

**12<sup>th</sup> July, 2020**  
**“Breaking Free”**  
**Romans 8:1-11**

In our first four messages in Romans we have sort of been in what we might call the “shadowlands” of the faith. Paul has described the context in which the righteousness of God has been revealed (Romans 1:16-32). That context is that all people, whether Jew or Gentile have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). He claims that in such a context the revelation of God’s righteousness is available from faith for faith (Romans 1:17). Paul has said this has always been the case. Even Abraham was reckoned righteous not by following Law, but by faith (Romans 4:3).

The righteousness of God that is revealed in the Gospel allows for liberation from sin and death, and from sin’s destructive use of the Torah (The Law). Unfortunately, this does not mean, as Paul made clear in chapter 6 and 7, that sin is obliterated for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Paul sees that in the life of the Christian, sin still has an influence. His direction to believers is to not give sin any power, but to consider themselves dead to sin (6:11)

By the time Paul gets to chapter 8 of Romans, he has described in graphic and dramatic detail the “shadowlands” of the Gospel; the darkness into which the light of the Gospel has shone and the challenge that that light has to stay bright.

I’m not sure if you saw a recent post on our Facebook page that I thought picked up what we have been grappling with in chapters 6 & 7:

*“One day an old Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson. He said, “There are two wolves fighting inside all of us - the wolf of fear and hate, and the wolf of love and peace.” The grandson listened, then looked up at his grandfather and asked, “Which one will win?” The grandfather replied, “The one we feed.”*

Paul was fairly despondent about this “fight within” during chapter 7. The Message paraphrase of v24-25 puts it this way: *“I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.*

At the beginning of chapter 8, Paul focuses on the Gospel apart from the shadowy edges that it must contend with. With a ringing and positive and strong voice Paul says, with conviction, *“so it is, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* He is saying what he has said before, but he is saying it one more time with feeling. And he is saying it without qualification.

Humanity’s problem, which he has described so poignantly and powerfully -- the problem that there is condemnation for all humanity because of Adam’s trespass (Romans 5:16); this problem is solved by being *“in Christ Jesus.”* The solution to humanity’s problem is being *“in Christ Jesus.”* Paul has said earlier that the solution is faith. Here he describes what faith means. Faith means being *“in Christ Jesus.”* It is not simply putting faith in Christ; it is *being in Christ.*

V1-4 in the Message paraphrase puts it this way: *“With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ’s being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.*

*God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn’t deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that!”*

## Breaking free - No Condemnation

### Read Romans 8:1-11

It is a tad discouraging for us to dwell on the things we have done wrong in our lives, the mistakes we have made, or our errors of judgement – we are all too aware of the history of our lives littered with events and choices and decisions that, if we had the opportunity to go back in time, we would do things differently.

But the wonderful truth of the Christian gospel is that there is nothing in our lives that we have ever done that is too big, or too bad, for God to forgive. He is always more willing to wipe away the guilt of the past than we are willing to ask of him. **God's grace and love for us is beyond comprehension.**

And he begins in v1 with this most wonderful claim that sums up the Christian gospel: ***“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** That is the whole of the Gospel summed up in one sentence. *“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

And Paul goes on to remind us why that is the case in v2: *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”* Let's just stop there for a moment.

Our liberation from the wrongs of our past comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we are **'in Christ'**, the mistakes of our past no longer have any power over us because we have been set free by his saving work.

And Paul expands his understanding of that fact further in v3: *“For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so, he condemned sin in the flesh,”* Now, there's a lot here – so let's take this verse apart...

*“For what the law was powerless to do...”* Paul is reminding us here that the Jewish Law was never meant to bring salvation

*“...because it was weakened by the flesh...”* So, it's not a problem inherent in the Law, it was not the fault of the Law that it couldn't save but because we are weak in our flesh, in our emotions and desires. It is the interaction of the Law with our broken humanity that makes it impossible for salvation because the flesh is so weak.

But the good news for us is contained in what Paul says next: *“God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so, he condemned sin in the flesh”.* The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. God revealed himself through his Son Jesus, who lived among us as a full human being. And God has redeemed our humanity through the humanity of Christ, who lived among us, and died, and was raised from the dead. As Paul says here, Jesus was the sin offering. He has paid the price for all that you and I have ever done wrong. Jesus died on the cross and took the penalty for our wrongdoing so that we could be free from the errors of our past. As Paul has written here, ***“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.***

And in v4, he outlines the end result of that: *“in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”.*

That was the purpose of God sending his Son: so that our future may look different from our past, so that we may walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and make better choices for God and for other people and for ourselves. If we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are not condemned to an endless cycle of making the same mistakes but we can move into a more positive future with God.

Paul isn't saying here that we will never sin again; he's not saying that we won't ever make mistakes and bad choices again: of course, we will – because we are still frail human beings. Instead, Paul is referring to our motivation for living; the direction in which we are walking. As Christians, we walk in

accordance with the Spirit - our intention is to serve God and live holy lives - but that isn't the same thing as being sinless. We still get it wrong time and time again but our general motivation and desire is to walk in accordance with the Spirit not in accordance with the flesh.

He makes this point absolutely clear in v5: *“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires”*.

It's a question of what motivates us: if we want to pursue the flesh, we are motivated by the flesh and choose for it but if we want to pursue the Spirit, we are motivated by the Spirit and choose for God. We don't always succeed – but it remains our primary motivation.

Then Paul draws the comparison again in v 6: *“The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace”*. That's not to say that every time we choose for God we will experience life and peace. We know that, often, choosing for God is a real struggle and causes pain. But in the broader picture, when all is said and done, those choices for God will paint a canvas of life and peace, which is our life on earth and the life to come.

Paul then goes on in the next two verses to extend the parallel: *“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God”*. Of course, we want to please God – we want to live lives that are pleasing to God. But whenever we choose to follow the way of the flesh, that is not pleasing to him because it is always an act of hostility towards him. God has given us his Spirit and when we choose to live in the flesh, that is the opposite of what he desires for us.

But Paul is aware that he is writing to a mixed audience where some of them would be committed believers and others would be exploring the faith, so he adds a disclaimer in v9: *“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ”*.

For Paul, the definition of being a Christian is someone who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. If we are of the flesh, primarily motivated by our own desires, we do not have the Spirit and we are not living the Christian life. But if we are of Christ, primarily motivated by a desire to walk with God, we do have the Spirit and we are living the Christian life.

So, Paul works towards a conclusion of this part of his argument, v10: *“But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness”*. Here is the tension with which we constantly live: the tension between the body, which is dead and the spirit, which is life, and we are constantly living with that tension on a daily basis.

Now, he concludes in v11: *“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you”*. Here is an eternal promise that just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so we too will experience resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection body, all the tensions we experience in this life will be gone and we will no longer be torn between spirit and flesh as we are now.

It is all about mindset, about what absorbs our interest and how we use our time.

V5 *“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires”*.

What is our mind set on today?

We are not doomed to a life of servitude but a life of freedom in the Spirit and that is our eternal destiny through the love of God towards each one of us if we choose for God and live in the power and experience of the Holy Spirit.

To become truly free, we must be bound to God. *Romans 6:22* "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life".

George Matheson (1842 -1906) wrote:

Make me a captive, Lord,  
and then I shall be free;  
force me to render up my sword,  
and I shall conqueror be.  
I sink in life's alarms  
when by myself I stand;  
imprison me within thine arms,  
and strong shall be my hand.

Prayer: