

Free To Be What God Wants Us To Be

Romans 8:1-4

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In chapter 6 Paul has shown us that living under the power of sin is no longer the lifestyle of the believer. We are dead to that kind of living. We died with Christ and now we have been raised up with His Power to live as He wants us to live.

We are no longer in Adam, but we are now in Christ and His Spirit and life is in us. We still have our “body of sin” with the inordinate passions of the flesh, but it is powerless to control us like it once did. We can still sin, but sin is now a choice.

We are now free from the penalty of sin and the power of sin in Jesus Christ. It is at this point many believers would say, “I’m in trouble if I’m supposed to be dead to the power of sin!! My flesh is defeating me on a daily basis. What’s the problem?”

Maybe you feel like “Chippie the Parakeet” in Max Lucado’s *Eye of the Storm*. The story goes like this. Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched on his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean Chippie’s cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said “hello” when sssopp! Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie—still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water.

Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do. She reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who’d initially written about the event contacted Chippie’s owner to see how the bird was recovering.

“Well,” she replied, “Chippie doesn’t sing much anymore—he just sits and stares.”

It’s not hard to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over. That’s enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart. Maybe that’s the way you feel. And chapter 6 hasn’t helped you much.

Well, that’s why we have chapter 7. It shows us the frustration of trying to go back and live under law. From 6:14 to 7:25 we saw how Paul shows us why it is that people who are free from the power of sin are still defeated by it. You see, they make the mistake of going back under the law, trusting in their own ability. The law commands the flesh to work, and then condemns everything it does.

The flesh comes alive when put under the law. And when we put our confidence in our flesh again it is disastrous. In the religious arena, putting our confidence in the flesh deceives us so that we think we can do something that would please God in our own power. It

is having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. Apart from the law, the flesh is idle. But putting ourselves back under law arouses it.

Living under the law and living under God's transforming grace is the difference in trusting God or in trusting in ourselves.

Well, the answer lies in the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Remember back in chapter 5:5 when Paul told us that God loves us so much that He poured out His love in our hearts by sending the Holy Spirit to live there? The Holy Spirit lives in us to enable us to do what we could not do before to please God. Listen to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:16: "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Then in 5:18 he says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,"

Jesus, knowing our desperate condition as human beings, said in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

In Romans chapter 8, the apostle Paul takes us from the valley of despair and defeat of trying to live under the law, to the heights of what it means to live the victorious Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, in verses 1-4 we see that we are forever free from the condemnation of the Law. Verse 1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Our freedom to be what God wants us to be comes when we realize that the law can never condemn us again.

Paul starts off by saying, "There is therefore now no condemnation." "There is" is in italics, which strengthens the meaning that there is absolutely no condemnation to those in Christ. "Now," is when we put our faith into the Lord Jesus Christ, and "no condemnation" means the result of judgment itself, here referring to "death" eternally.

Now, the apostle has already covered the fact that being "justified" means that the charges are no longer against us—we've been acquitted. Romans 5:1: "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But, here he seems to be saying something else. It is to me that he is saying there is no need to continually put yourself under condemnation every time you sin. You are members of Christ's body.

"For those who are in Christ Jesus." Remember we have seen that we are either "in Adam" or we are "in Christ." To be in Christ is to be an organ in His Body. To be attached to Him. And to be in Christ is to recognize that we are indwelt by His Spirit of life. Never condemn yourself. Get out from under the penalty you have imposed that God has not.

Now, the King James Version adds some qualifying words that help bring about a much clearer picture for us. It identifies "those who are in Christ Jesus": "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This shows us the lifestyle of those who are in Christ Jesus. We saw in chapter 6 that we who are "in Christ Jesus" cannot continue to live in habitual sin anymore because of Christ living in our hearts.

"Not after the flesh." The word translated "not" is the relative word for not, meaning that we will never live perfectly on this earth, there will be times when we choose wrongly. There will be times when we act "after," or a better translation would be "according to," the flesh. The "flesh" is still resident in our "bodies of sin" and continues to war against the Spirit in us, and there will be times when we will allow it to control us. But it is always our choice: it

cannot control us anymore on it's own, as we saw in Romans 6:1-11.

Then we see the contrast to those who walk consistently after the flesh: “but after the Spirit”—or according to the Spirit’s power in our lives.

Moving on to verse 2, we see why. Romans 8:2: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

Now, think for a minute. What does he mean by the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”? A law is the **principle** by which something operates. For instance, gravity. The law of gravity says that if you throw a rock up in the air, then the rock will plunge toward the ground. The spin of the earth causes the rock to be pulled toward the ground.

By saying the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” Paul refers to the principle of how the life of Christ is now in us, in the presence of His Spirit, works in us. Remember that we are now identified with His life. His Holy Spirit lives in us as the embodiment of that resurrected life. He does in and through us what our flesh has been shown it cannot do.

How? The Holy Spirit supplies the risen life of the Lord Jesus in us that empowers and enables us to obey and to live in the victory that is ours in Christ. It is the Spirit in us, that won’t allow us to get away with sin. It is Christ’s Spirit that gravitates us towards the Father and to what the Father wills in our life.

This law of the Spirit of life “has set us free.” Here’s a word we’ve seen before: *eleutheroo*—it has shown us to be free, as well as set us free at a certain time. The Spirit, who brought the life of God Himself into us, has set us free from the power of our flesh and free to be the person God wants us to be.

Free from what? From the law that is totally in opposition to the law of the Spirit of life—the law of sin and death. The law of sin is that principle in us that pulls us downward into death and that used to control and condemn us. Now, it can only operate when it is put under law by our own foolish choices. It commands us to work “in the energy of our flesh,” and then condemns all that we do. It has no control over us unless we foolishly fall into the trap of performance and law, which is the beachhead for this principle to operate.

The law of the Spirit is higher and more powerful than the law of sin and death. In fact, Paul says, it “has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” I am now free to be what God wants me to be because the Spirit of God living in me enables me. No longer am I bound by the “the law of sin and of death.” I’m free in the Spirit of God. God has changed us so on the inside with the indwelling Holy Spirit residing within us, that the Spirit now compels us like a magnet towards God and His righteousness.

Go back to the law of gravity. Think about a big 747 sitting on the runway. You realize that it weighs more than you and I can comprehend. And if you apply the law of gravity to that fact, then it is impossible for that plane to fly. But, when you look at the power of it’s engines, and watch it take off, you realize that there is a higher law in force, which does not deny the law of gravity but it simply supercedes it. The law of sin and death still works in our flesh, but is superceded by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ.

Go on to verse 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.”

We have established the fact that the law is good, righteous and Holy. There are several things it is good for and can do. The law can **expose** sin. Romans 7:7: “What shall we say

then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" The law can **provoke** sin. Romans 7:5: "For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." But the law **cannot** produce the righteousness it required. It could in no way save, nor could it sanctify.

The word used here for "could not do" means it was without ability to save or sanctify. It **could not** produce the righteousness it required. Why could it not produce the "righteousness" it required? Because the "flesh" of man was too weak because of sin to achieve it. The "flesh" of man is contaminated with the disease of sin.

The mind of the flesh is hostile towards God, and even though the law is good, it only irritates the commands of the flesh to disobey. The law was powerless to save us. Man was hopelessly lost in Adam, and his rebellious flesh repulsed the law. God's law demands righteousness, but it cannot provide the means to achieve that righteousness.

So, what the law could not do, "God **Himself** did." God is with the definite article—God the Father, **Himself**, did what needed to be done. What did the Father do? "Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh."

"In the likeness of sinful flesh." Jesus came into this world with a body **similar** to ours but not exactly like ours. The word "likeness" here means exactly the same, but be careful or you could miss this. What was exactly like ours was He was totally God in the flesh. He **became** flesh; He did not just indwell it.

But, what was **not** "exactly like ours" was that He had no propensity of sin in His body. His body had no inordinate desires as ours have. When Satan came to wave his wand of temptation, nothing in Jesus responded. Sin had to bow to its victor, the inherently holy Lord Jesus Christ.

First John 1:5: "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." He was in the flesh, yes, but not sinful flesh. In His body He had inherent immortality.

The penalty of sin is corruption of our bodies. Jesus' body could not corrupt. Acts 2:27: "Because thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow thy holy one to undergo decay." Acts 13:35: "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'Thou wilt not allow thy holy one to undergo decay.'" Both of these are quotes of Psalm 16:8-10.

Jesus **gave** His life—no one took it—"and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." John the Baptist understood this in John 1:29: "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

Jesus was the "offering for sin"—He died for all mankind. He "condemned sin in the flesh." In other words, God judged sin in the flesh. God dealt with sin judicially by condemning sin in the flesh and then paying its penalty by dying the death the penalty required.

Why would He do that? Romans 8:4 tells us: "in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

First we see that Jesus died "in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us." The "requirement of the Law" refers to the acts of righteousness that the law demands. This is what the character of God demanded in us. It is summed up in Romans 13:9: "For

this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Might be fulfilled in us." This carries the idea of filling full, supplying fully. To fill up what was otherwise empty. This is beautiful. Remember Galatians 5:22? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness." This is what we are filled with.

"Who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." "Who do not walk" is present active tense. Here it is! The role of the Holy Spirit. All the righteous character of God can now be supplied fully in us, because the Holy Spirit lives in us to produce that character as we walk "according to the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit lives in us to empower us to do what we could not do before. What God has commanded us, He now enables us to do. What the "flesh" could not do, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, lives in us to do as we learn to yield the members of our bodies to HIM. This is what I call the Christ life, the exchanged life. Christ living in us, producing His righteous character through us.