

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, August 27, 1989, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

ROMANS 8:1-4

“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. 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.”

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Have you ever realized this almost incredible fact, that up to this point in Romans, the Holy Spirit has been mentioned only once -- in chapter 5:5 where it says that “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Whom He has given us.” But in seven chapters that is the only mention there is of the Spirit. But now, in this one chapter, chapter eight, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times; because now the Apostle Paul is teaching us how to be what we have already become -- that is, how to live in a practical way the life we have attained in a positional way. And so, I want you to notice several things that the Lord says about those of us whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

1. There is no condemnation (8:1). “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Friend, I don’t have to wait till the final judgment to find out whether I’ve made it or whether I haven’t. There is now (present tense), at this very moment, no condemnation, none whatsoever. The unbeliever has his judgment day in front of him; but the believer in Christ has his judgment day behind him, for his judgment is past and gone -- there is no condemnation.

Now notice - Paul doesn’t say that there is no cause for condemnation. When the Lord looks at my life, or your life, He could list quite a few things that would condemn us. Paul doesn’t say that we haven’t failed and failed badly, that we don’t sometimes lose our temper, that we aren’t selfish, opinionated, prejudiced, hard to get along with, or spiritually ignorant. Paul doesn’t say that we are not insensitive to the cry of the hungry and the oppressed millions around the world who cry out for social justice. Paul doesn’t say that we don’t fail the Lord at times and ways without number. But he does say that there is no condemnation, and that is good news. Now he is not suggesting that a Christian is perfect and therefore does not deserve condemnation. Far from it, for later in Romans, in chapters 12-16, he corrects the believers on many matters relating to morals and practical holiness. But because we are Christians, there is no condemnation.

Now notice why there is no condemnation. There is no condemnation “for those who are in

Christ Jesus.” My friend, if you are a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus, it would be just as hard to condemn Jesus as it would be to condemn you, because you are “in Christ,” and to condemn you, they would have to condemn Him. Do you think the Lord Jesus Christ can ever be condemned? Simply to ask that question is to answer it. “We are in Christ.” Notice verse 33 of this chapter -- “Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God Who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus Who died, yes, Who was raised from the dead... Who intercedes for us.” There is no one who can condemn us. When you are “in Christ” there can never be any condemnation.

Remember, there are only two classes of people in the world -- those who are in Christ, and those who are in Adam. If you’re in Adam, you’re under condemnation. If you’re in Christ, there is no condemnation. Now when we look at some of the sons of Adam, and some of the sons of God, they look very much alike. They act alike in many ways. The unsaved man can be very religious; he can perform good works; he can be kind, generous and high-principled, while the Christian can sometimes fail and sin. But there is a difference, a clear line of demarcation that you may not be able to see, but God sees. Either you are in Christ or you are in Adam. In Adam, all die; in Christ, all are made alive. In Adam, all are condemned. In Christ, there is no condemnation. Now I hope you are in Christ. You come into Christ by faith in what He did by dying for you on the Cross; but if you’re in Christ, you have settled your case out of court. There is therefore NOW, not “will be,” but now, at this very moment, no condemnation. Right now, I’m as saved as I’ll ever be! Isn’t that good to know! In the sight of God right now you are justified and righteous; that is, you are accounted righteous because you are clothed by faith in the righteousness of Christ. You are wearing the wedding garment! (Matthew 22:11,12). You have “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).

Christ takes our sin and we receive His righteousness. Our Lord lived a perfect life and died an atoning death as our Substitute; and that perfect life, death and resurrection of Christ is imputed to us the very moment we believe on Him. It is “placed to our account,” so that in the sight of God we are then accounted as righteous before Him. It is as though the spotless white robe of Christ’s perfect character and obedience were placed upon us, and in that robe, we stand faultless and therefore uncondemned before God. No condemnation!

2. There is full Emancipation (verses 2,3) - “because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 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...” What does that mean? Well, Paul here is speaking of three laws:

a. The law of sin and death. What is that? The law of sin and death is simply this -- that if you are born into this world as a normal human being, you’re going to sin and you’re going to die. It’s just a law; it’s written into the warp and woof of nature, and there’s no way you can escape it.

An apple tree is not an apple tree because it bears apples! No. It bears apples because by nature it is an apple tree. If the root is that of an apple tree, then the fruit will be apples and not pears or plums. You and I are born with a fallen sinful nature inherited from Adam. The root of

“sin” is in us, and the fruit of sin is “sins,” and so we are sinners by nature and by practice. Man is inclined to sin and therefore destined to die. It is just a law that is at work within us; and the unregenerate person can no more by his own volition cease from sinning than a leopard can change his spots. Now this is the law of sin and death. Paul is referring to it in Romans 7:21 when he confesses, “It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right I inevitably do what is wrong.” It’s a law like the law of gravity; and I don’t think there’s one of us here today who would dare to say, “There is no such law; I have never sinned compulsively.”

There is a law of sin and death. And there is a second law —

b. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (verse 2). “And,” says Paul, “this law has set me free from the law of sin and death.” Now what is “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”? It is a new spiritual principle or force that sets us free from that old principle, “the law of sin and death.” It is the dynamic principle that takes over when you enter the Spirit-filled life.

Let me illustrate this by referring to a physical law. I have flown the Atlantic and the Pacific many many times in a Boeing 747 jet liner which, as you know, seats more than 400 people. I well remember my first flight in a 747 many years ago. When I got inside I said to myself, “This thing is more like a ship than an aircraft! How can something so massive ever get off the ground?” But it does, and I love to fly in it! Now there is a law of gravity which says that things tend to cling to the earth. And, thank God, this law is working all the time. If it wasn’t, you and I would be floating around all over the place. I let go of this book, and the law of gravity takes over. But when we got into that huge airplane, and started down the runway, and then soared into the sky, another law came into effect, the law of aerodynamics, and so we saw two laws working at the same time. There was constantly the law of gravity telling the airplane to come down, and there was another law, the law of aerodynamics telling it to stay up. And, thank the Lord, the law of aerodynamics has always prevailed!

As long as we were in the plane the law of aerodynamics was setting us free from the law of gravity. Now -- as long as you walk “in the Spirit,” the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets you free from the law of sin and death.

But suppose I had said halfway across the Pacific, “This plane is making me feel too cramped, cabined and confined. I think I’ll get some good ocean air”; and I open the hatch and step outside at 37,000 feet! Well, no one would have blamed the pilot for what would have happened! You see, when I decide that I no longer want to abide in that principle, the old principle takes over.

Now living according to the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus does not eradicate the old sinful nature, any more than flying cancels or eradicates the law of gravity. But there is a new law that sets us free from the law of sin and death. It emancipates us! So not only is there no condemnation - there is also full emancipation.

But notice the third law mentioned in these verses -

c. The law of Moses, spoken of in verse 3 where Paul says, “For what the law (i.e., the

Mosaic Law) could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” He is really saying — the Law of Moses could never set us free from the law of sin and death; but the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free. Now, why could not the Law of Moses set us free from the law of sin and death? Because the Law of Moses can only tell us what’s wrong with us. It can’t make us right. Standing alongside a ten-foot pole doesn’t make me ten feet tall! It just tells me I’m not ten feet tall! Standing alongside the holy law of God doesn’t make you holy; it simply reveals to you how unholy you really are. The Law of Moses could not make me holy any more than a ten-foot pole could make me ten feet tall. But Jesus Christ came in the flesh, died upon the Cross, died for sin, and condemned sin so that sin can’t condemn me! And now by faith I have the righteousness of God in Christ, and there’s no condemnation, but full emancipation.

Now let me say an additional word about verse 3 because it is so important that you should see this. Dear friends, listen -- “For what the law could not do in that it was weak” (that doesn’t mean the law was weak. It was weak “through the flesh” -- i.e., we were the weak ones, not the law; the law is good, but our sinful weakness could not keep the law). “For what the law could not do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

Now when we spoke on Romans 6 we told you that there were three words that were the key to victory. In Romans 6:6- - the word “KNOW” - “knowing that our old self is crucified with Christ.” You’ve got to know it. Then Romans 6:11 - “Likewise RECKON yourselves to be dead to sin” -- i.e., you’ve got to keep on counting on it that your old self has been crucified with Christ. Then Romans 6:13 -- “YIELD yourselves to God.” We said that is the way to live the victorious life. Know this, that when Christ died, you died. Reckon upon it; accept it as a fact by faith. And then yield yourself to God moment by moment. And when you do this, you begin to live in a new dimension.

Now to some people this may sound like a lot of fancy talk, because it seems as if you are simply getting yourself worked up psychologically. You are saying, “I’m dead to sin. This sin doesn’t have any more control over me” (yet all the time you’re thinking that it does!). Is this teaching of Paul just another case of “the power of positive thinking”? No, it isn’t, because when you “reckon” - when, by faith, you say not only that Jesus died for you, but that you died with Him - when you reckon that by faith -- then that’s where you stop and God starts; and what God does for you is not the result of your positive thinking, it is a mighty work of God that God literally accomplished in you. God actually comes into your life and takes over. It’s not positive thinking. It is the power of God that moves in. Your “reckoning” doesn’t do it; your reckoning only lets God do it. There is a dynamic principle that enters in. God the Holy Spirit begins to take control, and you do become victorious. And so, there is full emancipation -- no condemnation: full emancipation; and finally, there will be

3. A faithful Participation, because we get right down to fundamentals -- no condemnation and full emancipation means that our lives are changed! Notice this verse: “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” Now when by faith, you start to live this way, your life is changed not just positionally in Christ,

but practically in this world. The Bible says that “the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.” Now what this means is what Jesus meant, I believe, when He said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets. I have not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it.” Jesus doesn’t say to us, “Now that you’re Christians it doesn’t make any difference how you live.” Rather, He says, “I am going to teach you how to do what the Law says you ought to do.”

Notice that the righteousness of the law is not fulfilled by us, it is fulfilled in us. A new power takes over, and we are enabled, in a very practical way, to do what the spirit of the law tells us to do. We have a new participation. In what practical way is it fulfilled in us? Well, as we “walk in the Spirit” - “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” You see, the principle is to walk. And how do you walk? One step at a time!

When you become a Christian, that is a crisis -- the beginning of a journey. You never begin again. There is just one coming to Jesus and that is a crisis. But the crisis is followed by a process. After I “receive” the Lord, I begin to “walk in the Lord” and the walk is a step at a time. Do you know what the victorious life is? It is not making one great monumental “decision” that will enable me to sail all the way to Heaven without effort or struggle. No. It is a day by day, moment by moment “reckoning” -- a step at a time -- reckoning ourselves dead to sin, reckoning that the new resurrection life of the Lord Jesus is living in us and through us. Call it continuous prevailing faith -- faith for sanctification as well as faith for salvation. And when we do that, God moves in, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from that downward pull, and we begin to experience the life of glorious victory -- no longer demeaned and beaten by the world, the flesh and the devil.

I must confess that I have always had trouble with flashlights. You haven’t used your flashlight for a while, and then, one night when you need it, you operate the switch, and you get only a faint glimmer of light, or no light at all. But just last week I saw an advertisement for a new kind of flashlight, and I hastened to the store to buy one. How is it different? Well, look at those two prongs. You know what they mean, don’t you? They mean that this flashlight can be plugged into the source of power, and it will therefore remain continually charged and usable. There is continuous power through continuous contact with the source of power.

It is interesting that the Greek word in the New Testament for “power” is “dunamis,” from which we get our word “dynamo.” The Gospel is “the dynamo of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Are you “plugged in” to the limitless power of the Lord Jesus as that power is made available to you through the Holy Spirit? If you are, then others will be able to see the righteousness of the Law fulfilled in you because you walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit!

AMEN.