul speaks about the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. And in verses 13 and 14 he especially

focuses on the sanctifying ministry of God the Holy Spirit in the lives of the children of God.

One of my favorite hymns, (it's rarely sung today), it begins, I think,
"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow thee."

Some of the lines in that hymn, (*Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken*), that have lingered with me over many, many years as a Christian believer are these,

"Think what Spirit dwells within thee,
What a Father's smile is thine,
What a Savior died to win thee,
Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?"

But those few words: "Think what Spirit dwells within thee"!

You remember when our Lord Jesus was preparing His disciples for Him leaving them— John chapters 14 through 17? Their distress, their hearts are troubled; and Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me." (Jn 14:1). And then in verses 15 and 16 he said to them, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments... and I will send to you **another** Helper', (another '*counselor*', another '*comforter*'). And the word he uses, *paraklétos*, is very difficult to translate with one word in English: 'I will send you someone just like Me.' [You know, there are two words in Greek for '**another**'; and the word that the Lord Jesus uses here; 'I'm going to send you *someone just like Me*; and He will be to you a Helper, a comforter, an encourager, a strengthener.'

And Paul here, (*Romans 8*), in verses 13 and 14, is highlighting one of the profound aspects of the Holy Spirit's helping ministry in the lives of the children of God. He writes in verse 13, "For if you live according to the flesh...", (*if you continue to live as unregenerate men and women*), "...you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For...", (and you need to notice the significance of the

connective particle, 'For'), "...all who are led by the Spirit of God..." (*and here is the force of the language, 'they, and they alone'*), "...are sons of God." (vs13&14).

Who are the sons of God? Who are those, (see verse 17), who are heirs, (together with Christ), of the glory of God? Who are they? Well, says Paul, 'They are those who are led by the Spirit of God.' Well, what does that mean, to be, "led by the Spirit of God", and thereby show that you are one of God's sons? Well, he's told us in verse 13: The Spirit leads us to put sin to death in our lives.

This little phrase, 'led by the Spirit', occurs three times, if you will note, in the New Testament. We read at the beginning of Luke chapter 4, that Jesus was 'led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil'. (vs1). The Spirit would lead Him in the sovereign purpose of God into that arena, that theater, where He would do 'hand to hand', (as it were), combat with Satan. And as Adam failed in a lavish garden, so the Son of God would triumph in a wilderness, surrounded by wild animals. He was 'led by the Spirit' into the arena of combat.

And then the other occasion, I think it's Galatians 5:18, where Paul speaks about us being, "led by the Spirit" to put to death what is earthly in us, and thereby to cultivate the graces of the Holy Spirit.

The point being that the three times this phrase, 'led by the Spirit', occurs in the New Testament, it's always in a *moral* and not a mystical context.

I think, when I was a young believer, people would say things like, 'Are you being led by the Spirit, brother?' And I think, in my early Christian days, I would be imagining they're asking me, 'Are you having exhilarating experiences of the Spirit? Are you being transported to the third heaven? Is the Spirit leading you?' But each time that phrase occurs, not least here in Romans 8:13 and 14, it's in a moral context.

So let me very simply walk you through these two verses. *First* of all, let me ask this question: Who are, "the sons of God"? Now you know, of course, that by "sons" he means male and female, men and women. This was a remarkable and new thought that came into the ancient world, that women were joint heirs together with men, of the

glory of God. They were not second class citizens. It was the son who would inherit the possessions and the property of the father; but now women are included; they are joint heirs together of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

Well, who are they? Well, says Paul, they are those who are led by the Spirit: "For all who are led by the Spirit...", (and the force of the Greek is, 'they and they only'), ..."are sons of God." (vs14). If you're not being led by the Spirit, you're not one of the children of God. —But if you are being led by the Spirit, you evidence in your life the adoption of sonship.

How do we become sons and daughters of the living God? Well, we know that only too well I trust: "As many as received Him". "As many as receive Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God." (Jn 1:12). We become one of God's own when we receive Jesus Christ—when by faith we are united to the Son of God. It is through faith alone into Christ that we become God's children. But here is what I want to focus on for the remainder of our time: How do you recognize the sons of God?

Not by their verbal profession. So that doesn't mean we are not verbally to profess Jesus Christ...of course we are. We're to confess Him openly; we're to declare Him; we are to make Him known. But the children of God, the sons and daughters of God, are to be known not principally by their 'confession', or their 'profession', but by something else—by being "led by the Spirit". (vs14).

And what does the Spirit lead you to do? What is the great New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit, sent by the risen, ascended Christ into the lives of the children of God? What has the Spirit come to do?

Well, in terms of the grand design, He has come to conform us to the image and likeness of the Son—that He, (*the Son*), might be the first born among many brothers. God's ultimate purpose is not you and it's not me. Salvation is God's *proximate* purpose—the glory of His Son is His *ultimate* purpose. "Those whom He predestined He also called... those whom He called He also justified..." (Rom 8:30). But the ultimate, the 'omega point' of God's grand design, Romans 8:29, is to make Christ, "...the firstborn

among many bothers." And so the Spirit has come to form us and fashion us into the likeness of the Savior.

Some of you, like me, will have been to Italy; you have seen Michelangelo's great statute of David; how did he get to that place where people, at 600 years later, are still coming to admire this remarkable workmanship? He started with a block of marble; and slowly but surely, he chipped away, slowly but surely he had this design in his mind—and with effort the block, the undistinguished block, slowly but surely, began to take shape until he produced this masterpiece.

Or do you want a more homely, Scottish analogy. (Now I play golf, not very well, but I play golf.) I remember one of the great golf architects was asked by someone, "When you look at a piece of land, what's in your head as you're looking to construct a golf course? What is it you're thinking?" And he said this, "I'm thinking I'm going to take away everything that isn't golf course."

And that's what the Holy Spirit's come to do. He's come to take away everything that isn't Jesus Christ. And that's why verse 13 is so intimately linked to verse 14. "...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God..." (to do that, 'they and they only'), "...are the sons of God."

Now, would we have the time to unpack the theological grammar of these verses...but notice, *first* of all, that the Spirit has come to put sin to death in our lives in a way that involves us: "...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body." (13b).

We have a responsibility before God. The Spirit doesn't come and say, 'Now sit back on flowery beds of ease; and during the nighttime I will eradicate sin from you...and you'll wake up in the morning a little bit more like your Savior.' —No. The Spirit comes and says, 'We're going to do this together.'

In Romans 8:26 Paul speaks of, 'the Spirit helping us in our weakness'. Now, in the Greek, the word *help* is a 17 letter, double compound. (We translate it as 'help', four

letters.) *Synantilambomai*, it means, the Spirit of God will 'come alongside us', but He will 'stand over against us to help us'. So that's a little bit odd: How can He come alongside us, and yet stand over against us? Because it's only as the Spirit of God, who is 'over against us', who is as far from us as the heavens are from the earth in terms of His deity and power, that He can come alongside us and say, 'We'll do it together.'

You know, some of you will have seen the little card, "Footprints in the sand"...and it has language that says something like: 'You know, if you're struggling, and life is hard, there's only one set of footprints in the sand—and it's the Lord who is carrying you.' Well, that actually isn't biblical. Underneath are "the everlasting arms", (Deu 33:27), but we're never passive; we're never inept in sanctification. We are involved in it. We are to make 'every effort', (2 Peter 1:5), 'every effort to add to our faith.'

So the question I want to ask is: 'How does the Holy Spirit help us to put sin to death—the sin that remains to trouble us and humble us and distress us?'

'LORD, here I am again, confessing the same sin, seeking the covering of the blood of Christ. LORD help me, help me!' How does the Spirit of God help us to put sin to death?

Well, let me mention three or four things. Number one: It is the great ministry of the Spirit of God to show us, *'the sinfulness of sin'*. How do we learn the sinfulness of sin? ...By reading our Bible. That's why we must be much in the Word, because in the Word of God, from Genesis through Revelation, one of the great truths that God graciously, as a kind hearted Father, wants to impress upon us is that sin is never a light, little thing—that sin is dark; it has consequences beyond itself. And as we read through the Scriptures, God is saying here, 'Now let me teach you the anatomy of sin. Satan will come and say, 'Sin as a little thing, it's a light thing. It's a sin that can be easily dealt with by the blood of Christ.' '

But sin has repercussions, it has implications...and that's why I think God punctuates His Word with the dramatic portrayals of 'the sinfulness of sin'.

Think of King David, 2 Samuel 11. He's walking about the ramparts of the palace, (and he is where he should not be). At 'the time when kings go out to war', (2Sam 11:1), what is David doing? He's living it up; he's relaxing; he's having a quiet, good time. And then he sees Bathsheba...and the text just rolls on.

[You know, Hebrew text is very beguiling—and very annoying. The Bible can be very annoying, I mean in this sense: 'LORD! Could you please stop a little minute?!'

'No, no. Follow the narrative, follow the narrative.'

'Well LORD, just..'

'No, follow the narrative...and later join up the dots.']

And so it goes on: Bathsheba, Uriah, David's wife, David's family, the nation...and God is pictorializing for us, 'the sinfulness of sin.' Look where one unguarded look...look what it led to. And the Holy Spirit, as we read the Scriptures, is seeking to awaken us to the reality of *the sinfulness of sin*.

And David comes to that, doesn't he, in Psalms 51, where he says in the 4th verse, "Against You, and You only, have I sinned", O God, "and done that which is evil in Your sight."

Now when you first read that, you must scratch your head and say, 'Now hold on there! Hold on; you sinned against Bathsheba, you sinned wickedly against her husband, Uriah. You sinned against your wife, you sinned against your children, you sinned against your nation, you sinned against God's church. What do you mean, "Against You, and You only, have I sinned, O God?'

Now I don't know, but I would reckon David was looking and saying, 'How right You are. I've sinned shamefully, and shamelessly against my wife, this woman Bathsheba, Uriah...I've done wickedly. But this God just showed me, the heart and horror of my sin that is against Him.'

One of my favorite verses in the whole Bible, is in Genesis 39. Joseph has been given up for dead. His brothers have sold him into slavery. But now a glimmer of light appears in the darkness; he's a servant in Potiphar's household, and things are looking

up. Then Potiphar's wife seeks to seduce Joseph. For 16 or so years he's been given up for dead, far from home, far from family....and it's his response that I find remarkable: 'How could I do such a thing!'... "and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9).

That's why one of the great needs in the gatherings of God's people is for pastors to be proclaiming who God is. The whole Bible summed up in three words..."Behold your God." (Isa 35:4). We need preaching that is powerful, yes, and passionate, yes, and insightful...But we need preaching that lifts up the greatness of God, the glory of God, the transcendence of God, the grace of God, the goodness of God, the kindness of God. 'How could I do such a thing?!...To sin against this God who made me, who gives me life, every breath I breathe!?' And so the Holy Spirit seeks to show us, 'the sinfulness of sin'.

Secondly, He helps us to say, 'No!', to the sinfulness of sin. You know those verses in Titus chapter 2, (vs11-12), isn't it; 'The grace of God has appeared, teaching us to say 'No!', to all ungodliness. The grace of God in the Gospel comes, not only to rescue us and redeem us, but to sanctify us—to renew us and remake us into the image and likeness of the elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Holy Spirit has come to help us, to give us the courage to say 'No!', even if it means standing alone. Young people in college and at high school, (and we live in 'a world that has gone mad', a world that has been deceived by Evil One into thinking that, 'Evil is good, and the good is evil', we live in a world wherein, 'the spell of the kingdom of darkness' has invaded and infected all of life), and young people today, how much courage they need to stand alone...and the Holy Spirit says, 'I'll help you. I'll help you.' "...call upon Me in the day of your trouble...". (Psa 50:15). 'I'll help you. You don't need to stand alone; I'll help you.' It's a wonderful promise we have—"I will send you", said Jesus, 'another counselor, comforter, helper, strengthener—another just like Me.' (Jn 14:16).

And the Holy Spirit comes to help us in our weakness. Romans 8, verse 26, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness." 'LORD, I'm weak in this class in this year at high school,

and I think I'm the only one.' God says, 'You're not the only one; My Spirit will be with you.'

But *thirdly*, the Spirit helps us put sin to death by showing us the grace and loveliness of Jesus Christ. Nothing will more guard your heart and mind from the seductions of this world, the flesh, and the devil, than an increasing apprehension of the loveliness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That, I think, is the Spirit's great New Covenant ministry. John 16:14, 'When the Spirit comes He will bring glory to Me.' The Spirit is always seeking through the Word that He inspired, ('*expired*'), to say, 'See how great He is!...Do you see His loveliness, His sweetness?'

Some years ago I was reading an Augustine's Confessions. I hope you've read that; it's one of the great, great books . It's an un-put-downable page turner, (until you get to *time* and *eternity* at the end, when he kind of loses people). It's a fabulous read—and what struck me was how often he spoke of God as 'his sweetness'.

Some years ago Joanne got this very good translation of *Confessions* with its Latin original on one page and the English translation on the other page. And he keeps using the word, 'docedo'...'docedo'. He could have used 'suavitas', 'You know, God is very *suave*'—meaning, 'very sweet'. He keeps saying, "My sweetness, my sweetness." And then I thought, 'Goodness! That's what John Calvin talks about in the 16th century.' And I discovered, reading through the *Institutes* again and other places, Calvin would speak of God as "his sweetness". And then it struck me that John Owen, the English Puritan, does the same thing...and then, of course, perhaps preeminently, Johnathon Edwards in the 18th century.

You see, the doctrine of God, as God reveals it to us in the Scriptures, is not simply there to inform our minds. [But of course it's got to do that. We need to know that God is infinite, and eternal—and unchangeable in being, wisdom, power, and always justice, wisdom and truth. We need to know that He is immense, unchangeable, impassable.] But God reveals Himself as a gracious God. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good." (It's a lovely verse, isn't?, Psalm 34, verse 8.) 'Taste—I'm sweet to the taste.'

And the Holy Spirit wants us to taste the sweetness of Christ. Read the Song of Songs, and read Samuel Rutherford's letters.

So the Holy Spirit comes to minister in our lives, so that we will become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And He does that in two particular ways, I think. *Number one*, He takes us to the cross every day in life. We never graduate beyond Calvary, do we? [Would we had some black brothers and sisters; they'd be saying, "Amen, brother! Go for it!"] We don't get beyond Calvary. We never graduate beyond the cross...'God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Gal 6:14).

And every day the Spirit says, 'Let me take you afresh to Calvary. How could you sin against such a Savior, who left the glory of the Father, took to Himself the frailty of your humanity, endured, 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', "...endured the cross, despising its shame... ", (Heb12:2). You're going to sin against Him?! You're going to entertain the possibility of sin?!'

John Owen, the English Puritan, (he's had a great influence in my life), he has a wonderful sentence in volume six, *Mortification of Sin*. I think page 57; "Set faith on Christ for the killing of thy sin and you'll die a conqueror."

You're struggling and, 'LORD, this temptation is powerful!' *Set faith* in Christ who overcame every temptation; *Set faith* in Christ. And the Spirit is always saying, 'Let me take you to Calvary!'

But then I think *secondly*, [and this just struck me yesterday, really], 'This Spirit says, 'Let me take you to church!' ' You see, we think of the Christian life far too '*atomistically*'.¹ We've been so infected by three centuries of post-enlightenment thinking that we think of our Christian lives of 'Jesus and me'; and, 'a little talk with Jesus makes it all right.'

But the Christian life is to be lived in community. Every picture of the church in the Scriptures is corporate and covenantal. We are "the body of Christ", (1Cor 12:27), (1."*atomistically*"-Connected with the idea of understanding something by separating it into its different parts.)

'the bride of Christ'. The body, the bride—connected together. And that's why the writer to the Hebrews, when he sees these Jewish believers being tempted to turn back from the Lord Jesus Christ, he said to them among other things, 'Do not forsake the assembling together of yourselves.' (Heb 10:25).

You see, we don't grow in Christ atomistically. Ephesians 3, verses 18&19, 'Together, ("with all the saints"), we learn how high, and wide, and deep is the love of God.' 'Together'. We need one another. We need the community of faith, the worship of the people of God *together*.

The Spirit takes us to the church. People say, 'Well, you know, I could watch on *'online'*. Well, you can, and in the good providence of God there are times when that's necessary. But life *here* is a preparation for life *there*. And life *there*, you won't be in a little atomized cubical watching Christ *online*. You'll be with a great multitude around the Lord—'of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation', (Rev 5:9), with one voice saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb who is slain to receive glory.' (Rev 5:12).

You won't be in your own little room hidden away. Brothers and sisters, if we're going to do battle with sin, we need one another. But that should remind us, (I just quoted it)...that should remind us of two things: That the Spirit has come to work *in* us, so that glory will be brought to Jesus Christ *through* us.

Where does *Gospel credibility* begin? It begins with a transformed life. Why should anyone take what we say seriously? This is very personal to me because I came to faith through watching the life of a boy at school who was a year older than me. (He was in his senior year of high school. I was in junior year.) Later he said to me that 'He was always speaking about Jesus to me'.

I don't remember it. I can honestly say I've got no recollection of him ever once sharing the Gospel with me, (and I told him that years later). He said, "I was always talking to you about Jesus!"

It was his life. I couldn't understand why he was the way he was. It's just... 'He was different.' Our backgrounds were different, our interests were different. And yet, there was something about him.

I had no Bible background, no church background, nothing. It was his life that gave credibility so that when he invited me, eventually, to come along to a Sunday afternoon Bible class that he went to, I thought, 'Well, yeah! I quite like Albert, I'll go along.' And in the good pleasure of God, I was saved that day.

The Spirit has come to bring glory to Christ, and He does that through lives that make *the Gospel credible*.

And the last thing is, the Spirit has come, 'to put sin to death' in us to make us more like Jesus. That's a very humbling thing, and a very, almost, dismantling thing to read. The new birth is the beginning—it's not the end; and God is going to populate heaven with creaturely analogs of His Son, so that wherever you look you'll see creaturely reflectors of the Savior. And so, put to death what is earthly in you by the Spirit.

'Come, Holy Spirit, come. Help me today to do battle with this sin...and that sin; and this temptation...and that temptation.'

Nothing more pleases the Holy Spirit than to have the children of God say,

'Come Helper, come.

Do the work that You were sent to do,

Make me more like my Savior.'

Amen.

(End of Audio)