

Assurance

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8, verses 1 through to 17. You might know that Romans 8 is the end of a section in the book of Romans.

Paul changes track ever so slightly in Romans 9. And I was kind of hoping that this Sunday in particular that we would be able to finish Romans chapter 8, but we're not going to be able to. And then for the next couple of weeks I'm on Sunday school, so it'll be a long time before we finish Romans 8. But again, it is a turning point in many ways, but it is a concluding part to the first seven chapters.

So chapter 8, verse 1, now hear God's word. There is therefore now, in fact, no, let's take it back to verse 24 of chapter 7, just so you understand what the therefore is there for.

Wretched man that am I, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

[1 : 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 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 mind 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. You, however, are not in the flesh, but are 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.

[2 : 36] 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.

Let's pray. Father, Romans chapter 8. If you have your Bibles, please open them again there to Romans chapter 8.

[4 : 07] And as you do so, it might be worth pointing out Paul's main point. And the point that he wants to make is assurance in Christ.

He has quite a lot to say about a lot of different things. The issue at hand here is that assurance is important for any kind of spiritual maturity, for any kind of growing in the faith.

And it is a troubling time when Christians lack assurance. Am I saved? Have I really been forgiven?

And I don't want to assume that you all here this morning, you know, that your assurance is perfectly intact. It could be the case that yesterday it was perfectly intact, but today that it isn't. Or last month it was perfectly intact, but today that it isn't. And that's the trouble with assurance is that if you go on feelings, it can come and go like the tide, but less regular and not according to the same type of pattern.

[5 : 22] Without assurance, you will fall away in your prayer life, common experience. Without assurance of the faith, you will fall away in your devotion. Without assurance in the faith, you will fall away in your worship of God.

In fact, with little assurance, your Christian life will make little progress. It's the same with the command to bring children up in the faith, rather than up in doubt.

It makes a big difference. If you're constantly questioning your child's little faith that they have in Christ, and say, well, it's not real because it's not mature, then don't be surprised if they're not around when they get to become a teenager.

Because for 15 years, you've been asking them to question whether or not the faith that they have is real. But it needs to be real faith in order for it to be a salvific faith.

That is, the person being saved by the work of Christ. So, in short, without assurance, you're not likely to live a very well-motivated Christian life.

[6 : 33] But with assurance, your Christian life is going to be well-motivated. But just in case you think assurance is to do with feeling, Paul clears this up in verse 14, if I can draw your attention to that.

He says, for all those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. So, Christian assurance, according to the Bible, is seen in those who are led by the Spirit, and indeed, who follow the Spirit. Hence why he has so much to say on whether or not you live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. So, the assurance here is not a feeling, it's rather a leading, and it's a following.

The Christians who have the most assurance are those who know that they are being led by the Spirit, and are following the Spirit. Those who are not following are probably the ones this morning who have very little assurance.

Because they recognize that it ebbs and flows with their decision to follow Jesus. Paul has just finished Romans 7, and he's basically said that even though you are a new person, and you have been set free from sin and death, you're not going to be able to stop sinning altogether.

[7 : 57] Which is a real discouragement for someone who is a Christian. To stop sinning, the fact that you can't stop sinning altogether. You know, some people get discouraged by the fact that they sin, and when they sin, they then question whether or not they are truly saved.

Now, it's fair to say that if a person goes on sinning without ever repenting, then asking that question and coming up with the answer that you're not, is probably not far off the mark.

However, a Christian who questions their assurance every time they sin, and are really repentant of it, are getting caught up in the trap of sin again that causes doubt and fear and everything else.

Sin wants to ruin your Christian life, but the grace of God wants to remind you that God has saved you. So, assurance.

Assurance comes from God to those people who are saved. Hence why Paul says in verse 1, there is now, therefore now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 10] No condemnation. What that means is this, that if you sin now as a Christian, you're not going to be condemned for it. If you make a habit of sinning without repenting, then you probably don't belong to Jesus.

Now, that may sound, well, that's quite blunt. That's quite black and white. Well, Romans 8, believe it or not, is a very black and white chapter. Those who make a practice of sinning, John says, are not born of God.

So, I'm not really saying anything different than what the Bible says. However, Paul says here in Romans, it is going to be the case that Christians will sin. And what they need to know when they sin is this, that you're not going to be condemned.

You will still sin because you still live in a fallen human body, but you're not going to be condemned for it. Because Christ has made atonement for it all.

The question here is this, how do I know the balance? Is there a certain amount of sins that I have to commit, thus proving that I'm not saved?

[10:16] Or is there a certain amount of sins that I'm allowed to commit daily and still be assured of my salvation? I mean, that's the way we Christians think, even if we don't work it out like that logically. We know when we've had a good week or a bad week, when it's come to sin.

So, assurance ebbs and flows because everything else ebbs and flows. Paul wants to make one thing certain, that assurance is always there for the person who is led and follows the Spirit of God. How do I do that? Well, this is his point. Firstly, don't live life according to the flesh. This is what he has to say. Chapter 6 says, you're no longer under the dominion of sin and death. In other words, sin can't make you do anything unless you choose to go along with it. And what that means is, is that as a Christian, when you sin now, believe it or not, you actually want to. When you commit the sins, you may even commit the sins on the basis that you have enough theology to tell you that you'll be forgiven for it. And so you go ahead and commit the sin.

[11:32] But as we saw, that grace will only lead you into further sin. It's like, sin will only ever lead you into further sin. And grace will never lead you into sin.

It will only ever lead you away from it. So these people who will say, you know, you need to be more graceful in order to be more tolerant with people living in sin, haven't understood the first basic thing about grace.

And that is grace teaches us to say, no to sin. Paul says this again in chapter eight, that sin's power has been broken by the work of Jesus Christ, verse two, and the spirit has been given, giving us the power to live a godly life.

So don't live according to the flesh, because anyone who lives according to the flesh will die. But those who live according to the spirit will live.

It's all about what you set your mind on. You know, I don't go out much. Not that I'm lonely.

[12:43] Not that I don't have any friends, I hope. It's very hard to have friends when you're in the pastorate, because everybody thinks you're going to talk about Jesus. And unfortunately, that's all that I, it's not unfortunately, I'm quite happy to speak about Jesus.

But I love going out and sitting in rooms where people are speaking, especially rooms full of Christians. And I'm terrible for this, you know, this is why me and my wife don't go out to restaurants, because she wants to spend an evening listening to me and talking with me, and I'm listening to everybody else's conversation.

It's not a sin, by the way. It may not be good practice, but I'm pretty sure it's not a sin. But when you're in a room full of Christians, a get-together in the back garden or something, it's interesting to listen to what people speak about.

Very rarely is it Jesus. Not that much. I'll tell you why. Because we tend to confine that type of speak to a Bible study, or to a prayer meeting, or to church on Sunday.

But out and about, Jesus seems to disappear. I'm not sure why, because if a conversation came up about Jesus, everybody would be quite happy to start speaking about him, unless you had friends there that weren't saved.

[14:03] In other words, Paul's point is very simple. What do you set your mind on? Or to put it in the same way, the pastor who trained me, well, after David White, Gordon Taylor, used to say this, whatever controls the heart, wags the tongue.

Whatever fills the heart, wags the tongue. Well, Paul says this, that whatever you set your mind on is what you will focus on, is how you will live.

And to set your mind on the flesh, it is death. In other words, in and of ourselves, there's no kind of good desires that come from our sinful nature.

Only the good desires come from the spirit. And Galatians 5 makes it very, very clear that the Christian has to live with this constant battle between the flesh and the spirit.

That the flesh wants to do one thing and the spirit wants to do something else. And we sometimes can feel caught in the middle. That should never be the case. We should be on the side of the spirit, keep in step with the spirit and battle against the flesh.

[15:16] But when a person's will, Paul says, and desires, and mind, is more in line with their sinful nature than it is the spirit, then there's nothing good at the end of that.

There is only death. Paul says, those who live according to the flesh and keep living according to the flesh, you will die. And here's what I want to point out, that he's speaking to a church.

And otherwise, he wants to make clear that the Christians in this church understand that they are really Christians and what it is to live a real Christian life.

Why? Well, because even in Paul's day, there were counterfeit Christians. You know what a counterfeit is? It looks like the real thing. Smells like the real thing. But it's not the real thing. Why is that damaging? Well, it's damaging to the witness of the church. It's more damaging as well to the person involved to be convinced of a faith that they don't actually have.

[16:26] So Paul makes it very, very clear. If you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if you live according to the spirit, then you will live. So he says, verse 7, the mind that is set on flesh is hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's law. It cannot submit to God's law. It just doesn't want to. I've said this before, that whatever gets your mind in the morning will probably get you for the rest of the day. Never underestimate something getting into your mind and how powerful it is. And I've also said this before, that, you know, those people who have had dreams and fallen out with a friend of theirs in their dream, and then they see them the next day, and you're not quite the same towards them. And the reason that is, is because it's got into your head. You just can't shake it off. It's just there. So what you fill your mind with, what you set your mind on, whether it's the things above or the things below, is going to direct the rest of your life that day and probably the rest of your life, period. So don't live life according to the flesh, because at the end of it, there is only death. Eternal death. We're not joking around here.

[17:56] Rather, he says, live life according to the Spirit. Now, he says, if you notice, that those here in Rome are not living in the flesh, but they are of the Spirit.

Verse 9, You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you. In other words, you live by the Spirit if you live by the Spirit.

And you live in the flesh if you live by the flesh. And it seems like a strange way to bring about assurance. But Paul's very clear here that he understands that people in this church don't necessarily understand or have got some misunderstandings that he needs to clear up.

One of them might actually be a false assurance or rather an assumption. You know, many people, grown-ups in the New Testament when they came up to Jesus, were cured of their assumptions of being and belonging to Jesus almost immediately.

especially when Jesus says to them, depart from me, for I never knew you. And they're saying, well, we've served you, we've done this for you, we've done that for you.

[19:16] That looks like a good Christian witness and service. Jesus, however, understands that it's assumption. So assurance is a serious matter.

In other words, no one can have real assurance from a lie. You want to be absolutely certain. And Paul wants you to have the type of assurance that is like bedrock, that it doesn't move, that it doesn't waver.

And the only way he can get you to that kind of assurance where you know for certain deep in your heart every single day, even on the bad days, is by convincing you that the assurance that comes from God is the assurance that comes from the leading and you following the Spirit.

Life according to the Spirit gives the believer the kind of assurance that pleases God. In fact, that's Paul's whole point here.

The whole question at hand is whether or not your life is pleasing to God. That's where the assurance comes from. You want to know if God's pleased with you.

[20:33] And Paul says God is pleased with those who live life according to the Spirit because they can live life according to the Spirit because of what Christ has done for them.

So don't continue in sin. There's no reason for you to enjoy sin. Rather, hate it. And turn away from it.

The Spirit gives life to your mortal bodies not so that you can carry on doing sinful things in your mortal bodies, but so that you can use your body for the glory of God. So that you can use your body to follow Jesus and to serve Him.

Paul's not saying you're in and you're out. What he is, however, saying that it's quite obvious to spot those who are living according to the flesh and those who are living according to the Spirit.

Here's how to identify a believer then, Paul says. They say no to sin. They hate sin. They battle against sin. They turn away from it.

[21:44] Yet they will still sin. Okay? You need to add that bit in case you think that Christians can somehow be perfect. You know, you may be great, you're never going to be perfect.

You may be able to reduce the amount of sin that you commit, but you're never going to be able to stop sinning altogether. The question is, is how do you feel about the sin that you commit?

That's the issue. Do you want to do it or do you are caught out by it and hate the moment that you've done it? Do you battle against it or do you sort of hold it in your lap as though it's a toy that it's somehow you can be safe and play with?

You know, Proverbs warns the person against gathering hot coals into their lap thinking that it's safe to hold. Sin is not safe to hold. And so Paul wants the believer to know that you can have assurance if you live life according to the Spirit.

Because if you live life according to the Spirit, then the way you feel about sin is to reject it, to turn your back on it. You will put to death the deeds of the body and you will live.

[23 : 03] That's his point here in verse 14. verse 14. For all those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. All those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Notice the believer's attitude here. One that will follow God. Paul then has one more thing to say and that is believers don't move backwards.

Believers don't move backwards. Now I understand that there's a thing called a backslidden Christian. I understand that it's called that. I don't necessarily understand what a backslidden Christian is however.

And the reason I struggle to understand it is because of what's known as the perseverance of the saints. And what that means is fairly simple.

That a true believer continues to follow Christ. Christ. That's how you know you're a true believer. The fact that you wake up in the morning and today you still want to be like Jesus.

[24 : 11] And tomorrow you want to be like Jesus. And the next day you want to be like Jesus. Because it saddens me the fact that I know dozens of people that have been baptized as adults.

and yet there is absolutely not a shred of Christianity in them. Now can you lose your salvation? Clearly not. Not even for a moment. Remember if you could lose your salvation then just think about what that says about the God who saved you.

that he can't really save you. Or he can save you but he can't keep you. No, you can't lose your salvation. So what have we got to say about people who then seemingly come to faith and are baptized and then disappear?

Well, Paul says that true believers can never be identified in the moment. They can only be identified by continuing to follow Christ.

[25 : 21] it's called the perseverance of the saints. The true believers persevere. Yeah, they may have a rotten Christian life because, you know, they can't get away from a certain sin or they, you know, life is difficult for them but the very fact that they continue to persevere in the faith is the defining mark of their salvation.

Yeah, they have up times and down times. Yeah, they may appear to backslide in the sense that their devotion is not what it was but they're still persevering when their prayer is down to once a month.

They're still persevering. Yeah, we all have moments like that where some of us can pray three times a day and some of us can barely pray three times a year. The question is is perseverance. And perseverance isn't a standard that you reach 60 miles an hour and you keep going like that until Christ returns. No, perseverance is the fact that you keep continuing whether you're up or down or even if you feel that you're out.

You get up the next day and however hard it is you know that the person to follow is Jesus.

Whether you make a mess of it that day or not your intention is to get up dust yourself off and follow Jesus.

[26 : 50] That's the perseverance that Paul is speaking of here that we did not receive a spirit of slavery that makes us fall back into the old ways.

Rather we received a spirit of adoption verse 15 as sons by whom we cry Abba father. This is the final issue that Paul has to say.

Adoption is one of those things that moves anybody I feel. When one family takes in a child that doesn't have a parent or takes in a child whose parents have neglected the child and then another family takes them in and adopts them.

We've got friends that have adopted a young girl and a young boy. The girl now is 20 odd and all the pain and struggles that come with that she's a lovely Christian girl and she was actually a

bridesmaid she was adopted into the family.

The interesting thing about that is the parents are wonderful Christians. Strong in their faith strong in their prayer life and they could give their daughter whom they adopted they've also adopted a son now anything that they wanted well within reason.

[28 : 25] They're also because they were Christian parents they could give that child everything that they needed because everyone needs Christ. So not only could this child have what she wanted within reason the child could have what she needed because the parents were Christians.

But here's the thing that though those parents were wonderful and prayerful and biblical and could bring that child up in the way God expects a child to be brought up there was one thing that the parents could never give the child ever and that was their DNA.

Could give them everything else but could not give the child the parents DNA. Paul however says that when you come to Christ you're not just adopted as sons but you've been given a new DNA. It's called the new life. You are spiritually the same as the divine nature.

You may find that very hard to believe. This is why Peter says in his letters do you not realize that we have become partakers of the divine nature?

[29 : 47] Well how have you become partakers of the divine nature? Well because you've been adopted by God. And it's not an adoption where you are not transformed on the inside. It's an adoption where you can receive blessing.

It's adoption where you can receive everything that you need. But more importantly it's an adoption where you have actually been given the divine nature of God himself. In other words you are changed on the inside.

And it's because of that change on the inside that you can persevere in your faith. It is because of that change on the inside that you no longer walk according to the flesh but you walk according to the spirit.

In other words it looks like on the surface Paul was giving out all these commands walk according don't walk according to the flesh and walk according to the spirit and you're sat there thinking man alive how am I going to do all of this and then he finishes in these last few verses by saying oh and by the way the reason you can do it is because you're adopted and you've got a new nature. Impossible to achieve in the old nature. but the reason this is expected of you as a believer is because you have the divine nature within you. In other words Paul doesn't expect this of unbelievers.

[31 : 03] He expects this of believers because their nature has changed. They're able to do it now. They're able to follow God. Able to follow the spirit. Why? Because in nature they're just like him.

You may find that really hard to believe that you as you sit here this morning as a believer in Christ actually share in the divine nature.

Every time you pray that's the divine nature coming out of you. Every time you worship that's the divine nature coming out of you. Every time you serve God that's the divine nature coming out of you.

Every time you surrender your own rights for the benefit of someone else that's the divine nature coming out in you. In other words you are like God. So when Paul says don't live life according to the flesh can you see how abnormal it would be to do that?

Can you see how abnormal it would be for God himself to live life according to sinful flesh? So Paul says don't you do it because you share in the very nature of God.

[32 : 13] which is what he's already explained in chapter 6 and in 7 and now in 8 is why we can have the confirmation that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So here's the exhortation. As a believer you have a new life and your new life is not like the old life. Your new life is led by God.

Your old life was led by you. your new life says no to sin. Your old life used to say yes to sin. Your new life loves God and follows God.

Your old life was hostile to God and didn't want anything to do with him. Your new life pleases God and your old life did not please God.

Your new life is full of assurance because the spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are indeed children of God. Your old life didn't give you any assurance at all.

[33 : 16] In fact it blinded you of the reality that you are actually facing. God's judgment. That's why only Christians are aware of the judgment of God.

Think about that for a moment. People out in the world aren't aware of the judgment of God. It takes the spirit to convince them. That's what Jesus says. I send the spirit of God into the world to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come.

In other words, those kind of realities only come from God. Sin doesn't let you know the trouble you're in. The spirit does because it seeks correction.

So a final thought. Assurance is not to be found in longevity. I had an experience once when back in the day when I was a roofer and fit enough to get up onto a roof, I did this ridge line.

There was about 87 ridge to put down which is a cement tile that goes over the top and you had to cement it. And back in the day there was no clocking on and clocking off on building sites.

[34 : 24] You could work until as late as you wanted and it was summertime and I decided to finish this roof. So I laid 87 ridge. I was so proud.

It was 9 o'clock at night and I got home in tight. They were straight, they were tidy and then my boss came out to me the next day and he says you laid 87 ridge but they were all the wrong colour.

But I said I did do it in the right way. He said it doesn't matter. They're all the wrong colour. You know there's a lesson there that you can do something and even do it in the right way.

But when it's wrong it's wrong. And assurance is not found in longevity. The fact that you have been coming to church for 40 years.

What if you have been coming to church for 40 years but have never come to Christ? The call here as in all the gospel is to come to Christ.

[35 : 34] Paul's point is to make it absolutely clear that a Christian life is a new life. A brand new life that lives life according to the spirit not according to the flesh.

You can come to church in the flesh. You can even pray in the flesh. You can go through the motions of singing the hymns in the flesh. You can do all of that. And we must be very careful of externals because that's how we normally judge people but God looks at the heart.

So assurance is not found in the externals. It's found in the internal. The spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed children of God.

Persevere in your faith. Don't seek out some kind of retirement plan. Persevere and keep following Christ in the ways of Christ.

That's the important thing. Because Christians are very, very good at making up their own way of how they're going to follow Jesus. And yet I'm pretty sure when Jesus said follow me he was quite clear where he was going.

[36 : 42] That's the call. Persevere in your faith. Be led by the spirit. Keep in step with the spirit. Live life according to the spirit. In simple terms, follow Jesus.

Amen.