

The Freedom is Real!

Series: *Righteousness Revealed*

Romans 8:1-17

Chadron Berean Church

I wish it were true that at the moment we came to faith in Christ, we suddenly became super spiritual people who never struggled with sin again. I wish I could place my Bible under my pillow at night and wake up more Christlike. Or by attending church, I was guaranteed to never fail in my walk with Jesus. But that's just not the case. We all know the spiritual struggle that Paul discussed in Romans 7. We want to follow Jesus. We want to do God's will. But there is a part of us that wants to prevent that called the flesh or sin nature that makes it a struggle. *The struggle is real!*

But last week we also started to discuss how *the freedom is real* as well for those who are in Christ. But let me ask you, How was your week? Was the struggle real? Or was the freedom real? If the struggle was real this week, I want to pose another question: What did you focus on? What was your mind set on? What did you believe about yourself in those moments of struggle when you did what you didn't want to do? Because our belief influences our behavior. I'm convinced that much of the time we don't experience the freedom and new life Christ wants us to live because we have a *belief* problem. We don't live out what we don't believe, and won't believe what we don't understand. So today we're going to look at some truths about who we are in Christ that we might live in the freedom and new life He offers.

8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Since chapter 1, Paul has discussed how we're **all condemned under the Law** (the Law of Moses with the 10 commandments and all of that). The Law, he has explained, cannot justify us because we've all broken it. All it does is show us that we're Law-breakers. Every single one of us. It doesn't matter if you're a secular atheist, a moralistic do-gooder, or a religious and observant Jew—all fall short of the standards and are condemned. In chapter 5, he said we're all condemned in Adam: "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." And then even if we try to keep God's Law (the Law of Moses with 10 commandments and all of that), we find within ourselves a "**law**" of sin that uses the Law to condemn us even more. So the picture that we see in Romans 7 is a miserable man crying out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" Notice he didn't say, "What" but "Who"—will set me free? Answer? Jesus Christ. Verse 25: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

If you're in Christ, there is no condemnation for you.

Why Jesus? Because it's through faith in what He did for us that we are saved from condemnation and given new life. Think of the difference it will make in your life if you just believe that: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. If you believe that, it'll set you free from all sorts of legalistic false gospels and self-effort to attain heaven through your own performance. Belief affects behavior.

But it's important to keep in mind we're also talking in this section about sanctification: how to live, not just how to be saved. And Paul says it's the Spirit of life that sets us free from the law of sin and death and gives us new power to live for Him. The moment we are saved we are given the Spirit of God. He comes to dwell in our hearts forever.

If you're in Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ in you.

So far in Romans, the Spirit has only been mentioned a couple of times. In chapter 8 He will be mentioned over 20 times. Paul wants to make it as clear as possible: there is no spiritual life without the Spirit and the Spirit is only given to those who are in Christ. One thing that's really critical is that we do not look at the conflict in chapter 7 with a sense of comfort, thinking this is what the Christian life is supposed to be like. That's not the point Paul is trying to make. That is a futile life under Law/law. That's religion. That's legalism. That's living by a list of do's and don'ts, and it cannot give you life. You need the Spirit of God.

You might remember from chapter 5 when we talked about how we're all like an AM/FM radio. *Adam Man* vs. the *Faith Man*. Before Christ, we only have AM signal. We're dead spiritually. But when we come to Christ, the Spirit comes to dwell in us and we become the *Faith Man*; FM. We have a new spiritual frequency to operate on. New spiritual life. A new nature. So everyone in Adam is spiritually dead. Their only option is the law of sin. But for the believer in Christ there's a new "law" in town called the "law of the Spirit of life." Paul is now using a play on words with the word law, as in a general regulating principle or driving force.

Last week I shared the illustration of a Boeing 747—not the biggest plane in the world but one of the largest and most familiar. It is 232 feet long and weighs over 400,000 pounds. It can carry 416 passengers. Now, how does a plane that large fly with the law of gravity working against it? It takes advantage of a different law—the law of aerodynamics. In a similar way, we have a "law of sin" at work *in* the members of our body. The Law of God is external and stimulates that law of sin. Sure, it can stop people externally for a while or to an extent but eventually the rust shows through. What we need is a new law *in* the inner man to meet the law of sin where it's at. That law is the "law of the Spirit of life." We learn to fly, spiritually speaking, by the Spirit. It sets us free from gravity of sin and death pulling us down and trying to keep us from living the new life.

3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Okay, so plainly stated: the Law could never set you free. The Law could not give you power over sin. Any hope you have of finding freedom in the Law, forget it. Because of the weakness of our human flesh, it doesn't land on our hearts the way we think it should. It stimulates sin. However, as Paul says, God did what the Law couldn't do. He sent His Son to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law and condemn sin in the flesh. Being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, Mary, Jesus never inherited the sin nature from Adam like we did. He never sinned. So He came *in the likeness of* sinful flesh, but did not sin. Notice the precise wording of Paul. It does not say He came in sinful flesh, but *in the likeness of* sinful flesh. He really did take

on a human body like us, but never sinned. Therefore, sin didn't condemn Him; He condemned sin in the flesh. He fulfilled the requirement of the Law! What was the requirement? Perfection. In order to be justified by the Law, you'd have to keep it perfectly. But as Paul has taught, only one could ever do that: Jesus Christ. And so He it is fulfilled *in* us who believe in Him. We are given a perfect standing before God: His righteousness (1:16-17).

If you're in Christ, you are given Christ's perfect righteousness.

This week the comedic evangelists Rick and Mick came and shared with us. I really enjoyed their approach to sharing the gospel. I didn't appreciate how they asked me to sing on stage. They ask people, "On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, what do you think your chances are of going to heaven?" Most people answer with a 7-8 because they think, "Well, I've never killed anybody or went to prison or anything like that." They're comparing themselves to others. What we need to do is see that we need to be perfect. We need to be a 10 by perfectly keeping the Law. But no one does. So how else can you be a 10? By trusting in Jesus who fulfilled the Law for you. He gives you His perfect 10 righteousness through faith. I'd invite you to trust in Him this morning as well as your Lord and Savior. Call out to Him in your heart and ask Him to save you even while I preach here. And then let me know if you've done that after the service and we'll get you some new believer resources.

5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

So now Paul quickly contrasts those who **are according to the flesh** and those who **are according to the Spirit**. Notice that you're either in alignment with one or the other and characterized by one or the other. You either have your mind set on the flesh or on the Spirit. I would suggest that those who have their minds set on the **flesh** are those who fall under the categories of **legalism or license**.

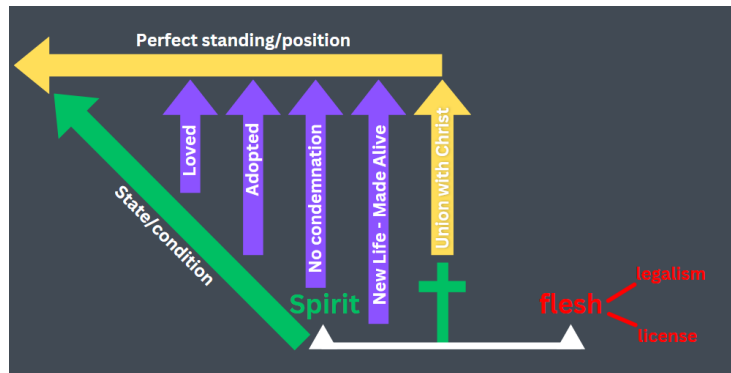
The **legalists** are those who are trying to please God with their religious performances or those that think God will accept them because they're not as bad as some. They may even exchange a wild party life for Bible studies and exercise. But the legalist loves comparison and that's why Paul says in Galatians 5 that legalists devour one another. Their lives and churches are characterized by divisiveness, strife, jealousy, selfish ambition, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, etc. No one wants to be around that.

It often isn't long, however, before that the person turns to **license** or the person raised under law turns to license. License is abusing God's grace as a license to sin and/or turning to unrestrained sinful indulgence. The person under license will try to tell themselves that "since God is a God of love, I'm going to live however I want. A God of love would never send anyone to hell or judge a person." This is the other side of the flesh: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, drunkenness, carousing (Gal. 5:19-21).

But while legalism and license look like two extremes, the reality is that both are expressions of operating in the flesh. And it's **hostile** and **unpleasing** to God. This is why I don't like to present the Spirit life as if it's somewhere between the two. It's a new base of operation entirely. It's operating from a different realm. A different frequency. Not AM, but FM.



The person who has their mind set on the things of the Spirit, Paul says, knows **life** and **peace**. The things of the Spirit, I would suggest, are the truths of God's Word related to the gospel and who we are in Christ. They are the provisions and revelations in Christ that should actuate us or compel us. As we live by faith in Christ, we shall see our state or condition lining up more and more with our standing or position.



Think of it like a **mirror**. Rather than looking into the mirror of God's Law and seeing our sin and condemnation, we look into the mirror of the Gospel and of Christ where:

- We see that we have been given the righteousness of God. We're a perfect 10!
- We see that we have a perfect standing with God.
- We see that we have been accepted.
- We see that we have been forgiven.
- We see that we have been shown mercy and grace.
- We see our that we are sealed by the Spirit of God who indwells us.
- We see our union with Christ.
- We see our own death to sin.
- We see our own burial and resurrection to new life with Christ.
- We see that we are made alive in Christ.
- We see that we have been born again to a living hope.
- We see that we are sons of God with an eternal inheritance.
- We see that we have God as our Abba Father.

You don't experience these things under Law. They're foreign to Law. The Law cannot give you these things or let you experience them in your life. They're foreign to Mt. Sinai. At Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given, no one wanted to approach God's stormy mountain for fear of death. They said, "You go up Moses... Uh, we'll stay here." The picture at Sinai is a God far off, distant, and remote. The picture of Mt. Calvary, however, is a picture of God coming down to us, dying for us, bringing us near and personal like a child sitting on his daddy's lap. **Abba Father**. The Law revealed sin and condemnation. The cross reveals how much He loves us—so much that nothing can separate us from His love. That's how this chapter ends. Nothing can separate us. That's the things of the Spirit: we see that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So again, here we go with the contrast. There are those in the Spirit and those in the flesh. The Bible teaches that at the moment you believe in Jesus Christ, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and He seals you for God for eternity. You now belong to Him. You are complete. You are His forever child. There's no such thing as a Christian without the Spirit. If you have Christ, you have the Spirit. If you have the Spirit, it's because you have Christ. Though your body may still be influenced by the sin nature, your spirit is alive because of the Spirit. And He gives life to your mortal body. Again, new life is an experience. It changes our lives. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you!

Think about what this means for interactions with outsiders. How can someone's life be transformed if they don't have Christ? It can't. People can clean up their life and quit doing bad things and start doing religious things... but what difference does it make without Jesus? If you want to see their life change or you really want to change the world, keep helping people to know Jesus. Because so often what happens is that someone gets saved. They're born again. They begin to experience this new life. Their heart desires to walk with God. They begin to experience, by grace, victory over so many things they used to struggle with. And they are amazed at the grace of God. But after a while, maybe that newness wears off (God forbid it) and then they begin to look around at others and all they see is their poor behavior. All they can think of is that they need to stop doing this or that and are nit-picking everyone's behavior telling them to clean up their act or else. We must not forget that there is no way they're ever going to clean up their act until they have an encounter with living Jesus Christ. They simply can't. They're enslaved to sin. They have no option. All they have is the AM frequency and they're using it to try to find life in this world. In their pursuit of life through the flesh, they're often lost, struggling, confused, and pain-ridden. What they need is Jesus and who better to show them than those who are of the Spirit, showing them the fruit of the Spirit like love, joy, peace, patience and kindness? Showing them that life is better with Christ.

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

So Paul concludes that we are not under obligation to live according to the flesh. We don't have to answer to the flesh. It's not our master. Because of the Spirit—the new FM frequency—we are free. He actually gets kind of graphic and says to says to put to death—kill—the flesh. The flesh is something to get serious about. Either we kill it, or it kills us—kind of thing. One man shared

an illustration that was hard to forget. To understand how serious the situation is, just think of you and a rattlesnake trapped in a small room. There is no way out and no making friends. You kill it or it kills you. What are you going to do? You're going to kill it.

The flesh is deadly to our spiritual life. And we certainly don't want to give it unnecessary opportunity to spring up in our lives (Rom. 13:14), but I'm afraid some of you will hear this and think that I'm just telling you to try harder. Kill the flesh by trying harder. Kill the flesh by coming up with a list of do's and don'ts. I need to do this. I need to do that. Remember, we've already been there in chapter 7. I, I, I. It's all about me and my performance. The word of chapter 8 is Spirit. His power. His life in us. Put the flesh to death by the Spirit—by walking by the Spirit—setting your mind on the things of the Spirit.

Put it to death by focusing on what is true of you in Christ. I'm not condemned. I'm loved. I'm accepted. I'm forgiven. He says we are children of God. Specifically, **sons**. Paul is not being chauvinistic by calling us all sons in verse 14. He's just being theologically accurate in his culture. If he wanted to use the Greek word for children, he would've; and some translations do that. But he calls us sons because in his culture it was the sons who received the inheritance, including adopted sons. What he is saying is that God has adopted us and given us an eternal inheritance. These are the kinds of truths we need to be actuated by.

At the beginning of this discussion, I asked you what you were focused on when you found out that the struggle was real this week. Was it Christ and who you are in Christ? "I'm forgiven. I'm accepted. I'm loved. I have new life. Christ is with me." Or was it, "Thou shall not. Thou shall not. Thou shall not." One is Christianity. One is not. Christianity is not living by a list of rules. It's not a mere system of ethics. It's living and operating by faith in Christ.

Again, I go back to my favorite character, Eeyore. If I'm walking around and thinking, "I'm just a no good, dirty-rotten sinner. I'll always be stuck in this besetting sin. I'm shameful. I'm condemned. I'm guilty. I'm a nobody. I'm a failure..."—then I shouldn't be surprised when that's how I behave. Proverbs says, "As a man thinks within himself, so he is." You know what my daughter said to me once when I wasn't in a good mood? She said, "Dad, I feel like you're not thinking about Jesus right now." She was spot on. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2). To see ourselves in a new mirror. In Jesus. Not the mirror of the Law. That mirror shows me I am a condemned sinner every time I look in it. The new mirror is the mirror of the Spirit is where I see Christ's righteousness applied to me. That's what God sees too. He sees no condemnation. He sees grace, acceptance, mercy, forgiveness. A child of His. The old me dead and buried and a new me with new life. New mission. New purpose. New calling.

It is abundantly clear that new life is something God wants us to experience. He doesn't want us being slaves to sin, living in Romans 7. He wants us in Romans 8. He wants us to be free. He wants us to be who He created us to be. To really *Live*. But in order to live right, we need to believe right, and we need to understand right. How do you live what you don't believe and how do you believe what you don't know. But now you do know. You know that God's Spirit lives in you. You have everything you need to live Christ. The only question I have for you now and when the struggle gets real, is, "Do you believe it?"