



Please open your copy of the Scriptures to Romans 8 (p. 887 in pew Bible). Every time we open our Bible with humble hearts, asking God to speak to us, we find that these ancient words do for us what no other words can do. That's because these words are *God's words*. These *words of life, words of hope / give us strength, help us cope. / In this world, where e'er we roam / ancient words will guide us home.*

Romans 8 celebrates life in the Spirit – the life of God that few people find, yet one that God gives freely to all who trust in him for salvation. Listen as I read vv. 1-11:

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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

- Romans 8:1-11

This portion of Romans 8 along with the rest of the chapter teaches us that *life in the Spirit entails breathtaking privileges.*

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breathtaking privileges.***

A privilege is a “benefit enjoyed by a particular person or group of people beyond the advantages of most.” No other people enjoy such immense privileges as God’s people. Let’s look at the first few privileges highlighted in this chapter.

1. No condemnation from God (vv. 1-4)

Paul begins with a declaration so marvelous, that if it were not God’s own words spoken through Paul, we would think it far too good to be true. Paul states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

Throughout chapter seven, Paul has been lamenting over the problem of sin. But now he celebrates the power of God’s grace toward all believers. Paul doesn’t say, “There is nothing in them that deserves condemnation,” because there is. “For all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), and the penalty for sin is death” (6:23) – not just physical death (the separation of the soul from the body), but also spiritual death (the eternal separation of our whole person, body and soul, from God in the lake of fire. This is what Scripture calls “the second death.” The apostle John writes in Revelation 20, “This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14b).

That’s the punishment we all deserve on account of our sins against an infinitely holy God. The word “condemnation” refers not only to the verdict, but also to the penalty that the verdict demands. But, “thanks be to God,” the believer faces “no condemnation.” The word “no” is emphatic, meaning that “there is no trace of condemnation.”¹ How is that possible? Well, Paul has already explained how in chapters 3-5. But to sum it up, believers are not condemned because Christ substituted himself for us. he lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf and was also condemned in our place when he died on the cross for our sins.

This is what it means to be “in Christ Jesus” – to trust him as your substitute. In chapter 6, Paul declared that “all of us who have been baptized *into Christ Jesus* were baptized into his death,” and that “we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4, italics added). Baptism portrays the believer’s union by faith with Christ in his death and resurrection. So, everyone who trusts in Christ is “in Christ” and therefore faces “no condemnation.”

Not just in the future at the Final Judgment but also presently, at this very moment. Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This reality is celebrated in a song we sing often: *In Christ Alone*. Remember the lyrics? “No guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me.” Remember that! Since there is no *divine* condemnation as far as our sin is concerned, “there is no need for ... self-condemnation” either.²

¹ Daniel M. Doriani, *Romans*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), p. 241.

² William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 1708.

Paul tells us why in verses 2-4. First, he says, “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” In this verse the word “law” refers to a fixed principle. Just as surely as sin enslaves us and drags us toward death (both physical and spiritual death), so the Holy Spirit sets us free “in Christ Jesus,” by applying his work of salvation to us.

⇒ It’s sort of like the law of gravity. When you throw a ball into the air, it comes back down because it is heavier than the air it displaces. But if you toss a living bird into the air, it flies away, even though its weight is also heavier than the air it displaces. Why? Because the law of life in the bird overcomes the law of gravity. Likewise, the Holy Spirit supplies the risen life of Christ to believers, thereby making us free from the law of sin and death.³

Paul then reiterates how we were rescued, saying in verse 3, “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do” (v. 3a). Remember, God’s law isn’t the problem, we are. Because of our sinfulness, the law (moral law of God summarized in the Ten Commandments) could not get us to fulfill its righteous requirement. It gave us God’s standard without giving us the ability to meet it. So, God did what the law could not do. Paul goes on to explain what God did, saying, “By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 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” (vv. 3b-4).

Paul doesn’t say that Jesus came in sinful flesh but “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh.” By entering the world in human form, Jesus resembled sinful humanity. But he was in fact sinless. He lived a perfect life, fully obeying God’s law. Then on the cross he suffered the condemnation that we deserve for breaking God’s law. Believers “in Christ” are *completely free* from condemnation because Jesus *completely fulfilled* the “righteous requirement of the law” on our behalf.

Jesus did this for those “who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (v. 4). The word “walk” has to do with our conduct, our way of life. God gave us the Holy Spirit so that we could walk in his ways (Ezekiel 36:26). ***Our pattern of life is proof of our faith.*** Even though we will continue to struggle with sin until the Lord takes us home to heaven, we “make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor. 5:9). John MacArthur writes,

As far as the Christian life is concerned, everything that is a spiritual reality is also a spiritual responsibility. A genuine Christian *will* commune with his heavenly Father in prayer, but he also has the responsibility to pray. A Christian *is* taught by the Holy Spirit, but he is also obligated to seek the Spirit’s guidance and help. The Holy Spirit *will* produce spiritual fruit in a believer’s life, but the believer is also admonished to bear fruit. Those truths are part of the amazing and seemingly paradoxical tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s will. Although man’s mind is

³ Ibid.

incapable of understanding such mysteries, the believer accepts them because they are clearly taught in God's Word.⁴

This takes us right into the second privilege, or benefit, that life in the Spirit entails. Not only do we receive *no condemnation from God*, but we are also blessed with *the capacity to please God*.

2. The capacity to please God (vv. 5-9)

⁵ 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.⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

- Romans 8:5-9

When Paul talks about the flesh, he's not talking about skin, muscle, and tissue. He's talking about our sinful nature and impulses – all that is opposed to God. Those who live according to the flesh live to please themselves rather than God. They are “selfies” in the truest sense of the word. They are motivated by self-interest, self-glory, self-sufficiency, self-advancement. They are “lovers of self, lovers of money, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:2, 4). Whatever they have “*in mind*, God is outside the mind, forgotten and ignored.”⁵

At least God as who he has revealed himself to be in Scripture. Many moral people “live according to the flesh” by thinking that they can be good enough to earn God's favor. Even if they believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, they see Jesus' sacrifice as a supplement to their good works, to make up for their deficiency. They think the key to salvation is “Christ and me” rather than “Christ alone.” The root of their religion is pride. They trust in themselves instead of God, and “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

They live in a way that may lead them to say, “This is the way! This is the life!” when actually it is the way of death. Scripture says,

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
- Proverbs 14:12

⁴ John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991), p. 412.

⁵ Doriani, 251.

Jesus said,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

- John 14:6

No matter how hard they try, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). Why? Because their heart has not been purified by faith in Christ, so even their good deeds are not empowered by God or pleasing to God. They may live good, moral lives compared to other people, but they’re still under condemnation.

But that’s not the case with believers in Christ. Paul says to them in verse 9, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (v. 9a). The word “dwells” (*oikéō*) has the idea of being in one’s own home. One of the most astounding privileges of salvation is that God himself takes up residence in the heart of every believer. On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples,

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

- John 14:23

This indicates a very close and intimate relationship. The Father and the Son make their home in the heart of the believer through the Holy Spirit. Because of his empowering presence, every Christian has the capacity to please God!

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

- Philippians 2:13 NLT

God will be pleased, and you will be pleased! For to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Jesus said, “I came that that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Those who embrace Jesus as their Lord and Savior are no longer the enemies of God but are at peace with God” (Rom. 5:1). We don’t need to worry whether or not we’re good enough to gain God’s favor, because if we have put our faith in Christ, we are already pleasing to him.

Remember that Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience in our place. That’s why the Father declared on more than one occasion, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Those who by faith are “in Christ Jesus,” are accepted by God and are pleasing to him.

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.

- Psalm 149:4

That's why the writer of Hebrews ended his exhortation to the church with this encouraging benediction:

May [God] produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever!
Amen.

- Hebrews 13:21 NLT

Sophia Bricker sums up the matter well, saying,

Through their identity in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives, a believer can live in a way that brings great pleasure to the Lord. Truly, believers will find great joy and spiritual fullness in living to glorify God.⁶

Yes, "to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." I was almost tempted to title this sermon "It's a Wonderful Life." To know that because of Jesus Christ, all the works that we do out of love for God are truly pleasing to God in spite of all our imperfections and failures, is an incredible privilege that only believers can enjoy.

But it gets better yet, because in addition to receiving *no condemnation from God* and *the capacity to please God*, believers can look forward to *our coming resurrection by God*.

3. Our coming resurrection by God (vv. 10-11)

At the end of verse 9, Paul says, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." "But," Paul goes on to say, "if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:10-11).

This marvelous privilege of resurrection is prefaced with a sobering truth: "the body is dead because of sin." When Matthew Henry, a 17th century minister who wrote a commentary on the whole Bible, came to this clause in verse 10, he wrote, "In the midst of life we are in death: be our bodies ever so strong, and [healthy], and handsome, they are as good as dead ... and this because of sin. It is sin that kills the body."

After Adam sinned, God said to him, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken: for you are dust,

⁶ Sophia Bricker, "Are We Called to Please God?" Christianity.com, 9 July 2021. Retrieved on 5 February 2022 at <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/god/are-we-called-to-please-god.html>.

and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). No one has escaped this awful reality. We have grieved the loss of loved ones. We watch our own bodies grow old and wear out. The fact is, we’re dying. Matthew Henry went on to say, “Methinks, were there no other argument, love to our bodies should make us hate sin, because it is such an enemy to our bodies. The death even of the bodies of the saints is a remaining token of God’s displeasure against sin.”

If that’s all there was to us and all that remained for us, our state would be sad indeed. But notice what Paul says: “If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” What righteousness is Paul referring to? The righteousness of God, which is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for salvation (2 Cor. 5:21).

In verses 10-11, Paul shows how the present possession of ‘spiritual’ life will lead to the enjoyment of ‘physical’ life through the resurrection of the body.⁷ Just as God the Father raised the body of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, so God will raise up our bodies in the same way. Then the process of our redemption will be complete. We will finally be like Christ and share in his eternal glory.

This glory is guaranteed. Second Corinthians 5:5 says, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

Paul will have more to say about this topic a few verses later when he describes our future glory. Paul is merely introducing the topic here. But think about the privileges that Paul has already listed for those who are in Christ:

1. No condemnation from God
2. The capacity to please God
3. Our coming resurrection by God

If you belong to Christ, these privileges belong to you. So, rejoice! If you don’t yet belong to Christ, repent. Turn from your sin, your pride, your self-sufficiency, your empty religion, and trust Jesus to save you. Believe in Christ, and you will begin your new life in the Spirit!

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, “Romans.” New Bible Commentary, 4th edition, edited by G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, reprinted 2010), p. 1140.