

A New Liberation

Romans 8:2-4

Pastor John Miller

I want to read Romans 8:1-4.

Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." That's our key phrase. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The great American evangelist, Billy Graham, said these words: "Man has two great spiritual needs: one is for forgiveness, and the other is for goodness." I love that. The cry of our heart is to be forgiven and made righteous. Theologians use the terms "justified" and "sanctified."

We talked about that last time. In Romans 8:1-4, we discovered that God provides, in Christ, forgiveness and goodness. Notice verse 1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." That's the forgiveness that God provides because of our identification and union and position in Christ.

And notice in verses 2-4, especially verse 4, that Paul said, "...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." That's a new liberation. We're not walking in the dictates and under the control of the old sinful nature. We're walking in the power and control of the Holy Spirit.

So we have both forgiveness and goodness.

The key phrase is "in Christ Jesus." Notice it in verse 1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are..."—what?—"...in Christ Jesus." It doesn't say that "there is no condemnation to those who go to church," or "there is no condemnation to those who have been baptized," or "there is no condemnation to those who are really good people." For no condemnation, you have to be in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the person who takes us out of Adam and places us in Christ. We looked at that in great detail the last time; that every Christian is in Christ Jesus, and there is no degree of being in Christ Jesus. And once you are in Christ Jesus, you are always in Christ Jesus. "There is therefore now no..."—the word "no" is emphatic—"...condemnation." In the Greek, it says, "No now therefore condemnation." That's the way it would be literally translated. So the emphasis is on "no." Not now, not tomorrow, not ever will there be any condemnation, because Jesus died for me on the Cross, and my sins have been forgiven. Jesus took the penalty and condemnation for my sins.

So the first blessing we discovered of being in Christ is that there is no condemnation. Now notice that Paul uses the same phrase "in Christ Jesus" in verse 2. "For the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free...”—there’s our liberty—“...from the law of sin and death.” So the second blessing is that we have a new liberation. Paul tells us that there is a second blessing to those who are in Christ.

This is the first point I want to make in verse 2: We have been liberated. We have been freed in Jesus Christ. We have a new liberation. Verse 2 says, “For the law of the Spirit of life...”—and I’ll explain what that is—“...in Christ Jesus...”—there’s that phrase—“...has made me free...”—there it is; “liberated me”—“...from the law of sin and death.” So in Jesus, sinners are forgiven and free.

Also note in verse 2 the word “for.” It opens with the word “for.” Verse 3 also opens with the word “for.” Verse 4 opens with the word “that.” The reason for this is that Romans is a book of logic. Actually, in Romans 8 you find this connection word “for” 17 times. The reason it appears is because it is the rationale for what Paul had just said. Paul said that because we’re in Christ Jesus, “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free.”

So Romans being a book of logic, Paul is giving us another reason why we have no condemnation. Why is there no condemnation to those who are in Christ? The answer is in verse 2: because we have been “made...free from the law of sin and death.”

What does “the law of the Spirit of life” mean? I’ll try to make it as simple as I can. “The law of the Spirit of life” is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Some say it’s the Gospel, but I believe it’s a reference to the Holy Spirit.

You ask, “Well, Pastor, why does it say ‘the law of the Spirit of life’?”

He’s using the word “law” there to convey the idea of a principle. It is the life-giving law or principle of the Spirit.

When you become a Christian, everything changes because the Holy Spirit comes into your life. Someone without the Spirit, without God, without hope—there’s not much going on. When you give them new life, the Holy Spirit comes to live within them, so their life is radically changed. The Bible says, “Old things pass away, behold all things become new.” You are now a new creation. So everything changes when you become a Christian. You now have a life in the Spirit, but it’s the principle of the law of the life of the Spirit.

Talking about the Holy Spirit, I want to point out that the Bible teaches that there is one God. But one God in three persons. We call it the Trinity. The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, so some people think that is horrible and freak out. But we use that word to describe God’s nature as being triune. So the Bible is monotheistic; there is one God, but that one God is manifested in three separate persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Not three gods. One in essence or nature being divine, but three separate persons.

Some of you are looking at me as though to say, “I don’t get it.” Welcome to the club; neither do I.

"But you're the preacher trying to explain it. You can't explain God."

God is what's called "transcendent." He is above us and beyond us. And He's not like anything we can know, touch, see, smell, feel or anything. Trying to explain the very nature of God is hard for us to get our minds around it. We can just worship God in three persons, blessed Trinity. One in essence, three in persons.

So the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. We are familiar with God the Father, we know a lot about God the Son, because of the Incarnation. He became man. But we know very little about God the Holy Spirit. We'll have to do a series on Sundays sometime on God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts you of your sin. Then when you believe in Jesus Christ and are born again, He is the one Who saves or regenerates you. When you are born again, you are given new life. You are not a Christian unless you have been born again or given new life or regenerated. So the Holy Spirit convicts you, converts you through regeneration and then He indwells you, He lives inside you.

Every Christian has the Holy Spirit. When anyone asks you if you have the Holy Spirit, say "Yes, I have the Holy Spirit." You don't need more of the Spirit; the Spirit needs more of you. That's the key. It's not getting more of the Holy Spirit; it's the Holy Spirit getting more of you. He indwells you, He fills you and He seals you "unto the day of redemption." He is the comforter, the parakletos. He comes alongside you to comfort you and strengthen you. We're going to learn in this passage that you cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. He's the One who makes you a Christian, and enables you and strengthens you to live the Christian life.

So we move in Romans 8:1 from justification to verses 2-4 to sanctification—forgiveness to goodness and the living of the Christian life in holiness. Paul is giving us another reason for no condemnation: we've been made free, and it's the work of the Holy Spirit. Someone said, "Jesus died for us so the Spirit could live in us." I like that. "Jesus died for us so the Spirit could live in us" and set us free.

Set free from what? The answer is in verse 2: "from the law of sin and death." The Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." What's "the law of sin and death"? It is a sin principle of our sinful nature. It is the indwelling sin. Some say it's God's written law, and that's possible, because it brings about sin and death in our lives.

Let me illustrate. You're driving down the street having a zippity do-dah day, everything's great, and then you see a speed-limit sign. It says 55 miles an hour, and you're doing 75. I was having a good day until that stupid sign showed up. I'm late, I've gotta get there. Sometimes on my way to church and I'm late and I'm driving fast, I pray, "Lord, don't let me get a ticket on my way to church to preach." I can't tell the police officer, "I'm on my way to preach, so I have to break the law." He's actually a messenger of God too, and he's going to give me a ticket.

I'm having a great day, and this stupid speed-limit sign bums me out. Now I have an option: I

either slow down and obey the speed limit, or I just shine it on. I usually just shine it on. Pray for me! I'm preaching on sanctification, so I tell you my sins: I break the speed limit. Now I'm a law breaker.

The law doesn't make me sin; it just shows me that I'm a sinner. As a result, it brings about the sin and death in that sense. Someone once said, "God's law is the occasion of both sin and death." Paul said, "I have not known sin, but the law said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' Then when I saw 'Thou shalt not covet,' sin revived and I died." But I think Paul has more in mind than just the law of God. He's talking about, again, a principle of sin nature. Even as a Christian, you still have the capacity and ability to sin. So the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the indwelling sin nature.

At the end of chapter 7, Paul said, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Then he cried, "I thank God," it's been done "through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." So he's saying, "I want to do what's right, but I'm in this struggle or battle." So as we come into Romans 8, we find out that the liberty, deliverance and freedom comes from a life in the Spirit. It's the law of the Spirit.

It's like the law of gravity. If I were to drop my Bible, it would fall. If I hold it up, I supersede the law of gravity. There is this law of sin and death. It wants to pull me down. But the Holy Spirit comes to lift me up, to give me strength and empower me to make me soar over the law of sin and death.

Someone once said in a poem,

"“Do this and live!” the law commands,

But gives me neither feet nor hands.

But sweeter sounds the Gospel brings,

It bids me fly and gives me wings!”

I love that. So I can override that law of sin and death by the law of the life of the Spirit. So there is victory for those who are in Christ Jesus. We can walk in new liberty.

The second thing we need to ask is, how does God bring us this new liberty? How do we come into this new liberty? Notice it in verse 3. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through flesh..." Here's the answer. God did something that the law could not do. We could not do it. "...God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh."

Notice that verse 3 starts again with a "for." So he gives the rationale or reason. Paul first of all tells us what it's not. It's not by the law; you can't live the Christian life by the law or by

legalism. Notice what it says: “For what the law could not do....” The law could not bring forgiveness or goodness. It can’t deliver you or set you free.

Why can’t the law do that? Look at verse 3. “...in that it was weak through the flesh.” The problem is not the law. It’s not the speed-limit sign. It’s the sinner behind the steering wheel. It’s the sinner in the car, not the sign along the road. So the law could not set you free “in that it was weak through the flesh.” God’s law is holy, just and good, but it’s only good to show you your sin and condemn you for your disobedience. It’s not able to bring forgiveness, and it doesn’t bring goodness. But what the law could not do, God has done by providing His own dear Son.

Now the question is, how are we set free? The answer is in verse 3: God. When all hope is gone and we’re condemned, God steps in. God takes the initiative. He does what the law could not do. The Bible says that we love Him, because “He first loved us.” So if it wasn’t for God, in His mercy and grace, seeing us in our sinful plight and taking the initiative to reach out to us, we would be lost.

In verse 3, Paul describes what three things God has done to set us free. First of all, God sent His own Son. I love that. That’s the Christmas message. That’s the Gospel. That’s what God did. We love Him because He loved us and sent His Son. So God the Father sent God the Son so that we could be forgiven. God, in His love, sent His Son, Who died on the Cross so that we could have the forgiveness of our sins, no condemnation and the Holy Spirit. We have Christ’s death on Calvary and also a reference to Pentecost—forgiveness and goodness.

Notice John 3:16 along with this statement. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” So Paul says here, “God sent His own Son,” His only unique Son. There was no other. There is no other like Jesus. No other has ever been virgin born like Jesus. No other has ever lived a sinless life like Jesus. No other died a substitutionary death on the Cross for the sins of the world like Jesus. No one ever rose from the dead like Jesus. No one ever ascended back to heaven like Jesus. No one was ever seated at the right hand of the Father like Jesus. No one but Jesus—praise God!—will come again and establish His kingdom forever and ever. I’m looking forward to that. So there is hope in Jesus Christ. God sent His only Son, and we see His love.

Secondly, how did He send His only Son? He sent His only Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” verse 3. We have what’s called the “Incarnation,” which means that God the Son became flesh or took on humanity. That happened through the virgin birth, and it led to His sinless life. These are all implied in the statement, “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” If Paul had said, “in sinful flesh,” that would mean that Jesus was not virgin born, was a sinner, so His death on the Cross atoned for nothing but His own sins and not ours.

Jesus was fully human, but He was also fully God. His humanity didn’t lessen His deity, nor did His deity lessen His humanity. He was the God-man. One person, two natures; fully divine and fully human. So God did something: He sent His Son through the womb of the Virgin Mary. He

lived a sinless life. He was the God-man.

The last question is, why did God send His Son? Notice verse 3: “on account of sin.” That conveys the idea of the atonement or the Cross. Literally, it’s “concerning sin” or “as a sin offering.” Why did God in His love send His Son, with full humanity and sinless, to die a substitutionary death on the Cross? The answer is “on account of sin.”

Do you remember when the angel came to Joseph to assure him that Mary’s pregnancy was the work of the Holy Spirit? He told Joseph that he would have a son, and “Thou shalt call His name ‘Jesus,’ for He shall save His people from their sins.” That’s what Jesus came to do. The name “Jesus” literally means “God is salvation.” It’s the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament “Yeshua” or “Jehovah saves.” So the name “Jesus” means “God saves,” and that’s why He came.

But note also another reason why God sent His Son, verse 3: “He condemned sin in the flesh.” So there are two reasons why God sent His Son. He sent His Son “on account of sin,” or to atone for sin—that’s the Incarnation and Crucifixion—but He also sent His Son to “condemn sin in the flesh”—that’s goodness. So we have forgiveness and we have goodness. The sinless life of Jesus Christ is given to us or imputed to us so that we can walk in newness of life. God saves us not just to take us to heaven someday but to make us holy while we are on the earth.

This idea of “condemn sin in the flesh” is that in the flesh or in the real humanity of Jesus on the Cross, sin was condemned. Jesus condemned sin so that we can be free from sin’s penalty, sin’s power and, one day, from the very presence of sin altogether.

There is a third point we need to make, in verse 4. Paul now clarifies the reason that God sent His own Son to condemn our sin in Him. It is to make us holy. “That...”—so here’s the rationale or reason—“...the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled...”—how?—“...in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” This is where that phrase appears in the Greek text; not in verse 1 but here in verse 4—“...who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

So God saves us to make us holy. God said in His Word, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” If you’re a child of God, then you should be like your Father in heaven. If God is holy, we should be holy. In other words, saved, saint, sanctified, holy. They all come from the same root word “hagios” in the Greek. It means “to be set apart, made holy.”

So justification is our position—we’re declared righteous, and sanctification is our practice—we’re actually made righteous. Justification is God declaring us positionally to be righteous. There is no progression or degree there. All of us are equally righteous before God. But sanctification is God making us righteous. It’s actually God coming to live inside us. Someone put it like this: “Justification is me in Christ; sanctification is Christ in me.” So not only am I in Christ, but Christ is in me through the work of the Holy Spirit to make me righteous. This is all about living a holy life.

Let me make some important statements and observations in light of verse 1. Number one, holy living is salvation's goal. Holy living is the goal of your salvation. God didn't just save you so you get to go to heaven someday. God also saved you so that right now, you'll live a holy life. So you're a saint positionally. You need to be a saint practically.

Sometimes people say, "Pastor John, I don't know what God's will is for me."

I can say, "I know God's will." I can tell everyone what God's will is for their life. It's "Be ye holy, for I am holy." God's will for you is to make you more like Jesus Christ. The goal of sanctification is Christ-likeness.

We're familiar with Ephesians 2:8-9, which say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." But in verse 10, Paul says, "For we are His workmanship..."—an important word—"...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." So we are God's workmanship. That word "workmanship" is an amazing word. It's the Greek word "poiema." The word means "poem." It means "something created or something made." It means a work of art or something made or created. You and I are God's poiema, God's work of art.

Some of us have a long way to go. Have you ever seen someone painting a picture? They start putting the first brush strokes on it, and you think, This dude is a lousy painter! That looks terrible! But then as he goes on and begins to bring it all together and puts in the background, you say, "Wow!" The artist actually knew what he was doing. At first it looked like this guy needed help and wasn't really any good, but now it's very clear that he is.

You're God's work of art; be patient. It's like every Christian should have a sign around their neck saying "Be patient; under construction" or "Forgive the mess; under construction." God isn't finished with us yet. Some people have progressed a lot more than others in the construction process. God has chipped away a lot of the things that don't look like Jesus, and only the things that look like Jesus remain.

One of God's number one ways He uses to sanctify you, making you more like Jesus, is through suffering.

"Oh, I don't like that! Let's change the subject."

We don't want pain and discomfort. We don't want difficulty. How is God going to make you patient if you never have to be patient? How is God going to make you forgiving if you never have to forgive anyone? How is God going to teach you to love if there is nobody unlovely to love?

"I only love lovely people." That means you love very few people.

What we need to do is value character over comfort. (I'm preaching to my own heart right now,

because I have the gift of gripe. I'm really confessing my sins; aren't I? I'm really gifted at complaining. It just flows from me. I know how to gripe and complain.) If I realize that God is trying to make me more like Jesus, and I value character over comfort, then my trials are not going to upset me. Do you know why your trials upset you and you freak out so much? Because you want comfort over character.

God is working in you; you're under construction. He's in the process of trying to make you more holy. We love to talk about the forgiveness of God, but what about the holiness of God? God wants to make you more like Jesus Christ. He allows suffering and trials and difficulties. He uses His Spirit, He uses His Word, He uses prayer and He uses other spiritual disciplines to shape us, mold us and to make us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ so that He can condemn sin in the flesh. Holy living is salvation's goal.

Secondly, holy living consists of fulfilling the law's just demands. Notice verse 4. "...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." God wants His righteous demands, as seen in the law, to be fulfilled in us. Someone pointed out that it says "in us," not "by us." When God works in us, by His Spirit, then it manifests from our lives as we are obedient to the law. The righteousness of the law can be fulfilled in us.

This is what's called "The New Covenant," by the way. In Jeremiah 31:33, God said, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts." I love that.

I grew up in church and knew the Bible my whole life, but it wasn't until I was born again that I wanted to read the Bible, loved the Bible, loved God—wanted to, wanted to. I want to walk with God, serve God and follow God, because the Spirit came inside me and gave me that strength and ability. He wrote His laws upon my heart.

The third and last thing about verse 4 is that holy living is the work of the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says, "...who do not walk according to the flesh..."—that's your sinful nature—"...but according to the Spirit." The Christian life is a life and a walk in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. You cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent God the Son so that we could have God the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us.

How do we walk in the Spirit? Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation..."—or "debauchery"—"...but be filled with the Spirit." So he tells us not to be intoxicated by wine—then the positive—"...but be filled with..."—or "controlled by"—"...the Spirit." That statement is a command in the Greek; it's an imperative. It's not an option. God commands every Christian to be Spirit filled.

You say, "I thought all Christians had the Holy Spirit."

They do, but the Holy Spirit doesn't have all Christians. It's not, "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" It's, "Does the Holy Spirit have you?" Being filled with the Holy Spirit means that He controls you. He controls your thoughts—they're holy. He controls your words—they're holy. He controls your attitudes—they're holy. He controls your actions—they're holy. So just as you are

under the influence of alcohol and you do stupid things, so now, abandoning that, you are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit brings His fruit: His love, His joy, His peace, His goodness, His mercy, His kindness, His self-control. The greatest evidence of the Spirit-filled life is fruit. God doesn't want religious nuts; He wants spiritual fruit. There are a lot of religious nuts. God wants fruit. He wants love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, temperance and faithfulness. Those are all the fruit of the Spirit.

How are we filled with the fruit of the Spirit? Put Ephesians 5:18 right alongside Colossians 3:16, where Paul says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." The same results of being Spirit filled are the same results of being Word filled. You cannot be a Spirit filled Christian if you neglect the Bible.

I have people all the time say, "Pastor, I don't know what's wrong; my Christian life is so weak. I just keep falling into sin."

I ask them, "Are you reading your Bible?"

"No, I don't have time. I'm too busy sinning."

Dodo! The Bible can keep you from sin, or sin can keep you from the Bible. The psalmist said, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee." It's "a lamp unto thy feet and a light unto thy path." You cannot be a Spirit-filled Christian without being a Word-filled Christian.

Why do I teach the Bible as I do on Sunday morning? Certainly not because it's fashionable. I teach it because this is the way to holiness. When you grow in the knowledge of God's Word, you'll grow in grace, you'll learn to lean on the Spirit, you'll become more like Christ and God will change your life. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and transforms the child of God into the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God sent His Son to die for us—forgiveness—and He sent His Spirit to live in us—goodness.

John 8 has one of my favorite stories in the Bible. They brought to Jesus a woman who was taken in the very act of adultery. They threw her down and said, "Jesus, Moses and the law command this woman to be stoned. Condemn her. What do You say?" Jesus bent down and started doodling in the dirt, writing in the dirt. It was common in those days. They didn't have computers, phones or pencil and paper. So they actually smoothed the dirt out and would write in the dirt. One of the first things I will ask Jesus when I get to heaven is, "What did you write in the dirt that day?" It drives me crazy.

And when He was writing in the dirt, they're pressing Him; "The law commands that she should be stoned. What do You say?" Jesus stood up and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

One theory about what Jesus was writing in the dirt is that He might have been writing the Ten Commandments and putting her accusers' names next to their sin. "Thou shalt not commit

adultery—Rabbi Shemei.” The rabbi looked over and saw his name and said, “You know, I have a dental appointment right now. I gotta go,” and he took off. And the Bible says that from the oldest to the youngest—it could be because the oldest had the most sins—they wanted to get out of there. They started to slither away, and Jesus was standing there alone with this woman. He asked the woman, “Where are your accusers?” Under the Mosaic law, the accusers threw the first stone. “Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”

She said, “No one, Lord.”

Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” He gave her forgiveness and goodness. “I don’t condemn you. Now go and live a life of holiness.” That’s the Christian life.

Let’s pray.