

Session 1.4 The Spiritual Self

Background Notes to Romans 8:1-17

The words of Romans 8 should ring in the ears of every Christian as the freedom bells of salvation! It is the truth of these verses that enables us to take hold of our great inheritance. Paul begins chapter 8 with the words, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." 'Therefore' points us in two directions. It takes us back to what Paul has been saying in the first seven chapters of Romans: namely, that God declares righteous those who believe in Jesus as their Savior. When we, through faith, receive the good news of Jesus' death for us, we move from being guilty before God and sentenced to death to being justified, declared right with Him. The result of justification has both an immediate and future effect, so 'therefore' also signifies that for now and the future there *is* no condemnation for the believer!

'No condemnation' is the power of the gospel. God the Father sent God the Son to redeem people from their sinful nature who are then enabled to live righteous lives by the power of God the Holy Spirit. Why do Christians seem to be so slow in taking hold of this truth? Is it because they do not trust God enough to believe the words of Romans 8:1? We sometimes cling to judging ourselves and do not fully accept the complete forgiveness we have in Christ. If God has forgiven us, it is wrong to place our own judgment above God's. We have been set free from the law of sin and death in order to live the life that God desires for us to have now and into eternity with Him.

We can rightly say that one purpose of Jesus' incarnation and death was that all who are in Him might live holy lives. (see Romans 8:4) The Christian life is a path along which we walk, following Jesus Christ who goes before us. The path has a direction and it has boundaries. The direction of the path leads us towards the character of God, changing us into His image. The boundaries are the requirements of God's Word as revealed in the Bible. Will Christians make mistakes, fall and sin? Yes, but there is all the difference in the world between stumbling on the path, getting up and going on, and not being on the path of discipleship at all. A Christian's heart is set not on living according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

To be "in Christ" is to be delivered from the state of sin and death, given eternal life, and to be growing in holiness. In Chapter 8 Paul teaches that only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can anyone be holy. In verses 5-11 Paul contrasts life according to the sinful nature with life according to the Spirit. To live according to the sinful nature is to have the focus of life upon self. To live according to the Spirit is to have the focus of life upon God.

To live according to the sinful nature is to have one's mind set on what that nature desires. The unsaved person may or may not indulge in "fleshly sins." He may be quite successful and 'moral' in the eyes of the world, imagining that he deserves God's favor. He may do 'good things', but if he continues in his rejection of his Creator, his heart will grow hard to the prodding of the Holy Spirit and eventually all that he accumulates or accomplishes will come to nothing, for he will die without a Savior.

Non-Christians often develop a religious system "a la cart", choosing items from a potpourri of ideas, combining them to make their own beliefs. They feel comfortable with such a "religion" because it enables them to keep their heart focused on their one true god, self. The person controlled by the sinful mind is hostile to God, unable to please Him. He is veiled from the truth of Jesus Christ and the cross. (see 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:15-16) Condemnation follows the rejection of Jesus, for the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the continual rejection of the prodding of the Holy Spirit who points us to the truth of the gospel. (see Matthew 12:31-32)

To the believer, God is no longer unreal or intangible. On the contrary, He is more real to us than life itself. God has not only come alive to us as a result of the Holy Spirit's work, the Word of God, the Bible, also comes alive to us. Our desire is to become more like Christ in our lives. The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ. Being Christ's, is to begin to take hold of who we belong to. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body." The past is now dead for us and we must live as what we truly are, children of the King!

In Romans 8:9-17, we read about our deliverance from our sin nature. These verses tell us that we are sons of God. Verse 9 explains that those who belong to Christ have the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, living in you. Our mortal bodies have life today to live for righteousness. Paul's strength in service to Christ came from the reality of the Spirit of God living in Him. His life's desire is seen in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection." The power of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than the ability to bring death to life. Those who cling to their sin will die, but those who are led by the Spirit have life!

Christians "have an obligation" to live according to the Holy Spirit rather than according to the sinful nature because of what Christ has done for us. We have received sonship from the Father, being heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. In being a co-heir with Christ we will share in His suffering so that we may also share in His glory. Suffering can be for many reasons, but, as we suffer for Christ's sake, we keep our eyes on Christ and remember His promise of glory in the future. (see verse 18) To be able to suffer for Christ is supernatural because it is accomplished by the power of God alone.

In summary, we know we are in God's family as the Spirit of God leads us forward in our daily lives. God breaks the power of sin in the believer's life, giving him the power to put to death the misdeeds of the body. He enables us to live to please Him! This entire chapter teaches that if we are truly in Christ, nothing in creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God. Our obligation is to make a conscious effort every day to yield to the Lord. This must be done even in the small, secret things, continuing to understand that all we are and have is because of God's love and grace. Let each of us thank and praise Him for the relationship He has given us through Jesus Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit.