

Romans 8:1-17: Life in the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] 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.

For 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.

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law.

Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. If, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

[1 : 1 2] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. 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.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we also might be glorified with him.

This is the word of the Lord. Good afternoon.

[2 : 3 4] Good afternoon. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Take a moment and look down, if you're not yet, at Romans 8.1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This phrase, though just the beginning of the passage, has been running through my mind all week. And not only because I was tasked with preaching it today, but also I was with many of the interns and other pastors from Holy Trinity and about 6,000 other people this week at the Gospel Coalition Conference at McCormick Place, which was a meeting of many pastors and other leaders in the Christian community.

And whatever the reason, about half of the people who stood up to speak quoted this verse. I have no idea, well I have plenty of idea why it related to what they were saying, but they all brought it in.

And as we come here in Romans, we've gotten a little used to Paul and his sweeping statements, his grand theological truths coming out of Romans, and there are many more to come as we continue our series through the end of the book.

[4 : 07] But this may be one of the biggest. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The phrase, verse 1 here, is in one way a very simple phrase. There is no condemnation, there is no judgment, there is nothing that will come down on those whose faith has been put in Christ.

Yet at the same time, there is such a richness and a fullness that is built up to this moment, not only through the book of Romans, but through all of salvation history, that to truly expound it would take much longer than what we have today.

Even more interesting is the word condemnation that is here in verse 1. It's actually a word that's only used three times in the entirety of the New Testament. all three times taking place in Romans.

If you flip back a page to Romans chapter 5, you will see both of the other times that it's used. 5.16, we've looked at it before, Paul is talking about the difference between sin entering through Adam and life entering through Christ, and the free gift that is salvation is not like the result of that one's man's sin, for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification and down in verse 18, therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification in life for all men.

[5 : 49] It took one sin, one trespass, one falling of iniquity on Adam's behalf for sin and judgment and condemnation to enter into the world.

And yet, as Paul has built up his argument so far throughout the book of Romans, he comes to this point at the beginning of 8 and says, there is now, based on everything else that I have said, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The entirety of the created order is being reversed in verse 1. He uses this and he introduces in verse 2, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has been on the scene in Romans very subtly. We're going to take one more look back to the book of Romans if you flip to Romans chapter 1. He's appeared in a couple different places.

In 1-4, the introduction, speaking of Jesus, and he was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

[6 : 57] circumcision, again in 2-29, but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter.

One more time in 5-5, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

And much more closely connected to our own text today that we'll see, but now, sorry, in Romans 7-6, but now we are released from the law, having died to that which has held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

The Holy Spirit has kind of been interwoven through these first seven chapters of Romans, but then when we come to chapter 8, we get the largest concentration of Holy Spirit talk, so to say, in the entirety of Scripture.

In fact, in our passage itself, verses 1-17, the Holy Spirit is named 15 times, and if you continue through the rest of chapter 8, you will begin to see more and more the ministry that he is carrying on.

[8 : 11] So here the Spirit kind of bursts onto the scene. There is no condemnation, and this is paralleling Paul's argument over the last couple chapters that Dave and Pastor Jay have been showing to us, that there is a new law, that the old law has been replaced, and a new law has come for those who are in Christ.

And in fact, the one who is giving this law, the one who is overseeing life in this law, is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, in all His fullness and in all His richness.

Look at verse 2. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death referencing the Torah, referencing the Old Testament law, but as we've seen, if you just glance back across the page, as we saw last week, the law in and of itself was nothing bad, was nothing sinful.

Verse 7 of chapter 7 says, what then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

The problem or the difficulty with the law was not anything inherently wrong with the law itself. Rather, the problem is that the law demands perfect and righteous obedience to the very last letter if, in fact, it's going to be salvific, if, in fact, it's going to make somebody right with God.

[9 : 45] Obviously, we look briefly at Romans 5 and we know that that's not the case, that there is condemnation for all men, that all men have failed so far as it is under the old law.

But now, in such grand fashion, Paul says, there is new law. The old law has passed away. The spirit has not passed away, we'll see, it's been fulfilled, actually.

The spirit has set you free. The spirit has come if you are in Christ and has given you a new law to live by. The old law has been made complete. I don't know if you've seen the movie Shawshank Redemption, but there's a great kind of metaphorical image that comes out of there that I think helps us with this passage in general.

If you haven't and you don't know what it's about, most of it takes place in a jail. There's a couple characters that we follow. One man who has been jailed for something he did not do, but he makes friends with a character played by Morgan Freeman who goes by the name of Red.

And within the prison walls he's known as a man who knows how to get things. We have the privilege of actually following Red as he eventually is freed from prison and he's given life outside of the walls that have held him captive for decades of his life.

[11 : 07] He's now a man in his 60s or in his 70s. And as soon as he's been released and received parole we see a shot of him in a grocery store begging groceries.

It's the job he's found or been given to do in his life after jail. And he's begging groceries as an old man and he turns to his boss who's several decades younger and says, permission to go to the bathroom sir?

And he looks at him like he has no idea why he's doing what he's doing and says, go to the bathroom. You don't need to ask me to go use the restroom. The point being, Red, Morgan's Freeman character, has been released from jail.

There's nothing from his former life that is still holding him captive. He doesn't need to be told when to eat. He does not need to be told when to go to the bathroom.

But yet we hear in his narrative voice over, I've spent so long in prison that I need someone to give me permission to go to the bathroom. The same thing often happens in our own lives.

[12 : 12] We look back, we know in our head that if our faith has been put in Christ, if our faith is in the cross, which we're going to see in verse 3, that we've been removed from the old law.

We've been given grace, we've been given mercy, but yet there's still this shackling that sometimes our behavior reverts to the old way of doing things. We still want rules in place, we still want someone to tell us what to do, but Paul tells us that the law of the Spirit is life, and it's opposed to the law of sin and death, which no longer hold us captive.

in verses 3 and 4, Paul begins to, he gives us a very dense packaging of this idea of no condemnation for those in Christ.

It's very rich theologically, there's a lot of background that goes into it. If we had more time, we could spend hours on these verses themselves, we won't, don't worry, but they're worth taking a look at how this idea of no condemnation has been accomplished in the life of the believer.

Verse 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 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.

[13 : 53] There's a few things to take note of in this passage. First, that God has done the work that the law was unable to do. The law, though, created in order to bring righteousness, in order to give life, is not able to do that because nobody is able to meet its requirements or fulfill and accomplish what it has put forth for them to do.

So, therefore, God had to step in and do another way of accomplishing the law, and it happens through his son. Now, we're not in a traditional Palm Sunday or Easter text here, but there are many things that point to the similar ideas that we celebrate with the Church Universal on Palm Sunday, looking forward and looking back at the death and the resurrection of Christ are both packed into Romans 8.

How did God do what the law could not do? By sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, in the likeness that is in the form or to be in the same way of sinful flesh and for sin.

Christ came down in human flesh to experience and to understand the same things that everyone who was not able to accomplish the law to live to it fully were able to accomplish.

He took on the same form, he had the same flesh, he walked the same streets, but yet he did it without sin. If one was able to fulfill the law and if anyone has fulfilled the law, it was Christ.

[15 : 32] He was sent in the flesh and for sin. Those couple words in English, they don't quite fully unpack it. If you look at the phrase the way that it's used, the Septuagint's translation, the way that the Greeks translated the Old Testament, the phrase that's used there, and for sin, over 80% of the time it's used is used in referring to sacrifice.

In other words, he sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sacrifice for sin. A final sacrifice, Hebrews would tell us, that Christ is actually a better sacrifice and is the only sacrifice that would fulfill the law.

Christ is the sacrifice for sin, and indeed, as we know well, he condemned sin in the flesh. In Christ's flesh on the cross, sin ultimately was condemned, which of course connects us right back to verse 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation, because in his flesh, Christ himself was condemned for us. And finally, the results of God's work in verse 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.

We've said that the only way that someone would perfectly fulfill the law would be to hang on every letter of it all the way through, and that is the only way that righteousness would be fulfilled through the law.

[17 : 06] God. This is a tricky, in one way, a tricky kind of verse to weed through. One commentator puts it very simply and very well. He writes this, Christ becomes what we are so that we might become what Christ is.

In other words, the only way that the law, the requirement of the law, the righteousness that the law necessitates is that a righteous God became sin, so that those who are sinful because of Adam, can become righteous.

And because of that, Paul is able to give us another one of his very defining declarative statements that we no longer walk according to the flesh, but that we walk according to the spirit.

The implications for this reversal, for this kind of shifting of spheres or the shifting in circle of life from being under the letter of a law, as 7-6 told us, it got rid of the written code, to being under life and the law, the rule of the spirit is huge.

We often, as I mentioned a couple minutes ago, strive to be under rule. We want a code, we want rules, we want something to form our lives around so that we know there's a checklist that we can go through and say, I am good with God.

[18 : 26] God says, there is no condemnation for you because you have met all the requirements that I have put forward. But indeed, when Paul comes to Romans 8, when we come to Romans 8 and we read it, that's not the way of life, that's not the way that we live.

Because of Christ, the spirit has come and the spirit is the one who directs our life, who directs the way that we live. The old law has gone. We have no need to sacrifice.

I don't think any of you struggle with that. We have no need for priests. We can wear clothes with polyester and cotton in them. You can cut your hair.

You can eat bacon if you want and as much as you want. The old law has gone. The lists, the rules, the check marks are no longer pertaining to those who are in Christ because Christ has fulfilled the law.

He has completed it. It's over. It's finished. And he has given us new life that is dictated by his spirit. And as you continue through chapter 8, and we're going to see a couple of them, he begins to unfold the ramifications for life in the spirit, the ramifications for having been completely freed from this life of slavery or this life of imprisonment as we looked at it earlier.

[19 : 44] The first thing that we see is this kind of comparison between the old way of living, he terms it life in the flesh, and the new way of living for those in Christ, the life of the spirit.

Take a look at verse 5. For 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.

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not submit to God's law.

Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. This is the beginning of a section of basically life in the spirit, of what does it look like to live in the Holy Spirit, to live under his rule, and I think it extends the paragraphs, I think, are, I don't like them, I'll be honest with this passage, but I think it goes from 5 down to 13, and I think the reasoning for that is that it's framed with this idea of life.

All this language in Romans 8 of living, of life in the spirit, is bracketed within those, look at verse 5, for those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Verse 13 ends in the same way, 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.

[21 : 12] So we've entered into a description of this, and it's a comparison between life in the spirit and life in the flesh, and he begins by telling us what our life in the spirit looks like.

It looks like setting your mind on the things of the spirit. It looks like a life that has been given life, a life that has been given peace with God through the work of Christ.

This is where anything close to a kind of checklist of our new life in the spirit comes in. In fact, if you flip over to a very well-known passage in Galatians chapter 5, with the youth group we've been taking a look at the fruit of the spirit the last couple months in this passage, and it actually is an incredibly close parallel to our passage.

Look at Galatians 5.1 if you're there. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. You've been let go.

The chains, your chains have been cut off. And he picks it up in verse 16. You'll see the language, you'll see the parallels just come out. But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[22 : 31] The desires of the flesh are against the spirit. The desires of the spirit against the flesh, for they are opposed to one another. In verse 18, but if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.

Paul's saying the same thing to the Galatians that he's saying to the Romans, but then he puts more on it. He actually, in a sense, gives them a checklist.

It's not as easy of a checklist to abide by as bring the right dove for sacrifice, go to Jerusalem at the right time. But it's characteristics of life defined by the spirit and life defined by the flesh.

Look at life in the flesh, starting in verse 19. He's got it covered.

The life of the flesh is characterized by all of these things. Everything from envy and anger and jealousy and things that take place in your mind to things that involve other people and hurt and words and sexual misconduct with one another.

[23 : 40] But then he changes his tone in verse 22 and says, under the spirit, under the law, under the life of the spirit, this is what ought to characterize you. And it's not a list of rules, but look at what it is.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Those are the things that Paul has put forth to say, here is the characteristic, here is the definition of someone who is living life in the spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. Back in Romans, we see this coming out. Your mind, as one who has been put in the spirit, as one who is in Christ, is on these things and is on one seeking to fulfill them and to live them out.

Now, of course, we know that just like Red in the Shawshank Redemption, there are times when we need permission to eat, we need permission to go to the bathroom, when we fall back into that life that's been dictated by the flesh because we haven't been able to fully free ourselves of it, even though we know we should be.

[24 : 52] But he says, your mind ought to be set on the things of the spirit because the things of the spirit is what brings life and what brings peace. And he closes the paragraph there by saying, there is no neutrality.

There is not this idea of living with the law, this idea of living in slavery to the flesh and at the same time living under the spirit. It's one or the other.

You have to choose which one you are going to seek after. After speaking of our life in the spirit, he switches it around and he says, you're in the spirit, but the Holy Spirit is also in you.

It's a both and. Look at verse 9. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

In other words, if you have Christ, the Holy Spirit is in you. You are under the law of the spirit. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.

[25 : 59] If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

It's such a great text going in to Easter, looking at the Holy Week ahead of us. If Christ is in you, your body, everyone's body is dead.

It's going towards death. That's been the case since the trespass and the condemnation brought in through Adam. But with the life of the spirit is given life because of righteousness.

Because of the righteousness that Christ worked on the cross, the Holy Spirit is in you. And because the Holy Spirit is in you, you too will be raised from the dead just as Christ was.

We're going to pick up this idea again at the end of our passage. So we're going to move on from it now. But he concludes with the results of what happens because we live with the spirit inside of us in verse 12.

[27 : 05] So then brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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.

Our debt, our obligation is no longer to the flesh, is no longer to the law, is no longer to checklists and is to trying to accomplish righteousness through the things that we do, but rather it's to God because of his work in Christ and because we are governed by his spirit.

He shifts gears a little bit then as we enter the last part of our passage in verses 14 through 17. Romans is rich theologically and is rich doctrinally and makes makes your head kind of explode if you're not used to thinking logically that much or putting so much information into it.

But in verses 14 through 17, we start to get to see the results of everything that Paul's been preaching and everything that Paul's been teaching, but it comes out in such a different way. It comes out in a way of experience, in a way of emotion.

Take a look at verse 14. For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God. 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.

[28 : 30] The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.

He says very matter-of-factly, if you are in Christ, you are in the spirit. If you are in the spirit, the spirit is in you. If the spirit is in you, you are God's child.

You are God's son. You have been brought out of the family of the flesh, out of the family of the world, out of the brokenness and the condemnation, and you have been put in the family of God, with God, as your father, and with Jesus Christ as your brother.

He says it's the case. You don't have a choice. You can't, you know, reach the age of a cent and say, you know what, I want out of this family. I'm switching up. He says the fact is you have been placed in family with your father, God.

And because of that, he's able to say the reason why that that has happened, and it's in verse 15, you do not receive this spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

[29 : 40] You do not, you've not been adopted in order that you still listen to your old boss, in order that you still put on yourself the old law, that you still seek to fulfill its righteous requirement by the things that you do, because God has already done that for you.

That's not the spirit you've received, but you've received the spirit of adoption. And because you've received that spirit, the depths, the inner parts of who we are cry out.

Our own human spirit cries out with the Holy Spirit and testifies to that fact, testifies to, I have been adopted by God because of Christ's work, and the Holy Spirit is making that real for me within my own life.

We cry out, Abba, Father, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we indeed are the children of God. This brings out an interesting balance and something that many people, I know myself personally, have struggled with this, this balance, I think, of head knowledge and theology and doctrinally especially, versus the emotional side in our experience in our life in Christ.

So often we tend to be people who go one way or the other. We want to be able to put it all together. We want it logically. We love the book of Romans because Paul says, if this, then this, then this, and now this.

[31 : 06] But sometimes that restrains us and we are unable to really feel what it means to cry out to God as our Father. It makes it difficult for us to really understand love, to understand being in his family, to know what it truly means to love those who are unlovable to us.

But at the same time, or opposite of that, we can be someone who only can rely on our experience, who only knows what we feel, and therefore sometimes we can struggle with the foundation that has been laid for us, with the foundation of knowledge, with the foundation of doctrine that can serve us well, because if we depend only on our emotions, we are easily swayed and we're easily shaken.

For Paul, and I think indeed for the life of any Christian, it is necessary that it is our knowledge, it is our understanding of the Scripture, and it is our experience of Christ, our ability to cry out to him as Father, that we need to learn to bring together and to wed together.

Paul ends with quite a statement, and he speaks of our identity with Christ, our union as his children with his own children, Jesus. Verse 16 and 17, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

If we are children, we are heirs. If heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him.

[32 : 37] I think Paul set himself up for this at the beginning of the chapter. You are sons of God. The other son of God mentioned, chapter 8, verse 3. God sent his own son.

God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order that you may also become his son. That you also may become the one with Christ to inherit life, to be raised from the dead, to inherit the entire kingdom that belongs to God.

Provided, verse 17, and as it was said in 11, that just as Christ did, we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Suffering is the road that leads to glorification. It was the case for Christ. It's throughout scripture the case for all Christians. And not to take too much away from whoever's preaching next week, but take a look down at verse 29.

We see kind of the ultimate purpose in this. For these whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[33 : 55] The purpose of God's righteousness being fulfilled in Christ, being given to us through the Holy Spirit, is in order that he might make us just like Christ.

In order that just like Christ, we will be God's son. In order that just like Christ, we will die, we will suffer. In order that just like Christ, we will be raised again, and we will be glorified.

And that we will receive the inheritance and the glorification and the life that has been given to Christ by God. But that will also be ours, and that we get to rejoice with him in.

Amen. Romans 8 is a very overwhelming text. We looked at 17 verses.

There's a lot more sitting in there. And in one sense, I kind of hope you leave saying, I feel like we just got washed over. That if perhaps we leave drenched from the text, that there will be some beads of water that we're still squeezing out a little while later, and that we're able to remember in a way what we're able to soak something up from it.

[35 : 06] Paul makes these huge sweeping statements. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. You are free from the law, but you are living under the Spirit. You walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

That those who are in the flesh cannot please God, but you, however, can please God because you are in the Spirit, because you have the Spirit of God in you.

And we are no longer debtors, but we are sons that have been adopted into his family. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for its richness, its fullness, its promises, and also its declarations. Sometimes we just need to seek to understand who we are in you.

And we thank you for the challenge and for the suffering that are on the road to becoming just like your son. But we also praise and we glorify you for the fact that you have done this work in him already.

[36 : 13] And therefore, we are assured that it will happen in us and that you will make us just like him. In Jesus' name, amen.