

# Romans Eight

## No Condemnation

By Brian Coatney

After seven intricate studies analyzing Romans Chapter Seven, the cool waters of Romans Eight taste fresh and sweet, especially that first declaration: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). But the studies in Romans Seven laid a necessary groundwork, for we only know the positive by the strength of the negative. Trying and failing, those frustrating negatives, lead us to seek an answer and cry out for someone to deliver us from our self-effort.

At first we thought we had to keep the law, and therefore we accepted condemnation when we failed, not knowing that God never expected *us* to keep the law. We had to know the depths of the sin's deception using the law. Yet, outside of Christ, even though we could not keep the law, the law rightfully laid its demands upon us, and condemnation rightfully fell upon us, for the law demands keeping in us. The condemnation came, not because we could not keep the law, but because we thought we could.

Now, in Christ, no condemnation exists: first, God put us in Christ and condemnation cannot occur in Christ; second, we walk therefore in the power of the Spirit since everything that takes place in Christ happens by the power of the Spirit. Romans Chapter Eight picks up with Paul's point in Romans 7:4: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." Christ died for the law-breaker and *as* the law-breaker; he was raised as the law-keeper, with every Christian joined to him in Spirit union (the marriage of Rom. 7:4). Christ was raised as the "head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23).

Paul gives the cardinal trait of those in Christ; they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Walking after the flesh means living as if the flesh is reality—as if the world of the five senses can produce love. Jesus said the same thing to Nicodemus when he told him a new birth must take place: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5). Through the Cross, the believer experiences a new birth into the realm of the Spirit. The new birth means we move according to a new order—the order in which everything accomplished takes place by the guiding and empowering of the Spirit of God. No wonder Paul says, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

I taught Romans Chapter Seven for years, not realizing the hidden depths of self-effort still in me. After a terrible fall, the Lord fixed me in Romans Chapter Eight, but I could not bear to study or teach Romans Chapter Seven for some time. When asked about Chapter Seven, I would quickly exclaim, “I don’t live there any longer; I live in Chapter Eight. Perhaps I overreacted, or more likely just didn’t look back for awhile. Finally, however, I delighted again to study the mysteries of Chapter Seven as the negative backdrop to living now in the freedom of the Spirit.

So what does “walking in the Spirit,” mean? First, it means that not one ounce of effort originating from the flesh propels us in our new life; all we do is believe in the Spirit’s power and fly like gliders in the wind. Trust in the flesh opens the door once again for Satan to work the law of sin and death in our members; he cannot indwell us again, but he takes trust in the flesh and turns it into sin every time. Although flesh is not inherently sinful, faith in the flesh turns it into the instrument of sin (Rom. 6:13). Therefore, Paul says that the law “was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3), meaning that the flesh does not provide a suitable match for the law. Only the Spirit provides a suitable match, for the law and the Spirit are one.

Paul then makes an arresting statement: he says that God sent Christ “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). At first it might seem that Paul says here that flesh is inherently sinful. But another answer satisfies. We know from the study in Romans 5:12-21 that anyone born in the line of Adam comes into the world indwelled by the sin passed down through Adam as spiritual father: “Wherefore,

as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

Paul goes on to prove that everyone in the line of Adam sinned when Adam sinned. He reasons first that sin is not imputed where there is no law (Rom. 5:13). Second, he reasons that physical death came specifically as the consequence of Adam's sin and not any other sins between Adam and the Law of Moses. Third, he reasons that since men died between Adam and Moses, they died because of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:14). This seems complicated and involved, but nonetheless provides the critical reason for Paul's statement in Romans 8:3 that Jesus came in the "likeness of sinful flesh." Paul here means that only the virgin birth, making God Jesus' father instead of Adam, kept Jesus from being born into sin and death.

Christ, therefore, as the perfect man, untainted by sin, could be made sin on the Cross (2 Cor. 5:21) in order to condemn sin in the flesh. Christ became the sin-indwelled body of humanity in order to crucify it, bury it, and raise it in himself to new life. Paul amplifies what Jesus spoke about the new birth to Nicodemus: Paul explains that the new birth takes place in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection *as us*. Apart from taking our place in Christ by grace, through faith, no new birth can occur, for no one can bring about the new birth; it is a sovereign act of God on our behalf when we believe.

We live in Christ and Christ in us; we live in the Spirit and the Spirit in us. How? A favorite picture of such a mystical life comes to mind when I picture an empty bottle flung out into the ocean; the bottle moves in the ocean, and the ocean fills the bottle. Whereas the flesh—the world of the five senses and their gratification—controlled us in our lost estate, the Spirit of God, the God who is love, now controls us. Now, to live after the flesh goes against the grain; restlessness and frustration return; condemnation terrifies again. A Christian can experience such, but God's holy discipline finally teaches us to walk according to who we are in Christ. Sin can occur, but how unnecessarily.

Have you lost yourself to find yourself in Christ? If so, you don't miss the wearisome effort of trying to make life work in the flesh, and these words find a pleasant haven in you.

## Romans Eight Part Two: In the Spirit

Freedom and life originate in Christ Jesus. Often, however, people think of freedom only in political or social terms; freedom conveys then the idea of ample choice of where to live, where to study, or where to work. But these political and social freedoms emerge only as secondary streams from a main river. Primal freedom—the river of freedom—flows from the being of God. Though God commands total obedience, He paradoxically gives total freedom. Paul writes in Second Corinthians, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (3:17). So liberty comes from discovering our union with Christ—a union in which He lives through us as His vessels.

Our first freedom in Christ is freedom from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Although we still live in mortal flesh, eternal life springs up in us with certainty, though the body will fall away at physical death. Paul describes this life in Christ as “the righteousness of the law” fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). God's law finds fulfillment in us as we let the Spirit take control and live in us. Bondage falls away and we enter into ease of living.

Wouldn't it be convenient if Spirit control in us were automatic so that we never had to think about it? The word choice would fly out the window. But then faith could not operate, for faith contains choice. Knowing this, Paul exhorted the Romans to reckon themselves dead to sin and to cease yielding their members as instruments of unrighteousness (Rom. 6:11-13). Similarly, in Romans 8:5-8, Paul sets forth the consequences of two different choices: those after the flesh mind the things of the flesh, and

those after the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit (8:5). Notice that the King James Version (KJV) says after. Perhaps the New American Standard (NAS) reads more clearly, for the translators render the Greek word kata as according to rather than after.

Paul contrasts two realms of living: in one realm, choices center around gratification based on money, food, sex, bodily comfort, and pleasure—all at the expense of sacrificial love for others; in the other realm, the body receives its proper nurture and consideration, but a self-for-others life of love freely sets the urgings of the flesh aside to live for others. A person develops a mindset toward one of these two realms; Paul says that when someone is after or according to one of those realms, the person minds the things of that realm. The KJV for Romans 8:6 reads, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The NAS translation reads with a sharper focus: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (8:6). Although both translations offer accuracy, the NAS conveys the idea of a mindset, an idea essential to Paul's point.

Paul knows that his readers lived for years as non-Christians with a mindset based on the flesh. Now, through the new birth, God has transformed them into new creatures made one with Christ through baptism into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The Christian dwells in Christ and Christ in the Christian. Does the old mindset of the flesh immediately drop away? Perhaps, but Paul does not assume such. His exhortations to reckon and yield in Romans 6:11-13 and his discourse in Romans 8:5-8 imply that the Christian experiences the pulls of the old mindset strongly enough in temptation to invite a conscious change of mindset toward life in the Spirit. A new life calls for a new mindset. The choice to the new mindset can be exceedingly simple, or it can be laborious and painful, according to how we see the flesh.

As a teenager, someone gave me a Campus Crusade for Christ tract called "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit Filled Life?" A page of diagrams, consisting of three circles, immediately arrested me. The first circle represents the non-Christian's life: Christ lives outside the circle, and the human ego sits falsely on the throne (I would learn years later that Satan really

sits in union with that ego and rules it in the non-Christian). Also, the traits of the ego-ruled person exist in confusion and disarray within the circle. The second circle represents the Spirit-led person: Christ sits on the throne, with ego now under the throne, and the traits in the circle reflect order and harmony. The third circle represents the "carnal Christian." The word carnal derives from the Greek word sarx—frequently translated as flesh. In the circle for the carnal Christian, ego sits on the throne, and Christ sits under the throne. The traits bear the same configuration of disarray and disharmony as the circle for the non-Christian.

After reviewing these three circles, I looked at the circle for the carnal Christian and said, "That's me." But, I did not grieve about it; in fact, I wanted that kind of life—a life of security in knowing that I would go to heaven, but a life free to live according to the pleasures of the flesh. Not surprisingly, I knew nothing about Romans Chapters Six through Eight. Also, since sin has pleasure for a season (Heb. 11:25), I had not discovered "to be carnally minded is death" (Rom. 8:6) and that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). Fierce ground lay ahead of me. Although I was "in the Spirit" (Paul says in Romans 8:9 that we are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God indwells us), I did not walk in the Spirit.

When sin's pleasure ended, depression and disillusionment followed; life did not work. Only the mind set on the Spirit brings life and peace, and my mindset still held fast to the flesh. But the pain of depression, unresolved conflict, loneliness, and all the other friends of sin, convinced me that the Spirit-controlled life I had previously despised now looked appealing.

Unfortunately, I seized upon the Spirit-filled life as a project to be mastered by Bible memorization, following biblical principles and disciplines for the flesh. Although I turned away from conscious sin, I missed the central feature of the Spirit-led life; it is Spirit-led. Unwittingly, I missed the point that self-effort to live the Christian life stems from the last stronghold of the carnal mind; flesh tries to perfect itself. However, Romans Chapter Seven stood guard like the Cherubim at Eden's gate after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. They could not work their way back into paradise, and I could not work my way into the life of peace and rest.

Romans Chapter Seven finally did its work on me, and I ended up letting go to the Spirit—as I had the freedom to simply do when I first heard about Spirit-led living. So the choice to adopt the new mindset—the mind set on the Spirit—can come instantaneously and easily, or with excessive experimentation and trying to live in the Spirit while keeping the flesh too. How hard do you wish the choice to be? It will only seem as difficult as we make it. Let go today!

## Romans Eight Part Three: Led by the Spirit

Paul coins two important terms in Romans 8:8-9: “in the flesh” and “in the Spirit.” The former designates a non-Christian—a person in whom the Spirit does not dwell; the latter means someone who, by receiving Christ, now lives as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul’s emphasis on the non-Christian here centers not on the Satanic spirit indwelling the non-Christian (Eph. 2:2) so much as the unbeliever’s preoccupation with fleshly, sensual life as the source of all meaning. Furthermore, Paul knows that the main temptations of the believer relate to flesh-spirit conflicts; Jesus himself demonstrates this when the devil tempts him concerning food, prowess, and dominion (Matt. 4:1-11). Without tension in the flesh, the temptations mean nothing; the crux of Jesus’ resistance lies in his refusal to set the flesh as a priority over his Spirit mission.

Paul’s priority of emphasis concerns a person knowing Christ’s indwelling in a mortal body. This poses an interesting tension—eternal life in a body dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10). God leaves us in mortal bodies for at least two reasons: first, mortality provides the ongoing challenge of living by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7); second, a race of resurrected bodies living with mortal bodies would make a strange mix and lessen the meaning of intercession for others. When we walk in faith, having the same afflictions as others, yet praising the Lord, we demonstrate that joy does not consist in the physical. Paul

chronicles many of his suffering in 2nd Corinthians 4:1-9, but then he shares the glorious reasons in verses 10-12: he says that we bear about the dying of the Lord Jesus in our bodies in order that they might express the life of Jesus for others.

Think for a moment of how we receive salvation in Christ: without his death and resurrection, God could not forgive us. Similarly, without death and resurrection in us, the life of Christ cannot go forth to others. But Paul calls it the "bearing about in the body of dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10). In one sense, Jesus can never die again, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more" (Rom. 6:9); but in another sense, as the body of Christ, the church expresses the ongoing death of Christ for others until the last trumpet sounds and physical death gives way to the bodily resurrection.

The death of Jesus through his church does not mean further atonement for sin; the whole of the atonement for sin had to find completion through the one-time shedding of Christ's perfect blood. However, Christ's dying through his church continues God's expression of love as we lay down the prerogatives of the flesh that the Spirit might be formed in others. Therefore, Paul underscores that Christ indeed lives in bodies dead because of sin, but not bodies designated to continue to sin: "The Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10-13).

But why does Paul say that the body is dead because of sin? He does not call the body sinful; he calls it "our earthly house of this tabernacle" and says, "in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:1-2). Speaking of the future resurrection he says that God "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). That word vile does not imply something to despise, for the NAS translates vile body (KJV) as the body of our humble estate. Today we often think of vile as meaning morally debased or filthy; but the King James English, which dates from the 1600's, draws on a meaning for vile seldom used today: "of little value or account" (*The Random House Collegiate Dictionary* 1467).

The "body of our humble estate" or "vile body," therefore, describes our present earthly bodies as perishable and not

comparable in glory to the future, spiritual body of the resurrection. Speaking of the present body, Paul says, "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:43-44). The humble state and vile aspect of the present body does not make it unimportant; it makes it transitory—passing away—and not the investment for the future. Since our present bodies serve as the temple of the Holy Spirit, we give them responsible nurture and care and treat them as fitting instruments for God's grace to flow through to the world. As we maintain our cars and our houses, we all the more maintain our bodies and do not submit them to Satan's self-indulgent and destructive practices. But we expect our bodies to eventually perish, except for the generation translated at Christ's bodily return.

In the mean time we live from the eternal life already indwelling us in our spirits where, joined to His spirit as one, we enjoy our assurance that the real "I" never dies (the body just falls away at physical death). Our high calling now means that we "through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body" or as the NAS renders Romans 8:13, we "are putting to death the deeds of the body." Obviously we do not attempt to shut down all functions of the body and try to make the body not exist (the taste not, touch not mentality of Col. 2:21). We do, however, say "No" to urgings of the body that do not harmonize with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our command center is the Spirit, not the body. Therefore, Paul says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

Satan likes to create doubt about our son-ship and send shivers of fear to trouble our assurance. He sends waves of condemnation concerning every thought and feeling, trying to convince us that our flesh impulses mean that flesh dominates us rather than Spirit. Anticipating this, Paul comforts us by affirming our adoption by the Spirit: the fact that we cry, "Abba Father" witnesses to our adoption. Furthermore, the Spirit himself witnesses to our Spirits that we belong to him (Rom. 8:16). Satan tries to lead us into the lie that our bodies still belong to the powers of darkness. But the Holy Spirit all the more assures us that the bodily lusts of temptation do not indicate sin, but rather sin put to death

as we use those lusts as springboards to faith and walk on in the freedom and confidence of Christ's operating wisdom in us. Temptations act like volcanoes that make a lot of noise, but spew nothing while we trust God's keeping. Don't let those noisy volcanoes scare you; the flesh is under new management.