

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part seventeen

Sunday, February 10th, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2109

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TRINITARIAN GRACE - THE FATHER SENDS THE SON INTO THE WORLD AND THE SPIRIT INTO OUR HEARTS

Romans 8:1-4 - "There is *therefore* now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

These verses link up with Paul's teaching in Romans chapter seven. This is implied by the way Paul says, "**There is *therefore* now no condemnation.....**"(8:1). That word "*therefore*" means "*because of this,*" or, "*in view of this.*" So there is some previous *reason* for what Paul is saying in today's text. But it's not really the *whole* of chapter seven that's being explained here. Paul is expanding the message of the *first six verses*.

In **Romans 7:1-6** Paul used the illustration of adultery, death, and remarriage to describe the new relationship of the Christian to the law through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, in chapter eight, Paul will explain how those in Christ are freed from the condemnation of the law (that's the *first* point) and enabled by the power of a new, living relationship with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to become alive unto God (that's the *second* point).

1) **THROUGH CHRIST'S SINLESS LIFE AND SACRIFICIAL DEATH THE CHRISTIAN IS FREE FROM THE CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW NOW - Romans 8:1** - "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Understand, it's not that the Christian is *perfectly righteous* right now. Romans chapter 7 isn't ignored here. There are still struggles and there are still failures. The issue in **8:1** is *condemnation*. The dominating power of the law's just condemnation of sin isn't removed by *my* righteousness, but by *Christ's* righteousness. Paul picks up this truth with the words "*in Christ Jesus*" (repeated twice in verses 1 and 2 for emphasis).

Here Paul addresses a huge question. Given the holiness of God and the inevitability of final judgment, what shall we do with our Romans 7 feelings of failure and guilt? How shall we face what we know to be true of our inner thoughts and attitudes? The only hope we have is that we are no more tied to the guilt and condemnation of the law than a wife is guilty of adultery when she marries another man after the death of her husband (**Romans 7:1-6**).

Now Paul will explain what he meant in **Romans 7:4** when he described us being "*joined*" to Christ, our new spouse. This is the key to everything. Our only hope is to know from divine revelation the potency of **Romans 8:3b** - "...By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...." He [God the Father] condemned sin [*my* sin] in the flesh [*Christ's* flesh].

Paul will state the *result* of this marvelous transaction more fully in **Romans 8:33-34** - "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to *condemn* [there's that word]? Christ Jesus is the one who died—*more than that, who was raised*—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

Notice - "*...more than that, who was raised....*" Christ defeated the *penalty of death* for all my sin. The *wages* of my sin are cancelled out permanently.

This is what Paul means when he says in **8:1**, that there is ***“now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** There is no prosecutor anywhere in heaven or hell to make a case against those in Christ Jesus - not because of ***their*** righteousness, but because of ***Christ’s*** perfect righteousness. That’s where my sin was condemned. There is a ***finality*** to it. It can never be taken from those whose faith is planted in Christ Jesus. God will never condemn Christians in judgment when those same sins were condemned in the flesh of Christ Jesus.

2) **THE REMOVAL OF CONDEMNATION, WHILE CRUCIAL TO CHRIST’S WORK, IS NOT THE WHOLE GOAL OF HIS SAVING WORK**

I can understand how the condemning power of the law is broken through the saving work of Christ. I can at least begin to get my head around Christ bearing my sin, resulting in my release from condemnation. This is precious beyond words, but at least somewhat graspable. The more tricky question is how can the work of Christ effect moral change in my behavior.

In short, we ***can’t*** turn to the law for freedom from condemnation because all the law ***can*** do is condemn when we fail. And we’re ***going*** to fail because we’re weak and sinful. We can only turn to Christ for freedom from condemnation. ***But where do we turn for sanctification?*** Where do we go for help in ***transformation*** of habits and actions? This is the issue of the next part of our text:

Romans 8:2-4 - ***“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”***

I want to deal with two issues from these verses. Simply put, ***how can Paul say we have been set free from the law of sin and death?*** And second, if true, ***how does the law of the Spirit of life accomplish this freedom in us?***

a) ***How can Paul say we have been set free from the law of sin and death?*** If you think this is a simple issue, let me put it differently. How can we be said to be ***set free*** from the law of sin and death (**8:2**) when Paul has just described this experience: ***“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, [23] but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members”***(7:22-23).

How do we relate this to Paul’s words in **Romans 8:2** - ***“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”*** What kind of freedom is Paul describing? Do we ***struggle*** or do we ***not***, with sin? This, it seems to me, is a crucially important question.

And the ***answer***, I think, is we are, through the Spirit of God, free ***to*** struggle. ***Before*** we were in Christ Jesus there ***was*** no struggle with sin. Paul describes the ***state of our mind*** before we came to Christ very vividly: **Romans 1:18, 22, 24** - ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....22....Claiming to be wise, they became fools....24....Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity....”***

These verses don’t describe a struggle against ***sin***. They describe a resistance against ***God***. Here is a person moving in only ***one*** direction. Here is a person ***ruled*** by rebellion against God.

But something new happens when we're in Christ. No, we are not made perfect. But we are **set against** the sin we used to cherish. This is the complex process Paul describes in **Romans 7:20-22** - **"Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [21] So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. [22] For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being..."**

In Christ we are set free to rise up against indwelling sin. We are made anxious to struggle with its former dominance. So in answer to our first question, **yes**, we are free from the old dominance of sin. **But it's not a passive freedom.** The new birth has wrought a seismic shift, like a massive earthquake on the ocean floor of our being. Through Christ we see our inward sin as an enemy to be overtaken.

But now on to our second question:

- b) ***How does the Spirit of life set us free from the law of sin and death?*** And Paul's whole point here is simple, but profound. The law cannot **free** us from sin because the law cannot **change** our nature. The law cannot remove our inclination to love other things more than God. In fact, the law only causes us to **resent** God because it points out all the parts of our lives that don't line up with God's will. Far from helping us **love** God, the law causes us to **resent** Him. This is what Paul means in **Romans 5:20a** - **"Now the law came in to increase the trespass..."**

So, the law cannot remove our **reluctance** to love God. In fact, the law actually **increases** our reluctance to love God. And not loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is the greatest sin of all.

So where shall we go for help? How can we love our enemies instead of being angry with them? How can we treasure God more than we treasure wealth? How can we be Christ-like with ungodly spouses? Clearly, just **knowing** we're **supposed** to do these things isn't enough.

Paul points us to the Spirit of life, the indwelling Holy Spirit - **Romans 8:2-4** - **"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."**

To understand these verses we must remember some earlier teaching from Romans. There is only **one sin** dominating all of mankind. Paul describes it in **Romans 1:21-23** - **"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."**

If these words sound archaic, let me put the thought into modern speech. In today's language here is the essence of sin. We love the **creation** more than we love the **Creator**. We have a love affair with the things of this world. Wealth, power, pleasure, leisure, acclaim, influence - these are more precious by far to our fallen hearts. We see more to be desired in these things than in the glory of our Creator. That's what sin **is. All** sin.

And, says Paul, the law of God, while holy and good, can't **create** a love for God in our pre-occupied hearts. So what God does for us is this. He does **two** things, not just **one**. **First**, He sends **His Son** - Jesus Christ - into this dark and rebellious world to bear our sins. This, as we have already seen, is how we are freed from **condemnation** right now. But **second**, God sends **His Spirit** into our hearts **to cause us to see how beautiful this redeeming work of Christ is**.

This is the sanctifying effect of **mercy** - **Romans 12:1-2** - "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**"

In other words, He releases **love for Himself** in our hearts by His Spirit. Paul will describe this in more detail in **Romans 8:15** - "**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'**" This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He turns our hearts to God as a **Father** rather than just a **law giver**. And through this profound change, the power of **love for God** pulls our hearts into righteousness in a way mere command - however just and holy - never could.

So the goal of the Spirit's work - His **love releasing work** - in our hearts is "**....in order that** [note those purposeful words] **righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**"(Romans 8:4).

You were never saved just to go to heaven. You were saved "**in order that**" the beauty of righteousness might be displayed for all to see, so they might "**see your good deeds,**" not just as beautiful moral acts, but so grounded in Christ Jesus and His Spirit that people will "**glorify your Father in heaven.**"

And, as we said at the beginning, all of this is a more detailed explanation of what Paul illustrated in the opening verses of chapter seven - **Romans 7:4-6** - "**Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. [5] For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. [6] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.**"

The whole Trinity is involved in the transforming power of divine grace in our lives.