

Secure in the Spirit

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- [0 : 00] Our reading this morning is from Romans chapter 8 verses 1 to 17 and you can find that on page 1137. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 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.
- [1 : 23] 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. 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.
- [2 : 40] 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. 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. Thank you, Claire, and good morning, everyone. Do keep that passage open. We'll turn back to page 1137 to Romans chapter 8. You join us in the middle of a little mini-series in Romans chapter 8. Last week we looked at verses 1 to 4, and this week we're looking together at verses 5 to 17. And if you turn to the back of the service sheets, you might find it helpful to use the outline that's there. Just to say, so we don't panic later, you'll notice that under both headings it says, leading to two destinies. That sort of sub-heading comes at the end of both points, so you might just want, in terms of space, if you've taken notes, you might just want to be aware of that.
- [3 : 56] But shall I lead us in prayer as we begin? We prayed a little earlier during our confession. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name.

Our Father, we say words like that week in, week out at church, and yet perhaps we wonder whether we really are forgiven and whether it really is possible to serve you in newness of life when each week we fall again and have to confess our sins again.

And we thank you so much that your words, the Bible, gives us assurance about both of those things, of full forgiveness and the help of your Spirit to live the Christian life.

And therefore, we pray this morning that you would reassure us afresh on those things and give us renewed joy and help to live the Christian life as a result. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

[5 : 01] Amen. Well, I guess many of us will know the story of how circuses in the old days would teach elephants not to escape.

What they do is they tie a baby elephant to a stake with a rope or a chain. And for a while, the baby elephants would attempt to break free from the tether. But being babies, they lacked the strength to do so, and they'd quickly give up, thinking they'd never be able to do it.

Of course, as they grew up, they'd get stronger. But even when they were fully grown, and even when tied with a thin rope, they easily could have broken. They wouldn't try to escape, because they had learned to be convinced that they couldn't.

They could have been free, and yet lived as if they were still held by the power of the rope. Well, last week we began to look together at Romans chapter 8, where Paul proclaims freedom for Christians, freedom from sin's condemnation.

Have a look down with me at verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Paul assures us. Why?

[6 : 20] Because we have been set free. Verse 2. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

When it comes to God's judgment, Christians have been set free. It's wonderful news. And yet, while we have been freed from the penalty of sin and its ultimate power over us, we're not yet free from its presence.

In Romans 7, just before our chapter, Paul has shown how the normal Christian life is one where we so often fall into the sin we don't want to do and fail to do the good we do want to do.

And because of that, we can easily lack assurance and begin to wonder if we're really Christians at all. Like a circus elephant tied to a stake by a flimsy rope, unaware it could be free, we easily live as if we're still chained to sin's penalty and so fail to enjoy the freedom and assurance that can now be ours.

And so last week, we saw Paul spell out three solid grounds for the Christian's assurance. God's promise in his word, the Spirit's presence to help us in the war with sin, and the work of Christ, where he purchased us by his blood.

[7 : 45] But perhaps we're still not convinced. Maybe we think, sure, I get that Jesus' death means people can be forgiven. I believe that Jesus has done everything necessary to deal with sin.

But how do I know that I am one of those people who benefits from his death, that I myself really am one of those in Christ Jesus, as verse 1 puts it, and therefore no longer under condemnation?

How can I be certain I am free from condemnation when my Christian life so often feels like a gigantic failure, perhaps? Well, the next section of Romans 8, which we're looking at this morning, helps answer that question, I think, as Paul describes what characterizes those who are in Christ Jesus and compares them to those who are still under condemnation because they continue to reject God.

There are dense verses. There's lots in them, and we won't have time to consider every detail. But essentially, Paul highlights the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian by outlining two contrasting mindsets and two contrasting masters, and we'll consider each in turn.

So first of all, two mindsets. Two mindsets. Have a look down with me at verse 5 again. Paul writes, 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.

[9 : 18] If you had to divide the people in the world into two categories, I wonder how you would do it. Perhaps a division would be between rich and poor, or educated and uneducated, or capitalist and socialist, or progressive and reactionary, or extrovert and introvert.

Or maybe you divide people along lines of race, gender, or interests. Well, here in verse 5, Paul spells out the great dividing line that exists among human beings.

And it's a dividing line that transcends all those other divisions. Every human being either lives according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.

And he gives us a pen portrait of both these types of people and their contrasting mindsets. So first of all, there's those who live according to the flesh. And notice in verse 5 that they set their minds on the things of the flesh.

The flesh, as we said last week, is sometimes translated sinful nature. And it refers to our natural orientation to do what we want, to gratify our desires.

[10 : 30] The Sunday school definition is, I think, helpful that if you write the word flesh backwards and remove the first letter, it spells out self. So those who live according to the flesh are those who set their minds on themselves and the things that please themselves.

As Paul has already explained in the letter, it's what we're all like naturally, the default position of every human being. We see it in the office where people seek to advance their own careers, whatever the cost to others.

We see it at the party where people seek to gratify self. We see it on social media where people seek to promote self. And if we're honest, we still see it in our own hearts.

Because as we read in the final verse of chapter 7, even Paul experienced an internal battle between serving God on the one hand and the desire of the flesh to serve sin on the other.

So that's the first mindset. living according to the flesh. And it's a mindset which sets us against the God who made us. Have a look at how Paul continues in verse 7.

[11 : 44] 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.

This is, I think, so different from how we often think of those who aren't Christians. We may see them as misguided or as a mixture of good and bad but we struggle to see them, I think, as hostile to God.

But Paul says they are and can't even please God. I guess we might think that the person who isn't a Christian still pleases God when they give to charity or are kind to other people.

But the Bible doesn't see it that way. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. because even their apparently noble deeds are ultimately not done to serve God and in fact are often even an expression of their rejection of God and done to serve self.

So that's one category of people in the world according to Paul. It's what everyone is like by nature. But Paul then describes a second category, a type of person he's already introduced in chapter 7 verse 6, those who live according to the spirit or in the new way of the spirit.

[13 : 04] In other words, Christians, those who are in Christ Jesus and no longer face condemnation in the language of verse 1. And notice what their mindset is.

Verse 5, those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit. This is the person whose greatest longing in the final analysis is to do what the spirit wants, what God wants.

The person whose decisions and behaviour are governed primarily not by the question what do I want to do but what does God want me to do. The person who doesn't just shrug at sin in their lives but grieves over it instead.

Now we need to be clear, Paul isn't saying that such people, Christians, will always choose to do what the spirit wants. As we'll see in a moment, Christians have a body or earthly nature that is dead to God and won't receive new sinless bodies in this world.

Paul has already made clear in Romans 7 that those with the spirit still have a sinful nature. The flesh still rages and so as we said last week, the Christian will experience an internal war between the spirit's desires and the flesh's desires.

[14 : 22] So the difference between the two types of people described in these verses isn't that one is perfect and the other isn't or one always wants to please God while the other doesn't but that the Christian at their deepest level desires to please the spirit even if they do stumble and fall along the way and experience divided desires.

Imagine the person who's diagnosed with cancer, a cancer that will prove terminal if untreated. That's what sin is like, a terminal disease. But what happens when that person receives chemotherapy?

Well, I'm no medical expert so if you're a doctor here and the details aren't quite right I hope you'll forgive me for the sake of the illustration. But I guess there are then two agents inside the cancer sufferer.

The cancer itself which seeks to kill and the symptoms of which will still be present. But also the chemotherapy drugs which go to war against the cancer and seek to bring life.

There are two agents both of whose effects will be visible at times in opposition against each other. And so it is for the Christian. The desire of the flesh to sin which untreated leads to death remains inside us.

[15 : 39] But the spirit has also entered every Christian. Did you notice that incidentally in verse 9? So it's not true as some suggest that we receive the spirit as a second blessing after conversion or that only some Christians are spiritual Christians who've received a higher sorry reached a higher spiritual plane while others aren't.

Every Christian has the spirit. The spirit has entered every Christian and goes to war against the desires of the flesh as it seeks to please Jesus instead.

And actually just as chemotherapy may make the cancer sufferer feel worse for a while so the presence of the spirit in the Christian will often make us feel worse as the spirit makes us aware of and grieve over sins that never previously bothered us and as we start to engage in a battle we never previously had to worry about.

That's the experience of the person whose mind is set on the spirit. it's a painful struggle but just as chemotherapy is designed ultimately to eradicate cancer so Paul says that one day the Christian can also be sure that the sins of disease will be eradicated and I think that's the point of verses 10 to 12 have a look down with me verses 10 to 12 let's read on we're told but if Christ is in you although the body is dead because of sin the spirit is life because of righteousness that's Jesus' righteousness that's given to us that we were thinking about last week 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 at the end of chapter 7 Paul asks the question wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death referring I think not simply to the fact that our bodies are physically decaying and will die but also to that battle he has just described in chapter 7 that our bodies are spiritually dead that our flesh seeks to serve self rather than God and here we see the answer to his question the spirit will one day give life to our mortal bodies he will make us immortal giving us new bodies and new desires which seek only to please God the battle with sin will one day be over will be freed from sin's presence as well as its penalty and as we'll see later in chapter 8 it will happen when Jesus returns and we can be sure of this because that same spirit has already raised Jesus from the dead

Paul tells us in fact the presence of the spirit within us now giving us the desire to please God in this life is evidence that he will one day finish his work and give us new bodies too both physically and spiritually and I must say that personally this is one of the things I'm most looking forward to about the new creation about what we often call heaven the struggle with sin will be over it's a battle isn't it that can be painful wearying and discouraging when we fail so often but one day it'll be over as we're raised to life with new bodies and desires which we'll seek only to serve God that's where the Christian is headed you see in verses 5 to 11 Paul describes not only two mindsets but also two destinies that those mindsets lead to so here in verse 11 the one who lives according to the spirit will be raised to eternal life they can be confident of salvation not condemnation or as verse 6 puts it if you look back to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace whereas to set the mind on the flesh is death the destiny of those who live according to the flesh will only be death and judgment so in verses 5 to 11

[19 : 59] Paul describes two mindsets leading to two destinies and remember the purpose of this chapter is to give Christians assurance and I think the way these verses do that is they tell us that even though we may fall into sin again and again if we have any desire to please God if at our deepest level we want to fight sin or even want to want to fight sin perhaps it's a sign we are Christian believers that we have life and peace not death and judgment to look forward to that we won't face condemnation the spirit has given Christians a new mindset that's troubled by sin a mindset which wants in the final analysis to please Jesus more than anything else and if we know that that describes us then however often we may stumble and fall however weak we feel however feeble our efforts to please Jesus may sometimes be we can be sure we have the spirit living in us that we have been saved and that the same spirit will one day rescue us from sin's presence completely and give us new bodies it's a great hope and it's a hope which means we're able to and are to fight sin now and have a new master to serve as we wait for that day when the battle with sin will finally be over and that brings us on to our second heading from these verses two mindsets and more briefly two masters two masters have a look down with me at verse 12

Paul goes on 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 Paul wants us to understand that with our new mindset comes a new obligation or new master the flesh and its desires are no longer to have mastery over us we're no longer debtors to the flesh as verse 12 puts it or in the language of verse 15 slaves to the flesh sometimes we can be tempted to despair in the Christian life can't we we fall into the same sin again and again and we begin to think that there's no point fighting anymore it's just too hard it's impossible to make progress so we might as well just give up perhaps some of us here have made truce with sin in a particular area for precisely that reason we've let it master us and so slavishly follow its urges but do we see how dangerous that is because if you live according to the flesh you will die writes Paul and rather than failures in the battle being the sign we're not Christians it's the battle itself that shows we have the spirit and are Christians as long as we are engaged in the battle yes fighting sin is hard yes we will continue to stumble in this life sometimes again and again but we don't need to give up because we have the spirit's help now sin is no longer our master we're not elephants unable to break free from its hold on us we don't owe it anything because you see we now have a new master to serve the second master in these verses

Paul doesn't quite finish his sentence in verse 12 but the implication is clear I think we're debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh but implicitly to the spirit to live according to the spirit or as he puts it in verse 14 we are now led by the spirit of God he is our leader or master he's the one we're to serve and the second half of verse 13 shows us what that will look like and notice that being led by the spirit isn't some kind of mystical experience or internal form of guidance or something where we passively let go and let God but something in which we're actively involved if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live because the Christian is led by the spirit rather than the flesh he is therefore to put to death the deeds of the body or flesh to fight sin to wage war against the flesh not to give up in the battle we're to be ruthless and radical in putting sin to death as has often been helpfully said the sin that takes you to hell isn't the one you're fighting but the one you've given up fighting because if you live according to the flesh you will die a dead fish will always go with the flow won't it and so it is with those who live according to the flesh who are spiritually dead but a fish which is alive will be able to swim upstream against the flow yes it will be hard yes there will be a natural pull downstream but it's alive and therefore doesn't have to go with the flow and so it is with those of us who are Christians we're alive spiritually and are able to swim against the flow of our sinful natures even though it's hard and we may sometimes succumb to the current's pull we have a new master to serve a new direction to swim and just notice that we're not alone in this struggle in verse 14 yes we have a part to play

Paul says if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body but he also tells us that it will be by the spirit that we do this we have his help now you see the spirit isn't simply our master but also in a sense our servant a master who gets alongside us and helps us rather than simply sitting in judgment over us he gives us the spiritual oxygen we need to swim upstream so because the Christian has a new master he has a new fight but not only that notice also he has a new father 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 the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God we're not slaves but sons our master is also our father the presence of the spirit within us giving us new desires and enabling us to fight sin is a sign we are God's children and we therefore have the privilege of an intensely personal relationship with God crying

Abba Father which not only expresses the intimacy of that relationship but may also be a little reminder of Jesus' cry in the garden of Gethsemane when the eternal son of God was tempted by sin and yet cried out Abba Father yet not what I will but you will we have a father we can cry to for help amidst the battle with sin and who loves us we're not alone in the fight but it's a draw on God's strength and submit to his will even when the fight is agonizing so we have a new fight and a new father and because we have a new father we can also be sure of a new future if we're Christians those led by the spirit verse 16 this time 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 children inherit what belongs to their parents and as sons of God we're also his heirs and therefore can be confident of a glorious new future we will be glorified with Christ

[28 : 45] Paul tells us it's worth carrying on with the fight you see once again Paul reminds us that these two masters lead to two destinies on the one hand if we live for the flesh we will die as verse 13 puts it and can I gently say that if we're here this morning and conscious that we're not Christian believers at the moment or know that we never experience this desire to serve God and the battle with sin that we've been describing well then the Bible is clear that this is the terrible fate we're facing death and judgment but the answer isn't to despair or to somehow try to earn our assurance by trying to live moral lives but to put our trust in Jesus the one who as we saw last week did live a perfect life and who therefore has met the righteous requirement of the law for us and if we do that we can be confident we will be in Christ

Jesus and therefore free from condemnation and will receive the spirit who will then lead us to want to fight sin so according to verse 13 those who live for the flesh will die but in contrast notice that those who are led by the spirit can be sure they will live or have a look at verse 15 you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear we no longer need fear God's judgment when we fall into sin instead we have a different destiny we are heirs with glory to look forward to so do we see again what great assurance this is designed to give the Christian if we're those seeking to put to death the flesh if we are fighting sin if we are seeking to live with God as our master we need not fear death or condemnation but can instead be confident of the future glory

God has prepared for his children even when we fail we needn't fear judgment any more than a child needs fear being cast out of a loving family home when they disobey their parents our status is secure we're God's children precious to him able to share in all that belongs to him but notice as we close that Paul includes a caveat here in verse 17 this is true for the Christian he says provided we suffer with Christ provided we follow Jesus' pattern of suffering before glory you see just as the battle with sin is actually a sign of being a Christian rather than being condemned so suffering with Christ is also a sign of being the genuine article rather than the opposite as we might think like sin suffering can undermine our assurance and so that's the theme

Paul turns to in the next part of this great chapter and to which we'll turn next week but for now let's remember the Christian has a new mindset and a new master which together give us assurance that glory awaits and we have salvation not condemnation to look forward to we can be free elephants certain of a wonderful future shall I lead us in prayer as we finish 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 we thank you so much our heavenly father for that great hope we thank you again this morning that through the work of the Lord Jesus at the cross we have been freed forever from the penalty of sin we thank you that by the spirit we are free from the power of sin having total hold over us and we thank you for this great day in the future when we can be certain of being freed from the presence of sin and we pray therefore that you would grant us the assurance that it is ours if we're Christian believers and that we would be those who by the spirit seek to put to death the deeds of the body day by day and we ask it all for Jesus' sake

Amen God res■■ which but is justice we have good life not the fire and we I think this isBERT name and that is a great shame which is for that I know you have good and thank you that's why here is you can get