

“LIFE ...according to the Spirit”

- Romans 8:1-16 -

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Romans 8:1-16 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 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, 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. 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, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. 10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*



Chapter 7 was an exercise in desperation. Paul was overwhelmed by the realization that he, *that we*, will never be able to stop sinning...*at least in this life*. Our old nature was no good, and our new nature has no power! Ah, nothing but condemnation! And *then*, along comes chapter 8 of this book of Romans. Where chapter 7 ends with a struggle, chapter 8 begins with a shout! **We have been set free of our condemnation of sin.**

Romans 8 verse 1 is considered by many to be one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest verse in all of the Bible. It speaks one of the greatest promises in all of Scripture, and in all of life! “*No condemnation.*” We have discovered out of chapter 7 that such a positional state doesn’t come through following the rules! In fact, it doesn’t come through anything that *we* do at all. It’s not what we *do*, but where we *are*. Yes, indeed we know that such is *made available* because of the cross of Christ. Because he died, we are rendered *positionally* justified before God. But as chapter 7 made emphatically clear, we still fall *practically* short of a righteous and pure walk in Christ.

“*There is therefore now no condemnation...*” For many of us, this is where this passage begins and ends as does the theology behind it. We love the sound of those words and we have no trouble embracing the sentiment behind its message. However, that’s not the end of the verse and thus not the end of the story. For the verse reads on saying that that position of “no condemnation” is *to those who are in Christ Jesus*, and further...(those) *who do not walk according to the flesh, but* (for those who walk) *according to the Spirit*.

The latter half of verse one appears in some ancient manuscripts and not in others, and for many folks they would like it to not be in there because of the ramifications it adds to this chapter. But even if you are using ESV or another modern version that gives the English without it, the exact phrase is repeated in verse 4 and in verse 4 it is in *all the manuscripts*.

Now Paul is not talking out of both sides of his mouth here: *freeing us from the bondage of rules only to toss us back in again*. Please note the specific language. For it doesn’t say we are no longer condemned because we follow a set of rules. It says we are no longer condemned because we are “*in Christ*” and because we “*walk according to the Spirit.*” Hmmm...so just what does this “walk according to the Spirit” look like?

Paul has been preaching for several chapters...really in all of his writings, the idea that upon a *true rebirth experience*, there is a profound and very real transformation. We no longer strive or just *desire* to walk in Christ, we can really and successfully walk in Christ.

Note the specific mailing address for this new “no condemnation” package delivery. If we are to believe that God was specific and careful about the vernacular he used, then we must note that little word “in.” It is for those who are “*in* Christ.” (Read John 15!) Furthermore, it’s not walk *with*, or even walk *beside*. But rather those who “walk *‘according to’* or *‘in’ the Spirit.*” It specifically is a walk “in” the Spirit of God. Not ‘know’ that Spirit, or *heard* of Him. Not even those who “sit” or even a “stand” in that Spirit’s presence. But those live out their lives...literally *move* in the Holy Spirit. What can we gather from all this very specific verbiage?

Well, to begin with, we know what it is *not*. It is *not* “walking according to the flesh.” Again, that’s not just walking in bad living, but walking in any life that is according to our efforts, the laws and rules, and our own efforts. All of it is “flesh.” It is a rather a position held by those who have truly been reborn and now walk “not according to the flesh” but in the Holy Spirit of God. What does Paul mean by “walk?” The original language translates “walk” as “*to make one’s way, progress; to make due use of opportunities... to live... to regulate one’s life... to conduct one’s self... to pass one’s life.*” One thing is for sure, it is an ‘active’ word...one which denotes *movement*. A “life moving in the Spirit.”

It is not that we, as redeemed children of God, are free from *all* law. We simply are choosing a *different* law... “*the law of the Spirit of life.*” The term “law” is chosen carefully and specifically for this situation. Here “law” refers to “control, influence, to be ruled by.” Thus we are choosing rather to live under the control and influence of this new “Spirit of life.” Just the *sound* of that is wonderful! It is something that we never knew outside of salvation.

We not only know and experience this life, but we are now *controlled* by such! We used to be controlled by the “law of sin and death,” but now the “Spirit of life” controls our being. We are not free from *sin*, but free from its “control, influence and rule.” The word “spirit” here speaks of “*the disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of any one.*” 2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us, “*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*” We are no longer in bondage to sin...we have the knowledge now and we have the power of the Spirit now. Now we can *choose*. Life in that verse speaks of “*the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God, ... life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be consummated by new accessions (among them a more perfect body), and to last forever.*” **Wow.**

Notice that the text says the law “*could not*” give us that life. It never can because of a couple of fateful flaws in that plan: *One*, the law lacked any innate power to change us, and secondly, we ourselves entered the stage of life already corrupt! Our flesh is sinful by inherent nature. We just can’t do it...we just can’t follow it. What we need, is a *ringer*. Someone who was indeed human, but still actually has the ability to follow the Law. Well, that would take God Himself! *Exactly*. And that’s just how it was done. Jesus Christ, God in flesh form, came and fulfilled all of the Law without missing a beat.

But that would essentially only hold *Him* in the status of justified! So Christ moved on to step two. *He became the sacrificial lamb: our stand-in for the judgment and punishment that is waiting for each of us.* The Law demanded payment. A sacrifice of blood, literally *death*, to make things right before God. Justice had to be served. So Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, without sin and flawless in Spirit, went on to be the grand and final “payment” for sin. *All sin...my sin; and your sin.* He was our “sin sacrifice.”

The “righteous requirement” was not only “met” at the onset but can now be continually and daily *fulfilled* in us. In lives that are now controlled by the “Spirit of life.” With *HIM* in us, we fulfill the requirement to be in God’s presence. Holy, sanctified, justified. Will we now walk in that Spirit or in the flesh?

“*Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*” Eph 1:4

This is all good and fine, and we love the sound of it. But that gnawing question is still back there in our minds. What *is* our part then, in order to see such a reality in our lives? Our love for Christ must drive us not to the law, not

to regulations and rules, but to the Spirit. We are to “*set our minds on the things of the Spirit.*” (Col 3:2) Where are you setting your mind today?

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” (Prov 23:7a).

The truth is, so many of us are passing through this journey and in Christ we have the freedom, understanding, and power to walk holy and live free. But we do not, simply because we refuse to stop stuffing our brains with the “things of the flesh.” We live with a carnal mind, walk a carnal path and thus we go on being carnal. Such a path is the path of death, and we never know the promises of God as a reality in our lives. Now please don’t lose the impact of this message by misunderstanding what is meant here by “carnal.” Our modern use of that word speaks of a deep sin activity or an overt sexual activity. But the original use means anything involving the flesh and the world...even the perceived benign issues of human pursuits and activities.

So what Does Paul mean the when he speaks of the “carnal mind?” It can be the mind that is focused on the immoral, but also even the material and the physical. Worldly pleasure and pursuits. Thus it can even be one centered on human morality or the self-striving for an upright life, or one focused even on religion and good works. For these too are all earthly and temporal.

“The point is this: a carnal mind does not necessarily mean that a man's thoughts are upon the base, immoral, and vicious. A carnal mind means any mind that does not find its basis in God, any mind that is not focused upon God first. A carnal mind may focus upon a moral, upright, and cultured life and still ignore, neglect, and exempt God. A carnal mind may also focus upon religion and still exempt God. A carnal mind is a mind that finds its basis in this world, that focuses its thoughts upon the physical and material instead of God.” —Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary

What then is the “spiritual” mind? It is a mind “set” upon the things of the Spirit. These things include the fruit and character of Christ, the mission and ministry of the Kingdom, and knowing and understanding our Creator.

“...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...” (2 Cor 10:5)

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” (Phil 4:8)

To “set” our minds upon such is to place our thoughts firmly, and resolutely, and most important, *actively*, upon the things of God. It is not a *defensive* move, but rather an offensive onslaught. Once again, it is a “walking” in the Spirit. It’s not always an *easy* venture, but it is a *natural* one...for it is, *for us*, the “spirit of life.”

Verses 6-7 says *“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”*

We gather from this that the situation for the believer is no longer the bondage of sin in the flesh, but now it lies in the battleground of the mind. This is where the Christian is defeated. No doubt Paul had this in mind in Colossians 3:2 where he says *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

This is our fight now! A fight that many today are losing. Minds consumed by earthly comforts, worry, pleasures, and the secondary pressures that result from the first three listed! And not anything this world can offer to numb that mind will correct that spiritual imbalance. For such is enmity between us and God. “*Enmity*” means *hostility, animosity, division.*

In verse 8 Paul reiterates again the obvious: *we can never please God in the flesh.* Therefore, no matter how many “good things” one does on this earth...how “nice” we might be to our neighbors...how much church we attend or how much money we give to “good causes,” God will not be impressed! Because void of the “spirit of life” such can only done in the “spirit of the law.”

The irony is that the world outside our doors is consumed by the search for fulfillment. People trying without success to find their way to God and to purpose and yet still satisfy the carnal hunger within them. They will suck down just about anything *except* a faith in Christ, a “walk in the Spirit of life” because to do so would require humility, acknowledgment of sin, and the relinquishing, or rather the *acknowledging of the relinquishing*, of the control of our lives. So we just keep looking for another route, fruitlessly *searching*...

In verse 9 Paul abruptly pulls us back from the sunny flowered fields of the land of “Feel Good,” reminding us that we aren’t walking in the flesh now...or *are we?* To clarify, Paul clearly draws the line. If you don’t have the “Spirit of Christ,” you don’t belong to Him at all. The “inhabitation” of the Holy Spirit comes to us upon salvation. If the Spirit isn’t there, neither is salvation. Being born again is not a mental assent. It is a transformation of life. YOU cease, and a new person arises from the ashes. This fact then strongly adheres to the principle of “Lordship Theology.” Meaning that if he is not *Lord of your life*...not the controlling aspect, then you aren’t saved at all. You may have made a mental decision at some point...maybe even recited the perceived correct mantra, but there was never a *surrender* of the control of your life.

That path goes like this: I have decided I want to be a good person and not a bad person, and I want to go to heaven when I die. So I make a head decision to enter into the ‘world’ of Christianity and now I go to church and try hard to follow all the righteous rules in the Bible. But gang, that’s not salvation. That’s religion. That’s not the Spirit of Life...that’s the Spirit of the Law! And it’s this thinking that throws us all into the pool of the Book of Romans! Salvation is the *surrender of your life to Christ...His control...His path*. It is walking in the “Spirit of life.”

Verse 10 – 11 “*And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*”

If Christ is in you...that’s the ultimate question here. If He is, then the “Spirit of Life” is calling the shots.

“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test.” 2 Cor 13:5

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Gal 5:25

IF He lives within us, He brings “*life*.” Not just breathing and heart pounding life, but that illusive abundant life that we hear so much about but so many fail to ever realize. It’s not that we lack the effort, but likely because we lack the *Spirit*.

Note the specific language of verse 12. Paul says we are “debtors”...that the truth is “*we owe Him*.” It is as Romans 12 says... our “reasonable service” in light of what He has done for us, to us, and in us.

Verse 14: “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*”

So, just exactly who then is the redeemed individual? Who is the child of God? The one who has recited a “sinner’s prayer” sometime in the past? The church attendee? The “good guy” who never cheats on his wife or steals from his employer? The one baptized as a child or confirmed as a teen? Paul again clarifies...the Bible clearly and emphatically states the facts: *it’s the man or woman who is actually led by Holy Spirit*.

Then in verse 16, all ambiguity and mystery is taken out of the way and we are given a clear view of the scene before us. According to this passage, it is no secret who is a true redeemed child of God. I don’t always know who *isn’t*, but I can sure tell who *is!* For the Holy Spirit witnesses *in* us and *through* us the truth of our standing with God.

What is the Spirit saying today to you? Have you surrendered the control, the direction, and the destiny of your life to the Holy Spirit’s leading? Are you experiencing the “spirit of life?”