

New Freedom, Power, and Life

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verses 1 through 11, as printed in your liturgy.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit, who gives life, has set you free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

[1 : 18] Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires. But those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

The mind governed by the flesh is death. The Spirit is life and peace.

The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

[2 : 27] And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Good morning, Christ Church.

After summer vacation, I always feel the need to reintroduce myself. So my name is Jonathan St. Clair, and I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new over this past month, I look forward to meeting you hopefully soon, if not today.

We've been visiting extended family in Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. And I just want to say thank you to our church. Thanks especially to our elders and staff and deacons and particularly Pastor Andrew for encouraging me to rest.

And I praise God I've come back rested. Really glad to be home and reconnecting with you all and just reestablishing our rhythms and routines as we start into a new ministry year, a new school year.

[3 : 48] I'm especially looking forward to our all-church retreat, which is happening in just over a month, September 8 to 10. I'm really excited about this unique time and togetherness to build up our church family.

And I'm excited also for you to be able to learn from one of my mentors, Bob Roglin, who's led me on two different trips to Israel. And I think you're going to love him.

And so if you haven't registered, it's not to be missed, and you should register today. I've been praying, you know, all morning, Lord, help me not to have lost the ability to preach over this past month.

And so since Easter, we've been exploring this incredible letter. The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Rome. And this is really the crowning epistle of the New Testament.

It's ordered in our Bibles after the four Gospels, after the Acts of the Apostles as the first in the head of all the letters of the Apostles because it's the most important. It's the crowning epistle.

[4 : 51] And one of the brightest and most radiant gems in this crown is Romans chapter 8. I've said before, you know, Romans 5 is the most important chapter in this letter, but Romans 8 is far and away the most moving chapter.

And this is probably the best known and best loved, one of the best known and best loved chapters in all the Bible. And if you're looking to learn some scripture by heart, I would definitely start here. But the overarching theme of Romans 8 is that our salvation in Jesus Christ is absolutely secure and unshakable and uncertain.

That's what Paul wants to drive home for us, that anyone who has been justified by faith can be confident in their full deliverance, in their complete liberation, in their final salvation.

And Romans 8 really was written to strengthen people like us, Christians and men and women like us, people who are gathered like us today to strengthen us in our assurance of the gospel and in our relationship with God.

[6 : 08] And that's why he begins in Romans 8.1, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And he ends with there's no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Absolutely nothing whatsoever can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now this is a letter that's written by a Christian and to Christians.

It's written to instruct this church in Rome which is at the heart of the empire. But I also recognize we have people here every week who are exploring Christianity and investigating the claims of Jesus and his apostles.

And so if that's you, we're delighted that you're here and delighted to journey with you as you discover who Jesus is and what he did and why that matters.

And I just want to say to you, Romans is actually a great place to begin. And so what is Paul saying in this text we just read? What's he saying here in Romans 8?

[7 : 07] He's saying this, that in Jesus Christ you can have a new freedom and a new power and a new life. And I want to start with that first statement, that in Jesus Christ you can have a new freedom.

Paul begins, he says, Now you've been made free.

You've been set at liberty. So when we gather together at various sporting events and we sing the Star Spangled Banner, we come to that climactic phrase.

I'm not going to sing it for you. But there's sort of that elongated high note where we talk about, we sing about the land of the free. And sometimes we go, free, you know, like that.

And everybody starts cheering and yeah, woo! Our culture not only sings it that way, but our culture highlights freedom as the main theme and the main value of our society.

[8 : 22] We measure progress according to increasing freedoms. Freedom is the highest good. Becoming free is the most heroic story we can think to tell ourselves, right?

Giving people freedom, we think that's kind of the main role of all of our institutions. And one of the challenges is that in much of our society, Christianity is increasingly seen as the arch enemy of freedom.

You guys realize that? So what's interesting to me is that the Apostle Paul says that if your identity is in Jesus Christ, if you've been united to him in his life, death, and resurrection, you can experience a radical freedom.

You've been made free, he says. You've been set at liberty. And the question is, well, freedom from what? Freedom from what? Again, he says, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And really, Paul's been talking about that since Romans 1, verse 18, where he says the wrath of God, the condemnation of God, is being revealed from heaven against all of our ungodliness and our unrighteousness.

[9 : 38] The people like us who suppress the truth about God. The condemnation of God is upon us. And he goes to chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, and he says all of us are under the power of sin and death, the law of sin and death.

And that all of us have within us this dark, cancerous, malignant, metastasizing mass that's our fallen human nature, what Paul here calls the flesh that we inherited in Adam.

And because of that, we're all Republican, Democrat, Jew, Gentile, Eastern, Western. We're all under the judgment and condemnation of God.

And Paul has already said this back in Romans 5. I'll just repeat it. He says in Romans 5, 16, The judgment followed one sin of Adam and brought what? Condemnation. But the gift of God's grace in Christ followed many trespasses and brought what?

Justification. He goes on. He says, Just as one trespass of Adam resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act of Christ resulted in justification and life for all people.

[10 : 57] Paul's contrasting. He's juxtaposing condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ. And his point is that all of us who are in Adam are spiritually and morally not free.

We're not free. We're slaves of sin. We're in bondage to death. We are owned. We're dominated. We're tyrannized by this condemnation that we brought upon ourselves.

But here's the thing. Here's the gospel. Here's the good news. Is that God himself has done something about that. God himself has come in the person of Jesus Christ, it says here, to make us free and to set us at liberty.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

I want you to look at that little word, N-O. No. It's just a little tiny word. It's just two letters. And it's not, you know, really imposing.

[12 : 13] But do you realize what it means? Do you realize the power of that little word? Christians are people who've been taken entirely outside of the realm of condemnation in Adam.

And we have nothing more to do with condemnation. Y'all forgot to say amen while I was gone.

Okay. Woo. All right. There is no condemnation now, and there never can be for you anymore.

Now, I did not begin my Christian life knowing that. When I was, you know, elementary school, middle school, high school, I didn't know the truth of Romans 8, 1.

And that was a problem for me because I would be afraid that when I would sin, when I would fail to love God with all my heart, when I would fail to love, you know, my family and my neighbors as myself, which was happening all the time, when that was happening, I was afraid that I would come back again under condemnation.

And I felt like I was constantly passing from one state to the other, back and forth, condemned, not condemned, condemned, not condemned. And I felt like, man, I need to become a Christian all over again, just like I became a Christian yesterday.

[13 : 37] I need to become a Christian again today so that I cannot be under condemnation. And the problem was, if any of you experienced that, I did not understand my position. I didn't understand my status and my standing in Jesus Christ.

That little word, N-O, means never. It doesn't say for this moment and temporarily and for the time being, you're under no condemnation.

It means that you're never going to experience condemnation. Condemnation for you, if you're in Christ, is finished. It's not going to happen. No condemnation is the same thing as saying justification.

Justification equals no condemnation. And Paul's already said this in Romans 5.1. He says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have peace. We've been justified. There's no condemnation. So if you're a Christian, that means that your past, present, and future sins have already been dealt with once and forever.

[14 : 43] Do you know that? It's not just that your past sins have been dealt with, but that your future and your present sins might disqualify you.

It's that any sin you've ever committed or will ever commit has already been dealt with. So that you can never come under condemnation again.

You've been set free. You've been set at liberty once and for all. Now, if that's true, and I believe it's true, but if it's true, how is it true? How are we not condemned?

How are we set free? Well, the answer to that question is not because of what we are or what is in us or what we have done. It's all about what God did for us.

It's all about God's acts of grace toward us and on our behalf. If it depended on us, if it depended on my character and my efforts and my actions, I could have no confidence.

[15 : 45] I could have no assurance about my salvation whatsoever. But here's what he says.

There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death for what the law was

powerless to do because it was weakened by our sinful flesh.

God did. God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh.

What we could not do for ourselves in our flesh, God did for us through Jesus Christ. And what exactly did God do?

Well, he says, God the Father sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh. The eternal son of God became like us as a real human being, and yet he was unlike us because he only had the likeness of sinful flesh.

He was yet utterly sinless and without a sinful nature. He didn't come into the world in Adam. He's the new Adam.

[16:54] He's a new human being who's come to start a whole new race of human beings. And why did God the Father send his perfect and undefiled and sinless son? He says, to be a sin offering.

To take our sins upon himself. The cross of Jesus Christ, the death of Jesus Christ, that is the definitive time and place when and where God condemned our sins.

The judgment of God, the wrath of God, the condemnation of God for our sins was poured out, not upon us, but upon Christ crucified in our place and as our substitute.

And that is the heart. That's the center. It's the glory of the gospel. Because God did this. And because God has placed you in Jesus Christ, that is why, therefore, there is now no condemnation and there never will be.

It's impossible. You are utterly, completely, eternally free. Now, if you're exploring Christianity, I want to say that this is a radical freedom that you're not going to find anywhere else.

[18:14] No other religion, no other philosophy, no other system of life offers you this kind of freedom and liberation. And what Romans is telling us is that it can be yours simply by trusting in Christ as a sin offering in your place.

Romans 10, 9 says this, If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you too will be saved.

Now, if you're a Christian, I want to say to you that we must never allow the dark powers that are arrayed against us, we must never allow those dark powers to condemn us because our condemnation has already happened in the past, it's already been dealt with.

So when you're feeling tempted by this voice that often can come and condemn you, you need to quote Romans 8, 1 back and just say, Well, hey, you know, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and that includes me.

And what's more than that, if you're a Christian, we need not be looking somewhere else or to someone else or to something else to find our freedom. We don't need to be looking to the modern and the postmodern philosophers, and we don't need to be looking to the gurus who are popularizing their ideas and their books and broadcasts to teach me new concepts and new constructs of freedom and liberation to tell me who I am and what I am because I'm not looking for that because I already know that.

[19:54] I already have that. I know who I am and what I am. Those systems of thought that are permeating the air that we breathe, they come nowhere close to giving you what we're given here.

I already have freedom in Christ. I've been set at liberty by the Spirit of God. And it doesn't get any better than that. You can't improve upon that.

We, as the church, simply need to meditate upon that and believe that and apply that to our lives.

So, in Jesus Christ, you can have a new freedom.

Alright? But not only can you have a new freedom, but in Jesus Christ, you can also have a new power. You can have a new power. Now, in order to say a word on power, I've got to say one more thing about freedom.

Modern freedom is the freedom of self-assertion. I am free if I have the ability to do whatever I want. And so, we define freedom as the absence of constraints.

[21:09] And the irony of freedom as the absence of constraints is that it often, very often leads to the loss of our freedoms, right? So, if I eat ice cream all day, every day for the next several weeks, eventually I'm going to lose my freedom to be healthy.

So, real freedom... Do you guys believe that? Okay. That seems self-evident, but just need to... Okay.

So, real freedom comes with the strategic loss of some of my freedoms in order to gain other freedoms. Freedom is all about finding the right constraints and the right freedoms that I need to lose in order to have greater freedoms.

So, philosophers talk about negative liberty as freedom from. That's where we refuse constraints on our choices. But they also talk about positive liberty as freedom for.

Where we use our freedom to live in a certain way. Now, why am I getting all philosophical?

Because the gospel is not just about freedom from. It's about freedom for.

[22 : 17] The gospel says, yes, you have freedom from condemnation, but you also have freedom for something else. And why did God condemn sin in Jesus Christ?

Why did he set us free? He says in verse 4, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

God does not only want to deliver us from condemnation and forgive us and set us free from guilt and judgment. Salvation is about those things, but salvation doesn't stop there.

It goes way beyond that. God gives us something further than that. The thing is, I cannot stand in the presence of God without righteousness.

And so, God imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to me. He clothes me in the righteousness of Christ. So that all the righteous deeds, all the righteous actions of Jesus are applied to me as if I did them.

[23 : 19] But, verse 4 is saying something even beyond that. Verse 4 says, not only does God impute the righteousness of Jesus on me and put it on me from the top down as it were, but also, God imparts the righteousness of Jesus to me and grows it up within me from the bottom up.

In order that the righteous requirements of God's law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit. God wants us to increasingly, progressively exercise our new freedom from condemnation as a freedom for righteousness.

What in the world does that mean? What are the righteous requirements of God's law? Well, in the Gospel of Matthew somebody comes to Jesus and they say, teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law of God and what does Jesus say?

How does he respond? He says, love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. That is the first and the greatest requirement of the law of God.

And he says the second one is pretty close to it which is love your neighbor as yourself. And then in the Gospel of John as Jesus has just finished washing his disciples' feet and he's going the next day to die on the cross.

[24 : 44] He says to them, a new command I give you, love one another. In this disciple community, in this family of God with these brothers and sisters in the faith, I want you to love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another.

Jesus did not purchase our freedom at the cost, the infinite cost of his precious blood so that you and I can do whatever we want.

No, it's in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us. Or as he says later on in Romans 8, 29, God chose us in order that he might conform us into the likeness of his son and we might say, well that's impossible.

How is that going to happen? Where are we going to get the power to become righteous like Jesus Christ? And the answer is the Spirit of God, the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned 21 times in Romans 8 which tells us something. It tells us that the Christian life is essentially life in the Spirit. Life animated, empowered, sustained, directed, and enriched by the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 54] Without the Holy Spirit, true Christian discipleship would be inconceivable and would be impossible. But what Paul is telling us is that now that we're in Christ, we've been filled and we are now indwelt with the power of the Holy Spirit.

You should read verse 4 like this. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the weakness of the flesh like we had in Adam but now according to the power of the Spirit that we have in Jesus Christ.

It's a power that comes not from us. It's not a power that kind of bubbles up from within us. It's a power that's outside of us and above us.

It's a power from God. A power that comes to dwell inside of us and make possible what before was impossible. The Holy Spirit here is described as a person with tremendous power.

Look at verse 11. It says that the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you. That is an immense and an awesome power.

[27 : 05] Do you know any other power that can raise a dead person to life? Right? This new Oppenheimer film people are talking about the you know atomic power and nuclear power.

Some of you have tried to describe to me the potential of fusion power and I'm still trying to understand what you're talking about. But the Holy Spirit has a power way beyond any of that. It's the power to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. And Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit can do that great thing then surely he can do the lesser and the easier thing which is to give you and I power to fulfill the righteous requirement of God's law and be conformed to the image of Christ. Christ. In Jesus Christ you have a new freedom but you also have a new power. It's a freedom for and a new power to exercise your freedom for but beyond that you not only have a new freedom and a new power but you have a new life.

And I'll end with this. When you become a Christian a radical complete change happens to you. God moves you from one realm one order one kingdom into another.

[28 : 22] Paul is saying that in Adam we were under the reign of this death dealing flesh but in Jesus Christ God has moved us into Jesus Christ and now we're under the reign of this life giving spirit.

We heard that in verse 2 the spirit is the one who gives life and in verse 6 the Holy Spirit is the one who gives life and peace. Verse 10 the spirit gives life.

Verse 11 the Holy Spirit will give life to your mortal bodies. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life and the life giving spirit and to be a Christian is to be removed from the realm of the flesh and of death and to be quickened to be regenerated to be animated by the life of the spirit of God.

A dead person cannot give themselves life. God must come and put his life into us so that we can be alive in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

But the question is how do we continue? How does the Holy Spirit continue to work in us after he gives us life? Well that's where verse 5 comes in.

[29 : 30] Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires but those who live in accordance with the spirit have their minds set on what the spirit desires. Now I know it's hot.

I'm hotter than all of you. But stay with me for a second. To set your mind is to make a thing the absorbing object of your thought and interest and affection and purpose.

The question here about setting our minds is what is it that preoccupies us? What ambitions drive us? What concerns engross us? How do we spend our time and our energies?

What do we concentrate on? What do we give ourselves up to? What are we seeking most of all? What do we want to please? What gives us satisfaction? All those questions are bound up in this idea of setting our mind on something.

And Paul tells us that the Christian is the person who sets their mind on what the life-giving spirit desires. And what is that? What does the spirit desire? Well the spirit desires for every single one of us to know and to love God.

[30 : 43] Look at verse 7. He says the sinful mind, the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law nor can it do so.

Those controlled by the flesh cannot please God. You however are not controlled by the flesh but by the spirit if indeed the spirit of God lives in you.

Paul is saying that if I'm alive with the life of God then the life-giving spirit of God is causing in me the opposite and the inverse of those fleshly attitudes and actions that I had before.

And that means that no longer am I hostile to God but now by the spirit I'm hungry for God. No longer am I suppressing the truth about God but now I'm surrendering myself to God by the spirit. no longer am I resisting God's reality and God's law like I did when I was in the flesh but now I'm submitting myself to by the power of the spirit and the life of the spirit I'm submitting myself to the law of God.

[31 : 49] Before I could not please God but now the thing that drives me the most is that I want to bring pleasure and I want to bring glory to God in all that I'm thinking and saying and doing.

That's what the life-giving spirit of God does in a Christian. And so what does that mean practically? How does that change how you're going to live this week and what does that matter on Monday morning?

Well when you wake up tomorrow morning and when you wake up every morning this week the life-giving spirit of God is going to be there to meet you with his desire that you would set your mind on what he desires.

the spirit is going to be right there right when you wake up the spirit is going to be going I want you to set your mind on what I desire. And I you know I've never met a healthy Christian or a mature Christian who did not give the very first thing that they did in their day to this setting of their mind upon what the spirit desires.

And what does the Holy Spirit desire? The Holy Spirit desires that I would give my first time and my best time of the day to be with God. That's what Jesus did.

[33 : 00] It says that he very early in the morning while it was still dark he got up and he went off to a solitary place where he prayed and he set his mind on what the spirit desires.

And if nobody's ever shown you how to do that we would love to teach you that here. But the Holy Spirit is going to be right there when you get out of bed and your feet hit the floor and his desire is going to be there for you to care more about God.

His desire is for you to care more about the name of God and the kingdom of God and the will of God. His desire is for you to care about the word of God and the worship of God and the son of God and the people of God and the eternity of God and the life of the world to come with God.

That's what the spirit desires and that's what he wants to give you the very first thing when you start your day to immerse you in the life of God himself so that we can experience the life of God in our souls.

And we can say God teach me more about who you are and what you've done. God give me a power that's outside of myself to exercise a freedom for righteousness today.

[34 : 17] God help me to see how free I really am in Christ. that's what the Holy Spirit is wanting to do to give you life is to usher you in to the life-giving presence of the living God.

And I pray that he do that for every single one of us starting tomorrow morning and until we see one another again next week. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray.

Amen. Amen.