

(14) Life with the Spirit, life with purpose

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[0 : 0 0] The second reading is on page 1137, and it's Romans chapter 8, 1 to 17. 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 condemns 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. 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.

[1 : 1 5] 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 Christ Jesus 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 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.

[2 : 4 0] Rob, thanks very much for reading for us. Please do keep Romans chapter 8 open on page 1137. And you might also like to turn to the talk outline on the back of the service sheet as well.

Now, over these next three Sundays, we're looking at Romans chapter 8 as we continue our series of talks in Romans. It is a chapter in which the Apostle Paul continues for us to explain the implications of justification by faith.

That is that we are put right with God, not by what we do, not by our own merit and worth, but simply because, as we've been hearing this morning already, because of the death of Jesus Christ in our place.

And the big theme of Romans 8 is assurance and being certain and confident of where we stand with God.

Have a look again at Romans 8 verse 1 and see how the chapter begins. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[3 : 56] And then over the page, see how the chapter ends. Verse 39. We have a whole list of things and Paul finishes by saying that none of these will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The other big theme of the chapter is the Holy Spirit. He has been mentioned twice so far in the letter, but now in this chapter, in chapter 8, he is mentioned 19 times in one chapter.

The point being, I think, that it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we can have confidence and assurance before God. And you'll see I've tried to reflect that in the headings which are there on the outline.

So first of all, the Spirit has set us free. The Spirit has set us free. Now I wonder, those of you who were with us when we looked at Romans 5, 6, and 7, I wonder whether you were puzzled by the way in which Romans chapter 8 begins.

Because it looks so very similar, doesn't it, to Romans chapter 5. So you may remember back in Romans chapter 5, verse 1, Paul spoke of being at peace with God. In 5.11, of being reconciled to God.

[5 : 22] So we're bound to ask our guests, well, why say it again? Why say it again here? And surely it is because of what we saw in chapter 7 about what the normal Christian life is like.

You see, I know what your Christian life is like. And you know what my Christian life is like. Have a look at chapter 7, verse 18.

This is the struggle that is the normal Christian life. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Is that not your Christian life, if you're a follower of Jesus? At one level, wanting to do good. At one level, delighting in God's law. But actually unable to do the good we long to do.

And it leads to the cry of verse 24, verse 24, verse 24, verse 24, verse 24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? You see, it is not only those who are not yet Christians who need to hear that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 43] Let me say, if you haven't yet put your trust in Christ, we're delighted you're here this morning. We trust that Grace Church is the kind of church where you can come to and ask your questions and feel welcome. And we trust that you will grasp that there is nothing more important than saying that at the heart of the Christian message is the fact that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, for those who believe in Jesus.

But the point is that Christians need to hear that too. You see, it's not simply something which we hear when we become Christians and then move on to something else. No, this is what those of us who are Christians need to hear too.

This is the gospel for every day. This is the gospel for tomorrow morning when you muck up and get it wrong. And that is unpacked for us in verse 2.

For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Now, last Saturday afternoon, some of us watched one of those enormous Chinook helicopters land in a playing field in the middle of Dulwich.

Now, I have to say, I'd never seen a real one before. I'd only ever seen them on telly before. And they are absolutely huge. And part of me as it kind of sat there on this field in front of me, I thought to myself, it is so enormous.

[8 : 04] How on earth can this thing ever take off? You know, there are no kind of wings or anything like that like on an aeroplane. How on earth can something so huge ever get airborne?

How, if you like, would it ever overcome the law of gravity? But amazingly, it did. And actually, it took off fairly effortlessly.

Why? Because you see, the law of aerodynamics is more powerful than the law of gravity. The law of aerodynamics pulling, the law of gravity pulling it down, but actually, the law of aerodynamics meaning that it could effortlessly take off.

The one law more powerful than the other. Now, have a look at verse 2 because can you see that verse 2 speaks of two laws or two principles.

There's the law of sin and death which is a summary, really, of what we saw in Romans 1-3 that our sin, saying no to God, turning our backs on God, leads to death and judgment.

[9 : 11] But wonderfully, can you see there is a second law? Can you see there is a more powerful law? The law of the spirit of life which sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Have a look at 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.

Jesus took upon himself our sin. He died for our sin in our place. Which means that sin is condemned, the penalty for sin is paid, and so, verse 4, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled.

God's law said that sin deserves death, that sinners deserve to die. God's law. And now Jesus, by dying in the place of sinful men and women, has fulfilled the law.

This is the gospel that every Christian needs to believe, and every Christian needs to live every day.

[10 : 27] Not just once when we put our trust in Christ, this is the gospel for every day Christian living. Let me ask, when you sin, when you muck up, when you let God down, what is your kind of instinctive reaction?

What are some of the things you find yourself saying to yourself at that point? Or perhaps for some of us we condemn ourselves. or will you instead remind yourself of the cross?

That Christ has died. That he has paid the penalty for your sin. That you no longer face God's condemnation. Will you remind yourself of that?

Don't condemn yourself. Remind yourself of what Jesus achieved on the cross. Perhaps others, when you muck up, you simply say to yourself, I must try harder.

Perhaps next time, if I try harder, things will be different. But of course, that is the road, isn't it, to trying to save myself. And because I will continue to sin, it is also the road to guilt and to misery.

[11 : 50] It may be that some of us are trying to live the Christian life like that. I must try harder. Well, instead, will you remind yourself of the cross? We need to hear it every day.

We need to live it every day so that we enjoy God's good gift every day and enjoy his grace every day. Now, of course, it may be that those of us who have yet to put our trust in Christ, that actually, at this point, perhaps we're thinking to ourselves, well, there you go again.

There is the church trying to make people feel guilty. all this talk of sin and judgment and condemnation and so on. But no, guilty is what we are already.

You don't need me to convince you that you are guilty before God. So will you turn to Christ? Will you put your trust in him who was condemned so that you needn't be condemned?

That's our first point this morning. The Spirit has set us free. Secondly, the Spirit has given us new hearts. Now, have a look down at verse 4 and concentrate.

[13 : 07] So I don't see anyone's eyes. Okay? Down at verse 4 and concentrate. Now, do you see there are two senses in verse 4 in which the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled?

Okay? The first is what we've seen already, that God's Old Testament law said that sin must be punished by death. And wonderfully, Jesus has fulfilled the law in that sense by dying for our sin.

But there's a second sense which is this, that Christians, those who trust in Christ, are now empowered to fulfill the law, to live rightly before God.

how is that possible, verse 4? Because Christians live not according to the flesh, but the Spirit. Now, that is unpacked for us in 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. Now, you can look up now if you're still looking down.

[14 : 18] When Paul talks about the flesh, he simply means me doing what I want to do. And that is how everyone lives before they put their trust in Jesus.

It doesn't mean we're all hardened criminals. In fact, many Christians lead lives that are perfectly respectable. Not everyone is a news of the world phone hacker. But of course, they live like that because that is how they want to live.

Their minds are set on the flesh on living how I want to live. But of course, when they and God disagree, they will go their way and not God's way.

That's there, isn't it? In verse 7. For the mind that is set on the flesh, in other words, on me, is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot.

But the point is, the Spirit has given us new hearts. In other words, the Christian is under new management. Sometimes you see that sign, don't you, perhaps on a shop front and you're under new management.

[15 : 26] And it's as if the Christian is walking around and they have a sign above their head saying, under new management. The Holy Spirit gives us new hearts, a new mindset, as Paul says here, new minds.

Now I guess to some of us all this talk of minds and mindset may sound rather academic and intellectual. But when the Bible talks about the mind, it's speaking about what I guess we would call the heart.

What we set our hearts on. The obituary of the golfer, Sevi Beasteros, who died a couple of months ago, explains how right from the age of six, he had his heart set on becoming a great golfer.

And so even as a six-year-old, he would take an old golf club, which his uncle had given him, go down to the beach and he spent hours hitting pebbles into the sea.

His heart set on that one thing. What you set your heart on is what preoccupies you, but what absorbs you, what absorbs your thinking, the ambitions that drive you, the concerns that engross you, the way in which you spend your time, your energy.

[16 : 48] And the Spirit changes our hearts and what we set our hearts on so that, verse eight, we now want to please God. In other words, the mark of the genuine Christian is that when God and I disagree, I want to go God's way, not my way.

So then, how does this give us confidence and assurance? Well, let me ask those who have put our trust in Jesus Christ. Don't you want to please God deep down?

deep down in terms of who you really, really are? Don't you long to please God? Don't you want to do what is right in his sight, in your inner being?

Isn't that what you want to do? Isn't that your heart's desire? And although, yes, you still sin, as I do, aren't you now bothered by it? Don't you find yourself hating some of the things you used to love before you put your trust in Christ?

Isn't that your experience? Don't you find yourself no longer taking pleasure in some of the things you used to take pleasure in? If so, then be encouraged.

[18 : 16] Not because you can pat yourself on the back, but because this is a sure mark that the Spirit has given you a new heart, and that you're a genuine Christian believer.

Well, of course, if we don't yet recognize this change, then it might suggest that actually we are not under new management. Actually, God's Holy Spirit does not live in us.

And therefore, there may be some of us this morning, actually, in all honesty, we need to examine, where do I stand with God? Am I really a genuine Christian or not? The Spirit has set us free.

The Spirit has given us new hearts. Thirdly, the Spirit will give us new bodies. Have a 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.

Now, it's important to say that the if there in verse 9 is not kind of if in the sense of there being some doubt, but if in the sense of if indeed it is the case.

[19 : 28] In other words, Paul isn't suggesting in verse 9 that there are some people who are Christians who have put their trust in Christ and do not have the Spirit. Indeed, the second half of the verse makes that very clear, doesn't it?

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Now, I guess for some of us that will be a great assurance, that actually every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

After all, the Spirit is a person, the Holy Spirit is God himself, and you cannot, can you, have more or less of a person? So, if I tell you that my mother was coming to stay with us, you wouldn't say to me, well, how much of her is coming?

nothing. And it's no different with the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Spirit of God living in them. Notice too, that verse 9 says, if the Spirit of God dwells in you, verse 10 says, have a look at verse 10, if Christ is in you.

Can you see how Paul can speak of the same thing, the same reality, in one of two ways? He can either say if the Spirit is in you, or he can say if Christ is in you.

[20 : 50] In other words, you see, the Holy Spirit and Christ are inseparable. The work of the Spirit, the work of Christ are inseparable. You see, it's not as if the Spirit sort of has his own agenda, which is separate from what Christ does.

Or, indeed, what God does. Notice he's described again, isn't he, in verse 9, as both a Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ. And what is the promise in verse 10?

Well, if Christ is in you, yes, we have mortal decaying bodies, but, verse 11, the ultimate destiny of our bodies is not decay and death, but resurrection.

New bodies. New bodies. even in our culture, which tries so hard to avoid death, we cannot avoid it, can we? There was an article in the Evening Standard this week about how to announce your death on Facebook, and the author was saying that two of her friends had recently died, one of whom, bizarrely, was still getting messages on her Facebook page, and the other of whom, even more weirdly, even though she died before Christmas, were still making new friends in April.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? How in this kind of bizarre virtual world of Facebook, you can be dead but alive and still kind of making friends. So our culture blurs the distinction between life and death, but of course the reality is that death is final.

- [22 : 31] And therefore the promise of verse 11, have a look at it, is wonderful. 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 you, give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

In other words, you and I will not be saddled with our decaying, dying bodies forever. We will be given renewed bodies, new physical bodies, just as Jesus' body at his resurrection was a renewed physical body.

Now of course that explains, doesn't it, why Christians can feel torn in two at times. Because although we have new hearts, we don't yet have new bodies. We will one day, but we don't yet have them.

It explains as well why Christians sin. Because although we have new hearts, we haven't yet reached our final destination. We will one day, but we haven't yet reached it.

It also explains why it is vitally important that we hear the two implications that Paul has for us, for every Christian, in verses 12 to 17.

- [23 : 52] First of all, I want us to see that every Christian has a new battle to fight. Every Christian has a new battle to fight. Look at verse 12. So then, brothers and sisters, 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.

You and I have an obligation. We are debtors to live out the new life that God has given us in Christ by His Spirit.

Before we put our trust in Christ, we live for the flesh, for ourselves, for me. That is sin, to live for myself. But now that we are set free from sin, we are free to live not for ourselves, not to ourselves, but instead for God instead.

While we have new hearts, we don't have new bodies, and therefore as we seek to live for God, it will be a battle to do so. It will be a battle.

- [25 : 11] Every Christian has a battle to fight. And notice, will you, it's the Spirit who leads us into battle. Verse 14, we are led by the Spirit.

Now that word led is exactly the same word in the original, exactly the same expression that was used of Jesus in that first reading which we had from Mark's Gospel. Don't turn to it, but remember how Jesus was driven out, well he was led out into the wilderness by the Spirit to battle against the temptation of the devil.

And that is just what it means for us to be led by the Spirit. It is to be driven out, with a new battle to fight. You see, you and I mustn't fall for the false teaching that says that when we are led by the Spirit, suddenly the Christian life will become easy.

Have you heard that? You know, the idea that if you're led by the Spirit, you'll be like some great bird of prey, soaring on the thermal air currents on a warm summer's evening.

The Christian life will just be a breeze. But you won't have to do anything. But no, when the Spirit of God is in us, He doesn't make our lives easier, He doesn't make our lives more comfortable, our problems won't disappear, if anything, life will get harder and tougher.

- [26 : 37] Because He drives us out and leads us out into battle. people. And notice that while the Spirit leads us, we still have to take action.

Verse 13, to put to death the deeds of the body. We're not on our own, the Spirit is with us in battle, but nor do we just sit back and let Him do all the work.

No, put to death the deeds of the body. So let me ask, are you battling? Are you seeking to put to death the sin that is in your life?

Are you seeking to identify it? And are you seeking to kill it? Not tolerating sin, how easily we do that, so we sin, we say sorry to God, but actually we tolerate sin.

We never take the steps necessary to really identify it, to battle with it. And not resignation either in the face of sin, I think that is my temptation simply to give up in battling against sin.

[27 : 55] Because that phrase put to death in verse 13 means keep on putting to death. In other words, this battle against sin will always be a feature of the Christian life.

You and I will never reach the stage of our Christian lives when we are not battling against sin. I was reading recently about John Stott's enormous frustration at how as a frail man, in his late 80s, the temptation to live for himself is still there.

Here is a godly Christian leader enormously frustrated, he talks about his dismay at the sin of self-pity, but he sees in himself as his body decays.

There is the flesh saying, live for me, but he has resolved to fight it, not to live for me, but instead to live for God.

Let me say then that if your Christian life is a battle, if it is a battle against sin, then be assured. This is a mark of the Holy Spirit leading you.

[29 : 14] Well, for those of us who aren't particularly bothered by sin, for those of us who do always give in to the flesh, well, I guess the implications for us are equally clear, aren't they?

So, the first implication, every Christian has a new battle to fight, the second implication, every Christian has a new Father. Because here in the midst of the battle is the assurance that every Christian has a new heavenly Father.

Verse 15, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you've received the spirit of adoption of sons, by whom we cry Abba, Father.

Now, this is not sentimentality. Rather, this is the assurance and confidence that you and I need in the midst of the battle that in the midst of the battle we can call out to our heavenly Father for help.

It is exactly the cry of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. At his great hour of temptation, as he cried out, Abba, Father, a cry of agony and a cry of trust.

[30 : 30] And we can do the same. confidence, verse 17, that we are his adopted children, confidence that we have a wonderful inheritance.

I wonder if you read last month about Max Melitza, a homeless man who has spent years pushing his possessions around Salt Lake City in a shopping trolley.

His brother died earlier on in the year and Max Melitza had just discovered that he had inherited a huge amount of money. As the front page of the paper said, a life changing inheritance.

Well, here is a far greater life changing inheritance. Heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ in the new creation. God is not good.

For those who are quick to feel condemned, for those of us who are quick to feel perhaps like second class Christians, for those of us who feel trapped by sin, isn't God good?

[31 : 48] Isn't the gospel wonderful? There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. He has given us the Holy Spirit. We are under new management, with new hearts.

We will have new bodies. He leads us down to battle, but we're not on our own. We can cry out to God as our Heavenly Father, confident in a secure, certain, future inheritance.

As we sit, let's pray together. And a few moments for a reflection.

Thank you. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Our Father, we praise you for this wonderful promise, this glorious declaration that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, that he was condemned, that we might not be condemned.

[33 : 15] We praise you for your spirit, who gives us new hearts. Thank you for the promise of new bodies in the new creation. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that you would help us to engage in the battle that it is now to put our sin to death, a confidence that we are your children, that you are our Heavenly Father, certain of the new creation.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.