

Two Ways of Living
Romans 8:5

3/1/15
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Last week we discussed the first four verses in Romans 8.

In Romans 8:1 we read the astounding statement that Paul makes about anyone who is “in Christ.” This statement can only be made concerning those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior. But it does apply to all those who are “in Christ.” How many remember what Paul says about Christians in Romans 8:1? “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”¹ There is no guilty verdict against those who are in Christ. This is the Good News of the gospel. Why is God’s verdict over Christians so favorable? Because at the cross Jesus took our sin and paid its penalty for us; a great exchange occurred in which our sin was placed on Him and His righteousness is deposited to our account (for all who will receive it by faith). No strings attached—it is God’s gift through His Son.² Romans 8:1 begin with the word, “*Therefore.*” Whenever you see that word in the Bible, you want to study the preceding statements to know what it is there for. In this case, the “*Therefore*” refers to everything Paul has written in the first seven chapters of this letter. Chapters 1-7 provide the foundational truths that support the statement. “*Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”

But God’s salvation is not just an abstract reality written on some legal scroll in heaven. It is a reality that He brings into our lives in the form of practical holiness. “*So if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*”³; not just positionally, not just theoretically, but in reality: in our experience. “*Little children,*” the Apostle John wrote (1 John 3:7) “*let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous*” (NKJV). God’s salvation is designed to bring us into the practice of righteousness in our daily lives.

The alarming error of our day is antinomianism. *Nomos* is the Greek word for law. So in essence the term means anti-law or opposed to law. The error takes this line of reasoning: Since we are saved by grace and not by works, then the moral law is of no use to us; we have no obligation to it.⁴ God has declared us righteous. We are on our way to heaven. And it doesn’t matter all that much whether we live godly or not. In the end it will all work out. One reason people fall into that error is that they want to. They want to pursue their own fleshly desires and that kind of thinking makes them feel ok about that. The other reason people fall into that error is that they are taught a faulty theology. They are given half a gospel. They are told that grace means unmerited favor and that is true. But that is not all it means. That unmerited favor comes to us through the divine influence of the Holy Spirit. He comes into our hearts to guide us into all truth⁵ and to empower us for godly living.

Remember the declaration in Romans 6:14 “*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace*” (NKJV). The Greek word, *kurieuo*, in that verse is translated “*have dominion over.*” It refers to the exercise of power. It’s talking about something that dominates or takes control of a person.⁶ Understand that verse is not addressing legal positioning or penalty. It does not say, “*For you will not experience the penalty of sin....*” That issue is dealt with in other places.

¹ All Scripture quotes are in New International Version unless indicated otherwise.

² Romans 5:17-19; Eph. 2:8-9.

³ John 8:36 NKJV. Greek word, *ontos*, translated “*indeed*” means actually, really, certainly, of a truth. It’s not just an abstract concept but an experiential reality.

⁴ Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993) p. 51.

⁵ Not just head knowledge; but truth applied in our lives.

⁶ BDAG, 3rd ed., p. 576

What we must see in Romans 6:14 is that there is freedom in Christ from the dominance of an addiction, a habit, or any other expression of sin. The full gospel will make you free *indeed*.

So Paul says in Romans 8:1 *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* And then immediately adds verse 2 *“because”* (that connects it with the previous statement) *“through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* It’s the law or operation of the Holy Spirit in me that frees me from the cycle of sin that leads to death. And in verse 4 he writes, *“in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us....”* God is not trying to excuse us from living holy; He is empowering us to live holy. Peter put it this way, 1 Peter 1:15-17 *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”* So Romans 8:4 *“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.”* That last phrase makes sure we understand that this is stuff expressed in the way we live: *“who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”*

So last week we learned that this great salvation expresses itself in our daily lifestyles.

I want to make sure we understand the significance of what Paul is saying in Romans 8:2 *“because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* If we don’t understand that statement, we pretty well missed the point of the last two chapters. I will assume that we understand that it all comes to us *“through Christ Jesus.”*⁷ But what is Paul referring to when he says, *“the law of the Spirit of life”*? First, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. He is the active representative of the Trinity on the earth. Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to us to give us His divine life. Here Paul uses the word law to express the operation of a principle. He does it in the same way we would say “the law of gravity.” We know that is referring to the influence of a principle. When he says *“the law of sin and death”* the same is true. There is a principle of sinful desire in your body that pulls you toward sin. This is the problem encountered in Romans 7. From my innermost being I want to serve God, but *“the law of sin and death”* pulls me toward self-gratification.

Romans 8:2 is telling us that God’s solution to our struggles with sin is to overcome one law with a greater law. The law of sin and death (corruption) continues to operate in our bodies; but if we yield to the law of the Spirit we will not be under the control of the law of sin and death. A Boeing 747 weighs about 400 tons on takeoff.⁸ How does that much metal get into the air when the law of gravity will pull a feather to the ground? Answer: the law of aerodynamics.⁹ The engineers who designed that jumbo jet accept the fact that there is a law of gravity. They do not focus on the law of gravity. It’s there and its influence is to pull things down. Instead they focus on the law of aerodynamics. They try to understand what it takes in the design to get enough lift to make the plane fly. In that 747, the law of aerodynamics sets us free from the law of gravity. *“...the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* So here is the key to breaking out of an addiction, here is the key to godly living: get your focus off the sin; get your focus off the law of sin and death; turn your attention to the law of the Spirit of life.¹⁰ How do I take advantage of the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in me? How do I

⁷ See my messages entitled “The Cross: Absolutely Essential (Part 1 & 2)” preached 2/1/15 and 2/8/15 for extensive discussion of this.

⁸ “Boeing 747”, Wikipedia, accessed 2/28/25 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_747.

⁹ I read this illustration years ago, but cannot remember the source.

¹⁰ The life—the life—the life of Christ in you by the Holy Spirit is what enables a Christian to live above the power of sin. Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (NKJV) (emphasis mine). Christ lives in me; Christ lives through me as I yield to His influence. And that happens as I nurture my fellowship with Him. See my sermon preached 2/15/15 entitled “Embracing Your New Identity.”

let His life take over and enable me to fly? That is where I want to go this morning. How do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that His influence brings us into victory? I will only have time to introduce one aspect of the answer this morning. It is found in—

Romans 8:5 *“Those who live according to the sinful nature....”* That would describe every unbeliever; it also describes every carnal Christian. That’s why it is sometimes hard to tell the Christians from the non-Christians when they get out on the job, because they are both living out of or in accordance with the sinful nature—their own carnal desires. I’ve learned over the years, the flesh of a Christian is no better than the flesh of a non-Christian. When a Christian is operating out of his flesh, he can be just as stinky, just a self-centered, just as difficult as a rank sinner out there. And if he covers it all with a thin religious veneer, it’s even worse in my opinion. Have you ever worked with a Christian that knew all the Christian jargon; they say things like “we just need to love one another,” or “we need to pray about that” yet in their dealings with everybody, they’re just as selfish and indifferent as anybody could be? I’d rather deal with an all-out sinner who was at least honest about his intentions.

In Romans 8:5 Paul is focusing on the two ways Christians can choose to live. They can *“live according to the sinful nature”* or they can choose to *“live in accordance with the Spirit.”* Truth-be-told, most of have some kind of mixture going on—but one or the other could fairly describe the general thrust of our lives. The question we all have to pause and ask ourselves is this. Which one describes the general tone of my life? Are my attitudes and behaviors consistent with the Holy Spirit’s nature or are they consistent with my fallen nature? In my recent dealings with Sister So n So, was I living according to my sinful nature or was I living in accordance with the Spirit? Did I react the way Christ would react? That’s the measurement. In 2 Cor. 10:12 Paul talked about people who commend themselves because they only measure themselves by one another rather than the standard of the word of God. If everybody around me is living according to the flesh, and that’s the standard that I measure myself by, then I will probably not change. That’s one reason it’s so important to get into the word and know what God has to say about how we should live our lives.

In the next three verses (Romans 8:6-8) Paul makes sure we understand that the end result of those two paths are very different. Let me read it to you from NKJV. *“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.”* So if I live a carnal life (if I follow the impulses of my sinful nature), I will not be pleasing God and I will experience death rather than life. Death describes separation¹¹ and corruption. The Christian who walks after the flesh will not enjoy intimacy with God or with His people, his life will be marked by corruption, he may experience a premature physical death and in some cases it may regress into eternal separation from God. Gal 6:7-8 *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”* In contrast, if I live in accordance with the Spirit, then I experience life and peace. I experience the life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit: His joy, His peace: His love. I am empowered by His presence. I am comforted in times of trouble and strengthened in my daily walk. My life here is marked by peace and joy and my eternal destiny is with Him.

As we come to a close this morning, I want to come back to this question: How do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that we live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

There is an important key here in Rom. 8:5 *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on (say that with me: have set their minds on) what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”*

¹¹ Death in this context is focused on spiritual death experienced when a person is not living out of the power of God’s grace. BDAG, 3rd ed., p. 443 (*thanatos* 2.a).

What determines whether I will walk in the flesh or in the Spirit? It all hinges on what I choose to set my mind on. In preparation for next week, I want you to ponder Romans 8:5 and think about what you think about. Next week we will explore the impact of our thought life and how that is affecting our lives. I have given you a couple of verses on your outline to get you started on your study. Some of you may want to look up words like think, pondered, mediate, mind or minds in a concordance during this week and see what God would speak to you about that subject from His word. I leave you with this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny."