

## How Change Happens

Romans 8:1-17

May 22, 2011

We started with the message that we all need the gospel because we are all sinners who deserve only the wrath of God. From there we moved into a reminder of the gospel—of the fact that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, and was raised from the dead that we might be reconciled to God. Even though we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, and the wages of that sin is death, there is still the gift from God, even eternal life for all who believe.

This new life is made available to us as God places a new heart and a new nature in each person who is in Christ. The problem, as we saw last week, is that there are still the habits and influences of the sinful nature and the world in which we live. We are new, but we don’t feel all of that newness yet. We are made right with God, but we have not yet learned how to live in righteousness. We are already declared holy, righteous and pure, but we are not yet living the lives that God wants us to live, or that our new hearts want to live.

Paul begins this section with a note of hope and freedom. *“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.”* (vv.1,2) There is a condition: that we are in Jesus Christ. God’s wrath and condemnation still stand for those who are not in Christ. If we have not bowed our knee before Jesus, acknowledged our sin and our helplessness because of it, and asked God’s forgiveness, then we are still under God’s condemnation.

If, however, we are in Christ, then there is no longer any condemnation. We are right with God through His declaration because of the faith we share with Abraham and all the others who have believed God’s promises and submitted their lives to them.

The reason there is no condemnation is because we are under a new law. Notice Paul does not say that there is no law. We are still expected to obey, but we are under the law of the Spirit of life, not the law of sin and death. In Christ we have moved from the realm of death into the dominion of life. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection the Spirit of life is available to all who believe.

Jesus had to bring this freedom because we could not on our own. If it were dependant upon our ability to obey the law and avoid sin, there would be no hope. Thanks be to God that the answer does not lie in us. It lies in Christ Jesus. *“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.”* (vv.3,4) What the law could not do, God has done. What we were powerless to do because of our slavery to the law, Jesus has done for us. He gave Himself as a sin offering in our place so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us. Note two things.

First, God condemns **sin** in the sinful nature. He does not condemn those who are in Him. This follows from the first verse, and shows how it can be true that we

should not be condemned by a Holy and Righteous God. It is sin, the sin in us, that is banished. For those in Christ, there is no condemnation.

Also note the reminder that we now live according to the **Spirit** and not the sinful nature. We act based on what is most important to us. If we are doing the things that God says not to do, it is because we are being guided by the selfishness of sin and not the Holy Spirit. If we are in Christ, we must live according to the Spirit and follow the new law He is seeking to grow in our hearts. Not being condemned is not a licence to live as we want. It is freedom to live as we ought.

Paul points this out over the next several verses as he contrasts life lived out of the flesh versus life lived in the Spirit. We move to a new realm when we come to Christ. We are called and expected to live our lives for God with His agenda and priorities, but we are still stuck in the patterns of this world. This is not an excuse. There is no excuse for continuing to wallow in the sin from which we have been saved. Yet it remains a fact.

As an encouragement to help get us out of mire of sin to where we ought to be, Paul has reminded us that if we are in Christ we are not condemned and also that it is the sin that God has condemned. Now Paul continues with the contrast in the way sinful and spiritual people think. *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled*

*by the sinful nature cannot please God.”* (vv.5-8) The question is, “Where is your **mind**?” About what do you spend your time thinking? What has your attention? Your desires? The way you want your life to turn out? The things you think you need? Your happiness? These are all things of the flesh and lead to death. Even if we think we are trying to follow God, if we are basing our decisions and actions on what we want and our goals and agendas, then we are hostile to God, not submitting to His law and cannot please Him. We may have sought His forgiveness, but we are still living like the world.

People who live according to the Holy Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. Their chief goal is to learn what the Spirit wants and desire that more than anything else. Instead of their own comfort they want to be obedient. Instead of setting the course for their own lives, they desire what God has for them. Instead of seeking their happiness, they seek God’s happiness. This is the point Jesus made in the Beatitudes, and Paul is repeating it here. A mind controlled by the Holy Spirit’s agenda and desires is full of life and peace. We have to trust God to provide what we need. Then we can fully give ourselves over to Him and His agenda and desires.

Paul lays it out in the next few verses. *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”* (v.9) If you are in Christ, then you are no longer under the control of the sinful nature. This is Paul’s point over the whole chapter. We are **free** from the power of sin over us. If we are not free, then we are

not in Christ. If we are in Christ, then our bodies are dead because of sin, but our spirits are alive because of righteousness, and even more, the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. God, who raised Jesus from the dead, gives life to our mortal bodies through this Spirit who lives in us. The life force that drove us, our sinful natures that led us to fulfill our sinful desires, has been replaced by the Holy Spirit who leads us to fulfill God's holy desires. Outwardly our bodies haven't changed, but the very nature of the life that drives them, our life, has changed radically, if we are in Christ.

Because those who are in Christ have had this transformation take place in them, they now have an obligation to God to live in it. Paul writes, *"Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* (vv.12-14) Paul wants to say we have an obligation to God, but he never quite gets there. It's not that we don't. Paul doesn't get to that point because he instead reminded us of the negative. We have an obligation to **God**. That means that we are no longer obligated to obey the desires of the sinful nature. God has killed that so we need to stop trying to resurrect it. If we continue to live according to our sinful natures it means that we have not been saved. Paul says we must put to death the misdeeds of the body. We must stop doing what is wrong and start doing what is right. As he gives us this instruction, Paul also tells us how and why.

The "how" is the Holy Spirit. We can only put the misdeeds of the body to death through the Holy Spirit. We have already seen, over and over again, that we are not strong enough to obey on our own. Just because we come to Jesus does not make our bodies or wills stronger. Coming to Jesus frees our wills from the power of sin allowing us to obey. At the same time, the Holy Spirit seeks to fill us with His power and presence to strengthen us to obey and to remind us to do so. Without this continual, ongoing help, constantly fueled by prayer, Bible study, worship, Christian fellowship, and the other disciplines, we cannot meet our obligation before God. To the extent that we depend on "trying to do better" in our own strength we are doomed to failure. There is no condemnation for us, but there is condemnation for our sin. We dare not run back to it but, rather, when tempted we must run to the one Who condemned our sin and has freed us from it. We cannot run from our sin. Our only option then is to run to God.

In his book on marriage, What Did You Expect?, Paul Tripp offers a good insight into this truth. While his focus is on marriage, the truth applies to all of our lives in Christ as well.

God knows how big our struggle is. He knows how deep the war inside us runs. He knows how weak and blind we all can be. He knows how fickle our hearts can be. He knows how easily we lose our way. So, to help our marriage he didn't just give us a set of principles; no, he gave us himself!

Immanuel has invaded your marriage with an initiative of warrior grace. He is not

standing outside your marriage, giving you principles to live by and judging you if you don't. No, he has literally gotten inside your heart, so he can battle for you at the very place where the war for marriage takes place—your heart. He knows that you and your spouse are not perfect. He knows that sin will again and again get in the way of what a marriage can and should be. He knows that rules, principles, and perspectives are not enough. He knows that your marriage needs more than information; it needs transformation, so he has taken residence inside you. This means that he battles with the dark instincts of sin that are still within you, even when you don't!

Tripp, Paul David (2010). *What Did You Expect?* (pp. 128-129). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

The “why” is because we are children of God. Paul carries this thought through the end of this morning's passage. *“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”* (vv.15-17)

Through Jesus, God gives us more than just a new nature and freedom. He also gives us a new **family**. It is

a new name by which we are known. The change God works in us does not make us slaves to fear of His punishment. We no longer fear His wrath because He has declared us righteous through our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We do not live according to the Spirit in order to be made right with God. We live according to the Spirit because we are right with God and He is our Father. Rather than fear His wrath we are on intimate terms with Him and we throw ourselves into His loving care the same way a child throws herself into the loving arms of her father or mother.

God's Spirit testifies with our **spirits** that we are His. There is an objective measure to determine whether or not you are in Christ. It is whether or not you have trusted in Him, submitted to Him, and asked for God's forgiveness. There is also a subjective measure that is important. Do you sense the Holy Spirit within you causing you to love the things God loves and hate the things that pull you away from Him? Is the Holy Spirit testifying with your spirit that you belong to Him? Even in your moments of failure, do you know that God is working in you because you can see how much He has changed you already?

If the Spirit is at work in you then you are a child of God and a joint heir with Jesus. This means we share His life. We live in His perfection, seeking to live it out with the help and strength of the Holy Spirit. We are reconciled to God through Him. We share in His sufferings, going through trials, temptations, and rejection by the world. If all of this is true, then we will also share in His glory! But that topic will have to wait a couple weeks.