

## FREE TO LIVE BY THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:1-17

Key Verse: 8:1,2

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

In the last passage we learned that we died to the law through the body of Christ. We are no longer married to Mr. Law who is always demanding and never lifts a finger to help us. Now we belong to Jesus, Mr. Grace, who forgives us and embraces us and enables us to grow into his glorious image. Our new life is full of grace and joy. Romans 7:6 says, “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” In Christ, we died to sin. We have been released from the law. We serve in the new way of the Spirit.

In today’s passage Paul develops the teaching about life in the Spirit. Paul explains that the Spirit sets us free from the power of sin and death. But we must learn how to use our freedom wisely. Then we can go from victory unto victory until we reach the glorious kingdom of God. May God teach us today how to live by the Spirit.

First, the Spirit sets us free from sin and death (1-4).

Look at verses 1-2. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” Before knowing Jesus, we were in a condemned state. We were ruled by the power of sin and death. So we did what we really did not want to do and violated God’s law. Then the law pronounced us guilty, deserving of death. We were all like prisoners on death row. But Christ died for our sins. When we accept Jesus by faith, our old self is crucified with him. We die to sin. We also die to the law. Jesus bore all the condemnation and punishment that we deserve. Now, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit applies this truth to our hearts and sets us free from the power of sin and death.

Look at verses 3-4. “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” We know that the law could not save us. The law pointed out our sins with precision. It diagnosed our sickness. But it had no power to save or heal us. We were helpless.

However, God did not leave us alone. God loved us when we were unlovely and wretched. God looked upon us with mercy. God decided to send his own Son, to this world as a human being to be condemned in our places. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus took our sins in his body and died on the cross as a sin offering. God’s righteous demand for justice was satisfied fully by Jesus. Jesus purchased our freedom at the cost of his lifeblood. Thank you Jesus!

Now we have been set free. We are really free. In the past, we were slaves to sin. We sinned even though we did not want to sin. But now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are free from the power of sin and death. We are free to live a new life.

Second, set your mind on what the Spirit desires (5-8).

Freedom involves a choice. We must decide how to use the new life Jesus has given us. Sometimes there seem to be many alternatives and many good ways. But from God’s point of view, there are only two ways of life. There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who live according to the sinful nature and those who live according to the Spirit. In verses 5-8, Paul contrasts these two ways of life and explains their consequences. We must decide between the two. In making this choice, where we set our minds is really important.

Look at verse 5a. “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires....” In this verse, the words “sinful nature” are interchangeable with the words “flesh” or “unspiritual.” In other words, these people only think about life in this world and the desires of their flesh. They never think about God. The people of Noah’s time were like that. Outwardly they looked awesome. The women were all super-model material.

The men were all sportsmen of the year candidates. They called each other heros and heroines. They presented each other with Academy Awards and MVP trophies. But when God looked at them he was not pleased. God saw the thoughts of their hearts. They were only thinking about eating, drinking and sex. God sent his Spirit to make a relationship with them. But they ignored God's Spirit. They were not at all interested in the Spirit. They set their minds on the flesh and only thought about their flesh all the time.

Then what happened? Look at verse 6a. "The mind of sinful man is death..." Flesh, like all things of the world, perishes and spoils. Those whose minds are set only on the flesh inevitably end with death. When death rules their thought world they become skeptical and cynical. Their lives have no real meaning. Their philosophy becomes "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." They make plastic smiles and say clever things, but in the end they are nothing more than dead men walking.

Look at verses 7-8. "...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Finally, they become the enemies of God. Cain was once a pretty good guy. But when God accepted Abel's offering and not his, Cain was angry at God. God warned him that sin was crouching at his door. But Cain ignored God's word. The sin of jealousy grew in him until it drove him to kill his lovely younger brother. At the moment, Cain also became like a dead man.

On the other hand, there are those who live according to the Spirit. Look at verse 5b. "...but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." These people's minds are set on what the Spirit desires. The Spirit is God's life in them. They are related to God and connected to God. They can know the mind of God and what pleases him. Our Lord Jesus had his mind set on what the Spirit desired. He always lived to please God. So, during his passion week, he diligently taught the word of God to people in the temple courts. He did not think about himself, but about how to please God. He knew that what God really wanted was to save all people from their sins through the living word of God. So he taught the Bible to please God.

Then there was Jonathan. He was the crown prince of Israel. If his mind was set on the flesh, he would have done everything to establish his own kingship. But he was a man of the Spirit. His mind was set on what the Spirit desired. He recognized the work of God in David. He understood the will of God to raise David as the next king. So he gave up his chance to be king in order to fulfill the will of God. Not only did he please God, but he was a true friend to David.

Look at verse 6b. "...but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." The Spirit gives life. When the Spirit controls our mind he gives life to our souls. The Spirit gives us peace. There was a man named Joseph Scriven. He grew up in Ireland in the 19th century. After graduation from Trinity Seminary, he met a pretty Irish lass and was engaged to marry. But the night before their wedding day, she drowned. Joseph left Ireland and moved to Port Hope, Canada. There he met another beautiful woman of God and was engaged. Again, just before their marriage day, she died. Broken-hearted, Joseph joined the Plymouth Brethren and began to help needy people. He came to be known as "the Good Samaritan of Port Hope." Meanwhile, in Ireland, his mother fell ill. So he wrote a poem and sent it to her. It was titled, "What a friend we have in Jesus." Later it became a most famous hymn. One of the lines says, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!" Obviously Mr. Scriven knew the peace that the Spirit gives, even in times of trial.

When we want to live by the Spirit, we must set our minds on what the Spirit desires. We can do this by the help of the Spirit through Bible study and prayer. One young man indulged in fleshly thoughts, especially about women. He became sick in his soul. He became hostile to nice girls without reason. The power of sin was growing in him. Then, by the advice of his shepherd, he began to memorize Bible passages. At first, it took several hours to memorize one verse. Gradually, the Spirit began to control his thought world and his actions. He began to have pure thoughts and a shepherd heart for others. Now he is growing spiritually as a man controlled by the Spirit. Let's read verse 6. "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

Third, the Spirit gives life (9-11).

Look at verse 9. "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Paul's statement is very clear. Those who are Christians are controlled by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God shepherds us as he did King David.

David said in Psalm 23, "...your rod and your staff, they comfort me." The rod and staff were shepherd's tools to guide and control the sheep. David knew that his life was in God's hands. His life was controlled by the Spirit. We don't always know how the Spirit controls our lives. But when we have the Spirit, we can be sure that he does. The Bible says so.

Look at verse 10. "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." In Christ we died to sin. At the same time, we are made alive by the Spirit. We can know God. We can love God. We can worship God and serve God. For example, the prophet Daniel became a POW during the Babylonian captivity. He was chosen to serve in the king's court, a great privilege that carried the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of the palace. But Daniel made a decision not to defile himself with the royal food in order to please God (Da 1:8). He used his freedom to serve God instead of eating a little better food. Then God blessed him abundantly. God gave him matchless wisdom and spiritual insight. He saw everything from God's point of view. He saw that the Messiah would come and deliver his people. Daniel also lived a life of prayer to God. He was alive to God. Likewise, when our spirit is alive, we can see God and live before God.

St. John was on the island of Patmos, exiled because of his clear testimony about Jesus Christ. He was old. Yet on the Lord's day, he was in the Spirit (Rev 1:10). He was alive to God. Then he could have a glorious vision of the coming of the Son of Man in power and glory. He could see the coming of the new heaven and the new earth. He could see God's final victory and rejoice. The Spirit gives life.

When the Spirit of Christ lives in us we are alive to God. We can know God. We can pray to God. We can have the vision of God. We can see the world from God's point of view. We can enjoy the life that is truly life in our souls. That is not all. Look at verse 11. "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." We can be sure that the Spirit of Christ will give life to our mortal bodies. We will be raised again like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, we have an obligation to the Spirit (12-14).

Look at verse 12. "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it." Some people think they have an obligation to the sinful nature. They reason that they must sin to some extent. But Paul says that we have no obligation to the sinful nature—none whatsoever! If we live according to the sinful nature we will die. Compromising a little with the sinful nature never makes a person better spiritually. It always deadens the spiritual life and stunts spiritual growth. We must have a clear attitude toward sin. We have no obligation to the sinful nature at all—none whatsoever!

Instead, we have an obligation to the Spirit. God has done everything for us. He gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. Through Christ he has given us his Holy Spirit. When we depend on him, we can have victory over sin. Since God has done so much for us, shouldn't we respond to his love and grace with wholehearted devotion and obedience? We must cooperate with the Spirit as he works in and through us. Look at verse 13b. "...but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." The Holy Spirit desires to crucify our sinful nature. The Holy Spirit wants to sanctify us and make us fit for God's service and for eternal life. Father Abraham had to put to death his human passion, element by element, until he was fully refined in the love of God. This was a practical matter. He had to send Ishmael away. He had to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Finally, he had the faith, hope and love that God wanted and he passed God's final exam.

Look at verse 14. "...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Now we are freed from bondage to sin and death and the law. We have a new relationship with God. He does not treat us legalistically. Nor does he treat us as our sins deserve. He shepherds us through his Spirit to grow in his image. As God's precious children, we have an obligation to the Spirit to follow his leading.

Fifth, the Spirit reveals God's love and future glory (15-17).

Look at verse 15. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, we were enslaved by the power of sin and condemned by the law and had to live in fear all the time. But the Holy Spirit drives out fear from our hearts. The Holy Spirit assures us of God's love. The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children. By the Spirit

we can call God “Abba, Father.” And by the Spirit, we can hear God’s approving words that we are his children whom he loves (16). Look at verse 17. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

In today’s passage we learned that through the death and resurrection of Christ, God has given us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets us free from the power of sin and death. The Holy Spirit makes us alive to God and gives us peace. The Holy Spirit sanctifies our inner person and gives us victory over sin. The Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we are God’s children who have an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God. In light of what God has done, we have an obligation to live by the Spirit. May God give you life and peace as you do so.