

Prayers

To God

As you go about your business today, turn your mind to God and say a short prayer of praise. If it would be helpful, write down a short prayer and save it on the notepad of your phone or tablet. In your quiet time just now, commit to the Lord your intent and listen for His response.

For Self

Ask yourself whether you have forgiven yourself for some of the troubles you know you have caused through either raising your voice or failing to do what you know to have been God's will. Let no known trouble of the past inhibit your day.

For others

Father Almighty, You are peace divine. Speak into this warring world Your magnificent vision and purpose of eternal peace; so that, inspired by Your Kingdom of grace and righteousness announced in Scripture, men and women today might be ready to work for that partial but worthwhile peace which is achievable even now through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Meditation

Security.

We all seek this in different ways,
but how many find it?

For some who walk this world
it is a stranger on the path of life,
never found, seen only from behind;
something chased, but never caught.

So consider whether you have touched this phantom;
or is it an illusion of a bygone age
sent packing by our ever changing lives?

Your need is closer than you think,
and as you venture ever onward,
look down, across, behind, beyond, above and deep within,
for running side by side with every runner in the race of life,
if you will see Him,
is the Lord, whose passion drives Him on to offer His security,
as friend, companion, healer, more than this,

as Saviour and Redeemer, He is Lord!

Yes, all of this for us,
that we might rest in Him and know for sure
... He cares

Bible Passage

Romans 8:1-8

¹ So there is no condemnation for those who are 'in Christ Jesus!' ² For in Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

³ For God sent His own Son in sinful flesh to do what the law could not do because of the weakness of the flesh, which was to deal with sin. He condemned sin 'in the flesh' ⁴ so that the proper requirement of the law might be fulfilled in those of us who walk not according to 'the flesh' but according to 'the Spirit'.

⁵ Now those who live 'in the flesh' have minds set on natural worldly things, but those who are 'in the Spirit' have minds set on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ A mind set on 'the flesh' leads to death, but a mind set on 'the Spirit' leads to life and peace. ⁷ You see, a mind set on 'the flesh' is hostile to God; it does not submit to the law of God, indeed it cannot do so, ⁸ and those who are 'in the flesh' cannot please God.

Bible study Review

At last, we learn the glorious truth of the Gospel, '*there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!*' (8:1) These most wonderful and powerful words have inspired countless Christians over generations, because they express the truth of our salvation in one memorable sentence. They offer us the extraordinary assurance that in Christ Jesus, we are not rejected by God but accepted, and this is a message of pure love. In addition, these words stand at the beginning of one of the most memorable chapters of Romans. It is a long chapter, full to the brim with astonishing and exciting descriptions of the new life of those who have accepted Jesus Christ, and been liberated from the curse of death.

There is a great deal for us to explore here, but it is worth stopping for a moment to look at how this great confirmation of Christian faith comes not just at the beginning of chapter 8, but after the end of chapter 7. Immediately before this chapter, Paul concludes that the committed Christian bears no personal blame for the oppression of sin, which he describes as '*another law, which is at war with the law of my mind*' (7:23). The Christian whose mind is set on '*the law of Christ*' (7:25) experiences sin rather like a deadly cancer that can be overcome in Christ. Now if sin is the enemy and the Christian is truly set against it, there is indeed '*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*' (8:1).

Of course, Paul has more to say! Christians are not merely let off the hook on account of their salvation in Christ or because they treat sin as the enemy. Our passage today explains two

important and distinct things about what it means to be free from the '*law of sin and death*' (8:2). Firstly, that God alone has dealt with sin by sending Jesus to be a mortal human being capable of experiencing sin. As is explained here in verses 3 and 4, when Jesus died, he defeated sin by meeting the just requirements of God's sacrificial law. Because of this, those who have faith in Him and walk '*in the Spirit*' (8:4) overcome sin not in their own strength, but in His strength.

Secondly, the passage draws out the obvious conclusion of all this. Paul uses two phrases to describe the only two options for life, one of which is to remain as someone living by natural standards of the world, and the alternative, which is to follow the logic of faith and be set on the things of God (8:5-8). The first is described as living '*in the flesh*', and the second is living '*in the Spirit*'. In the translation I have given, I have placed quotation marks around these two phrases in order to make it clear that Paul is using them in a special way, to outline the choices facing humanity.

What Paul says here is a helpful way of explaining Christian faith. He tells us that God alone deals with sin, so we may overcome it not in our own strength but only through Jesus. If we struggle with sin, we should ask why we struggle, for we can never succeed in dealing with sin ourselves and only God can do this work within us. We must submit our sin to Him, and if we struggle to do this, then we struggle with faith itself.

In addition to this, today's passage contrasts the immense privileges of those who live '*in the Spirit*' (8:4,5,6), with the great mortal dangers of remaining '*in the flesh*' (8:5,6,7). On the one hand, living in the Spirit yields the benefits of being freed from the power of sin to destroy both life and communion with God (8:2,4), and also the benefit of '*life and peace*' of true Christian life (8:6). On the other hand, living in the flesh yields bondage to sin, hostility to God, and ultimately death itself(8:5,6,7).

It may be possible to quote this passage of Scripture when trying to persuade people of the benefits of Christian faith. But it is better used as Paul first intended it, as a means of explaining to God's people the true benefits of salvation.

Going Deeper

The passage that we have read today is part of a longer section of chapter 8 (verses 1-17), which introduces both the new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit into Paul's teaching. We will study it in two sections, the first (8:1-8) today, and the second (9-17) tomorrow. Each has important things to tell us, and we will look carefully at what each sentence reveals to us about the glories of the new life in the Spirit.

There is 'no condemnation'! (8:1,2)

The first verse of Romans 8 is very well known 'So there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'. This powerful and memorable phrase links with the very last part of chapter 8 which has the equally famous words 'I am convinced that nothing ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!' (8:38,39). On a number of occasions I have found that people easily mistake the one quote for the other, and this is testimony to the importance of both texts. They both say that the power of God through Jesus Christ on the Cross is far greater than anything else we can imagine, and if we place our faith in Christ, then

we are totally and absolutely safe in His hands, and there is nothing in this world that can prevent our salvation before the throne of Almighty God!

The words 'there is no condemnation' in verse 1, together with what is said in the second verse, sum up the blessings of being a Christian. They probably originate in the early church as words of reassurance given either to an individual or to a group of people who have just professed faith and committed their lives to Christ. Having declared their faith, they ask 'is it really true that I am now free from all the eternal consequences of what has happened in my life?' And the reply from the evangelist is 'Yes! There is no condemnation ... you are 'in Christ' ... you are free from the law of sin and death!' These two verses have long been reckoned to be such a formula used perhaps at a baptism service, and a great deal of study has gone into working out what Paul really meant by using the phrase 'in Christ' and why it suddenly becomes important at this point in his letter. But it is obvious that outside of the context of conversion, these words sound mysterious. However, Paul used them as a shorthand for the whole Gospel as it is experienced in the life of someone who believes; and if you doubt what Paul has already explained about the Gospel, then you can only ever look at these words as an outsider looking in. Their glory is understood by those for whom it is a real description of what has happened to them; their faith, their baptism and their knowledge of what Christ has done, is summed up by being 'in Christ'.

In verse 2, Paul introduces the 'Spirit', as if talking about that aspect of God which does the work of setting a person free from sin. Apart from two references in the introduction to his letter (1:4 and 9) and then two others in the build up to this chapter (5:5 and 7:6), Paul makes no other mention of the Holy Spirit before chapter 8. In this chapter, however, he mentions the Spirit no less than 22 times, starting here in verse 2!

The Holy Spirit is described in the Old Testament as the means of God's power in Creation (Gen 1:2) and then as the power of God at work in the prophets who brought God's Word throughout the stories of the people of Israel (Isaiah 11:2f., 40:13, Ez 1:12f. etc). But the Old Testament draws to a close with the promise of the outpouring of God's Spirit (Jer 31:31-33, Joel 2:28,29, Zech 4:6) which would be the fulfilment of God's 'New Covenant' and the completion of His revelation through the Messiah. This promise, of course, was fulfilled on the great day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1f.), an event at which Paul was not present with the disciples, but which set the pattern for all that would follow. There is no doubt from the story of Paul in Acts, that he was caught up in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which launched the early Church (Acts 13:2-9, 15:8,28, 19:2f. etc.). Paul himself received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17) after his conversion experience, but he did so as part of a healing process that went on in his life to restore his sight and make him fit for service to God. This personal experience explains very well why Paul only introduces the Holy Spirit at this point in his letter. It was not that the Holy Spirit was previously absent; more that His presence becomes evident as the believer walks into the new life that God has prepared for those who have faith.

The just requirements of the law (8:3,4)

Perhaps mindful of his own experience (as we have seen in the two precious studies in this series, both of which highlight Paul's own testimony within his writing), Paul now draws up a comparison between what it means to walk 'in the flesh' and to walk 'according to the Spirit' (8:3,4). For all the discussions about being under the law or under grace (6:14) and the previous detailed arguments in Romans about how the 'law' only serves to expose sin but not deal with it (7:13-25 etc), the purpose of these verses is to highlight the difference between life before a faith response to the Gospel and after.

Paul talks about how Jesus came into the world to do what the law could not (8:3). He came as a human being, and because he was human as well as God, He, and He alone was able to break the 'law' that connected sin and death, which lies at the heart of the barrier between God and people. Now, Paul has previously explained all of this within his letter, and some commentators make the mistake of trying to find some new or different clues within this passage about how salvation works through Christ. But in my opinion, their quest is in vain (for example, some commentaries discuss which of the laws of the Old Testament are the ones that cannot do what Christ can do, according to verse 4!) Paul's words are intended to summarise and draw together the reality of the Gospel, not give new angles or explanations of it.

The importance of the mind (8:5-8)

In the last part of our text, Paul highlights an unexpected part of the transformation from 'the flesh' to 'the Spirit'. When we think of the core features of evangelism today, they remain focussed on enabling people to take the great step of faith by which they declare Christ as their Lord and Saviour. To this day, you can identify evangelists who prefer big meetings (Luis Palau crusades) to those who work through small groups (Alpha), and a whole variety of other new approaches to doing evangelism and mission. However, we must focus on more than the decision to accept Jesus Christ itself, for in his letter, Paul has included three main elements in the process of evangelism (see the first paragraph of the introduction above). Firstly, the faith by which people accept what Christ has done for them; secondly, baptism by which they identify publicly with Christ; and thirdly, the commitment of their minds to explore the consequences of the faith they have declared. All of these are essential to the new life 'in Christ', especially the commitment of the mind.

Paul has not included discussion after discussion within his letter for nothing; points about Abraham, Adam, marriage, the law etc. do not appear within his letter for nothing. Everything he has written is important and part of that great transforming truth of Christ, and Paul challenges the believer to allow their minds to engage with their faith so that they can know its truth and understand that Christ died for them not as some kind of religious mystery, but as plain truth. This is absolutely clear in verses 5 to 8, where Paul talks about the difference between those who live 'in the flesh' and those living 'in the spirit' as a difference of the mind. In one case, the mind is set on worldly things, and in the other, the mind is set on the things of the Spirit (8:5:6).

But just as Paul worked hard in the previous chapter to draw to our attention to the truth that sin is the real enemy of humanity rather than 'law' or anything else, he now works hard to draw our attention to the importance of the mind. He says, 'a mind set on 'the flesh' leads to death ...' (8:6) and is 'hostile to God' (8:7), indeed, it 'cannot please God' (8:8). As far as Paul is concerned, the experience of transformation with lies at the heart of Christian faith, involves the essential transformation of the mind. Paul goes on to say more about this later in the letter (12:2f.), but he is concerned that some people readily accept an experience without thinking it through, and Christian faith is no mere 'experience'; it is truth, and truth is perceived in the mind.

Application

Discipleship issues

Freedom from the power of sin!

This passage begins with a wonderful statement of the freedom of God's people from the power of sin, and it is a phrase well worth remembering. However, it is good if we can remember what it means here in this part of Romans, for it does not stand on its own. It offers us two important things. Firstly, it gives a summary of the Gospel presented as a transformation from being 'in the flesh' to being 'in Christ Jesus'. This transformation enables people to live the new life of Christ, which is empowered by the Holy Spirit. In addition, the passage introduces the Holy Spirit to Paul's letter to the Romans, and we will learn much more about the Holy Spirit in later studies.

Transformation of the mind

The second feature of this passage is this; it explains something of the importance of the mind to the transformation wrought by the Gospel. Too often, I have found that people are resistant to the idea that 'knowledge' and 'learning' is important to the Gospel and to the life of a Christian, and this is extremely sad. I have also met many people who claim to be Christians and who profess faith as confidently and as clearly as one could wish; however, their lives do not exhibit anything like the life of the Spirit. This is often because they have shunned learning about their faith and even reading the Bible, and they do not really know what is wrong or what is right before God. In addition, in some churches, theology has become a tainted word because of bad teaching, but although it is true that there has been bad teaching, this can only be corrected if people use their minds to engage with the truth that God has given! This problem cannot be dealt with by ignoring the secrets of God's Word or the history of God's people, which shows how Christians have lived their faith for two thousand years. Only good theology inspired by the Spirit can overcome the bad that has blighted the church in the West for too many years.

You may find this a hard conclusion to draw from a passage which starts with such a wonderful word about what it means to live 'in Christ Jesus' and be free of condemnation. My point is this; Paul makes it clear that we are not living 'in Christ Jesus' unless we have engaged our minds with the truth about what God has done for us. This transformation is not 'religion', it is the truth of our experience as men and women, and we need to present it to the world as truth, not just because we say so ourselves, but because we believe it is God's truth, which we can defend with our minds. There will certainly be more about this in the rest of Paul's letter.

Things to do

- Read a good book about God, or the Bible, or the life of a Christian man or woman of God. Popular Christian books about religious matters can sometimes be rather light and do not engage the mind very much, but if possible find some interesting books in Christian bookshops. Try to engage your mind in the deeper things of faith. You will be rewarded.
- Pray for the church, that it might demonstrate in all good faith the freedom of the children of God, and witness to the whole world the fact that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'

Questions for groups

1. *What do you understand by the terms 'in Christ Jesus', and 'in the flesh'? Try to discuss what these mean without using words from the reading!*

2. *Discuss the importance of Paul's introduction of the Holy Spirit at this point in his letter. How does it help what he has to say about the 'new life in Christ'?*
 3. *In what ways are you aware of the oppressions of 'the flesh' that cloud the life of the Spirit in you?*
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Final Prayer

While people all around us reject the Christian faith, give us the presence of mind, O Lord, to stand firm in You through all circumstances. Your hand is our guide, Your Spirit is our strength and Your love is our comfort. No-one can take this away from us if we remain in Your presence; Thank You Lord; AMEN