

Freed By Christ's Spirit

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Romans 8:1-4

This morning our study brings us to Romans chapter 8. Romans 8 has been described as one of the brightest gems in the Bible! Our study of this chapter will reveal some of the most precious truths concerning what we, as believers, have in Christ. In verses 1-4 we will see that we have freedom in Christ. In verses 5-13 we will see that we have power by the Spirit of God. In verses 14-17 we will see that we have a new relationship as Sons and heirs of God. In verses 18-25 we will see that we have incredible hope in the midst of suffering in these bodies. And in verses 26-39 we will see that we have assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The Holy Spirit commands center stage in Romans chapter 8. We see Him more in this chapter than the rest of the letter combined. In chapters 1 through 7 the Holy Spirit is mentioned only five times, and in the remaining 8 chapters He appears only another 9 times. But in chapter 8, there are 21 references to the Holy Spirit. No other New Testament chapter rivals Romans 8 as far as its concentration of references to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here the Spirit frees, indwells, leads, gives hope and strength to God's people. This morning we are going to look at three ways in which the Spirit's power sets us free.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, 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. Romans 8:1-4

I. THE SPIRIT HAS FREED YOU FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN. (vv. 1-2)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Paul opens verse 1 of chapter 8 with the connecting word "therefore." It's important that we don't skip too quickly over this word because it tells us something. It lets us know that what follows is a result or consequence of the argument that Paul has been making in the preceding 7 chapters of his letter. Are you ready for a pop quiz? What is that argument that Paul has spent the

first 7 chapters of Romans developing? The central argument that Paul has been laboring to make is that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law (Romans 3:28). Chapter 8 marks a turning point in Paul's letter. Here, he begins to unpack some of the glorious truths and realities of our justification – namely, that we are secure in Christ. Paul begins chapter 8 by proclaiming no condemnation and he ends chapter 8 with the sweet assurance of no separation.

The first thing that Paul wants us to know is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. As we study this text this morning, I want to begin by looking at a few individual words in verse one. First, notice that Paul says that there is “now” no condemnation. The word “now” signals a point in time. In other words, this hasn't always been our status. This hasn't always been our standing before God. In Adam we stood condemned, crushed under the weight of sin and death. The law stood against us with all of its legal demands (Colossians 2:14). We were separated from God (Isaiah 59:2), enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18), hostile in our minds toward Him (Colossians 1:21), and we reeked with the stench of spiritual death. David, in Psalm 51:5, tells us that we were sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mother conceived us. Paul, in Ephesians 2, says, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.”

In Christ, we have been freed from every charge of sin that stood against us. Do you understand the implications of that? Just six chapters back in Romans 2 Paul said that we were storing up wrath for the day when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. How do we get from the wrath of Romans 2 to the “no condemnation” of Romans 8? It's not because we earned it. It's because our condemnation has been paid for in the death of another and our justification stands on the merit of His life and substitutionary death on our behalf. There is no condemnation because guilt has been swallowed up by grace! Phillip Bliss, in a 19th century hymn, captured the glory of our divine pardon when he penned these words, “Man of Sorrows! what a name, For the Son of God who came, Ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah! What a Savior! Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood;; Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

Secondly, look at the word “no”. Paul says that there is now “no” condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is interesting to note that the word “no” is actually the first word that appears in the Greek text. The original text literally says “no therefore now condemnation”. Oftentimes in the Greek language when a writer wanted to emphasize a word, they would put it

at the beginning of a sentence. Paul wants us to be absolutely clear about the fact that our justification means that there is not the faintest particle of condemnation with our name on it – Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.

Here is an incredible truth that I want to sink deeply into your heart, “no condemnation” means that if you are in Christ you aren’t condemned now and you never will be. No condemnation means that God doesn’t relate to you or me in light of our performance. How freeing is that! At the cross Jesus dealt with all of our sin - past, present and future. That means that you don’t slip back under condemnation when you sin...You remain in Christ. Remember that Romans 8 comes right on the heels of Paul’s struggle with sin in Romans 7. In chapter 7 Paul said, “I don’t even understand my own actions. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I don’t do the good I want, but the evil I don’t want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man am I. Who will deliver me from this body of death?” What is his answer? He said, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” And then what does he say? He reminds us of our security in Christ - there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus - what incredible assurance.

Satan would love for you to believe the lie that God acts punitively towards us when we sin. He would love for you to believe the lie that you are once again guilty and condemned. But the glorious truth of the gospel is that in Christ, in union with the One who is your righteousness, no matter what your sins are, or how often you struggle, God isn’t mad at you, He isn’t angry with you, He isn’t going to give up on you, He isn’t going to let you go, He won’t turn his back on you, He’ll never abandon you, He won’t deny you, He won’t cast you out, and He will never condemn you. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). Your freedom from the penalty of sin is as sure as the righteousness of Christ. You must understand that your sin, if you are a regenerate believer, changes nothing in respect to your justification before God. Should we then continue in sin that grace may abound? Absolutely not. But neither should we give ear to Satan’s lie that we are once again bound by guilt, shame, and death. C. J. Mahaney, in his book *The Cross Centered Life*, says:

Don’t buy the lie that cultivating condemnation and wallowing in your shame is somehow pleasing to God, or that a constant, low-grade guilt will somehow promote holiness and spiritual maturity. It’s just the opposite! God is glorified when we believe with all our hearts that those who trust in Christ can never be condemned. It’s only when we receive his free gift of grace and live in the [reality] of total forgiveness that we’re able to turn from old, sinful ways of living and walk in grace-motivated obedience.¹

¹ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2002), 39-40.

Turn your attention to verse 2. Paul explains here with greater clarity how it is that those who are in Christ will never see condemnation. He says, “For (because) the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” There are two laws at play here - The law of the Spirit of life, which brings freedom and the law of sin and death, which brings condemnation. Whatever it is that you are under can be described as a law. Paul is saying that we used to be under the rule, reign and power of the law of sin, which brought guilt, condemnation, and death. But the Holy Spirit has brought us under the rule, reign, and power of a greater law – the law of grace. Let me show it to you. Turn back to Romans 5:20-21. Paul says, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” What has set me free from the law of sin and death? The grace of God in Jesus Christ applied to us by the Holy Spirit! I love the way Paul has describes the ministry of the Spirit here in verse 2. Paul refers to Him as the “Spirit of Life.” Does that bring anything particular to mind? How about Genesis 1:2. The Spirit that brought forth creation ex nihilo, is the same Spirit whose power is at work in spiritual re-creation through the finished work of Christ on the cross. The spirit of life has freed us from the tyranny of sin and death.

What does being set free by the Spirit of Life mean for us in terms of the law? It means that we have been entirely set free from our old relationship to the law. I want you to see our new relationship to the law. Turn back to chapter 6 and look at verse 14. Paul says, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” Look forward one chapter to chapter 7 verse 4. Again talking about our new relationship to the law in Christ Paul says, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Lastly, look two verses down at verse 6. Paul says, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” What does all this mean? It means that we have nothing to do with the law from the standpoint of salvation.

I want to connect this back to Paul’s declaration that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Since we are not under the law (we’ve died to it) then how does God view our sin? Martyn Lloyd Jones illustrates this well when he says:

The difference between an unbeliever sinning and a Christian sinning is the difference between a man transgressing one of the laws of the [United States of America], and a member of a family doing something that is displeasing to another member of the family. [On the one hand] a man commits an offense against the State; [on] the other a husband, [for instance, sins

against] his wife. [The husband] is not breaking a law, he is wounding the heart of his wife. That is the difference. [For the Christian, sin] is no longer a legal matter, it is a matter of personal relationship, and that, a relationship of love. [For when the man sins he] does not cease to be the husband of the woman, [neither does] the woman [cease] be the wife of the husband. Law does not come into the matter at all; it lies outside [of the marriage] realm.²

The Spirit has freed us from the penalty of sin!

II. THE SPIRIT HAS FREED YOU FROM THE POWER OF SIN. (vv. 3-4a)

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, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...

The first thing that I want us to notice here is that every facet of our salvation is God's work. We could never earn it; there is no righteousness that is intrinsic to us. Therefore, God is the victor in our salvation. He is the hero of redemption – not us. The text says for “God” has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could never do. Remember, the law is not the problem our flesh is the problem. The law was powerless to justify and sanctify because of the weakness of our flesh. The law could stir up (excite) our sin, reveal our sin, and condemn us for our sin, but it couldn't save us from our sin. One man said, “To run and work the law commands, yet gives me neither feet or hands; but better news the gospel brings: it bids me fly, and gives me wings.” The gospel gives us the hope that the law couldn't.

How did God accomplish our salvation? Paul says that God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us... God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). We stood cursed by the law, but Paul reminds us that, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). Jesus has cancelled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them (Colossians 2:14-15). Sin no longer has power over you – grace does!

Paul says that God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Paul is intentionally using very precise words here. He didn't say that Jesus came in the likeness of flesh. One of the earliest Christological heresies was called doceticism. Those who propagated this position claimed that

² D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 7:1-8:4, The Law: Its Functions and Limits*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 279.

Jesus wasn't a real man; rather, He only seemed to be a man. Paul uses language here that affirms Christ's dual nature – fully God and fully man. Why is this important? It is important because if Jesus were not a real man born under the law (Galatians 4:4), He couldn't save men who were condemned by the law. Notice also that Paul didn't say that Jesus came in sinful flesh. To say this would have assumed that Jesus' nature was in some way tainted by sin. Paul articulates his theology very carefully when he says that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus' humanity was both real and sinless simultaneously.

What does it mean that God “condemned sin in the flesh?” 1 Peter 2:24 helps us out with that. Peter says, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.” God judiciously condemned sin in the flesh by sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering. We sinned in the flesh and therefore sin had to be condemned in the flesh. Therefore, Jesus took upon Himself the punishment that those who violated God's law rightfully deserved. The law does two things – it demands righteousness and it condemns. By sending His Son, God justified us, forgiving our sin and guilt (Psalm 130:4), and He imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to our account. By condemning sin in the flesh of Christ, God remains just, and can therefore be the justifier of all who anchor their hope in Christ alone.

Verse 4 tells us why God did this. Paul says, “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...” What does this mean? Some people read verse forensically and passively... In other words, they would say that our union with Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the laws demand, fulfills the law in us. To say it another way - Christ has fulfilled the law; therefore, in Him, I have fulfilled the law. This isn't a false statement, but I think the context of this passage has the actual obedience of the believer in view. Tom Schreiner, in His exegetical commentary on the book of Romans says, “The keeping of the law is God's work, yet this doesn't exclude human activity and obedience.”³ The Holy Spirit has freed us from the penalty and the power of sin so that now we can actually obey God's law. Not as one who is under it, but as one who has a renewed heart and desires to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Remember Paul was criticized by some who said that his gospel was antinomian and would produce nothing but licentious, grace-manipulating people. They said, “Paul, if you tell people that they are under grace and not under the law, they will use grace as an excuse to sin. In verse 4, Paul shows that quite contrary from creating a people who see grace as means to live in disobedience to the law, grace actually empowers believers to live lives that fulfill the law (obedience). Only those who have been freed by Christ's Spirit have the power to obey God.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 405.

III. THE SPIRIT HAS FREED YOU FROM THE PRACTICE OF SIN. (v. 4b)

...who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The purpose of Christ's atonement for our sin was not only our justification, but also our sanctification. God desires that we bear fruit for Him but we can only bear fruit when we are in a right relationship with Christ. What did Jesus say in John 15:5? He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." In Romans 6:22 Paul said, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." Fruit is both the result of and evidence of true conversion.

Notice that Paul says that the law is fulfilled in those who "walk not according to the flesh." Remember Paul's description of us when we were lost and condemned under the law? He said, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" (Ephesians 2:1-2). By God's grace and the Spirit's power, we don't walk that way anymore. The Christian may fall into sin, but he doesn't walk in it, live in it, spend his life in it... In Romans 6:2 Paul said, "It is impossible for those who have died to sin, to continue living in it."

What is the proper response to the grace that we have been lavished with in Christ? The proper response is a desire to please God through a life of grateful holiness. Grace is the foundation of our holiness. Remember Paul wrote to Titus in Titus 2:11-14:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We look forward, with great anticipation, to that day when Jesus Christ will present us blameless [without condemnation] before the presence of his glory with great joy (Jude 1:24). And until that day we can sing with great confidence - No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine; Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own. *And Can it Be* – Charles Wesley