

Romans 7 v 21 to 8 v 17: Why not live?

At last we come to Romans Chapter 8 – arguably the greatest ‘chapter’ that Paul ever wrote – a Mount Everest among the Himalayan peaks! But we need to remember that Paul did not write his letter with chapters, and the artificial division between Chapters 7 and 8 can be confusing. Paul’s argument makes better sense if the last few verses of Romans 7 are linked to the first few verses of Romans 8...

Conflict resolution (Romans 7 v 21 to 8 v 8)

- What dilemma do we face when we try to keep the law (v 21 to 23)? What is the end result of this inner conflict (v 23)? Who can rescue us from the “body of death”, and how (v 24, 25)?
- Why is there “no condemnation for those who are in Christ” (v 1)? What does “no condemnation” mean? What are the various ‘laws’ referred to in verses 2 to 4?
- What determines whether or not we are living according to the Spirit (v 5)? Why does the mind that is set on the flesh result in death (v 6)?

“There is therefore now no condemnation” (v 1) – this simple declaration comes to “those who are in Christ Jesus”. Since God the Father does not condemn Jesus, neither can the Father condemn those who are in Jesus. They are not condemned, they will not be condemned, and they cannot be condemned! The verdict is not *less condemnation*. That is where many believe they are – thinking our standing has improved in Jesus. It has not been improved, it’s been completely transformed, changed to a status of *no condemnation*. We receive this wonderful declaration from God’s court, though we certainly deserve condemnation. We receive this standing because Jesus bore the condemnation we deserved, and our identity is now in him.

“The law of the Spirit of life has set you free... from the law of sin and death” (v 2) – the law of sin and death was a strong and seemingly absolute law. Every sin we commit and every cemetery we see proves it. But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is stronger still, and this law frees us from the law of sin and death. Verse 1 tells us we are free from the guilt of sin; this verse tells us we are free from the power of sin.

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do” (v 3) – the law can do many things. It can guide us, teach us, and tell us about God’s character. But the law cannot give energy to our flesh; it can give us the standard, but it cannot give us the power to please God. “Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” – only Jesus can defeat sin, and he did this through his work on the cross, bearing the condemnation we deserved.

“That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (v 4) – because Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law, and because we are in Christ, we fulfill the law. “Who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” – God wants the Spirit to rule over our flesh, but when we allow the flesh to reign, we find ourselves bound by the sinful patterns that characterised the ‘Romans 7’ struggle. To walk in the Spirit means that the course, direction, and progress of our lives are directed by the Spirit.

“Set their minds on the things of the flesh” (v 5) – Paul gives an easy way for us to determine if we are walking in the Spirit or in the flesh – to simply see where our mind is set. The mind is the strategic battleground where the flesh and the Spirit fight for supremacy. When our minds are set on the flesh we bring *death* into our lives, but walking in the Spirit brings *life and peace*. We can try to do good works, and even religious things that are admired by others, but “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (v 8); the mind that is set on the flesh does not submit to God’s law, and is therefore hostile to God (v 6, 7).

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Living in the Spirit (Romans 8 v 9 to 17)

- How is the Holy Spirit described in this passage? How can you tell if you belong to Christ (v 9)?
- How can we be sure that we will have ultimate victory of sin and death? What does God do for us? What must we do (v 12, 13)? Who helps us? Why spend your Christian life weak and guilt-ridden, fearful, lonely, depressed and discouraged? Why not live?
- The secret of victorious, Spirit-filled living is to remind yourself, day by day, of this great fact: If you are a Christian, you are a son or daughter of the living God, adopted and born into his family. And because you are his child, God loves you, protects you, provides for you, plans for you. God claims you and openly acknowledges you, chastens and corrects you, and honours you...
- What are three ways we can be sure that we are indeed “sons of God” or “God’s children” (v 14 to 16)? Verse 17 ushers in the climax of Paul’s letter – we are “heirs of God”...

“You... are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (v 9) – because the Spirit is given to each believer when they are born again, every Christian has a ‘person’ more powerful than the flesh. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” – every believer *has* the Holy Spirit; however, many do not experience the *fullness of the Spirit* because they are not constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit as Paul commanded in Ephesians 5 v 18; they have no experience of what Jesus spoke about when he described ‘rivers of living water’ flowing from the believer (John 7 v 37 to 39)...

“If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (v 10) – because Jesus lives in us, the body is dead, but the Spirit lives and reigns, and gives life to our mortal bodies through Christ’s resurrection (v 11). “We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (v 12) – the ‘flesh’ (in the narrow sense of sinful flesh in rebellion against God) gave us nothing good, so we have no obligation to pamper it. Our debt is *to the Lord*, not to the flesh. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die” (v 13) – Paul constantly reminds us that living according to the flesh results in death.

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (v 14) – it is fitting that the sons of God should be led by the Spirit of God. But we must not think that being led by the Spirit is a pre-condition to being a son of God: instead, we become sons first and then the Spirit of God leads us. “You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons” (v 15) – living as a child of God means an intimate, joyful relationship with God, in contrast to the bondage and fear demonstrated by the law. A child of God can have a relationship with God so close that he cries out, ‘Abba, Father!’

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (v 16) – Paul says that those who are God’s children, born again by the Spirit of God, know their status because the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirits that this is so. “If children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (v 17) – because we are in Christ, we have the privilege of relating to the Father as Jesus does; and so we are *heirs of God* and *fellow heirs with Christ*. But because we are in Christ, we are also called to share in his *suffering*: God’s children are not immune from trials and tribulations. In fact, our sharing in present suffering is a *condition* of our future glorification.

By the end of verse 17 we can trace ‘seven steps from guilt to glory’ from Romans 5 through to Romans 8:

- (1) We started in Adam;
- (2) We are now, by faith, in Christ;
- (3) If we are in Christ, we are in the Spirit;
- (4) If we are in the Spirit, we can walk according to the Spirit;
- (5) If we live in the Spirit, we are led by the Spirit;
- (6) If we are led by the Spirit, we are the sons of God;
- (7) If we are the sons of God, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...

Prayer – Let us praise and thank God for all these wonderful truths!