

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

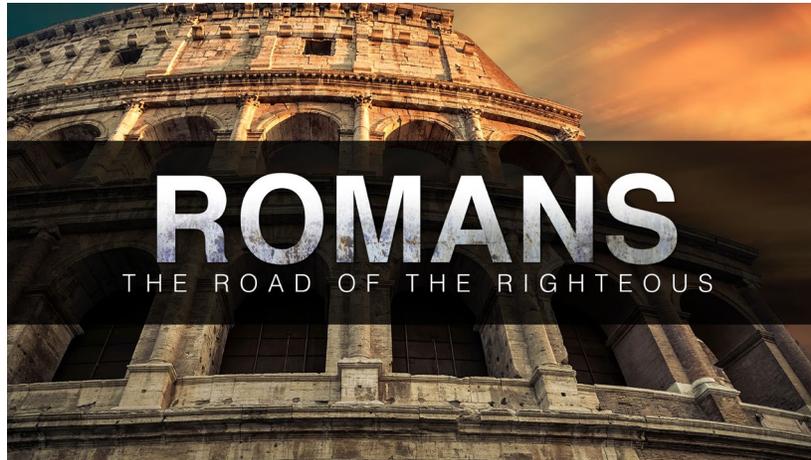
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 8:1-4

Written By

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I grew up watching boxing matches. I remember sitting with my father and his Port Director, J. D. Williams, and catching history on a black and white television as Cassius Clay, aka, Muhammad Ali, beat Sonny Liston by technical knockout in the sixth round, for the World Heavyweight championship on February 25, 1964.

Another great fight occurred in 1996 between bad boy Iron Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield. Evil and good certainly collided in the ring for this match. Holyfield, a devout Christian, determined to be the source of divine discipline through his powerful leather gloves. Yes, he saw himself as the judge, jury, and “executioner” of the much-feared Iron Mike, whose sordid background didn’t win him any friends.

People, however, being people, put their money on Iron Mike. Though Mike had been untested in his post-prison bouts, the general consensus was Holyfield probably wouldn’t last three rounds since he wasn’t far from retirement. They thought wrong.

Confidently saying, “I won’t fear him,” Holyfield went to battle against a powerful, ruthless foe. The first few rounds the fans waited for that inevitable Tyson power punch to floor Holyfield, but it never came. Instead, Holyfield pursued his boxing strategy with a religious zeal. Over and over again he aggressively went after Iron Mike, pushing him around the ring for a change.

By the fourth round, Holyfield had accomplished what other boxers had failed to do: get beyond the third round without being knocked out. In the fifth round, Tyson hurt Holyfield with the left right combination. Then in the sixth, the fighters butted heads, leaving Tyson with a cut on his eyelid, blurring his sight. At that point, the fans began chanting, “Holyfield, Holyfield, Holyfield.”

Empowered by the rhythmical chanting of the fans, Holyfield hit Tyson with the short left of the chest, sending the former champ to the canvas. At that moment, the crowd exploded. Tyson got on his feet at the five count, but over the next three rounds Holyfield just simply out boxed him.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> round, a powerful jab set up a devastating right hand that nearly decked Tyson again. With Tyson leaning on the ropes like a rag doll, Holyfield started working him over till the bell sounded.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> round, the crowd stood on their feet chanting again, “Holyfield, Holyfield, Holyfield.” Just 37 seconds into the round, 11 consecutive punches later, and with his opponent unable to keep his hands up to defend himself, referee Mitch Halpern jumped in and called the fight. Holyfield had finally done what nobody else could do: outbox the old iron Mike.

What happened in the ring that day in November 1996 is in many respects what occurs in the life of the believer like you. You, too, face an opponent with an attitude, and an opponent with a rap sheet, and an opponent who seeks to instill fear into your bones, and an opponent who wants to knock you spiritually out, he’s an opponent who, like Mike Tyson, seems at times to be made of iron. I say this because of what we learned about him and Romans 7:15-25. From these verses, it is clear that sometimes you, the saint, wind up on the spiritual ropes with your sinful opponent pounding you into submission and defeat. As Paul correctly says in Romans 7:19,

For the good that I wish, I do not; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

Ever felt like that? Sure you have. All spiritual boxers know the feeling you want to please God in a certain area of your life, the next thing you know, a one-two combination sends you falling like a stone statue to the canvas.

Just who is the opponent you and I square off, as Christians, every day? For the sake of our boxing analogy, we will call him *Iron Flesh*. “Iron” because he is really tough and formidable. “Flesh,” because he’s part of you until you die. Just what is this flesh?

The word “flesh,” is employed by Paul in Romans six through eight multiple times (ex. 6:19; 7:5, 14, 18, 25; 8:3 . . . three times, 4, 5 . . . two times, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12 . . . two times, 13). It can mean literal flesh as in Romans 1:3 or 2:28. But, as the word is used repeatedly in these chapters, we encounter a figurative meaning. Barclay helps us understand this crucial term he states,

He [i.e., Paul] really means human nature and all its weakness and he means human in its vulnerability to sin. He means that part of man which gives sin its bridgehead. He means sinful human nature, apart from Christ, everything that attaches a man to the world instead of to God. To live according to the flesh is to live a life dominated by the dictates and desires of sinful human nature instead of a life dominated by the dictates and the love of God. The flesh is the lower side of man’s nature.<sup>1</sup>

I couldn’t have said it better.

Each saint is moving around a spiritual boxing ring every moment of every day against a well-trained, and well-conditioned foe who doesn’t have your best interest at heart. If he has you on the ropes right now in a key area of your life, if your spiritual strength is drained and you are having difficulty keeping your arms up to defend yourself, then learn today from the apostle Paul,

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*. 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated: The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 102.

a successful professional spiritual boxer, how to regain strength and gain ground so you can overpower your formidable opponent for a change . . . you know, something spiritually akin to what Holyfield did to the supposed “Iron” Mike.

In Romans chapter 7, we see Paul getting a boxing lesson from this foe, *Iron Flesh*. At the end of the chapter, we could easily say it looked like the last round and things weren’t going well for the struggling apostle. Cuts over his spiritual eyes blurred his vision. is blurred. Stinging blows to his midsection caused him to group for spiritual air like a fish out of water. *Iron Flesh* looked like he was about to finish Paul off, but then we run into chapter 8.

From the first verse of this chapter to the last, Paul tells how he brought the crowd to their feet and Rome. He shares with each of us how he made molten metal out of old *Iron Flesh*. What’s the key? How did he do it? Come with me as we look at Paul’s playbook for victory as detailed on the pen and parchment of Romans chapter 8. And I’ll tell you right up front that this chapter is so important for victory in the Christian walk there is just no way we can move quickly through it. Puritan Thomas Horton, who lived 1674, understood the implicit importance of this chapter and went on to preach a whopping 46 sermons from these 39 verses! Don’t worry, we won’t go to that level (although it would be exciting), but we will methodically and systematically work our way through these particular texts so we know exactly how to be victorious over our own *Iron Flesh*.

As usual, we address a question which naturally arises from the exegesis of the passage.

## How Does The Believer Gain Victory Over Iron Flesh? (Rom. 8:1)

Two concepts emerge as we pour over the yellow, tattered pages of this divinely inspired ancient text:

### One: Realize The Principle Of Victorious Christian Living (Rom. 8:1a)

*The Principle Detailed* (Rom. 8:1a). With electrifying passion, Paul exclaims in Romans 8:1,

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The word “no,” *ouden* (Οὐδὲν) is actually the first word in the Greek sentence, and it is strategically placed here for dramatic emphasis. Also, the word “therefore,” *ara* (ἄρα),<sup>2</sup> is a pivotal inferential particle serving to grammatically connect chapter 8:1 with what Paul just discussed in chapter 7, viz., the believer’s spiritual struggle with the power of the flesh. In light of this fight, what does Paul, the weary spiritual boxer, conclude? The Christian boxer is no longer under divine condemnation for being a sinner after the order of the first Adam (Rom. 5:12-21). You are now on the winning team. The Christian boxer is, additionally, no longer a gladiatorial slave to sin because he is justified by his faith in the perfect person and redemptive work of Jesus, *the Christ*, in God’s holy courtroom (Rom. 6:15-23). Talk about a pep talk from the coach in your corner. As you box

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<sup>2</sup>Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, [Fri] ἄρα inferential particle; (1) denoting transition in natural sequence to show correspondence *accordingly, then* (MT 12.28; LU 11.48); (2) denoting logical inference *therefore, consequently, so; you may be sure, then* (RO 7.25); (3) in questions, drawing an inference from what precedes, referring to (a) possibility *then* (MT 19.25) or (b) uncertainty *perhaps* (AC 12.18); (4) emphasizing the result in the consequence clause of conditional sentences *in that case, then, as a result* (1C 15.14)

each round of life against Iron Flesh, he's over there pounding the mat and reminding you that "You are a spiritual winner." What a principle for spiritual boxers to remember, but there is more we must focus on in addition to this.

*The Position Described.* You might lose a round or two here to *Iron Flesh* (and you will), he might beat and bloody you occasionally, but he'll never win the fight because it was already decided in your favor the precise moment you believed in Jesus as your Savior. Paul describes your new, victorious position as being "in Christ Jesus," *en Christo Yaysou* (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The preposition here means to be placed within the protective sphere of Jesus, to be intimately and permanently related to Jesus. Paul loves this prepositional formula to describe God's spiritual boxers, and that's why you bump into it all over the place in his writings. Here a few informative illustrations:

... being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24).

δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Rom. 3:24).

Justification of the sinner is a gift of God, which comes by means of redemption, and this redemption is only secured when one is in the sphere of Christ by said faith.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (1 Cor. 1:2).

τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν (1 Cor. 1:2).

Positional sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30), or holiness, was given even to carnal, struggling saints like the ones in Corinth when they placed their faith in Jesus the Savior and Redeemer. And please note that the Greek word for sanctification is a perfect passive participle (ἡγιασμένοις). Why is this important? The perfect tense denotes a past act with an abiding, uninterrupted result. Ostensibly, this means once you are "in Christ Jesus" you will never be "out of Christ Jesus" (unsaved) again. The passive denotes that the subject, viz., the saint, is being acted upon by an outside force to acquire this sanctification. That outside force is undoubtedly God Almighty, and what He gives you He will not take away.

Here's another use of the instructive grammatical formula:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Gal. 3:26).

Eternal sonship/daughtership comes from being placed within Christ's protective sphere by means of faith in who is and why He came to earth.

Being "in Christ Jesus," therefore has many wonderful spiritual benefits, and one of them is you, yes, you, are no longer under divine condemnation because of your sinful status inherited

from Adam. No, you are guiltless because the Second Adam, Jesus, declared you righteous in His courtroom the moment you believed.

Why spend the time analyzing this particular prepositional phrase? Good question. It's important because in the boxing match called life you will encounter the power of Iron Flesh. He will, at times, mock you and tell you that you are nothing. He will degrade you at other times, saying you don't have a chance of becoming holy and defeating the likes of him. And when you do give in to him and he wins a round, he will waste no time condemning you with his condescending raspy voice: "See, you are just as wicked as you ever were. You are no child of God, and I'm sure He has just disowned you for hitting the mat again over this particular fleshly punch which always seems to deck you."

When this happens you must never forget who you are! Positionally, you are not condemned anymore before God. Practically, you will have tough rounds, but nothing will ever touch your high, holy position before God. Nothing. From a competitive perspective, Paul is a wise coach to bring this up because a positive mindset in a tough match is everything! Think like a loser and you'll be a loser. Think like a spiritual champion and you'll taste victory more often than not. This is some kind of principle, isn't it? And what can we say about our lofty position as God's boxers?

To switch our metaphor from boxing to basketball, we can see how powerful this Pauline principle is for achieving victory over *Iron Flesh* by listening to Michael Jordan reflect on his career:

I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.<sup>3</sup>

Winners don't quit when they lose a round or miss a shot. They push forward. You and I should do the same, especially in light of our unique standing before God.

## Two: Realize The Power Of Victorious Living (Rom. 8:2-4)

How, exactly, did we, the former sinners boxing on the losing team, wind up on the Team Jesus? I'm glad you asked. Once again, like a skilled and wise boxing coach, Paul informs us so we will never wonder how this wondrous team transformation occurred. Two concepts readily emerge from these instructive verses.

*Remember the inadequacy of the Law* (Rom. 8:2-3a). The spiritual liberation from sin Paul just discussed in verse 1 is now described in glorious detail in these ensuing verses. First, let's focus on how we did not secure eternal forgiveness and placement on God's team. It did not come by means of obedience to the Law, the Torah. Biblically speaking, the Law had numerous lofty and divinely ordained purposes:

- It revealed the holiness of God (1 Pet. 1:15).
- It exposed sin (Gal. 3:19).
- It established God's standard of holiness (Psa. 24:35).
- It revealed man's absolute need for a Savior (Gal. 3:24).
- It revealed a need for separation from sinners (Ex. 31:13).
- It made Israel into an unusual, distinct historical nation (Ex. 19:5-8).

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<sup>3</sup>Brainy Quote, *Winning Quotes*, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/winning>.

As Paul said earlier:

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7:12).

The Law was a pointer, not a provider. It could point the sinner toward God's holy path; however, it could not provide the power to actually walk in that worthy direction. The Law had limitations, as Paul asserts:

<sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup> For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did:

When I first moved here ten years ago, the first thing I did was to construct a fence around my backyard. Follow me on this one. It's a California thing. After I the country informed me of the exact location of my property lines, I stretched a line and started marking the location of all the posts. Once each post hole was dug, I dropped a post into the hole and started pouring dry cement in. Trust me, I checked the level nature of the post with a very long level. Any deviation in the bubbles motivated me to make necessary adjustments. In this analogy, the level is merely like the Law of God. It only tells you when your life is off center, spiritually and morally speaking. It, however, is incapable of making adjustments to fix the issue. The level is absolutely powerless in this regard. Adjustments must come from an outside powerful and thoughtful source.

No doubt, as a sidelight, this was new news to Jews who thought their obedience and observance of the Law secured their place in God's holy presence. They thought wrong. They placed power in the Law God never did. Perhaps you are guilty of doing the same thing. You, too, might think salvation and redemption before God are secured by religious/moral obedience. It is not for this is asking more from the Law than what God intended. Remember, the law just points, it doesn't provide.

Into this hopeless situation entered Jesus, the Son of God.

*Remember the adequacy of the Lord* (Rom. 8:3b-4). Permit Paul's words to seep deep into your heart and soul:

<sup>3</sup> sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

Don't ever forget that sin against and absolutely holy, lofty, morally perfect God calls for a sacrifice of equal measure. Some false religions question how one man, Jesus, could bear the sin of all mankind, but that is a naïve observation in light of the nature and magnitude of sin. Man's sin had affronted God Himself; therefore, a perfect sacrifice was needed which would placate God's wrath against man's sin. That perfect sacrifice *had to be* the Son of God (Isa. 53), and that's why God the Father sent Him on this redemptive mission.

Over and over in the gospel of John, Jesus reminds us that he came specifically to fulfill the mission the Father set before him.

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work (Jn. 4:34).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (Jn. 5:24).

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn. 6:38).

I know Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me (Jn. 7:29).

God the Father sent the Son and the Son came.

How did the Son come to us? As one of us. He came, as Paul states, "*in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin.*" Some read this first prepositional phrase and hyperventilate that Jesus was only *like* us in His flesh, meaning He wasn't really one of us. He came in a fleshly body, as we can readily see from a cursory reading of the Gospels. His flesh, however, was unique insofar as it was not contaminated by sin like ours and this positioned Jesus to live a life of absolute holiness, which was a mandate of the Law (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). This unique standing made it possible, also, for him to be "an offering for sin." This is the typical phrase for the sin offering in the Old Testament (Ex. 29:14-36; Lev. 4:4-34; 6:26-30), which was used to cover sins committed without a person realizing what they had done, or to cover sins committed in a weak moment.

The writer of Hebrews informs us that Jesus alone fulfilled the requirements of the sin offering . . . and all sacrificial Levitical blood offerings . . . when he died for us and our sin:

<sup>24</sup> For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; <sup>25</sup> nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. <sup>26</sup> Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. <sup>27</sup> And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without *reference* to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb. 9:24-28).

When Paul says in Romans 8:3 that "*He condemned sin in the flesh,*" he is alluding to the fact that the Father judicially condemned our sin in the sacrifice of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13), who was sinless.

What did this judicial action accomplish?

<sup>4</sup> **in order that** the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8).

The purpose clause, in order that, viz., *hina* (ἵνα) gives us the much coveted answer. What did the Law require? Absolute righteousness. Jesus, of course, lived an absolutely holy and righteous life, and by so doing he fulfilled the Law and was able to be *the* sacrifice of all sacrifices for sin.

But, please, don't miss that little prepositional phrase "in us." Jesus' fulfillment of the Law becomes our fulfillment when we come to Him in faith. Put differently, His glorious victory over

sin becomes our victory. His defeat of the power of sin and the flesh becomes our defeat of the power of sin and the flesh. His victory is transferred to us, lovingly and thoughtfully, at the moment of faith in His person and redemptive work. You might need to read that one more time. One insightful author puts it this way, “Christ becomes what we are so that we might become what Christ is.”<sup>4</sup> His victory becomes our victory, positionally and practically.

Since we are on God’s team, since we are His boxers, as it were, our new position gives us power from on high we never had before. And just who/what is this power? Paul informs us in the last clause of this verse:

<sup>4</sup> in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit** (Rom. 8).

Ah, there is the identification of our power to be victorious on the canvas of life. Our power comes from the Spirit of God who dwells in us as we take on Iron Flesh (Eph. 1:13-14). His presence in our lives makes all the difference when we are trading blows with our ever-present fierce foe. He does what the Law could never do: He gives us the power to live a godly life. One author puts His ability in our lives this way: “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.”<sup>5</sup> The sacrifice of Jesus, therefore, gives repentant sinners a new eternal position before the Father, and the Holy Spirit gives the new saint power for victorious living as they battle the flesh until God takes them home.

As a Christian you are victor. Do you know that? Are you living like one? If *Iron Flesh* has landed a few powerful blows on your spiritual jaw and sent you reeling lately, it’s high time to seize the moment for holiness. It’s high time for you to, by God’s power, to put him on the mat. How do you do that?

- One: Realize The Principle Of Victorious Christian Living (Rom. 8:1).
- Two: Realize The Power Of Victorious Living (Rom. 8:2-4).

The Spirit of God is just waiting for you to (finally) yield to Him in this spiritually nettlesome area of your life. Will you yield?

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. D. Hooker, “Interchange in Christ,” *JTS* n.s. 22 (1971), 349–61.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 301.