

Preservation—kept securely in Christ (8)

The word “spirit” (πνεῦμα *pneuma*) occurs twenty-one times in Romans 8 and all but two of them refer to the Holy Spirit. Even so, Paul’s focus is more on what the Holy Spirit does than on the Holy Spirit per se. The main theme is assurance of salvation.

1. Christ’s death as the Basis for Deliverance (8:1–4)

8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If the present analysis of the passage is correct, then 7:14–25 elaborated on 7:5 and 8:1–17 elaborates on 7:6. Because believers died to the Law (7:4) they are released from it and can serve in newness of the Spirit.

“Therefore” in 8:1 means that Paul is drawing a conclusion. The word “now” (in 7:6 and 8:1) signals a new era of salvation history. Those in the old era of salvation were under the Law which resulted in increased sin, condemnation, and death (7:14–26); by contrast, life in the new era of salvation results in justification and life, walking in newness of life (6:4), and bearing fruit for God (7:6). Paul summarizes the contrast in verse 1 by simply saying, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

“Condemnation” harkens back to Romans 5 where the word appears in verses 16 and 18, and is typical of those who are in Adam. However, one cannot also help but notice the connection between Romans 7 and 8 where the work of the Spirit solves the problem of the Law and the weakness of the flesh (8:3), liberating the believer from sin and death (8:2). The reason believers are not under condemnation is because they are no longer under the dominion of the Law (7:6; Schreiner, 398). The condemnation deserved as children of Adam (5:16, 18) has been removed by the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

What Paul is saying is that all of God's condemning wrath and all of His omnipotent opposition to us in our sin has been replaced by almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. In other words, if you are in Christ Jesus, all of God's action toward you is almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. It is not mixed. It is not as though some days He is against you with wrath - and those days are bad days - while other days He is for you with love - and those days are good days. That is emphatically not the case and not the way to think about it. . . In Christ Jesus God is always for you. Always! (sermon by John Piper, Ro 8:1, September 30, 2001—John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org)

8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Verses 2–4 tell us why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, namely, because (“for”) the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death.

The “law of the Spirit of life” is the opposite of “the law of sin and death,” so the way one is interpreted determines the meaning of the other. Although there are various interpretations, it seems best to see these two “laws” as descriptions of the gospel and the Law of Moses. The “law of sin and death” is the OT Law—the same “Law” in 8:3 that was weak through the flesh. The Law is itself not sinful, but is called the law of sin and death because it reveals (Ro. 5:13) and provokes sin (7:7–8), and provides the ground for condemnation which results in death (7:9–11) (Hodge, 250–251). In other words, when the Law comes into contact with sinful people it is an instrument of sin and death (Moo, 476). Paul felt this when, after seeing his total inability to conquer sin under the Law cried in despair, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (7:24).

“The Law of the Spirit of life” cannot also be the Law of Moses [as some take it] for in the context, God accomplished through the Son what the Law of Moses could not do (8:3). The next verse almost demands this interpretation for it gives the reason the believer needs to be freed from the OT Law. In 7:1–5 the believer had to die to the Law and be freed from it so that sin would not master him. It would be unlikely that he is now being rejoined to the Law that he died to, in order to be joined to Christ. Furthermore, throughout Paul’s letters the Mosaic Law is pictured on the opposite side of the Spirit (Moo, 474). The impotence of the Law is not met with empowering the Law through the Spirit, but with God’s gracious activity in Christ (Moo, 475).

The gospel can be called “the law of the Spirit of life” because the Holy Spirit is the author of life (cf. 8:10; II Co. 3:6; Gal. 6:8), and that which comes from Him results in life. This life is defined as being “in Christ Jesus.” By “law,” Paul means power or principle.

8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

8:4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The “for” in verse 3 signals that Paul is using verses 3 and 4 together to explain and expand upon verses 1 and 2. It also sums up the point of chapter 7—the problem with the Law is that it is weak when the sinful, unregenerate nature (the flesh—7:14; 8:3, 4) is at work. What the Law could not do, God did; He condemned sin in the flesh by sending His Son. The sending of the Son does not focus on the incarnation as much as the need of a sacrifice to be made.

We needed to be delivered from the Law because it was weak; it did not provide the power for people to follow it. That is, it was powerless to save us because it could not overcome sin and justify the believer. But what the Law couldn’t do, God did by sending His Son.

Two comments about the Son should be noticed: (1) the form which the Son took and (2) the mission for which He came.

(1) The form in which the Son came:

Romans 8:3a says that Jesus came in the flesh. “Flesh” has multiple meanings, even in this context. For example, Paul said in Romans 7:5 of unbelievers, “while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to

bear fruit for death.” In Romans 7:14 he said of himself, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” Romans 8:7 says of unbelievers, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” So flesh can refer to the nature of fallen humanity in Adam in bondage to sin. But this cannot be the meaning of “flesh” in relationship to Christ. When it says that the Son was sent in the flesh it means “clothed in human nature.” However, it doesn’t just say that Jesus came in the *flesh*, for that could have simply meant that He possessed the same nature as Adam before the fall. Nor does it say that He came in *sinful* flesh which is the dominant meaning in the context. If that were so, He would have been sinful which the Bible flatly denies (Heb. 4:15). Rather, Paul says that Jesus came *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας). “Likeness” is added to emphasize a distinction between Christ and the rest of humanity, while “flesh” maintains a connection between the two.

Thus, Paul probably means that Jesus experienced the infirmities of fallen humanity such as pain, weariness, sorrow, and temptation just like we do, but without sin (Hodge, 253). The word “likeness” stresses full identity with sinful humanity without suggesting that He, too, was imprisoned to sin (7:5, 23; 8:8, 9). He “participated fully in the age of the flesh so that His body was not immune to the powers of the old age – including sickness and death” (Schreiner, 403).

Murray comments:

He [Paul] is concerned to show that when the Father sent the Son into this world of sin, of misery, and of death, He sent him in a manner that brought Him into the closest relation to sinful humanity that it was possible for Him to come without becoming Himself sinful. He himself was holy and undefiled -- the word “likeness” guards this truth. But He came in the same human nature. And that is the purpose of saying “sinful flesh.” No other combination of terms could have fulfilled these purposes so perfectly (Murray, 280).

(2) The mission for which the Son came:

In **8:3b** Paul says that Jesus’ mission was “on account of sin” (περὶ ἁμαρτίας). Some believe this is a general reference to sin, meaning that Jesus came to deal with sin. But the Greek expression in the OT (the LXX) is used 44 of 54 times in reference to a sin offering, so it probably refers to Jesus as a sacrifice for sin; for that reason, the NASB translates the expression as “an offering for sin.”

God condemned sin in Christ—not just in His human “flesh” but in the sin of His flesh as He hung on the cross (Schreiner, 404). He became our substitute for sin. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “He was made sin,” and therefore propitiated God’s wrath (Ro. 3:25). The believer is no longer condemned because Christ is condemned (Moo, 477).

The purpose of this judicial act is in verse 4: “that (i.e. in order that [ὅνα–hina]) the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ, because God sent His Son to atone for sin and the Holy Spirit has set them free from the powers of sin and death. By means of Jesus’ sacrifice the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled. “Fulfilled” in verse 4 is a passive verb.

The passive aspect means that the fulfillment was not something we do, but something done to us. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us through Christ's death. When the obedience of Christ is accepted for us, the Law is satisfied and we are counted just (Moo, 483, 484).

If Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law, in what sense is the righteous requirement fulfilled *in us*?

Although Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law, "*in Him* believers also fulfill the Law – perfectly, so that they may be pronounced 'righteous,' free from 'condemnation' (v. 1). It is in this way that Paul's stress of faith 'establishes the law' (3:31), for, in grasping Christ by faith, people are accounted as really having 'done the Law.' Indeed, as Paul makes clear in this letter, it is *only* through faith in Christ that the Law can really be accomplished" (Moo, 484). The "us" is therefore, not instrumental (we aren't the ones who fulfill the Law by walking according to the Spirit) but descriptive ("those who walk in the Spirit" is a description of those who have been joined to Christ and share His righteousness) (Moo, 484, 485).

By breaking the power of sin the believer is able to walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. The controlling principle of the believer's life is no longer tied to the Law but to the Holy Spirit, the external evidence we have of being in Christ is the subjugation of the whole life to the Spirit (Moo, 484, 485).