

No Condemnation: Romans 8:1-17

Having completed two-years at Oak Hills Bible College, I next attended Bryan College in Tennessee because it was the fastest way to earn the necessary Bachelors Degree that would allow me to get into Seminary and after that the pastorate.

At Bryan, knowing where I wanted to go, gave me two different strategies in choosing and taking courses. There were the hard courses, like Classical Greek, that I really needed to learn in order to succeed in seminary. And then there were other courses that I just had to take to satisfy basic degree requirements. Such as for my science elective, I chose a no-brainer Freshman level course: Introduction to Earth Sciences (otherwise known as "Rocks for Jocks"). You can bet for those Greek classes, I was totally dedicated: putting in hours of personal study, joining study groups, and prepping days in advance for exams. But in Rocks for Jocks, all I had to do was show up to get a C, and without much more effort I easily aced the class – what can I say, I like rocks.

The different approach that I took toward those classes that were part of my major versus those I took as electives reminds me a lot of how some people view the Christian life.

It is a rather common belief that there are two different tracks for a Christian.

There is the disciple track for those who are really serious about their Christianity. These are the people who are totally dedicated, "all in" for Jesus, and they give up everything to follow Him. They yield control of every area of their lives to Jesus, including their finances and their schedules. They constantly look for ways to serve Jesus in the church and in the community and they share their faith with others regularly. They are even willing to suffer hardship and sacrifice if necessary. They truly want to be just like Jesus – a "Little Christ."

Then there is the cultural Christian track for more "ordinary" believers. Those who choose this track may pray a prayer and accept Jesus as their Savior – because the preacher said that would assure their home in heaven. But they want to remain free to pursue their own dreams for success and personal fulfillment as long as they live here on earth. They may drop something in the offering plate to "pay their dues" and once in a while they join a Bible study or volunteer at church when it doesn't interfere with everything else on their schedule. They aren't too serious about living a holy life, because that is, after all, for those fanatics on the discipleship track. Besides, they say, we're all human and God understands our weaknesses and He will be gracious to forgive us. So there is really no pressing reason to be a 100% committed Christian.

Or is there?

This is the question that Romans 8:1-17 will answer for us which is:

**If Christ is really living in you,
how then will you live?**

This is the question that Paul is asking you to seriously consider this morning because your answer – the way you live – may truly determine whether or not you are even a Christian at all.

Here is a simple outline of Romans 8:1-17 which we come back to in a moment.

8:1-4 How I now live if Christ lives in me.
8:5-9 How I Know if Christ lives in me.
8: 10-17 How I will live Knowing that Christ lives in me.

But first, since it has been five-months since we last looked at Romans, so let's do a quick review of Paul's letter which has now brought us what he writes in Chapter 8. **Please take out the Romans insert from your bulletin** and follow along with me as we remind ourselves of how God has dramatically changed the lives of those who have accepted his proffered gift of salvation.

(September 2016-April 2017)

Ch. 1: Paul said he was not ashamed of the "**GOSPEL**" – and neither should we be because it is the story of God's plan for our salvation that is offered to us through Jesus' death on the cross.

The Gospel has the power to save all who accept it.

And the Gospel both reveals God's righteousness as it provides for our righteousness before Him: ***The righteous will live by faith.*** (1:17) This was the idea that launched Martin Luther onto the path of the Church's reformation (the 500th anniversary of which we will be celebrating in just three weeks).

Paul continues that on the other hand, God's wrath is directed against all others who – in rejecting the Gospel – are suppressing the truth of humanity's "built in" knowledge of God, built in morality, and knowledge of the consequences of their own sin.

They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them (1:32).

Ch. 2: And for all those who also reject the Gospel, thinking they already have a special relationship with God because of their religious and law-abiding lifestyle, and who judge themselves to be better than “sinners” -- are themselves deluded and also without excuse for all of us are sinners...

Chs 3-4: Because as Paul explains, no one can be justified before God by obeying the law, for through the law only comes knowledge of sin (3:20). ***Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified now by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is [provided] in Christ Jesus*** (3:23).

Pay attention to these underlined phrases, because I am going to bring them all back in a moment.

Ch. 5: continues on to declare that those who are justified by faith now have peace with God. ***For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His son, much more surely, having been reconciled we will be saved by his life*** (5:10).

Chapters 6 and 7 then take a short detour away from Paul's main message as he answers two questions that he knows people are thinking: The first question coming from “**saved sinners**” is: If God has already declared me righteous because of my faith in Jesus, why can't I just go on living and even sinning as I please?

Ch.6: Paul's answer is HEAVEN FORBID NO! As one who has been saved by Jesus, ***you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions*** (6:11-12).

The second question, coming from the **religious wanabes** is, If the keeping the Law could never save me, why then did God give me the law and tell me to keep it?

Ch.7 Paul's answer is that God gave us the law to prove to us that we can't be righteous enough to save ourselves. But now, through Christ, having died to the law and our enslavement to sin we can and are expected to live

righteously. ***But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit*** (7:6).

Ch. 8 And today, Paul returns to his topic of how the Gospel – The story of God’s grace accessed by our faith – has changed our relationship with God forever. He begins this chapter by declaring: ***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*** (8:1-2).

[Therefore] ***if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God***

So let’s take a moment to list the underlined statements describing what God through Christ has done for us ...

- ***We are justified by His grace as a gift***
- ***we have peace with God***
- ***we are reconciled to God***
- ***we will be saved by Christ’s life***
- ***we are dead to sin and alive to God***

- ***we are discharged from the law***
- ***we are living the new life of the Spirit***
Which brings us to Chapter 8.
- ***There is now no condemnation***
- ***The law of the Spirit has set you free.***

If all this is true of your current relationship with God – brought about by your believing the Gospel – How do you think you should now be living the rest of your earthly life?

you can stick the rest of this outline in your Bible to help you see where we will be going next year. But notice that we have an 8-month break after January, until we get back to finish Romans in September 2018. All I can tell you now is that we are planning a special journey that we can take together through the entire Bible. In the last 10 weeks you traveled from Egypt to meet God on Mt. Sinai. So this Spring why

don't we walk with God from the very beginning to the very end of time in order to comprehend the full story of His plans for us. (More about this later, let's look again at the monitor).

8:1-4 How I now live if Christ lives in me.
8:5-9 How I Know if Christ lives in me.
8: 10-17 How I will live Knowing that Christ lives in me.

8:1-4 How I now live if Christ lives in me.

Chapter 8 begins: *There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* What a wonderful way to get back into Romans! In Christ, you are no longer condemned – because he has swapped the rule books for you. If you have accepted him as your savior then God's son Jesus has satisfied all your old condemnations deriving from the "**law of sin and death.**" And you now get to live by a new set of rules: the "**Law of the Spirit of life in Christ.**"

But before you settle comfortably back in your seat, notice that Paul has stuck three question marks into this passage; as if to say this is true for you only **IF** Christ is truly within you. Notice the three "ifs" in this section.

IF in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you (v. 9)
(the NRSV translation says "since" ... the "if" here is implied)

IF Christ is in you (v. 10)

IF the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you (v. 11)

So **IF** there is a question of whether Christ's Spirit is truly living in me ... then I had better find out whether or not He truly is, because all these promises of a changed relationship with God are based only on that singular truth.

Only if Christ truly lives in me ... then there is no condemnation. If not? So I would think each one of us would want to check this out personally: **How can we know if**

the Spirit of God truly dwells within us? Which brings us to the next set of verses.

8:5-9 How I Know if Christ lives in me.

Paul does not hesitate to give us a very decisive way of determining whether Christ is truly living within us or not by contrasting those people in whom Christ not living with those in whom he is living.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (verse 5).

That seems clear enough. Paul says a good indicator of whether or not Christ is living in me is to see where I have put my focus in life. If I am only focused on my goals, my pleasures, my comfort, my resources, my time ... then it is pretty obvious that your focus is not on the things of the Spirit but on yourself – your fleshly life.

Paul continues on to show you where such a fleshly focus inevitably leads:

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is **death**,
⁷... the mind set on the flesh is **hostile to God**
it **does not submit to God's law**
⁸and **cannot please God**

And then he shows you where a Spirit Life focus leads.

⁶but to set the mind on the Spirit is **life and peace**.
⁴...who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

that word "walk" here in verse 4 is very important because it doesn't indicate arrival but rather growth and progress. **IF we have been born into God's family, then Christ Spirit is living in us, helping us grow and learn from the new text book: the "Law of the Spirit of life in Christ."** This is what leads us to life and peace.

“This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

— Martin Luther

This is what it means to “walk in the Spirit.”

So Paul has given each one of us a very pointed test:

Simply put: Where is the focus in your life – that more than anything can tell you whether or not Christ is truly living in you, and where your life is headed.

Either you are a growing disciple, in your life walking towards God. Or you are not. Not a Christian, not justified, not reconciled, not at peace, But still dead in your sins, condemned.

Your focus in life will tell you where your life is truly headed.

That’s a hard thought. Just dwell on that for a moment, consider what it says about the life you are now living.

(pause)

But as Paul does, let us turn to a happier thought.

8:10-17 How I will live Knowing that Christ lives in me.

Throughout his letter, Paul has consistently taught that salvation is not a matter of what I can do for God, but rather a matter of what God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have done for me. *When we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ.* Ephesians 2:5.

And as this section of Romans adds *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.* (8:11).

How will you live if Christ lives in you? You will have life, and peace in this life and when your physical body dies – because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God – your mortal body must be swapped out for an immortal one. That is a really happy

thought for me as my mortal body daily finds new ways to let me know that it is headed down hill.

So Paul concludes if Christ is truly living in us, we will no longer be living according to our old self-centered fleshly ways but will now be living according to the Spirit of Christ now living in us. And The new life imparted by the Holy Spirit always manifests itself in what we set our minds on and ultimately in the way that we live our lives. That is not to say that genuine disciples of Jesus can't fall into sin, sometimes even into gross sin. But it does mean that they can never remain complacently in that sin.

So think on this question one more time:

**If Christ is really living in you,
how then will you live?**

Let me be very clear, my purpose in getting you to honestly answer this question is not to have you needlessly question or doubt your salvation. There is not one person here this morning who could say that the he or she is 100% all in for Jesus 100% of the time. So I'm not suggesting in any way that if you don't do that perfectly that you're not a genuine disciple of Jesus.

But on the other hand, because I love you and want what is best for you, I don't want anyone leaving here this morning deceived into thinking that you're a Christian just because you prayed a prayer, or walked down an aisle, or raised your hand.

The only way you can know for sure that you belong to Jesus is to know that the Holy Spirit dwells in you. And how can you know that? You can't, as some people claim, feel it. You don't get tingly all over when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life. His presence in your life is not evidenced, as some people claim, by speaking in tongues.

The only way we can know for sure that the Holy Spirit dwells in us is to evaluate what we think about and how we live our lives.

- If the Holy Spirit dwells in me, then my mind will be set on the things of the Spirit.
- I will consistently relate every area of my life to God and His Word.
- So I will treasure the Bible and spend as much time as I possibly can there, not out of a sense of duty, but because I want my mind to be full of the things of the Spirit.

And then that mindset will overflow into the way that I live my life. Again, that doesn't mean that I will ever do it perfectly here on earth, but my walk in life, my focus of interests, will give testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life.

You want to know one of the best ways to evaluate where your focus is, what you value, is to look at your checkbook and your calendar because how you spend your money and your time will give you a pretty good indication of what really matters to you.

I can't help but think of how different our church and our world would be if we had a lot more people who were on the discipleship track for Jesus; *who were walking not according to the flesh but to the Spirit.*

- Imagine what would happen if we lived daily in the reality of the truth that I am not my own because I belong to Jesus. ?
- What if I lived like my tongue is not my own to use to tear down others, but rather I lived like it belongs to Jesus and I must use it to glorify Him?
- What if I determined that my eyes are not my own to look lustfully at someone else, or to dwell on much of the immoral trash that now qualifies as entertainment ?
- What if I decided that my money was not my own to merely use to satisfy my fleshly desires, but rather that it belonged to Jesus and that I need to use it to honor Him and further His purposes rather than my own?
- What if I lived as if my time was not my own to squander on meaningless pursuits, but rather than it belongs to Jesus and I need to use it to serve and glorify Him?

IF God's Spirit does not live in you, then you will be hostile to those thoughts. But if he does then that Spirit will bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16).

Something to think and pray about.