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|---------------------------------------------------|----|
| THE CONDEMNED SET FREE! – ROMANS 8:1–4 | 64 |
| THE MIND SET ON THE FLESH – ROMANS 8:5–8 | 64 |
| THE MIND SET ON THE SPIRIT – ROMANS 8:9–11 | 65 |
| THE PRIVILEGES OF GOD’S CHILDREN – ROMANS 8:12–17 | 66 |
| PERSONAL APPLICATION – ROMANS 8:18–39 | 68 |

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The battle for control of our lives is fought — and won or lost — in our MINDS before it ever reaches our mouths or hands or feet! We “think it” before we “do it.”

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A NEW MINDSET

MINDSET

“Mindset” is a word that comes in handy when we describe another person we think we’ve got pegged. “She has a parochial mindset.” “He has a businessman’s mindset.” One might be described as having an “optimistic” mindset or a “medieval” mindset or a “suspicious” mindset, among others. What would people say your “mindset” is?

The *American Heritage Dictionary* says a mindset is “a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person’s responses to and interpretations of situations.” Your mindset is your whole way of coming at life! It may not, of course, be so “fixed” as the dictionary says. There are online quizzes, for example, that distinguish between a “fixed” and a “growth” mindset. A fixed mindset, it appears, equals a “closed mind.” A growth mindset, on the other hand, belongs to a person with an “open mind.” A person who is truly serious about this can take a Mindset Assessment Profile (MAP). It is used to predict how successful someone thinks that person will be, especially in business.

In Romans 8, we meet the word “mindset” (a good translation of the Greek word *phroneema* in 8:6). Paul describes people who “set their minds” on things that are polar opposites, with the result that their lives are lived in very different ways. There are eternal consequences to where they set those minds of theirs. The Bible, of course, is not written about “them.” It’s about “us”! We’ll need to get very personal as we jump into this chapter. Let this word be what James says — a “mirror” (James 1:23). Let’s see if we can see ourselves, our mindset, and our destiny in these words.

THE CONDEMNED SET FREE!*ROMANS 8:1-4*

These verses are a “hinge.” Romans 7:25 was not really the end of the previous thought, and Romans 8:1 is not really the beginning of a new one. An unfortunate paragraphing break at 8:1 artificially separates these first four verses from what went before, when in fact they bring the Christian’s struggle under the Law (described in Chapter 7) to a joyful conclusion, proclaiming us free to have a new mindset.

So let’s retrace our steps. Chapter 7 was about the Law and our relation to it. Four more times in 8:1–4 we read the word “law.” The first two of these narrate the astonishing good news that in God’s courtroom, “wretched man” Paul’s cry for deliverance has been answered. Watch how Paul uses “law” here: “the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (v. 2). How? By fulfilling the “righteous requirement of the law [of Moses]” (v. 4). We didn’t do it — God did. The word “law” has here been widened to mean how the Holy Spirit, given us in our baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), has put us “in Christ Jesus” (v. 2) and given us the benefits Jesus won by His life, death, and resurrection. That “law of sin and death” which had demanded a rightful payment to God has thereby been satisfied. God the Judge does the condemning here, but it is SIN that winds up “condemned...in the flesh” (v. 3). In the very flesh of Jesus. We are now (to use a favorite prepositional phrase of Paul) “in Christ.” And we are free!

Because of that, there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1)! “Condemnation” is the polar opposite of the Greek term for “justification.” You can see those opposites paired earlier in Rom. 5:18. The justified person has been declared “not guilty” by God the Judge. The condemnation we’ve all experienced in the eyes of an angry spouse or disappointed children has been cancelled. The accusing voice of conscience has been hushed. God Himself “has done what the law... could not do” (v. 3). For many people, it’s the sort of peace it takes a lifetime to find, but once found, brings lasting joy and a new mindset.

THE MIND SET ON THE FLESH*ROMANS 8:5-8*

The battle for control of our lives is fought — and won or lost — in our MINDS before it ever reaches our mouths or hands or feet! We “think it” before we “do it.” What Paul says here about the importance of where one “sets one’s mind” is echoed in Phil. 3:19 (“minds set on earthly things”). Jesus says much the same thing when He says that the sinful behaviors people display come “out of the heart” (Matt. 15:19).

In these verses, Paul gives us a tutorial review of two opposite “mindsets,” summed up in the words “flesh” and “Spirit.” Jesus uses the same words in John 3:5–6 to instruct Nicodemus about the new birth in baptism (“born of the Spirit”) contrasted to the condition of fallen humans (“born of the flesh”). The mindsets Paul describes produce not simply thoughts, but actions. The word translated “live according to”

literally means “walk around.” The way we think becomes the way we walk!

Here in vv. 5–8, Paul points us to what’s going on in the unbeliever’s mind. An unbeliever is preoccupied with “things of the flesh” (v. 5). Need a list? Just look around at what’s advertised. Our culture is preoccupied with money, sex, and power, says Richard Foster, author of a book by that title. In Galatians, Paul provides a list of the sins such preoccupation produces — “sexual immorality... jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries... drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Gal. 5:19–21). Not a pretty picture!

A fleshly mindset, Paul adds, is “hostile to God” (v. 7). People with that mindset don’t want God’s boundaries or prohibitions. They are spiritually “disabled” — unable to submit to the Law (v. 7) and unable to “please God” (v. 8). The infamous “hate man” of Berkeley, California, has been living out his philosophy of “oppositonality” to God and others since 1973. That spirit is growing more prevalent in our culture. To cite one example, atheists have begun posting ads against God and the church, especially at Christmas. The point in these verses, however, is not to look at “them” and say, “Ain’t it awful?” but to look at ourselves and ask, “Is it I?” All of us, Paul said in Rom. 5:10, were once “enemies.” Good questions to ask oneself include, “What occupies my mind these days? Where am I spending my time and money? Is my spirit one of gratitude or resentment?”

THE MIND SET ON THE SPIRIT

ROMANS 8:9–11

Thankfully, there is another mindset one can see and experience. Verse 9 begins with an emphatic “You!” As if underlining the wondrous contrast (“You, however” — yes, YOU reading this letter!), he alerts the readers to the wondrous new life, the very new mindset, that is theirs now. He does not presume, to be sure, that every single person at the church in Rome is a believer, so each succeeding

sentence contains a thought-provoking “if.” Once again, we are moved to ask ourselves, “Does this describe me?”

The new mindset does not mean a Christian is simply one who “thinks differently.” That would be too tame an explanation! No. Those who have this new mindset have a completely different spirit, not because they “think better thoughts” or “live better lives” but because they have the Holy Spirit inside! The “Spirit of God dwells” (v. 9) in the believer. Our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Observant readers will note that later in the same verse the Spirit is called “the Spirit of Christ.” The ancient preacher Chrysostom explained this: “Paul is not saying here that the Spirit is Christ but is showing rather that anyone who has the Spirit has Christ as well...” (*Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*, 13).

To have Christ, to be “in Christ,” is Paul’s favorite definition of being a Christian. In writing to the Philippians, he urges them to “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). There are more than 150 comparable expressions in Paul’s letters.

This mindset (v. 10 — “if Christ is in you”) has a blessed consequence. The “fruit of the Spirit” Paul lists in Galatians 5:22–23 (“love, joy, peace, patience” etc.) is here summed up in a single word — “life.” There are two words for “life” in Greek — *bios* and *zoe* — from which derive our English words biology and zoology. *Bios* denotes the merely quantitative, physical life (heartbeat, respiration, brain waves) that we see monitored at a patient’s bedside in the CCU. *Zoe* refers to a life that is a qualitatively different, deeper life with a spiritual dimension. This was the “more abundant” life Jesus said He had come to bring (John 10:10).

Paul is no Pollyanna. He knows, as we know, that Christians must still live in a troubled world and must still endure their own aging, dying bodies. He

makes an astonishing declaration in verse 10: “if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” We STILL have fleshly, mortal bodies. *Simul iustus et peccator!* We still experience arthritis and Alzheimer’s, migraines and muscular dystrophy. We must still endure physical death, what someone called “the last way station on the road to eternal life.” But we are no longer “in the flesh” (under the control of the sinful nature). Even our dying can be hope-filled. How many an older saint in his final years can show us that light of life shining through the windows of a frail body!

Those who have this new mindset look forward to one last (and lasting) benefit, the resurrection from the dead. “I’m gonna live till I die,” said one grizzled fellow, “and then I’m gonna live forever!” Once again, it is because we are IN CHRIST, whom the Holy Spirit raised from the dead (v. 11). There’s a close connection between the resurrection of Jesus and that of the believer. The most obvious is the promise that the same God “who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies” (v. 11). Paul never tires of opening this precious package and looking at it with wonder. The same God will raise us with the same power (1 Cor. 6:14). Jesus is the “firstfruits,” the first of many (1 Cor. 15:20). In the process, He will transform our lowly bodies and make them to be glorious like that of the risen Jesus (Phil. 3:20–21)! Our rising will mean coming face to face with our Savior at last (2 Cor. 4:14) and returning with Him at His Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:14). An old song says, *When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory!*

THE PRIVILEGES OF GOD’S CHILDREN

ROMANS 8:12-17

Until our home-going, there is daily life to live. We live with a whole new status. We are “sons of God” (v. 14)! It’s common, of course, to hear people say, “We’re all God’s children.” If what they mean is that God made us, that’s true enough. But there is much more to “sonship” than being physically made. We all know people who say, “I haven’t seen my father in years; we have no real relationship.” We need an intimate personal relationship with our Father, a life lived out of gratitude and not fear. Not everyone has that. How do we get it?

Paul introduces a new word to explain the sonship we now enjoy. The word is adoption. “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons” (v. 15). Adoption is a deliberate procedure undertaken by parents to bring a child into the family. God has done that for us. In the Roman world, adoption into a family meant that all prior debts were cancelled. Jesus did that very thing on the cross, “canceling the record of debt that stood against us” (Col. 2:14). The literal meaning of “It is finished” (John 19:30) is “paid in full”!

What's in our "sonship package"? The first benefit is an intimate, loving relationship with God the Father.



So why does Paul say we are "debtors" (v. 12)? The very next phrase makes clear that our debt is "not to the flesh" (as if still enslaved by our sinful appetites). We have also been "released from [our debt to] the law" (7:6). The only debt that remains is the debt of gratitude that fills us for the grace, the adoption, and the privileges we have received!

An old hymn says, *O, to grace, how great a debtor/ Daily I'm constrained to be!*

What's in our "sonship package"? The first benefit is an intimate, loving relationship with God the Father. Fear is banished, and we come to Him as we cry, "Abba! Father!" (v. 15). Jesus Himself used those words as He knelt in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). Luther unpacks this joyful privilege:

"In the midst of these terrors of the Law, thunderclaps of sin, tremors of death, and the roarings of the devil...the Holy Spirit begins to cry in our heart: 'Abba! Father!' And His cry... breaks through... the horrible cries of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. It penetrates the clouds... and it reaches all the way to the ears of God." (Lectures on Galatians)

There is more that comes as part of the "sonship package." Verses 16–17 contain four beautiful compound verbs (verbs employing "with") that express other benefits God includes for us. First, the Holy Spirit "bears witness with" us "that we are children of God" (v. 16).

We are not only made to be children of God, we are made aware of it in a continuing way. When life batters and conscience accuses, we still know who we are!

Then, in rapid-fire succession, Paul says we "are... heirs with Christ," provided we "suffer with him," so that finally we may also "be glorified with him" (v. 17). A father makes his children "heirs" of his estate. At the last judgment, we will hear Jesus say, "Come... inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (Matt. 25:34). Our sonship, like that of Jesus Himself, will mean that for a time we "suffer" with Him. This suffering is a holy privilege that bears witness to the world (the Greek word *martyr* means "witness"!) that we are His. Finally, there comes "glory"! C. S. Lewis wrote:

"Remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."
(The Weight of Glory)

In our next lesson, we will have a look at the "everlasting splendors."

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ROMANS 8:18-39

Lord God, renew me through Your Word today. When I don't know what to pray, and when my hopes dwindle, strengthen me with Your sure and certain promises here. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

For Review:

1. Identify and contrast the two "mindsets" described in Romans 8:5-11.

2. What are the two Greek words for "life"? How do their meanings differ? Which one does Paul employ?

3. List benefits of being God's children.

Romans 8:18-25

4. Make a list of the words in this section that describe the "present suffering" of the creation.

5. Make a similar list that describes "the glory that is to be revealed."

6. How would you characterize your own experience of the "groaning"?

7. Why does Paul employ the metaphor of childbirth?

What do the passages listed below say by use of that same picture?

John 16:21-22

Gal. 4:19

1 Thess. 5:3

Romans 8:26-30

8. Do you normally see the glass "half full" or "half empty"?

9. How does the Spirit help us in our prayer life?

10. “All things work together for good” for believers. Is there something you can now see (by hindsight) where God “worked for good” that did not appear “good” at the time?

11. Predestination (vv. 29–30) has been called a “doctrine of comfort.” What is that comfort?

12. What other words follow in a sequence after “predestined”?

Romans 8:31–39

13. A “rhetorical” question is one that does not need answering because the answer is obvious. How many such questions can you find in verses 31–35?

Go back through the questions and, even if the answer is obvious, answer Paul as if you were face to face with him... perhaps even aloud!

14. What passage does Paul quote in verse 36?

What incidents from Paul’s ministry can you remember that illustrated its truth in his personal experience?

15. List the items in the “enemies list” (vv. 38–39).

Which of these is most dreaded by you personally?

16. In what way do you find God’s Word in this chapter encouraging to you?

Memory Verse Challenge for Chapter 8 (Part Two)

Choose one of the following:

Rom. 8:18 *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

Rom. 8:28 (NIV) *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Rom. 8:38–39 (NIV) *I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*