

Walking In Our Spiritual Freedom

Romans 8:1-8

Pastor Tim Rech

Introduction

The book of Romans gives us some amazing truth. Through the first half of chapter 7 alone Paul shows us:

- The purpose for writing; to bring about the obedience of faith in God's people from every nation for the sake of His name
- The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes – for in it the righteousness of God is revealed
- The terrible predicament of man before God – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – nothing we can do to escape God's wrath
- We are justified by faith before God through faith believing in Jesus Christ and His sin atoning death and resurrection
- As a result of our justification we obtain:
 - Peace with God (5:1) and access by faith into this grace in which we stand
 - Eternal life
 - Crucified and buried with Christ so that we have newness of life and no longer an obligation to sin
 - The ability to serve Him in the new way of the Spirit from the heart

Our God is good to us, is he not?

But then in the latter half of chapter 7, Paul gives us some bad news by showing us what the struggle inside the life of a believer. If it were not for our own experience, such a struggle might surprise us after reading the text leading up to it. God has freed us through the work of Christ on our behalf. We died to the old self and have been set free from sin, right? And also now serve in the new way of the Spirit, right? So then what is the problem? Paul summarizes in 7:21-25:

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Two natures or laws exist in us for now; one a law of the mind wanting to do things God's way and the second a sin nature that wants to ignore God and to serve sin and self.

Now if we stopped reading at 7:24, we would go down a road of despair. How can we be powerless to stop sinning? Besides if this is the apostle Paul's experience, then what chance do we have? Who will deliver us?

Sadly, this can be the condition that many Christians find themselves in if they do not read on.

But thankfully the letter goes onto 7:25 and into chapter 8. Paul exclaims in 7:25, “*Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ!*” The resurrected presence of Jesus Christ is the deliverer from our bodies of death. Amen!?

And there is far more to see as we start into chapter 8. There is the new life of the Holy Spirit we enjoy on the basis of Jesus’ work of salvation.

A Freeing Declaration (8:1)

The chapter begins with a breathtaking statement of truth:

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

This is one of the sweetest “therefores” in the Scriptures. It is the “therefore” of assurance for the Christian. Feeling beaten down by your flesh? Are you groaning under the weight of unwanted responses to the difficulties and trials of life? Are doubts beginning to creep in whether or not you are a Christian? Be comforted by verse one and praise God.

Through Christ, God has and will fully deliver us from our bodies of death – the body of death which invariably leads him into doing things he does not want to do. O Wretched Man, take heart. In Christ, you are not condemned, not even one bit condemned.

Such an assurance comes from God Himself. No condemnation – God says so.

This verse echoes 5:1 where it says, “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Its Basis - Freed by the Spirit (8:2-4)

But why and how does this work? We read on in verses 2-4:

2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 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, 4 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.

Now up to this point in Romans, the Holy Spirit has only been mentioned two times (1:4 and 5:6). But in chapter 8, He is mentioned twenty times. Romans 8 is about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Paul reveals here the vital role the Spirit of God plays in freeing us from sin and death and giving us new life in Christ.

His Work (8:2-3)

There is no condemnation for the child of God because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The law or principle of the Spirit of life (that of the life in Jesus Christ) has freed you from the law or principle of sin and death. The absolute power of sin has been broken in his or her life by the Spirit. Death has been replaced with life. You are free.

So you see, rather than condemning the sinner who is now a saint, God instead condemned sin in the flesh or the sinful nature. This was a work impossible for the old principle of sin and death. The law was unable to do because of man's sinful nature – the flesh is too weak. The sin nature weakened and made impossible for a person to obey the law and thereby overcome or condemn sin. As we learned in chapter 7, the law actually makes it worse for a person living in the realm of the flesh. His sin nature simply leverages the law and energizes the flesh to sin more intensely. It like the leverage principle in the physical world – a person can lift far more weight with a lever and fulcrum than without. Such is the case here – our sin nature simply leverages the law as a fulcrum to generate far more sin than it could without the law.

Verse 3 is clear. God and God alone has done this work. He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ in the like of sinful flesh for sin or as a sin offering. Note how carefully Paul writes this; Jesus did not come in the likeness of flesh because His flesh was real and not a ghost or apparition. And He did not come in sinful flesh because Jesus was perfectly sinless. Rather Jesus came in the “likeness” of sinful flesh. The sins of His people were placed on the sinless man, Jesus Christ which was an acceptable sin offering offered to God. As a result, sin was condemned in the flesh. John Stott wrote, *“That is, in the flesh of Jesus – real flesh, sinless flesh, yet made sin with our sins (2 Cor 5:21) – God condemned sin.”*¹

Now at the start of chapter 8, Paul has stepped back and brought chapters 5-7 together. In Christ there is salvation and with it no condemnation and no bondage to sin. God has justified us before Him through His Son which is glorious in and of itself. But He also has overcome indwelling sin with the indwelling Holy Spirit. The “Spirit of life” administers the work of God the Father and sanctifies us.

His Purpose (8:4)

And God did these things for a purpose. Verse 4 tells us He did these things to enable us to live righteously. You see He freed us so that we might accomplish something in this life for God and the kingdom. We might then be useful in His eyes. God's objective was not simply to save us and leave us powerless to become who He declared us to be. No, His purpose was/is to change us – to transform us into the image of Christ and produce righteous fruit.

More specifically, God has liberated us from condemnation and set us free that we might live in holiness – the only kind of living that pleases God. Our attempts to be holy on our own do not save us but holiness can now be the fruit of God's work in us through Christ. God's Word and commands can now be obeyed from the heart by faith as recipients of God's grace. No mere law keeping anymore. In those whom the Spirit controls, everything the Law requires can be realized.

Such holiness appearing in us is the work of the Holy Spirit. Freed from the bondage of sin, we can now walk according to the Spirit which energizes our being in a different direction – one of righteous living. Our entire manner of life (our walk) according to the Spirit produces the fruit of righteousness.

Those who are set free walk this life in a peculiar way compared to this world. They live or order their behavior in a way that is dominated by the Spirit and not by the sin nature. Overall, their lives are about God's things.

¹ John R.W. Stott, *Men Made New* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1987), p. 81

The Holy Spirit frees us through Christ. When we yield to the Spirit's power we no longer have to sin. Christ's character and life are shown to us by the Spirit and we are free to love God and other people from the heart. We are true worshipers in spirit and truth.

Now let's look at what drives this truth.

A New Mindset from the Spirit (8:5-8)

⁵For 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. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Two Ways to Live (8:5)

Despite the imaginations of people, the Bible teaches there are only two realms where people can reside spiritually; the fleshly realm or the realm of the Spirit. There are no other options and no gray area. You either live in the flesh or you live in the Spirit. Now granted there are those living in the flesh who lead highly moral lives but not according to the Spirit. And there are believers who struggle more than others with the flesh. But you either live in one realm or the other.

So what distinguishes which realm we operate within? It is where we set our minds. Paul mentions the phrase "set their minds" five times in these four verses. It is everything and determines whether we live righteously or not.

"Flesh-walkers" are habitually dominated by the sin nature because their minds are set upon the things of the flesh or sin nature – those things that this unbelieving world prizes. "Spirit-walkers" are habitually dominated by the Spirit because their minds are set upon the things of the Spirit – those things that God values.

The two mindsets not only pursue diametrically opposed things, they lead to two different outcomes; one glorious, full of hope and one in a downward trajectory, and tragic.

Two Outcomes (8:6-8)

Minds dominated by the Spirit lead to life and peace. Life current and life eternal. Peace with God and within today, and for eternity. So the person's spirit is alive even though his body progressively dies over the course of this life. But as we will see later on in this chapter, the Holy Spirit who lives in you and raised Christ Jesus out from among the dead, will also make alive your mortal body. The ultimate result is our glorification with Christ – new Spirit and a new glorified body.

But the mind dominated by the sin nature leads to death (8:6). Why? Well, it is hostile to God (8:7). The sin nature can only be hostile to God because it seeks its own autonomy. It is hostile because it is incapable of submitting to God and ultimately cannot please Him (8:8). How can rebellion against God ever please Him? Therefore a fleshy mindset places a person on the way to eternal death. God is holy and such thinking and behavior must remain separated from him. And this is not just future death but current death – the wrath of God is already upon the one who sets his mind upon the flesh.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So our mindset is critical. Stott writes again:

“we see how much depends on our mind, where we set it, how we occupy it, and on what we focus and concentrate its energies.”²

So one ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer is to give him or her a new mindset – one that is consumed with the things of God. The chapter will go on to further explain how the Holy Spirit gives us a new sense of life, the life of Christ – to be like Him, a new obligation to live by the Spirit, and a new identity as a child of God.³ This will be reserved for the next sermon or so in this series.

What Does A Mind Set on the Spirit Look Like?

But notice back in verse 4 where it says that we “might” fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. Being freed from the power of the sin nature does not mean clear sailing in our life. God has merely given us the ability to choose life over death. We now have the power to live righteously. So there now exists a moment-by-moment choice of what realm orders our life in that moment.

At conversion a struggle begins in the life of a believer and continues throughout this life with the sin nature opposed to the work of the Spirit in your life. As unbelievers, there was no struggle since we were powerless to choose otherwise and had absolutely no desire to set the mind on the Spirit.

Paul just gave us the two laws in chapter 7 through his own experience; he served the law of God with his mind but with his flesh he served the law of sin. The sin nature continues to exist within us and it will not go down easy. This is why back in Romans 6 we are commanded to:

- *11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (6:11-14) and..*
- *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. (6:19)*

The Spirit has given us the power to order our behavior (to walk) according to the Spirit but recognize and always remember we are in a fight with our flesh. And until we receive a glorified body, we are biased toward evil because of the sin nature we still carry around.

So what does God’s provision look like and what does it look like to set our mind on the Spirit?

² *Ibid.*, p. 88

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans* (Wheaton, Crossway, 1991), pp. 142-148

- Faith and trust in God's sovereign care
- A consistent intake of God's Word both personally and corporately
- Obedience to God's Word
- Praying always
- Worship
- Fellowship
- Serving others especially those of the faith
- Sacrifice and suffering – nothing matures us more in our faith and keeps our mindset on the Spirit
- Confession and Repentance
- Forgiving and Being Forgiven
- A conscious effort to put off the old ways and put on the new in accordance with our identity in Christ – put on the whole armor of God
- Imitating Christ in His character; sacrifice, humility, grace, etc

Now these are things we do. Put on / Put off, put on the whole armor of God, etc. Much needed and commanded of us. They help much to set our minds on the things of the Spirit avoid doing the things of the flesh. But is this simply an intellectual exercise? Let's look further – turn to Galatians 5:16:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy,[a] drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We are commanded to walk by the Spirit to avoid gratifying the desires of the flesh. Then Paul shows us the desires of the flesh oppose the desires of the Spirit to keep us from doing what we want to do according to the Spirit. Verse 19 gives us the works of the flesh followed by the works of the Spirit in verse 22, right? Wrong! Paul gives us the fruit of the Spirit...the outcome of the desires of the Spirit. Now with our minds we can start with the fruit of the Spirit and work backward and act these ways. But this fruit is about more than about we think about and more about what we feel and sense. It is about our desires. And the Holy Spirit produces these desires in us.

So walking in the Spirit and setting our minds to the Spirit includes receiving the desires of the Spirit He gives us and not grieving or quenching them. If we do so, He may limit His working in us. And this is not good since righteousness is God's will for us back in Romans 8:4. So be sensitive to the Spirit's leading – see His desires He is trying to show you and adopt them – test them against the Scriptures – pray that your desires equal the desires of the Spirit.

The goal is to make chapter 7 less and less our experience and by God's grace this will occur in our lives.

Reflect and Respond

- By faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation in this life or in the next – Rejoice!
- The Holy Spirit has freed us from the principle of sin and death and given us life
- Because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us, we can overcome the sin nature that remains in us and produce righteous fruit pleasing to God
- One day the Spirit will rid us of our sin nature and give us glorified bodies
- Realize you are in a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit
- You say you are a Christian – what is your mindset?
- Take advantage of what provision God has given you that your mind may be set on the Spirit – may His desires be your desires
- May all that we do be done in the power of the Holy Spirit