

ROMANS

R8

EIGHT

Part 1 – Set Free in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:1-4

The eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans has been variously called the acropolis, the apex, and the summit of the New Testament. It has been likened to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and an inner sanctum of the cathedral of Christian faith. This reverence for Romans chapter eight makes perfect sense. It is filled with the most glorious truths of the Christian life. It reveals some of God's most precious promises to his people both in the present life and in the life to come. The great promises of Romans 8 encompass the entirety of the Christian life. From our liberation from the condemnation of sin, to the comfort that is ours in suffering, to the promise of

future glory, the Christian is held secure within the love of God in Christ Jesus.

One interesting detail that emerges is that there are no commandments in Romans eight. It is all promise. It is all about what God has done and will bring about to final completion for his adopted sons and daughters. One writer summarizes the promises of Romans eight with three "no's": No Condemnation, No Defeat, and No Separation. It is a portrait of life in the Spirit which is in stark contrast to life under sin's power and the law's condemnation highlighted in the previous chapter. The life in the Spirit that Paul describes in Romans eight is not a special or elite category of Christianity only to be experienced by a few. Rather, life in the Spirit is the ordinary Christian life which begins at the moment of new birth, endures through life in a "groaning" world, and proceeds into eternity inseparable from the love God.

The Holy Spirit is referred to no fewer than 19 times in Romans eight. That means that the Holy Spirit is mentioned nearly once for every two sentences. Nevertheless, "Paul's focus is not so much on the Spirit as such, but on what the Spirit *does*. And perhaps this is the best way to learn about the Spirit... The Spirit is best known in his ministry on behalf of Christians. It is those blessings and privileges conferred on believers by the Spirit that are the theme of this chapter."¹

In this relatively brief series of messages from Romans eight, we will examine the heights and depths of the Christian life. We will see why Paul places such great emphasis on the working of the Holy Spirit. There is no flinching on the part of the apostle concerning life's sufferings and sorrows under which the entire created order groans. Neither is there any reticence in assuring the Christian that even the worst of the world's maledictions cannot compare to the glory that is to be revealed in Christ Jesus to all who belong to him.

1. The Christian's Assurance

- In the opening words of this chapter Paul connects back directly to his central theme in chapter five that for all who are "in Christ," eternal life has now replaced the condemnation and death which was our inheritance in Adam.

Vs 1 – "Therefore," links this chapter to all that has gone before, particularly with Paul's argument set forth beginning in chapter five. The combination of "therefore, now" is emphatic. That is, it marks what follows as a significant conclusion.²

"Now" – Once we were dead in trespasses and sins; slaves to its power. But "now" we are free from the condemning power of sin and the law. Believers stand presently justified before God. While, many of the choicest blessings of salvation are yet to come such as the life everlasting in the new creation, we are "now" justified, freed from condemnation.

"No condemnation" – The adjective "No" (*uden*) is the first word in the sentence in order to emphasize its sweeping and definitive nature. "Condemnation" is forensic language. Paul has in mind the penalty under which sin places us. While we do not want to draw too thick a line between the power of sin and the penalty

¹ Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) p. 468

² Moo, 472

of sin, it is the latter to which Paul is referring. Condemnation refers to the sinner's state of estrangement from God. Apart from Christ, every person remains in this state of condemnation under God's holy justice.

"Those who are in Christ Jesus" – Christ makes all the difference. The God under whose condemnation sinners remain is the same God who paid the penalty of his own justice. He did this in the dying of Christ, his Son, our Savior. "In Christ Jesus" describes the realm in which believers live, the realm in which people experience "justification" and "redemption" (3:24), where they are dead to sin and alive to God (6:11), and where they receive God's free gift of life rather than sin's wages of death (6:23). These eschatological blessings have broken into the present, as the term "now" demonstrates.³

"He was for us in the place of condemnation; we are in him where all condemnation has spent its force."
- Marcus Loane

2. The Christian's Liberty

Vs. 2 – "For" – What follows will proceed from "no condemnation."

"The law," [*nomos*] – Here is Paul's way of referring to authority or binding power. In this verse Paul contrasts the power or authority of Holy Spirit with that of sin and death.

"The Spirit of Life" – This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The "law of the Spirit of Life" is not to be understood as a new and better system of ethics replacing the Law of Moses. Rather, this is a reference to the power or binding authority of the Holy Spirit. "It is God's Spirit, coming to the believer with power and authority, who brings liberation from the powers of the old age and from the condemnation that is the lot of all who are imprisoned by those powers."⁴

"The law of sin and death" refers to the authority or power of sin which yields only death.

"Has set you free" – God's redemptive work in history accomplished through Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit has resulted in liberation for God's people. That is, believers have been freed from the binding authority of sin. Paul likely means for us to understand this as liberation both from the penalty and power of sin. One scholar summarizes Paul's teaching on various "laws" as "Moses' law has right but not might; Sin's law has might but not right; the law of the Spirit has both right and might."⁵

3. The Christian's Walk

- Having been delivered from the controlling authority of sin, Christians are now freed to walk according to the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 3 – "For God has done what the law..." – Here, Paul's use of law (*nomos*) is in reference to the Law of Moses; the moral law delivered at Sinai. Being the law of God, it is good. But it cannot give life because sinners cannot live up to its righteous demands. While God's law is perfect and reveals sin, it was never designed to atone for sin. Therefore, the answer for the Christian is *NOT* a new and better law to obey in order to be made right with God. The answer is God's grace in Jesus Christ.

"in the likeness of sinful flesh" – Of course Paul is not suggesting that Jesus was a sinner. Rather he uses the term "sinful flesh" to refer to the fact that the Son of God was incarnate in a fallen body ("sinful flesh") subject to everything we are subject to yet without sin. "Likeness" does not suggest that Jesus possessed anything less than a true human nature. Rather, the approximation suggested by "likeness," probably lies in the fact that though Jesus was truly human, he was without sin.⁶

"he condemned sin in the flesh" –

"We can conclude that what Paul must mean is a judicial action that was accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and that had as its object 'the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled' in Christians (v 4a)...The condemnation of sin [consists] in God's executing his judgement on sin in the atoning death of his Son. As our substitute, Christ 'was made sin for us,' (2 Cor. 5:21) and suffered the wrath of God, the judgement of God upon that sin. In doing so, of course we may say that sin's power was broken, in the sense that Paul pictures sin as a power that holds people in its clutches and brings condemnation to them. In executing the full sentence of condemnation against sin, God effectively removed sin's ability to 'dictate terms' for those who

³ Frank Thielman, Romans, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016) p. 378

⁴ Moo, 476

⁵ Quoted in Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) p. 301

⁶ Thielman, 380

are 'in Christ.' (V. 2). The condemnation that our sins deserve has been poured out on Christ, our sin-bearer; that is why, 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'"⁷

Vs. 4 – The law of God is perfect. It does precisely what God designed it to do. However, the law was never intended to justify sinners. In this sense, the law was "weakened by the flesh." Paul is not suggesting that the law is flawed. Rather, mankind's sin made it impossible for the law to function as a means to justify them before God. For this reason God sent his eternal Son, to do the very thing the law could never do.

"He condemned sin in the flesh" – God "condemned" (or, judged) our sin by means of the Son's incarnation and death.

"The righteous requirement of the law" is perfect obedience, which Christ alone accomplished. It is because of this requirement of perfect obedience that the law cannot justify sinners (7:13-25). The law requires that "the wages of sin is death" (6:23). This penalty Christ bore on our behalf.

"...might be fulfilled in us" – The perfect obedience of Christ and his atoning death serve to fulfill in us what the law requires.

"The fulfillment in question is 'in us,' not in all people, and this is further defined as 'those who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.' Paul finds the metaphor of walking congenial as a way of bringing out the steady if unspectacular progress that characterizes the Christian way (cf. 6:4; 1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 5:7, etc.). The believer does not 'walk according to the flesh.' There is, of course, a sense in which he is 'in the flesh' (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3), and Paul can go so far as to speak of 'Christ, according to the flesh' (9:5). But to live within our horizons bounded by the requirements of this fleshly life is quite another thing, and it is this that Paul has in mind here. The person outside of Christ sees nothing beyond their here and now and, however altruistic he may be, in the end is wrapped up in things he wants or even on which he has set his approval. Not so the Christian. The believer walks according to the Spirit."⁸

- Though sanctification and justification are different, the Reformed faith has always stressed that they should not be separated. Certainly, Christ alone has fulfilled all the law's requirements. But being "in Christ," Christians begin to live the kind of life that God would have us live. Notice that Paul does not say that we fulfill the law's righteous requirement, but that "the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us." Before we came to know Christ we were continually defeated by sin. It could be no other way. But when we came to know Christ and received the indwelling Holy Spirit, the controlling power of sin was broken. Now we are able to live in a way that was beyond our reach under our own strength.⁹

⁷ Moo, 480-481

⁸ Morris, 304

⁹ Morris, 303-304