

Mike and I discussed this passage as we normally do. I looked over it yesterday and still didn't see the point Mike was making about the text. Then as I reviewed it again this morning I suddenly saw what he was seeing. I prepared this sermon with the view that this text was about sanctification. But I am revising it with a view closer to justification. So please bear with me.

## Romans 8:1-4

First a review to remind us where we have come from:

Chapter 1 gave us Paul's introduction and his overview statement in verses 16,17. 16For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Chapter 1 verse 18 launched right into the topic of the wrath of God and Paul showed us God's justice in condemning sin and sinners.

In Romans 3:21 Paul begins teaching us about the salvation that God has provided for sinners. He shows us that it is a righteousness provided by Christ, apart from any idea of human merit. We are told about how the propitiation was accomplished. (How Christ took upon Himself and suffered the penalty of that sin in our place.) And we are told about the important part that faith plays in salvation.

We are reminded in Romans 4 of the fact that Abraham was a very clear example of salvation by grace through faith.

In the beginning of chapter 5 we are told of the rich benefits that believers have received, in that believers were legally justified by what Christ did. They are at peace with the God who they had been at war with. And they are in that state justly. It is not a trick or a loophole. The wrath of God has been satisfied on their behalf.

In Chapter 5:12-21 Paul shows us how we are in a completely new state, a new condition, a new identity than we were in before

we were born again. While it is one thing to say that our sin record was expunged and can no longer be held to our account. It is even more to say that we are now living in a new life. We are new people. We who were IN ADAM are now living in a new power. We are IN CHRIST. It is one thing to be **declared** righteous in justification that was accomplished by Christ for all believers. It is another to have the power to be **made righteous** by Christ through the process of sanctification. Forgiveness of sin and the power for living have been shown to be the gifts that have been bestowed on believers by what Christ has done for us. Where sin reigned, now **we** can reign through Christ. And that could not have happened but for the miracle of what Christ has done.

At the end of Chapter 5 Paul takes a side road to refute ideas that Paul knows some will wrongly conclude as a result of his teaching.

First in Chapter 6 he covers the idea that Grace gives a person a license to sin. He counters the antinomian's response to the true gospel of salvation by grace through faith. An antinomian is someone who is against God's law. He shows that, due to the new nature of a believer, an antinomian response is incongruent and can't be sustained in the life of a believer.

Then in Chapter 7 he counters the idea that a person can be justified or sanctified by obeying the law. Here he counters the legalist's arguments. He deals a death blow to this idea by showing what the law really does in the life of a person who tries to obey it for salvation or sanctification. The results are dismal and leave the person calloused under the weight of trying to obey and being unable to do so. They cry out for a deliverance.

Now we arrive at Chapter 8. Paul comes back from his side road of removing the common obstacles that many would have to submitting to his teachings.

Let's read this from Romans 5:18-21 and then skip right to the text.

**18Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.**

**20Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, 21so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Romans 8: 1There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

By reading it in this way you can see that Paul's line of thought is clearly progressing logically on its way. He is building on a foundation, step by step. All of the scholars I read said the same thing. The therefore is not based merely on Chapter 7. It is based on all he has said up to this point.

Now, let's look at the passage at hand.

**Romans 8: 1There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

I think if we are to read Chapter 7 without carrying a prior opinion of its meaning, it sure looks like chapter 8 is not talking about the guy in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 sure looks like a guy in condemnation. And Chapter 8 is certainly about someone who is assured of their salvation.

In the Greek, the first word in the sentence is "No". The word for no is made up of two Greek words meaning no. It is a very strong "no". It is one of the most blessed negatives in scripture. It means not even one, none, nobody, nothing, never (man), no (man), none (+ of these things), not (any, at all, -thing), nought. This word was used in the New Testament by men and they were all mistaken. For instance when Peter told Christ he would never deny Christ, he used this word.

Christ used this word 46 times and all His statements were true. Paul starts by making the strongest statement possible that Christ's work has completely eliminated any and all condemnation. There is absolutely none left.

The question is, do we really believe that? Or does condemnation creep back into our thinking? Do we see God as being for us if we are His children and seeking to obey Him? Or do we view Him as any kind of source of condemnation to us? Do we believe that God exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him? While it is proper to fear God, it is improper to call God a liar. We must have it clear in our heads that there is no condemnation for a believer, ever! Christ's work is that effective.

**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

**Now-** The Greek word resembles our word for Now. In the present, at this time. Paul's previous chapters lead up to this "therefore" and this "Now". Once Christ's atoning work on the cross is done there is thereafter no condemnation for those in Christ. We live in that glorious period of time when we can look

back on Christ's life, death, burial and resurrection and understand how we escape condemnation.

**Condemnation-** The word for condemnation is not so much based on the verdict handed down for the crime but the penalty the verdict demands. So if we were caught for murder and stood before the judge, this word would not refer to the jurors handing down the verdict of "guilty". It would refer to the judge handing out the sentence of the death penalty. Theologically this is an important point. Christ's death does not make us innocent of having committed the crimes. But it removes the condemnation that the guilty verdict earned.

**in Christ Jesus** –We don't need to spend much time here. This has been Paul's point for the last three chapters. We are either in Adam or in Christ Jesus. He is talking about those who are in Christ Jesus. He is talking about believers. He is talking about those in this new position, not in the old one they were born in.

**who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. –**

It is important to keep in mind that this verse is not talking about a way to earn salvation. No. It is talking about a logical result of the position of a believer. If a believer is In Christ, a result of that change will be that they will walk according to the Spirit. This is not like an option, like when you get a car you can get it with a sun roof or without one. It is more like the engine. You can't buy a new car for the factory without an engine. It comes stock. That is what walking according to the Spirit is like in the life of a real believer.

A believer is no longer in Adam, no longer under the law, no longer in the state of sin. So he or she is free to live in a new way. Free to walk according to or in step with the Spirit.

This section was not in most of the other ancient texts and it is believed to be a copying error. I'm going to assume that to be

the case and deal with the text in greater depth in verse 4. But saying it twice, if it was in the original text, doesn't change any of the meaning of our text.

## **2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.**

Law- The way I look at this, I think that the law being spoken of is like the law of gravity. It is a governing principle. The way I look at it the law of the Spirit of life and the law of sin and death are both governing principles and the law spoken of in verse 3 is the law of Moses. Mike is more of a concrete logical thinker so he may present this in a different way that has more logical flow in the text. It is possible that the law of the Spirit of life is the spiritual side of the Mosaic law and the law of Sin and Death is the natural sense of the Mosaic law. This is worth some study. Mike gave us a very strong picture of the law of sin and death. Remember the guard dog that jumps up every time a person tries to obey the law. That is **the law of sin and death**. The law of sin and death is that a person in the state of sin, in the position of sin, in the state of being in Adam cannot- not sin. That is the law. They just cannot do anything other than sin. Now they may do things that are very beneficial to those around them. But due to the sinful nature they cannot obey the law in a way that is acceptable to God, in a way that meets His righteous requirement.

**The law of the Spirit of life** is just the opposite of the law of sin and death. When a person is in Christ, he or she is now free to obey the law. They have been given the ability to do what they could not do previously because they have a nature that they did not have previously.

We see in chapter 5 how the law of the Spirit of life works. Christ died to sin. He rose again in new life. We are in Christ. Now by faithful reckoning we can say yes to God and no to sin. We can

obey, and in fact, a Christian will obey. It is his new nature to do so. It is the governing principle, the law, that he will do so. He won't do it perfectly due to the fleshly remainders, but he will do it.

Notice these things in this text:

Spirit of life in Jesus Christ

**Spirit-** This is probably referring to the Holy Spirit. With God's Spirit in us everything changes. We now have power that we could not have had previously. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. It is now like the guard dog jumping up at us when we attempt to obey is chained. We must reckon it that way. But we have the upper hand.

Spirit of **life-** this is in direct contrast to sin and death. Logically, if we are free from the power of one we must be free from the power of both. They are lumped together. Doctrine that would have a believer free from death's power but not free from sin's power is in error. We are surrounded by a world that thinks they are really living when they are experiencing the best this world has to offer them. Yet they are in the saddest state possible. They are slaves to the law of sin and death and they cannot break free. They are eternally lost. They have no everlasting life or any legitimate hope of having it in their current state. They think they are living but have no Spirit of life.

Then on the other hand are believers who **do** have it.

I was watching a dvd of an interview of a minister to Laos that we support. He ministers to those who suffer greatly for following Christ. This minister asked some of these suffering saints why they don't just chose to keep quiet about Christ. They said that they can't because Christ has given them eternal life. They never had that hope before. They have freedom from the spirits they were in bondage to in the past. They never had that freedom before. How can they deprive others of having that same life?

**Free-** The Greek word used here means- to make free to set at liberty: from the dominion of sin. To set free is in the aorist tense, meaning it is a once and done transaction. This is the same word Jesus used in John 8:34-36

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. The word for "makes you free" is the same aorist tense as in Romans. It is talking about the same transaction.

I can't figure out why, but for some reason many of the reformed scholars confine this freedom to the guilt and penalty of sin, but not to its daily power. They also do the same thing to verse 4 in our text. But this freedom from the law of sin and death is couched in our context here in Romans of daily here-and-now obedience. It is talking about a freedom that results in a daily walk in the Spirit.

The freedom from sin that Christ was talking about in John was also obviously talking about something that results in changed behavior, not just penalties or guilt feelings. Those who commit sin- practice habitually and behaviorally- are slaves to sin. So when they are set free from sin positionally, wouldn't it logically follow that they would no longer practice sin habitually and behaviorally? To say that Christ sets you free from sin indeed positionally, so that you can continue to habitually practice sin is simply absurd. The Son has set us free in Justification from the penalty of sin and is setting us free behaviorally in sanctification from the practice of sin. And we are FREE INDEED!

You have the power by faith to say no to any known sin! If it doesn't mean that, it doesn't mean anything.

And as we continue to say- this does not mean that sin does not live in our bodies. This is not to say that we are free from the



presence of sin. This is not to say that sin doesn't affect us unknowingly continually. But we have power over sin.

### **3For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,**

Paul has thoroughly explained this to us already. While the Mosaic law was just fine, it could not take care of our sin problem. But the problem wasn't the law. The problem was us. We were living in the fleshly state and could never overcome sin on our own. We could never attain righteousness. And the law could do nothing to help our flesh.

### **God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin:**

So what the law could not do, God did for us. And how did he do such a thing? He sent His own Son. And how did He send him?

### **in the likeness of sinful flesh-**

This phrase is tricky. It could not be said that he came in sinful flesh because that would be untrue. Christ was sinless. I'm sure the scholars have a name for that error but I don't know what it is.

It cannot be said that he did not come in the flesh, the same skin and bones that we have, or that would be untrue. And that would lead to error of Gnosticism.

So how do you say how Christ really came. He came in our likeness. The word likeness means made like to.

It is used in Romans 1 where men made god into images of their likenesses.

Philipians 2: 7 (Christ) made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8And being found in appearance as a man

So Christ came looking just like any other human being, but with a difference- no sin.

**on account of sin-** Again- why did Christ come? His mission had to do with sin. It had to be dealt with for anyone to have a chance to live. And Christ came in man's likeness to fulfill that purpose. And how did he take care of sin?

**He condemned sin in the flesh-** Up until now sin had condemned us. It held us in its grips and we could do nothing about it. Now Christ condemned sin. He did it by taking upon himself the full penalty while He himself was sinless. He took the full wrath of God regarding Sin and by so doing condemned sin in the flesh. Now sin has the death sentence instead of us. Now sin is damned to hell instead of us. And it is sin in the flesh. It is the kind of sin we are tempted to commit. Praise God that Christ took care of all of the real issues of sin for every believer.

**4that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

So why did God send Christ? What was he after in the end? To know God's purpose in sending Christ will lead us to the end that Christ WILL accomplish in His people both in once for all justification and the process of sanctification. Could we conceive of Christ being sent to accomplish something that He miserably failed to accomplish? I don't think so. If there is a "God sent Christ so that.." statement we can rest assured that the "so that" will be fulfilled. And what is the "so that"?

**that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**

Remember how hard the law is on sin? Remember how condemning the righteous requirement was on those who are in Adam? Well God's purpose in sending Christ to save people was that same righteous requirement that condemned sin will be fulfilled in those who Christ draws to Himself. Now the million

dollar question. Is Paul talking about what Christ did or what he will do through us?

## **who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

**walk** The Greek word means-

to make one's way, progress; to make due use of opportunities to live, to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self

This firmly couches the fulfilling of the law to day to day behavior.

Now it is important to note that the fulfilling of the law is passive in the Greek. From what I read the emphasis is that it is the Holy Spirit through us that fulfills the righteous requirements of the law. It is God's work so God will always get the credit. But it gives us a firm indication of what the normal Christian life will look like. It is not a continual powerless struggle against sin that continues to pound us into pulp. No, it is a struggle, but a struggle that the believer is winning, day by day, thought by thought, inch by inch.

And how is this achieved? By justification that puts us in a new position that results in walking according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

Well what does that mean?

We will be dealing with that topic a lot in the next section, but most simply it is the process of saying "yes" to God at every point of His known will.

Romans 8: 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

We can see what walking by the Spirit does. It puts to death the deeds of the body. Basically it says "Yes" to God and no to our fleshly sinful behavior.

While sometimes doctrine can be pretty complicated, walking according to the Spirit is not. You could also call it walking in the light or in the truth. It is all essentially describing the same thing different ways.

And it is the thing that a believer must do based on the fact of his changed nature. A dog barks, a duck quacks and a Christian walks according to the Spirit. It is how we are defined. It is what we are.

But unlike Justification which is once and done and it is done perfectly forever, walking in the Spirit involves degrees and intensity and our wills. We can walk in the Spirit better today than we did yesterday. We can grow in walking in the Spirit. We can say yes to God in ways that we have not said yes to Him in the past.

We will find later in Romans that we owe it to God to do just this. To submit to His will at every point... to live a living sacrifice. To have Christ's will be done at every point, even when it conflicts with our selfish desires. As we continue in Romans I pray for us that we will learn how to and practice living according to the Spirit better and better. And that we would, like the angels, have Christ's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.