

New Life in Christ

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Date: 06 September 2020

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[0 : 00] My name is Mark, and if you have your Bibles there with you, do keep the passage of Romans 8 open in front of you, as we'll be looking and working through that tonight.

Well, many of you, I'm sure, knows what it feels like to start a new life. I can see some puzzled faces through the camera there.

But think about it. If you've ever moved cities, say from Sydney to Melbourne, from Shepparton to Melbourne even, although maybe Shepparton's not quite a city, or you've been married, or graduated from high school, or changed a church, then you've started a new life.

Not everything changes. For example, your parents don't change. Sadly, some of you might be disappointed with that. Your name probably doesn't change.

Some of your bad habits don't change. But it's a new life because you're leaving an old one behind. You might be leaving friends and neighbours, which you lose contact with because you've moved.

[1 : 09] Or maybe you're no longer able to buy that favourite treat of yours at the school canteen anymore. Or if you're married, you'll no longer have that en suite bathroom all to yourself anymore.

Or if you're like James and Vivian, new parents, just ask them about life without sleep. Life of sleep before kids compared to now.

It's a new life, isn't it? Because there's no going back to the old. Some things have changed forever. Well, tonight, Paul speaks about our new life in Christ Jesus.

And if you look on the next slide, at the very start of the letter, Paul announces the good news of salvation, away from death to life that is found only through faith in Jesus. As he says right there at the bottom in verse 17, the righteous will live by faith.

Then he goes on to say that all other ways don't work, including for the Jew trying to obey the law. Because no one can do that perfectly. All have sinned, Romans chapter 3 verse 23, and fallen short of God's glory.

[2 : 22] Then over the next two chapters, Paul counters some of the objections to that. that if you're only saved by faith, then we can keep sinning, is one thought, because it's all grace anyway.

Or the other one that says, oh well, God's law, let's not worry about that anymore, because we don't need that to be saved. Well, Paul shows that that's not true in the last two chapters.

But now in this chapter, he goes on to show us what life is like. If it's not about rejecting, ditching sin, it is about ditching sin now, and ditching the law, then what is it about?

Well, in this chapter, he shows us that it's new life in Christ. And in this chapter, he shows us what that looks like, what obeying God looks like.

And it's actually according to the Spirit. So let's pick up Paul's logic in verse 1, which is on the slide there, where he says, 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.

[3 : 36] For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His 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.

So here Paul reiterates again that faith in Jesus frees us from having to keep the law. Yes, nobody can keep it anyway, but for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation either.

Why? Because of what Christ has done for us. Paul puts it like this, that we have been freed or set free by the law of the Spirit from the law of sin and death.

What's this law of the Spirit, which is the first point of the sermon, versus the law of sin and death? Well, we have to realize that in Romans, Paul uses the word law quite a bit.

But we actually need to read every instance in its context, because it doesn't always mean the same thing by its use. So when the words the law is used on its own, then it usually refers to the Mosaic law.

[4 : 58] That's the one the Jews have. But here, he's actually referring to something else. He's referring to the idea of the law as rule. Think of the law of the Spirit as the rule or reign of the Spirit, which frees us from the rule of sin and death over our lives.

He's saying that a very different set of rules now apply. We go about pleasing God in a very different way. As Christians, the regime that governs us no longer leads only to sin and death. Rather, we're now governed by the Spirit, which leads to life. Let me give you a somewhat imperfect example. Many of you are RACV members, I'm sure.

You become one when you buy roadside assists for your car. Well, I'm a member too. It says on my card that I've been a member since November 2003, and that makes me a silver member.

Why does it make me a gold member? I don't know. I think I should really be gold, given the number of years. But, silver and gold, that's probably, you know, not the best anyway, because did you realize that there was another level of membership called RACV club membership?

[6 : 16] You pay lots of money to be a club member, but when you do, a different set of rules apply to you. We're all still part of the RACV organization, but if you're a club member, you get benefits.

Like, you're able to go to the club that they have in the city, or I think the resort in Hillsville is really only for club members. You get privileges that ordinary members, like me, the silver member, does not.

As I said, we're all still RACV members, it's just that a different set of rules apply to the club member. And it's the same with God. So, I'm going to go back to a very high-tech method tonight. I'm going to use the whiteboard, so just come with me the whiteboard. It's the same with God, right? So, remember back in chapter 5, you can see God created one man, Adam.

That's this little stick figure here. That's Adam. Maybe I should put an A in there, so we all know it's Adam. God created Adam under his rule, but as we know, Adam disobeyed, and sin and death entered into the world.

[7 : 30] So, what happens is that Adam is now caught up in this sin and death bubble, which I'm going to draw. Think of that as the sin and death bubble.

Let me just write that there, sin and death. Okay. And then, since then, everyone that's born of Adam is trapped in this bubble.

bubble. So, that's you, that's me, that's everyone else, Steph, Michelle, Alex, and everyone else. It's a bit like, you know, for us now in Victoria, everyone is outside the bubble.

There's life and righteousness outside the bubble. bubble. But inside, there's the law of sin and death. Now, God still rules over everything.

Alright. So, God's rule is still over everything. That's his rule there. It's just that the rules that apply inside the bubble is different from when you are outside the bubble.

[8 : 35] Now, sometime later, Moses comes along and God gives him the law. So, I'll just put a little book here. That's the law.

Okay. And it's for his people to live by. This is the Mosaic law, which is what Paul refers to in verse 3. And it's like a road map. It's actually a good thing that they have the law.

It's useful. It's a guide for how to escape the sin and death bubble. But ultimately, this law is powerless because it's weakened by the flesh.

Here, the flesh is our sinful nature. We're all of the flesh if you're born in this bubble, the sin and death bubble. And no matter how hard we try, we cannot fulfill God's righteous requirements, which is in the law, simply because we are sinful, because we're of sinful flesh.

Instead, God had to send his own son, so in verse 3, it says, in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. It's very precise wording here.

[9 : 48] Jesus isn't of sinful flesh. He's just the likeness of it. He enters the bubble from outside, sinless and divine, but clothed in a human body.

He's every bit like us, except without the sinful DNA of Adam. But as a human, he's able to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin.

He's a like-for-like substitute, if you like, a human life for our sinful natures. And so, he fulfills the righteous requirement of the law.

He does that, firstly, by living a sinful life as a human. But then, secondly, by then offering his life as a sacrifice on our behalf.

And so, when he does that, he fulfills the requirements on our behalf. And as a result, what he does is he punches a hole, if you like, in this sin and death bubble through the cross.

[10:53] Alright? So, he comes in here as the only sinful person, lives and dies, and because of what he did, he creates a hole in the sin and death bubble.

And that's our way of escape through the cross by believing in Jesus. And so, the implication of this is, first, that there is no longer condemnation if you are in Christ Jesus.

And that's a great comfort because when you read the law, like the Ten Commandments, and you realize you can't live up to it, you don't need to feel guilty about it.

Jesus has washed away that guilt by condemning sin in his own flesh and blood. But rather than making us blasé about sin, we should be humbled by it because we realize how costly his sacrifice is.

and because his sacrifice is so costly, it makes us realize how deadly our sin is. But realizing that actually allows us to be honest with our own sin.

[12:07] There's no need, if we know that we're no longer condemned by our own sin, to be defensive of it because we don't need it to, we don't need to prove how good we are in order to be in Christ, in order to be saved.

And that's a really good test, isn't it? If I asked you, how do you react to criticism? Are we always trying still to be in the right?

Or even when we realize that we're in the wrong, somehow we still want to know that or prove that we are less wrong than the other person? Or that it's their sin that provoked ours?

Well, Paul says that there's no need for all that because Jesus has fulfilled the righteous requirement in us. We don't have to prove that we're better than we really are.

Jesus has fulfilled those requirements in full. Now, the second implication then is found in the next set of verses, in our next section. And that is being set free from the law of sin and death.

[13:16] motivates us to live according to the Spirit. That's point two. Rather than being careless about sin, being freed from it should motivate us all the more not to sin.

You see, when Jesus died, what we see is God's universal act of love for all humanity. His death makes available salvation for all people who believe in Him.

but when the Spirit is poured out into each of our lives so that we do believe, that's God's specific act of love for each of us as it were.

So that we can take advantage of His salvation, of that universal act of love. And so what happens when that occurs is that the Spirit comes in into this here and He sort of sucks us out.

Doesn't look very good but I'll rub that away. So that now those of us who are in Christ Jesus I'm going to put a little cross here to show that we're all Christians here.

[14:35] We're now in the realm of the Spirit. This is the Spirit, you know, with the flames. I'm really bad at my drawing. Let's just go with words.

This is the realm of the Spirit. We're no longer under the sin, the law of sin and death, but we're now all outside under the law of the Spirit or the rule of the Spirit.

All still under God's rule, but we're no longer stuck in the bubble. We're out of the bubble. And so let's read verse 5 and we see exactly what Paul is saying.

And when we do, I want you to see just the sharp contrast, the difference between living according to the flesh on the one hand and answering to the sinful nature and living according to the Spirit on the other.

I want you to notice what the world of difference that makes. And so in verse 5, Paul writes, 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.

[15:46] The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by 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. Can you see, it's very clear cut, isn't it? There is no in-between, having a bit of both.

You're either in the realm of the flesh that is inside the bubble, or you're in the realm of the Spirit. And you certainly don't want to be in the realm of the flesh, do you?

According to Paul, it only leads to death. It is hostile to God. It doesn't and cannot submit to God's law, Paul says. It's never pleasing to God.

[16:46] Now, some of you here might be thinking, hang on there, but what about those who try to do good, like the law-abiding Jews, for example? What about people like Abraham and David and Moses?

Did they not try to please God? Well, for a start, we've already seen in chapter 4 that people like Abraham, even though they didn't know Jesus, yet they lived by faith.

Remember what God said, Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. And so, in a sense, they weren't living by the Spirit, even though technically they didn't have the Spirit either. But Paul here is referring, I think, to people that are after Jesus, post-Jesus. And that, Paul is saying that once Jesus is revealed, then the only way to please God is by the Spirit, through faith in Jesus.

And so, that's all of us tonight. We've all now heard of Jesus. Even if this is the first time you've joined us, I've just told you about Jesus. And so, if you then still try to please God by doing good deeds, and you reject this offer of faith in Jesus, salvation by faith in Jesus, which is what Paul writes about in Romans, then, you're living according to the flesh.

[18:09] You're in the bubble. You see, a lot of people don't understand this, but it's possible to do good deeds, it's even possible to try and do it to please God, and yet, not be pleasing to Him.

And that's because, whilst you're trying to do good, you've actually rejected His gospel. You've rejected His means of salvation. And that's why Paul calls it being hostile to God.

It's God giving you something that you really need, and you've turned your back on it. And you said, no God, thanks, but no thanks. And so that's the same that applies with the Jew who tries to obey the Mosaic law, and yet does not believe in Jesus.

He or she isn't submitting to God's law or rule. They might be trying to obey the law, but not submitting to God's law.

Now, earlier in chapter 7, which is on the next slide, Paul referred to this way as trying to serve God the always. through the written code, rather than the new way through the Spirit.

[19:23] But when we're in Christ Jesus, outside the bubble, that doesn't mean we no longer need to serve God or obey Him. No, it's just that we do it according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

In fact, Paul now says we're empowered by the Spirit to do it because He lives in us. That was the promise that God made in Jeremiah in our earlier reading that God would put the law in the minds of His people.

He will write them on their hearts. Well, now we know how He does it. He does that by giving us His Spirit. But again, as I say, what motivates us now when we want to obey God is not a desire to then earn our righteousness from doing it, but simply to respond as one who already is made right before God.

Again, it's a bit like parents, isn't it? We know that some parents make their children earn their love, don't they? They will only show their approval if their children live up to their standards.

On the other hand, there are other children that know their parents love them unconditionally. And yet, and even more so, I would think, these children who know that they are loved strive to obey their parents.

[20:40] Not because they have to, not because they need to do it in order for their parents to love them, but rather to show their own love in return, to reciprocate. And so, it's the same with God and us.

We desire to live according to the Spirit, not because we have to. You know, when we read the Word of God, we desire to obey it, even though our salvation doesn't depend on it.

We want to do that because we love God. Not because we have to, to be saved. We do it because we want to please Him, because we love Him. And I know that many of you have this desire as Christians.

I know that that's what you want to do. And I guess your issue now is more that you still struggle. Notwithstanding your desire, you sometimes find yourself struggling to do what's right.

And you might be asking, why is this when we're meant to be governed by the Spirit? Isn't Paul saying that we live according to the Spirit? We're outside the bubble now.

[21 : 42] Why do we still live as though we're inside the bubble? Well, verse 10 and 11 gives us a clue. For Paul says, 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.

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.

Now, if you go back to the board again, you would have noticed that I've deliberately drawn the people in blue. Only Jesus is in red even though I know He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. But blue means that we're still in human bodies that are earthly bodies that are subject to death even though we have Jesus or the Spirit living in us.

And so, although we're outside the bubble in the realm of the Spirit, we're still having bodies that are subject to death because of sin. And these fleshly bodies of ours make us susceptible to temptation and sin.

[22 : 53] Now, sin has no power over us. It's just that because we're still in these bodies, we are tempted to sin. So, for example, when you're hungry, that's a human desire, it tempts us to be hangry.

When we're tired, we tend to lose our temper. We don't have to, but it's just that when we're feeling the body is weighing us down, we're tempted to say yes to sin.

But the good news is that because we have the Spirit living in us, we actually have eternal life already. We have the Spirit's life, eternal life within us.

And Paul says, don't estimate that. You may feel like your body is really dragging you down, but he says that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will one day also, this very same Spirit that now lives in you will raise you from the dead as well, will give life to your mortal bodies, he says.

And the great thing is this Spirit, he lives in us right now. And because he lives in us, he has enabled us to say no to sin, to reject what our human bodies are crying out for us to do at times.

[24 : 14] The other thing, of course, to realize as well is that this whole process is actually something that takes time. We're not transformed immediately when we become Christians, just like with the snap of a finger when the Spirit comes to live in us.

Rather, godly character, which is what the Spirit is trying to do in us to obey God's word takes time. So let me give you an illustration.

It's like buying a new laptop. Hopefully, you're buying one that is much better than the old one, you know, better memory, better processor, better operating system and all that. But when you first log in, you're not familiar with every feature of the laptop, are you?

You know, you have to take time to learn and make full use of all the features that's there. Now, the Spirit is in the laptop, okay? He's a person and actually He controls you, not the other way around. You don't control Him. But the analogy lies in the fact that even though you're filled with the Spirit now, it will take time for Him to work in you fully, to teach you how to say no to sin.

[25 : 28] That will take practice over time. In fact, for a time you might not even know what sin is and what sin is not. You have to read God's Word and learn from God's Word so that you can discern right from wrong.

So I want to encourage you not to be disheartened whenever you feel like, oh, it doesn't seem like the Spirit's doing anything, God's doing anything in my life. No, God's Spirit is actually still at work in you.

He is. If you're in Christ, He's at work in you. It just will take time. It will require you, as Paul says in verse 12, therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it, so it requires you to live according to the Spirit.

For you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. And so this is what it means to live according to the Spirit, to put the misdeeds of the body to death.

You're no longer ruled by the flesh, but you still have to keep saying no to it. There's almost a little tug of war happening where the fleshly desires of your body keeps rearing its ugly head.

[26 : 42] Some of you might have seen this ad on TV recently. Because of the lockdown, a lot of people are turning to the bottle. But the ad tells people to put that demon, that alcoholic gremlin, back in its place, to say no to it.

Well, that's the same thing we need to do with our fleshly desires. Put to death the misdeeds of the body. We have the power to do that because the Spirit lives in us.

And by saying yes to the Spirit, by saying yes to God's Word, what we say is no to the body of sin or subject that is subject to sin. And so we need to realize then that whenever we talk about the power of the Spirit, working in us, it's not some fuzzy feeling or some power sort of coursing through your veins as though you are like one of the Marvel superheroes.

No. When you learn to forgive, when you walk away from an argument instead of engaging in telling lies, when you turn off the internet and refuse to look at the pornography that might be on it, when you don't flirt with someone because you know you're married, every time you say no to sin and temptation, that's proof that the Spirit's power is at work in you.

It's not some feeling or some miraculous sign, but it's just this faithfulness of submitting to God's law, trusting in Jesus. That's the evidence that shows that the Spirit is at work in you.

[28 : 15] And then over time, when you look back, you will see the change in your character and that's when you know that the Spirit has been working all this well. And part of this whole process, of course, requires you to endure suffering because saying no to the flesh can be hard.

It requires discipline. Those who live according to the flesh will ridicule you for it because they're hostile to it. So it is hard and so we shouldn't be surprised if we have to suffer for it.

But as Paul now says in verse 14, when that happens, don't lose sight of who you are in Christ, that you're actually God, heirs, and children. Yes, you may be suffering, but only because a far greater glory awaits you.

So let me read verse 14. For those who are led by the Spirit are children of God. The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship.

And by him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

[29 : 30] If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. Now I have to say that if I have the chance, I'll preach a whole sermon just on these verses. But for tonight, I just want to make one main point.

And that is what Paul is trying to show here is our identity with Christ. If we are led by the Spirit, then we are actually, verse 14, sons of God.

Because we are inherited Christ's status as the son of God. We are small as sons of God. I know the translation says children, and I don't normally try and pick folks, but the literal translation in verse 14 is sons of God.

We are all small S sons of God while Jesus is the big S son of God. And although we'll never be like Jesus, that's why he's the big S and we're the small S's, what that affords us is that now we are co-heirs with him.

That being a son of God, we share in all the inheritance that he has. Whatever God has bestowed on him because of what he's done on the cross living the righteous life, we now have as sons of God.

[30 : 45] We enjoy the same status as him. And that's why we have his Spirit living in us. I think it's interesting that even the fact that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh, well, now that we are dead to sin and the Spirit lives in us, there's a parallel, isn't it?

That Jesus lived this life in the likeness of sinful flesh and now with the Spirit dwelling with us, we're called to live this same life with this body that has no power over us anymore, although it is in one sense in the likeness of sinfulness.

And it's interesting there as well that Paul talks about being able to cry, Abba, Father. And you might be wondering, why is he saying that? Well, that's because, again, it's like Jesus.

We're able to cry, Abba, Father. Abba is the Aramaic for Father. And Paul uses that precise word here because that was exactly what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed and on the cross as well.

So Paul is here really saying that everything that Christ has, we now have as well. And here, I think I just want to pause just to share something with all the sisters of Christ here.

[32 : 13] I know often that we often hear the references of you, sisters in Christ, being daughters of God. And I have no problem with that because we're all children of God. We're sons and daughters of God.

But when it comes to this specific passage in itself, let me urge you to think of yourself as sons of God as well. I'm not trying to change your sex or gender.

Rather, I'm getting you to identify with Christ. Not just to be just daughters of God, but sons of God because the word sons denotes inheritance. It allows you to identify with Jesus as the son of God. And that's your rightful inheritance. Not just for those who are male sons of God, but also for those who are female sons of God. But we'll get more to that next week because the catch is that if we desire this glory, which we will have, then what we need to embrace now is the suffering as well. If Jesus suffered, then neither are we exempt. This tussle, Jesus endured all his life until his death. And that is our experience as well.

[33 : 31] God's spirit living in us and yet us in earthly body. But like Jesus, we too are led by the spirit so that when Jesus finally gave his body to crucifixion, we likewise have the same parallel, don't we?

We have to crucify the misdeeds in our body. We have to die to self as well. I hope this is a very quick snapshot of verses 14 to 17, but I hope you can begin to see the parallels that Paul is trying to paint here between who Christ is and who we are in Christ Jesus.

This, then, is the new life that we have in Christ. We are united with him. I don't know about you, but that gives me great joy and great hope.

I think it makes the spirit stir within me to give me a greater desire to want to live according to the spirit, to live this new life in Christ.

Well, let me invite you to join us all in prayer so that we can ask God to help us do that. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that we are sons of God and we have the great hope of glory as coe-z with Jesus.

[34 : 51] Help us to live according to the spirit, to please you by putting the misdeeds of the body to death, even if we suffer as a result. Thank you that we are no longer under the law of sin and death, but set free, freed of condemnation by the law of the spirit.

We praise you for all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.