

Romans 8, Pt. 1

As we move into the eighth chapter, it is good to remember that there are three great divisions to the first half of Romans. After introductory matters, Paul gives us **justification** in 1:18 - 4:25; **sanctification** in 5:1 - 8:17; and **glorification** in 8:18-39. The way of mercy in Jesus teaches us that there is a righteousness that is credited to us (justification), a righteousness that is worked into us and out of us into the world (sanctification), and a righteousness that awaits us in the restoration and renewal of all things (glorification). In his letter to the Romans, Paul is building a base for ministry and mission. And the good news he has to share is **the good news of God's righteousness**.

The first verse of chapter eight begins with **a reply to the situation that concludes chapter seven**. Paul had cried out in desperation over his spiritual condition, given thanks to God for mercy in Christ, and succinctly stated the situation in which all people who know Jesus find themselves - with our minds we serve the law of God but with our flesh we serve the law of sin. And to this situation Paul tells us, "There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus." This "no condemnation" given in the gospel is a precious truth. It echoes the first verse of chapter five. There we saw that we have peace with God. I commented at that point that the Christian life could be summed up as **learning to live as someone who is at peace with God**. A similar situation prevails in the verse before us. To be a Christian is to be someone who knows in the depths of the heart that she will receive no condemnation from God. For the sake of understanding, it will do us well to further divide vv. 2-16 into three sections. Each of these sections contributes to our knowledge of how the Christian life works. In particular, each section says something about the Holy Spirit. The Christian life would be impossible without the Holy Spirit. Here we see that he is the **Liberator**, the **Indweller**, and the **Coach**.

The Liberator (vv. 2-8). The second verse sets the tone for all that follows. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law

of sin and death.” Notice here that Paul contrasts two different laws. This is the point that I have been trying to make over the last two weeks. There is a **“law of sin and death.”** This is the law apart from faith. This is the law experienced as an unregenerate person. It is a law that is manipulated and abused, leading ultimately to condemnation. The other law is **“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”** When God joins us to Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection, he renews our hearts (we are born again), and we find that Jesus has both taken the penalty of breaking the law upon himself (he is an atoning sacrifice) and the Spirit is present causing us to love God’s moral instruction. This is the kind of perspective that emerges in **Psalm 119** - a person with a soft heart who learns from God’s law and asks forgiveness for his failures to do so. God has solved the problem of our sin and unrighteousness through Jesus. We experience **freedom from the flesh as we set our minds on the things of the Spirit.** He is the Liberator - “To set the mind on the flesh is death but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

By the way, you may have **questions about how the Christian is supposed to relate to specific instructions from the law of Moses.** I have largely left those kinds of questions untouched over the last several weeks. It is important to observe first that our subjective experience of the law is different from the law itself. Think about it this way. There are laws that say we should stop at a red light. Some people experience that law as repression and annoyance. Some people gladly consent to such laws as means of public safety. There is a difference between the law itself and the experience of the law. Some will stop fulfilling the law because they feel like it. But others will only stop fulfilling the law only because the law has changed. **Experiencing the law as an unregenerate person is different than experiencing the law as a regenerate person.** There are many things God’s people were told to do in the Old Testament that Christians do not do. But here is an important point - they stopped doing them not because they decided that the laws were repressive but because **God told them to stop.** We will pick this subject up again later in our study of Romans. It is enough for the moment to note that the Holy Spirit liberates us from the old consequences of the law of sin and death.

The Indweller (vv. 9-11). And this Liberator has also come to live inside of us. **The presence of the Spirit is what makes the difference between a**

true Christian and one who is a Christian in name only. There are no other options. Either the Holy Spirit lives inside of you and gives you life, or he doesn't. And if he does, then he brings to you the life of Christ right now in the midst of this present life. Jonathan Edwards once wrote,

So that that holy, divine principle, which we have observed does radically and essentially consist in divine love, is no other than a communication and participation of that same infinite divine love, which is God, and in which the Godhead is eternally breathed forth and subsists in the third person in the blessed Trinity. So that true saving grace is no other than that very love of God; that is, God, in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting himself to the soul of a creature as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting himself by the faculties of the soul of man, in his own proper nature, after the manner of a principle of nature.¹

I know that this is a mouthful. But it is a beautiful paragraph containing a mind-blowing truth. God's love subsists in the third person of the Trinity. God's Spirit is the love of God shared first between Father and Son and then shared with us poor creatures. **The love of God dwelling in our hearts is the third person of the Trinity dwelling inside of us.** So in other words, Edwards is simply following Paul by saying that, if you are a Christian, it is because **God lives inside of you.**

There is so much victory over sin that you can have. There is so much work that you can do for the kingdom. There is so much love that you can share with the people around you. There is so much growth and transformation available to you. Why? **Because God lives inside of you.** Never give into the lies and the sense of despair, but instead remind yourself of the truth.

The Coach (vv. 12-16). The Holy Spirit comes alongside us in our battle against sin. There is a clear structure to these verses. Verse twelve introduces the main idea of the section - that we are not debtors to the flesh - before giving us three sub-points which each begin with the word "for" (vv. 13, 14, 15-16). To say that we are not debtors to the flesh is to say that **we do not have to disobey God.** Satan wants us to think that our disobedience is

¹ From the "Treatise on Grace."

inevitable, but the Spirit of God wants us to know otherwise. The **three ideas** show us how the Spirit coaches us to overcome sin. I asked Justin Fawley how he would define coaching. He graciously shared with me the words of another coach, Nick Winkleman - "Coaches are stewards helping athletes navigate the rough waters of personal growth that they wouldn't otherwise push through on their own" I think it is wise to paraphrase and apply these words regarding the Holy Spirit. He comes alongside us and indwells us, and then **he helps us navigate the rough waters of sanctification** which we couldn't push through on our own. First, **the Holy Spirit is the one through whom we put to death "the deeds of the body,"** our sinful expressions and habits. He puts an end to our sin by teaching us truth and causing us to experience God's love and power. Second, **he leads us.** He doesn't break us by bringing up our problems and sins all at once. Instead, he graciously and gently exposes things a little at a time, pacing us as we put to death the flesh. Third, **he affirms and encourages us.** In fact, he causes us to cry out "Abba! Father!" As we battle sin, he is always there telling us that we have a personal, meaningful, and intimate relationship with the Creator of all things. To slightly reorder things - we could sum it up like this. **He gently exposes our errors and wrongdoings, teaches us to overcome them, and reminds us how deeply we are loved every step of the way. He indeed is our coach.**

And that gets us to the seventeenth verse. Here we have a reminder that if we indeed are God's children, then we are heirs of a glorious future. There may be suffering in the present, but, as we will see next Sunday, that suffering is nothing compared to the weight of glory which is coming our way. It is to the subject of glorification to which we next turn.