

Deliverance through the Spirit

A Study on Romans 8:1-4

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As a pastor, I have many Christians come to me and say, “I just can’t live this Christian life. I’m trying to live it, but I can’t make my life conform to what I know the Bible teaches about Christian living.” Always my answer is, “Of course you can’t live the Christian life by yourself, but did you know that God has given the Holy Spirit to help you live a life of progressive victory over sin?” The problem is that these Christians have not yet learned the secret of walking in dependence upon the Holy Spirit in their everyday walk as followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul had something like the same experience as a Christian who tries to live the Christian life in his own strength apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. After he was saved, Paul still loved the Mosaic Law, for the Law had been his whole life for over thirty years when he was a self-righteous Pharisee. When he became a Christian, he soon learned that he had died to the Law as a way of life (Rom. 7:16), but he still respected and loved the Law because it was a reflection of God’s holiness. Therefore, he desired to keep the righteous requirements or the spiritual principles of the Law. He was convinced that as a saved man he could make his flesh obey the Law. As he sought to do this, he found that he simply could not. He had a new nature from God which gave him a desire to keep the spiritual principles of the Law, but in himself he did not have the power. Thus, Paul was brought to an end of himself as he discovered within him the principle of indwelling sin and the helplessness of his flesh to keep the Law in his own strength. This caused him to cry out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Having become disgusted with his own life — with his sinfulness, his hypocrisy, his futile attempts at holiness — he cried out for a deliverer!

Paul was then able to give a cry of victory, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” He had learned that sanctification as well as justification is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The answer to indwelling sin is the indwelling Christ, and the answer to self-effort in Christian living is dependence upon Christ, through the Spirit, instead of self.

How many of us have felt this struggle and frustration as Christians! It is not always that we do outwardly sinful things, but we do not do the things we should, and even if we do them it is often out of fear and habit rather than love. We discover our inability to serve God by much zeal and much prayer and much study, and we are baffled and frustrated. At this point we may be tempted to quit being a Christian. We may say, “Oh, Lord, what is the use? I have tried and tried, and I have gotten nowhere.” Here we are at the end of self and will cry for help. Without a word of reproach or rebuke for our failure, God will do through

us what we have struggled to do in our own flesh. He will teach us to live Christ's life through us!

In Romans 8:1-4 Paul tells us about the secret he learned, that God had sent the Holy Spirit to make real in his experience the death and life of Jesus Christ. He learned that God had provided supernatural power to live a supernatural life. He came to realize his own insufficiency and turned to Christ, through the Spirit, for his sufficiency. Paul never was perfect in this life (far from it), but he began to enter into the life of liberty and freedom of the Spirit.

The argument of this section is that the Holy Spirit, by working on the inside of a Christian, can produce the righteous requirements of the Law in him. The responsibility of the Christian is to be rightly related to the Holy Spirit in his experience, to submit to his guidance and will.

RELEASE FROM CONDEMNATION — Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” “Therefore” refers back to chapter seven where Paul, trying to keep the Law, was struggling with self-effort and warring with sin.

Paul had his theology straight. He believed in the security of the believer, that once he was saved he could never be lost. As a struggling saint brought to the point of defeat and despair, he never doubted his salvation. He had great confidence, even when struggling with sin and self-effort, that he would not be judged by God in eternity for his sins. He knew that he had genuinely trusted Christ and was in a living and vital union with the Lord.

All those who are in Christ Jesus need never fear the wrath of God or eternal punishment. Christ has taken away their sins forever. If God condemns the Christian, he must condemn the Lord Jesus too, for every Christian is in union with Christ. God would never condemn his own Son! What a comfort it is to know that amidst all our sins, struggles, fleshy efforts, shortcomings, despair, discouragements, and defeats, that God loves us and sees us in his Son, so that he will never cast us out. Our standing before God is perfect, although our state or experience is imperfect!

“Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” This is probably an interpolation that was either copied by mistake by a transcriber from 8:4, or placed there purposely by an editor. Almost all scholars agree that this part of the sentence is not in the better manuscripts. Even if this text were original, it would not indicate that a Christian might fall under condemnation by failing to walk after the Spirit, but rather it identifies a quality that belongs

to those who are in Christ Jesus: they walk according to the Spirit. Elsewhere Scripture attests that a person who is in Christ Jesus can never lose his salvation because God preserves him in a saved state.

RECOGNIZING THE NEW POWER OF THE SPIRIT — Romans 8:2

Paul realized and recognized the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. The law of the Spirit is an inward principle of action which operates with the rigidity and fixity of a law. It is a completely new kind of principle that takes over to produce the life of Christ in the Christian. The law of sin and death refers to the sin nature which acts as a principle of action operating with the rigidity and fixity of a law (cf. 7:23,25).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” This could be translated, “For the law of the Spirit, namely, the life which is in Christ Jesus.” This may mean either “the law of the Spirit which produces life in the Christian who is in union with Christ,” or “the Law of the Spirit is the life the Christian has in Christ.” The Christian need not fear condemnation because he has the law of the Spirit or the life of Christ in him, giving him progressive victory over the flesh.

The Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the Christian to reproduce the life of Christ in him. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that the Christian is being freed from the power of the sin nature in his experience. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to produce the life of Christ in the Christian.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

This is the law of the Spirit. It is not the Mosaic Law or a man-made law. It is the law of the indwelling Spirit producing the life of Christ which gives a power to regulate and control the sin nature. The Christian operates on this new principle or law which is a new regulator and authority for him, and which provides the power to keep down the outbreaks of the flesh which the Mosaic Law could not do.

The law of the Spirit supersedes the law of the sin nature. Something that might help us understand this is an airplane. Two principles operate when a plane flies: the law of gravity and the law of aerodynamics. A plane can get off the ground because the law of aerodynamics is stronger than the law of gravity. When the plane is in the air, gravity is still there, and if the engine stops the law of aerodynamics will not keep the plane from crashing.

Peter's walking on the water is another example. Natural law says he should have sunk when he stepped out of the boat, but natural law was superseded by the spiritual law of faith. However, Peter did sink when he stopped operating on the law of faith and natural law took over. We must walk in dependence on the Spirit if the law of the Spirit is to dominate over the sin nature.

"Hath set me free from the law of sin and death [the sin nature]." This freedom is positionally accomplished, for the sin nature has been judged and its power or reign broken in the Christian by union with Christ in death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14). Christians experience this freedom as they appropriate or lay hold of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. It is for those who walk after the Spirit (8:4).

The Christian trusts, depends on, and leans on the Holy Spirit to produce the life of Christ in him so as to keep the sin nature under control. It was a fact that Paul had been set free positionally, but through time and knowledge he came to learn it in his experience.

REMEMBERING CHRIST'S DEATH — Romans 8:3

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." It was impossible for the Law to produce righteousness in a person because of man's basic sin nature. But God sent Christ to die on the cross to judge the sin nature, and while it remains in the child of God, it does not reign over him or have any rights over him. Christ's death broke the power of the sin nature, and this positional truth becomes a progressive reality to those who are walking by the law of the Spirit.

REALIZING OUR RESPONSIBILITY — Romans 8:4

"That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Christ's death made it possible for the righteous principles of the Mosaic Law to be fulfilled in the Christian.

"Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This fulfilling is possible only if the Christian is walking after the Holy Spirit in his daily experience, and not walking according to the sin nature. To walk by the Spirit means to have a life of resting-activity, depending on the Holy Spirit to produce the life of Christ in oneself. To walk by the flesh is to feed the base desires of the sin nature and to yield continually to its temptations.

CONCLUSION

God has told us that eye has not seen nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for them that love him. Those who walk in dependence on the Spirit will progressively enter into the abounding, satisfying, comforting life of Christ.

For those without Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, there is no abounding life, only spiritual death; no satisfaction, only restlessness; no comfort, only fear of eternity. But Christ promised abundant life to all who would receive him as personal Saviour from sin. If you feel the prompting of the Spirit, will you receive Christ as your personal sin bearer?