

Life in the Spirit

Romans 8

January 21, 2018

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.³ 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,⁴ 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.⁵ 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 minds on the things of the Spirit.⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.⁷ 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.⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but 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.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.¹¹ 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.

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.¹³ 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.¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

¹⁵ 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!"¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,
 “For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
 we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 Romans 8:1-39 (ESV)

Alex did a very good job last week of looking at Romans 7 and the main point being the continual battle in our life here on earth between the Law of God and the Law of Sin. That even for Christian's, the Law of Sin often wins out, or at least more than we would like.. The key verse in last week's passage is probably Paul's own admission in v. 21 - 23:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within the members.
 Romans 7:21-23 (NIV)

Even as Christians, the battle between the way that God wants us to live, found in his law, and the sin that wages inside of each of us, continues on until we breathe our last breath here on earth in this time frame. I remember hearing or reading about a young man who asked a very well respected and looked up to Christian man who was in his 90's, “at what age did you finally get past the desire of sexual sin?” The 90 year old man said, “I don't know, I'll let you know when I get there.”

But we also need to be very careful here because Paul tells us over and over again, both here in Romans and in his other letters, that the grace of God that believers receive through the work of Jesus Christ, is not a license to keep on sinning. In our passage this morning, Romans 8, Paul tells us that there is another Law at work in the bodies of believers and that is the Law of the Spirit.

Many believe that Romans 8 is the crescendo or the peak of Paul's letter to the early Christians in Rome. He begins by offering a brief summation of what he has talked about earlier, from the beginning of his letter through Romans 7, “**Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 8:1). For believers, because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, taking upon himself the penalty for all our sins – past, present and future, we are no longer under condemnation from God. While that might be easy to verbalize, it is much harder to internalize. It is my experience that the two groups of Christians that seem to have the hardest time with that are Roman Catholics and Mennonites. Since those are the two groups I have spent most of my time with, it is no wonder that I have such a hard time thinking that I have to measure up, or

revisiting the sins of my past, or dealing with the guilt. “Every day, my entire life, I’ve fought to find my worth in what Christ has done for me, not what I do for Christ. There were times, I’m sorry to say, I mostly lost the fight” (from *Clear Winter Nights* by Trevin Wax).

You see, on our own we will always lose the battle. Everything that Paul talks about here in Romans 8 is a gift from God through the work of Jesus on the cross and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, which is why the Holy Spirit is mentioned some 20 times in the chapter. Paul is giving us a list of what a life in Christ, a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Law of the Spirit brings. I’ve been able to come up with a Top Ten List from our passage this morning:

1. No condemnation

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

It’s is also what the Law of God could not do.

³ 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, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us Romans 8:3-4a

For those who are in Christ, God condemns the sin but not the person.

2. A Walk according to the Spirit

⁴ 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. Romans 8:4

3. A Mind set on the things of the Spirit

⁵ 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 minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:5-8

A life in Christ, a life under the control of the Law of the Spirit will require a change of one’s mind. That’s really what the biblical word “repentance” means, “to change one’s mind.” Further along in Romans, at the beginning of Romans 12, Paul writes: *2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Paul wrote the same thing to the early Christians in Colossae, *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* Colossians 3:1-2

4. A New and Resurrected Life –

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but 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. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ 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.

Romans 8:9-11

Those who are “in Christ” experience both a new life here and now and a resurrected life in the life to come. Many Christian denominations focus more on one than the other, some focus all on one at the exclusion of the other.

5. We become children (sons and daughters) of God –

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

Romans 8:14-17a

6. Suffering

—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:17b-18

It is not only through Jesus’ sufferings, and his death on the cross, which we are glorified, it is also through our own. That’s a tough pill for us to swallow today. We want the glory now, pain free! It doesn’t work that way. Jesus provided our atonement for sin because he suffered and died as a sinless human being. We suffer and die during our life here on earth because of our own sin. As v. 19-23 point out, it’s not just us humans, it’s all of creation.

7. We will be glorified with Christ

heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:17b-18

Christ was glorified through his suffering, no less for us.

8. We have Hope

²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
Romans 8:24-25

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
1 Corinthians 15:19

9. Our prayer aligns with God's prayer

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God
Romans 8:26-27

10. The Love of God is within us

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37b-39

Those who are in Christ, who are walking in the Life of the Spirit not only have the love of God within them, they display the love of God towards others. They can't but help it!

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
Galatians 5:22-23

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, "*The greatest of these is love.*"

If you look at the header of the Top Ten List, you will notice it says, "The Top 10 things we receive from a Life in Christ," meaning they are something that God gives us. And there are a few verses from our passage this morning that I have not yet addressed, three verses which might just be the most important verses of chapter 8 and three verses which have caused divisions among Christian denominations throughout the centuries, especially that of those who believe in Free Will, like most Mennonites and Anabaptists and many others, and those who believe in predestination like the Calvinists and others.

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
Romans 8:28-30

I have personally struggled with this part of the passage, along with a couple others in the Bible like it, for several years now. But in preparing for this week's message I might have just discovered one who can explain it best and it comes from William Barclay in his commentary on *The Letter to the Romans*.

“This is a passage which has been very seriously misused. If we are ever to understand it we must grasp the basic fact that Paul never meant it to be the expression of theology or philosophy; he meant it to be an expression of the Christian experience. If we take it as philosophy or theology and apply the standards of cold logic to it, it must mean that God chose some and did not choose others. But that is not what it means.

Think of the Christian experience. The more a Christian thinks of his experience the more he becomes convinced that that he had nothing to do with it all and all is of God. Jesus Christ came into this world; he lived; he went to the cross; he rose again. We did nothing to bring that about; that is God's work. We heard the story of this wondrous love. We did not make the story, we *received* the story. Love woke within our hearts; the conviction of sin came, and with it came the experience of forgiveness and salvation. We did not achieve that; all is of God. That is what Paul is thinking here.

The Old Testament has an illuminating use of the word *to know*. When the Bible speaks of God *knowing* a man, it means that he has a purpose and a plan and a task for that man. And when we look back on our Christian experience, all we can say is, ‘I did not do this; I could never have done this; God did everything.’

And we know well that this does not take freewill away. God knew Israel, but the day came when Israel refused the destiny God meant her to have. God's unseen guiding is in our lives, but to the end of the day we can refuse it and take our own way.

It is the deep experience of the Christian that all is of God; that he did nothing and that God did everything. That is what Paul means here. He means that from the beginning of time God marked us out for salvation; that in due time his call came to us; but the pride of man's heart can wreck God's plan and the disobedience of man's will can refuse the call.”

William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, Revised Edition, p. 114-115

God has a purpose, plan and task for all men and woman. He has had a plan since before time began. First and foremost it is that we come to know and love Him. But on our own we cannot do that. When it is just the law of God and the law of sin, our human fleshly nature, sin will always win out. So God needed to intervene. He first intervened with the Israelites, but they still had the opportunity to choose to accept his love or not. Then he sent his Son, Jesus, not only for the Israelites but for all people. And we still have the opportunity to choose to accept God's love for us displayed through His Son, Jesus Christ, or not. “We love God because God first loved us.” When we do choose to accept God's love through the free gift of His Son Jesus Christ then we **receive** the gift of the Holy Spirit and all that entails:

1. No condemnation
2. A Walk according to the Spirit
3. A Mind set on the Spirit
4. A New Life now and a Resurrected Life to Come
5. We become sons and daughters of God

6. We will still experience suffering during our life here on earth, but “take heart, it will be overcome.”
7. We become glorified with Christ
8. We have Hope
9. Our prayers aligns with God’s prayers
10. The Love of God is within us

That is the true test of what a Life in Christ, a Life in the Spirit, looks like, not just whether we say we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, or been baptized in water, or come to church each and every Sunday, or read our Bible’s regularly. The true test is “am I being transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus Christ.”