

Living According to the Spirit

Romans chapter 8:1 begins with the word THEREFORE.

Some of us may have studied Euclidian Geometry at high school. In Euclidian Geometry we would be given certain facts from which we were required to prove a hypothesis. By arranging these facts in a logical manner we should have been able to finally state that the hypothesis was true. The final statement of our proof always began with the THEREFORE sign. Therefore, came at the end of logical reasoning but today's reading from Romans 8 actually starts with the word. This tells us that what is about to follow is the summation of what has come before. Although Paul's argument is not as tidy as a geometric proof this is indeed the case.

In some of the preceding chapters Paul has written of man's sinfulness. In 5:16 and 5:18 he speaks of mankind being condemned because of one man, i.e. Adam. In Chapters 5 and 6 he explains in detail the saving work of Jesus for people who have faith. So it is in 8:1 he now declares *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Condemnation means to be found guilty in the eyes of God, sentenced to judgement, and separated from God. But for the believer, as Charles Wesley wrote in his mighty hymn, "No condemnation now I dread."

Advancing the same idea, but in a different way Paul writes in v2 that he no longer fears condemnation *BECAUSE through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*.

This is the first time in his letter that Paul has used the term *the law of the Spirit of life* and it is interpreted as the principles of the Holy Spirit, the spirit which brings life. He contrasts it with the *the law of sin and death* i.e. the principles of sin and death, sin and death being seen as a natural pairing.

So Paul is saying that he fears no condemnation because through Jesus, the Holy Spirit has LIBERATED him from being the captive of sin. The Holy Spirit brings LIFE while sin brings DEATH.

Charles Wesley knew what it meant to go from living under the law of sin and death to living under the law of the Spirit of life. In that mighty hymn he describes it with these words, "My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee." At his conversion the chains that bound him to sin fell off and he was no longer a prisoner to sin but lived under the Spirit's ruling.

As if all that Paul has already written in the first 7 chapters of Romans wasn't enough to explain why the believer should not fear any condemnation, Paul reminds the Romans, and us in 8:3-4 of the significance of Jesus death.

He refers to the law, the moral law given to Moses by God. Paul's opinion of the law was that it is spiritual (7:14). It is good (7:16). And its great value lay in that it showed us what sin is

(7:7). To fulfil the requirements of the law Jewish people were to do three things. Firstly, they were to be faithful. Secondly, they were to show their faithfulness by obeying the commandments set down in the Law. Thirdly, if they didn't obey them they were to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer prescribed sacrifices as an act of penitence. There was the expectation that the penitent person was sincere, truly repenting and trusting in God's mercy. The law showed people how they were to live, but its standards were impossible to fulfill even for the most devout. It showed sinful man what he was doing wrong but didn't enable him to live differently. It didn't empower sinful man to live differently. The law couldn't get man to live a righteous life because of man's basic sinful nature, so people had to repeatedly offer sacrifices in the Temple.

However, what the law couldn't do, God did. He sent *his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering....in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*(8:3c, 4)

We may well ask the question why does God require a sacrifice/sin offering?

The answer is that the God we worship is a HOLY God. The moral commandments of the law reflect the nature of God. God is not only loving by nature but he is also moral. He is righteous so the requirements of the law are righteous. God abhors evil and is reviled by sin. He loves the sinner but hates the sin. His righteous nature calls for justice. A price must be paid for failing to keep the moral code and the price was in the form of a sacrifice. The greater the sin the greater the value of the sacrifice.

When we speak of Jesus as a "sin offering" we compare him to the animal sacrifices that Jewish people offered at the Temple. However, the difference is as vast and profound as the universe itself. Unlike the animal sacrifices Jesus was not part of creation. He was God himself. He was without fault; without blemish; without sin. He came to earth to die as a sacrifice for all of mankind's sins. Yet Jesus was also a man. He was tempted like any other man, but he did not fall to temptation. And as a man he humbly accepted God's will for his life. So the creator sacrificed his dearly beloved Son for the sake of his creation. His sacrifice was a once and for all sacrifice so it never needs to be repeated. The righteous requirements of the law have been met forever. Jesus was the PERFECT sacrifice.

In as much as Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sin, mankind no longer needs to stand condemned but, in a sense, sin is declared condemned. The wages of sin is death but this is not the case for those who live according to the Spirit.

Christ is the "sin offering" for people of faith today, or as Paul now puts it, those *who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*. Our sin is condemned but we are released from condemnation. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Living according to the Spirit.

Paul considers there are two ways that mankind lives: either according to the sinful nature or according to the Spirit. Those who are in Christ have the Spirit and should be living according to the Spirit. Verse 5 from the NIV of the new Bibles tells us that

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

The NEV translates it slightly differently,

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.

Both translations speak of a “mindset.” In the NEV translation the wording has a greater suggestion that we have an active part to play in what our mind is set upon. That means we can consciously determine what we will think about. Many self-help books teach that our attitude impacts how we live. Sportsmen are very disciplined in training so as to achieve their goals. People studying for exams are very focused. Research scientists are very dedicated to the work they are doing. Their mindset can block out many distractions. Paul wants people who are in Christ to set their minds on things of the Spirit so that they think, say and act in a way that reflects the influence of the Spirit. He wants them to submit to the movement of the Spirit in their lives.

Should I be giving the impression that it is all up to us, let me remind myself and draw your attention to the words of Paul in v6, where he writes of the *the mind controlled by the Spirit*. It is a two-way street. Being “in Christ” means we have the Spirit but the more we consciously set our minds on the things of the Spirit the more our minds are controlled by the Spirit. And vice versa. As the Spirit controls our lives then the more we should set our minds on the things of the Spirit.

Spirit and the sinful nature are two exclusive realms, governed by two opposing authorities or powers. One is either in the spirit or in the sinful nature but not in both at the same time. Verses 7&8 tells us that people controlled by their sinful nature are hostile to God, do not submit to God’s law and cannot please God. These are strong words indeed but we need to remember that people without the Spirit are people who have not recognised the person and work of Jesus. So no matter what they do, because they are not right with God, it is not counted as righteous in God’s eyes. In contrast we can deduce that those controlled by the Spirit are welcoming to God, submissive to his will and capable of pleasing him.

We are told in 8:6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace*. Peace with God because we live our life in accordance with what he wants. Life because the Spirit enlivens. The Spirit of God is first mentioned in the Bible in the second verse of Genesis 1. The Spirit was there when the world was in darkness and God began his process of creation. From the very beginning God’s Spirit is associated with a creative life force.

Living in the Spirit

In 8:9-11, the last three verses of today’s passage, Paul speaks directly to the people in the church at Rome. In v9 Paul writes about both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. He tells them that if the Spirit of God lives in them then they are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit. But if they do not have the Spirit of Christ they do not belong to Christ. He is implying that to be controlled by the Spirit means to have the Spirit of Christ.

And we remember that Christ was the fulfilment of the Law and he summarised the Law with these words, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all our mind and your neighbour as yourself.”

In v10 the Romans are told that their mortal bodies are decaying and are dying because of sin i.e. human nature, but their spirit is alive because of righteousness. The older Romans would be quite conscious of the natural decay of their bodies. Their increasing number of aches and pains would have testified to that. But what the Romans have is a spirit that is alive because they have been made right with God through Jesus’ sacrificial death.

And in v11 Paul gives the Romans the great assurance that He who raised Jesus from the dead, will give life to their mortal bodies, through his Spirit who lives in them. This is the promise that they too, like Christ, will be raised from the dead.

You may remember that last week Hyun preached on Romans 7:15-25. In that passage Paul wrote about the struggle between wanting to do the right thing and the fact that so often we find ourselves doing the wrong thing. Whereas this week you have been hearing that those who living in the Spirit have i) a different mind-set and ii) are alive because of righteousness. They are people who live according to the law of the Spirit of life and not the law of sin and death.

Paul has not been saying those in Christ Jesus no longer sin or that they are exempt from the struggle against sin. Rather, he is saying that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ and that they are “FREE from the law of sin and death” 8:1. Last week, in Romans 7:23 Paul wrote about the experience of being “a PRISONER of the law of sin.”

The apparent contradiction does not cancel the fact that both represent the experience of believers. Christians are never totally free from the hold of sin yet there is a big difference between our response to that grip and that of non-Christians. The great Christian theologian, Augustine, said prior to his conversion “my sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner”. Christians are alert to the ways of sin and are no longer ignorant and should not be unresisting accomplices to its work. We recognize its power and fight against it in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Christians may still live with the effects of sin but we do not live under its authority.

Let me quote from P150 “Righteousness from Heaven” by R Kent Hughes commentary on Romans:

We live our life under the authority of Jesus Christ and we live our lives according to the laws of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates a new humanity which is characterized by living “according to the Spirit”. This new humanity, through its union with Christ, whose flesh never sinned, is infused with the power to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Everything the law required is now realized in the lives of those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for the redeeming love of Jesus. Help us to acknowledge the reality of the Spirit in our lives and to earnestly live according to the Spirit’s way.

The principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the principle of sin and death New. Thus, when we yield to the power of the Holy Spirit we are liberated. We no longer have to sin. Through the Holy Spirit the virtue and perfection and power of Christ's life is communicated to us. We actually do the law of God from the heart. We love him with all our hearts and we love our neighbours as ourselves.

The law not only required the outward show of obedience but it required the internal devotion of the heart. The ultimate requirement of the law was to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5.) and it is for people who desire to show this love that Christ was the "sin offering."

The Setting of the Sails

We all, whatever our spiritual state, live in a storm-tossed world. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. The set of our minds will determine not only eternity but the quality of our life now.

*One ship drives east and another drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.*

*Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate,
as we voyage along through life-
'Tis the set of a soul
That decides its goal
And not the calm or the strife.*

Wesley H Hagar, *Conquering* P65

This is not to say that Paul no longer sins but rather that sin no longer dominates his life. He lives under the laws of the Spirit.