

## PROLOGUE TO PRISON

### Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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### Chapter 14 -

### THE LAW OF LIFE

Romans 8:1-17

Paul concluded in the middle of the third chapter, verse 20, "**Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight**"; immediately thereafter he pointed out that GOD's righteousness has been manifested "**without the deeds of the law**" in the Gospel, and that this righteousness of GOD is to be received by faith. Righteousness is not a goal to be achieved; it is a gift to be received.

The proposition stated, Romans 3:21-31, is illustrated with Abraham and David, chapter 4, and applied, chapters 5 through 8. Hence the "**therefore**" by which Paul begins Romans 8, refers back to everything he has said beginning at the 21st verse of the 3rd chapter. In a more specific sense (8:4), the "**therefore**" in 8:1 refers to the last verse of the 7th chapter, but it is important to see 8:1-17 in its relation to 3:21 following.

In other words, Romans 8 does not introduce a new theme; Paul is penetrating more deeply into the subject of chapters 5,6 and 7, enunciating the same truths, exploring the same propositions, applying the same principles.

These principles are first, the inadequacy of human nature; secondly, the adequacy of JESUS CHRIST; and thirdly, the application of CHRIST's adequacy. That is to say, in Romans 8 Paul is exploring to greater depth the practice of justification by faith. He begins, "**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ JESUS.**"

The "now," incidentally, is not used chronologically as though Paul were saying, there is no condemnation at this moment though there may be in the future; but rather, "Now therefore, on the basis of what I have already written," because of these facts, there is no condemnation. The man in CHRIST is free from the threat of condemnation forever, no fear of the consequences of my sin and failure, ever. The condemnation has been lifted and I am free from it.

It may help to work our way through this rather complicated argument by asking some simple but basic questions as we go along. The first question, what does Paul mean when he uses the phrase "**in Christ**"? What does it mean to be "**in Christ**," "**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ.**" You will recall in Romans 5, beginning at the

12th verse, Paul referred to two men, the first Adam and the second Adam, that is, Adam and CHRIST; two acts, disobedience and obedience; two results, sin and death as a result of Adam's disobedience, righteousness and life as a result of CHRIST's obedience; and two races of people. The whole human race polarizes around these two men, those who are in Adam by necessity of birth, and those who are in CHRIST because they have chosen Him.

A word about original sin is in order; it is not to be thought of in terms of conduct, but of choice. When the Bible uses the word sin (singular), it is not talking about the misdeeds of men but rather man's choice against GOD, man's self-alienation from GOD. To illustrate, when one hears the Gospel and refuses it, that is in the nature of original sin. John puts it this way in the 3rd chapter of his Gospel, "**And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**" You may argue with this doctrine of original sin, but it is more than dogma or theory.

If you can find any better way to explain what is wrong with mankind, be assured that thoughtful Christians will welcome any other adequate explanation or diagnosis of mankind's dilemma.

Meanwhile, Paul's explanation has proven to be thoroughly consistent with things as they are. Our interest in original sin is not academic, any more than a doctor's interest in a diagnosis is academic. Diagnosis is supremely important because it makes a difference as to whether or not the proper cure will be applied; therefore, instead of considering original sin as a dogma to be accepted theologically, think of it as GOD's diagnosis as to what is wrong with the world.

As history unfolds, we become increasingly aware that what the Bible teaches about the sinfulness endemic in human nature is most realistic.

The Bible says Adam disobeyed GOD, his sin and its consequences were transmitted to all his descendants. JESUS obeyed GOD, His righteousness and its reward, eternal life, are transmitted to all who accept Him. As all men are in Adam, therefore; so all Christians are in CHRIST. "In Adam" is to have a sinful nature which leads to death. "**In Christ**" is to have a new righteous nature which leads to life.

JESUS CHRIST became fully man in order that as we were one with Adam, we might be one with Him; as we were involved in Adam's sin, we are now involved in JESUS' perfection. "In Adam" man broke GOD's law; "in JESUS" man obeyed GOD. Man is lost because he is involved in Adam's transgression; man is saved who is involved in CHRIST's righteousness by faith in His life and work and Word. This then is what it means to be "in CHRIST," to trust Him, to believe in Him, to accept the gift of righteousness which He provides.

Another question: How is it possible that there is "**no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**"? You will recall at the end of chapter 5 Paul said, "**the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS Christ our Lord.**"

That is the theme of 8:2, "**the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**" Romans 8:2 is another way of saying Romans 5:20, 21. "**The**

**law of sin and death**" is identical with "**sin hath reigned unto death**"; "**the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS**" is identical with "**grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.**" The word "law" here is not used in the sense of ordinance or statute but as we speak of the law of gravity.

The next question, how does this work? How does the law of "**the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS hath made me free from the law of sin and death,**" or how does "**grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life**" and free me from sin's reign unto death? The answer is given in verses 3 and 4: "**For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh**" that is, because of sinful human nature. GOD has done it! This is basic - it is GOD's doing.

In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul declares, "**by grace are ye saved through faith . . . it is the gift of GOD: not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ JESUS unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**" We are "GOD's workmanship!" A Christian is GOD's doing. No man can make himself a Christian. GOD's business is to make Christians, only He can do it. "GOD has done it!"

We have it all turned around, you see, Christianity has become for us what man does for GOD, what he does for his fellow man, and what he does for himself.

*Christianity has become piety, doing something for GOD; religion, doing something for GOD; liturgy, doing something for GOD. Or it has become sociology, man doing something for his fellow man. Or it has become psychology, doing something for oneself. But this is not authentic Christianity. Christianity is the antithesis of this man-centered effort. Christianity is man recognizing his own inadequacy, the sufficiency of GOD's provision in JESUS CHRIST, and its acceptance by faith. GOD has done it! You accept it! The law could not do it, not because there was anything wrong with the law, but because of the "weakness of flesh."*

This raises the question, what does Paul mean by "flesh"? He is not referring to the physical body; he means "*human nature in its vulnerability to sin and temptation*": (Stifler); that part of man which gives sin its chance, its bridgehead. He means everything that attaches a man to the world instead of to GOD.

To live according to the flesh is to live a worldly life, to live a life dominated by the dictates and the desires of sinful human nature instead of a life dominated by the love of GOD. We have made worldliness in the Church a matter of smoking, drinking, going to dances and the theater, and so forth. Therefore, if one does not drink and dance and smoke and go to shows, he is not worldly! Some have carried it further; cosmetics are worldly; a certain way of dress is worldly. We have made worldliness a matter of externals. But the Word of GOD defines worldliness as inward.

In the words of John, "**the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.**" You may not smoke nor drink nor dance nor play cards nor go to the theater and still be extremely worldly. The very purpose for refraining from so-called worldly practices may in itself be worldly. You may separate yourself entirely from the world, isolate yourself from its entertainments and still be worldly. When the family down the street gets a new car and you think you must have a new car, that is worldliness.

When you go to someone's home and you are impressed with the lovely furniture and the thick carpets, and you think, "the next thing we are going to do is to change the carpet and buy new furniture," that is worldliness. ***When these concerns dominate the life, this is the "flesh," this is carnality. And because of this element in man's nature, the law cannot save him. Man is congenitally the slave of this "flesh."***

Then how does GOD do for man what he is incapable of doing for himself? "**Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh**"; He destroyed it, neutralized its power.

JESUS CHRIST was the second Adam. He entered history, faced the same choice as the first Adam; He obeyed, where the first Adam had disobeyed; therefore He was perfect. He obeyed GOD every time He had a choice; He was perfect in His obedience. Then He died on a cross as though guilty of Adam's sin! He took upon Himself the sin of the whole human race, He poured out His life upon the cross of Calvary, a sacrifice (expiation) for sin.

Now CHRIST dwells in those who accept Him. Men who reject Him remain in Adam. Available to all, His power is efficacious for those who accept Him, obviously. That tempting drinking fountain in the hall, electric so the water is ice-cold, is for everybody. If you refuse to use it, your thirst remains; but that does not alter the fact that it quenches thirst. The fountain is for all but efficacious only for those who drink.

In verse 2 Paul says, "**the law of the Spirit of life hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**" The law of sin and death works like the law of gravity, holding man to the ground, spiritually speaking. You can not break this law; try, and it will break you. Jump out of the Empire State Building in disregard of the law of gravity, whether you believe the law or not it will destroy you.

You cannot break the law of gravity! But you can introduce another law, the law of aerodynamics, and fly! In the same way "**the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS**" has broken the hold of the "**law of sin and death,**" and I am free of the law of sin in Adam. This is Paul's theme in Romans 6, illustrated from his own experience, in chapter 7. Therefore, he says in 8:4, the "**righteousness of the law,**" is "**fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**" In other words, the way to be a victorious Christian, in fact, is to walk after the Spirit instead of after the flesh.

***The secret of living the Christian life is not self-improvement by righteous discipline and self effort, the secret is to walk after the Spirit.*** If you have a bad habit, the way to break it is not by sheer effort, which results most often in failure (though some certainly succeed); the way to break a bad habit is to walk in the Spirit. If you are constantly victimized by a certain temptation, growing weary of it, humiliated by it, and you pillow your head night after night having capitulated to the same temptation, the way to break it is not by some heroic struggle but to walk in the Spirit.

This suggests an important insight into the new birth. Paul testifies at the end of Romans 7 "**with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.**" Some radical

change has occurred in Paul's mind as a result of the new birth, for in Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 3, he describes those outside of CHRIST, the natural man, the man still in Adam, as obeying the "**desires of the flesh and of the mind.**" That is, the desires of flesh and mind agree in unregenerate man. But now (7:25) he says, "**with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.**" Mind and flesh are opposed. When a man is born of GOD, his mind is transformed. (Mind here is more than intellect; it is the whole man in his unity, the whole personality.) The body is just a house, a tabernacle, in which he dwells during his earthly pilgrimage. The person occupying that body is changed by the power of GOD while the flesh principle remains the same; it still continues to serve the law of sin and will until the day the body is put into the grave.

Paul indicates, therefore, that there is no reason to expect this flesh to be any different because nothing happens to it by regeneration. That is to say, I am no less subject to temptation today than twenty-six years ago before I accepted CHRIST and was born of GOD. As a matter of fact, some temptations are more insistent now than they were then. My flesh is the same; the same sinful desires await their opportunity to spring into action, but now with the mind I serve the law of GOD; I have a new mind, a new purpose, new motivation, new loyalty. I desire to live for GOD as a result of spiritual birth. I have been emancipated from the flesh by the power of GOD.

This brings us to a further question; what is it then to walk in the flesh and to walk in the Spirit? Paul describes it here in a very interesting way. It is to "**mind the things of the flesh**".? To live according to the flesh is to "set your mind" on the things of the flesh. Tony Fontane, the young singer, bought a new Cadillac on an average of every nine months; his wife had to have a white mink stole and a white mink coat; they had to be covered with jewelry; they lived in an \$85,000 home in Beverly Hills. This was normal. Then came the automobile accident, as a result of which Tony was converted. He believed that GOD was calling him to sing the Gospel; he lost his home in Beverly Hills, and today Tony and his wife and ten-year-old daughter are living with the wife's parents. The white mink stole and coat are gone, and the Cadillacs are gone. They had "set their minds" on mink and Cadillac's and an \$85,000 home; they were living according to the flesh. Now they have "set their minds" on the Spirit.

Something must be said here that is very important.

Someone is reading this whom GOD has prospered; you live in a good home, and you drive a big car. Thank GOD for it! This does not necessarily mean that you are living according to the flesh. If GOD did not have some people like you in homes like you have, other people in homes like that might not be reached. He has put you there for that purpose. Some people can live in a hovel and be more preoccupied, have the mind more set on things than people who live in a mansion. JESUS said it is the love of these things - not the things themselves. GOD prospers men for His own glory. Thank GOD for what He has given you, the lovely home, your new car, but do not set the mind on these things. Those who live according to the Spirit "**mind... the things of the Spirit.**"

Remember JESUS' counsel in the Sermon on the Mount, "**seek ye first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness.**" That is, set your mind on the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness; these other things will follow in His providence. If you are a man who has the ability to make \$100,000 a year, setting your mind on the things of the Spirit is not going to damage that ability;

if anything, it will sharpen it, enhance it, purify it. You may be able to make \$150,000 a year and you will use it GOD's way. Set the mind on the Spirit. One way leads to death; the other way leads to life. The set of the mind is the clue.

I remember the first time I saw sailboats. I was born and reared in North Dakota; sailboats were unfamiliar in my youth. One day, driving along the Pacific coast, we came upon a large lagoon in which about seventy-five boats were sailing. Never having seen a boat under sail, I stopped the car and was amazed by the phenomenon of many boats blown by the same wind yet going in every direction. I thought to myself, how is this possible? Of course this seems naive to sophisticated people, but to me, even at twenty, it was an amazing thing. What made the difference? How could these many sailboats thus by the same wind go in all directions?

It was the set of the sail; the rudder helped, but it was the set of the sail. So it is in the Christian life; set your mind on the Spirit; let the winds of temptation, the winds of tragedy, the winds of difficulty, the winds of circumstance blow against your life; they will blow you on course. Set your mind on the things of the flesh even when favorable winds blow; they will blow you to ultimate destruction. It is the set of the mind that counts.

One step further Paul takes us when he says, "**the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.**" As a matter of fact it is incapable of submitting to GOD. That is the reason JESUS said it is "**easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.**" Not because he is rich; that is not the problem, but because he has set his mind on the riches, and his mind therefore is hostile to GOD's way. The mind set on the flesh is not able to please GOD, he concludes in verse 8. In verses 9, 10 and 11 he hastens to reassure those who are in CHRIST that they are in the Spirit and not in the flesh because he knows from personal experience, as he has testified in chapter 7, that the Christian is going to be discouraged again and again by the stubborn death-throes of the flesh.

Paul knows the Christian is going to think that Romans 8 is unrealistic and contrary to the facts because he has gone through it himself. He is concerned that each Christian know that to be "in CHRIST" is to have the SPIRIT of CHRIST whether he feels like it or not. The important thing is to believe GOD's Word, not feelings. The hardest thing a pilot who has flown by the "seat of his pants" has to learn when they put him on instruments, is to obey the instruments instead of his feelings. Men have cracked up when the instruments said one thing and they believed the way they felt instead. The spirit of man may crack up as well doing what his feelings dictate rather than that which the instruments indicate.

Paul is urging, do not believe your feelings, believe the instrument of GOD's Word. If you are in CHRIST, you have the Spirit; if you do not have the Spirit, you are not in CHRIST. To be in CHRIST is to have His Spirit; this is inevitable. If CHRIST is in you, His SPIRIT is in you.  
*Believe it!*

Before closing this passage, Paul anticipates the glorious hope of the Christian, "**if the Spirit of him that raised up JESUS from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you,**" that is, raise your mortal bodies from the dead. You see, this redemption that is in CHRIST, this

righteousness that is in JESUS CHRIST, is not just for the soul of man; it is for the body as well. What a day that is going to be when the graves of Christians are opened, when the little urns holding cremated ashes crack and break, and brand-new bodies, immortal and incorruptible, rise from those graves and urns at the coming again of JESUS CHRIST! That is the great hope of the Church.

Paul's conclusion, verses 12 to the end of our passage, is this: "**we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.**" You say, "I feel like I am." Of course you do, argues Paul, so did I, that is what I express in Romans 7, but you are not. You have been liberated by "**the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS.**" Remember his instructions in Romans 6? ***Know this to be true, reckon it, and then yield to the reign of CHRIST.*** Once more he enunciates these great affirmations: these things are true, know it, believe it, depend on it, and you will find it works.

I come to the church late of an evening. It is dark. I want to get something from the auditorium, and I go to the light switch believing that if I flick that switch, the auditorium will be flooded with light. Imagine someone with me who has never seen electricity. I say, push that button and the darkness will disappear and this room will be filled with light. He says, how can this be, surely it is not that simple. But it is, and he flicks the switch and there is light.

Now Paul is saying, listen, it is dark, and your flesh is terribly powerful; you have desires and temptations that embarrass and humiliate you even if nobody else knows about them. You know you are not the man you ought to be. I have great sympathy for this human condition so real in myself, Paul says as he cries, "**Wretched man that I am! ho shall deliver me from the body of this death?**" But there is a solution, I know on the authority of GOD's Word that we have been liberated; there is a power resident in us identical to that power which raised the Son of GOD from the grave. Push the button of choice or decision; that power is operative instantly as you will discover; reckon on it and yield. It is really wonderful! It is for everyone of us. Quit struggling, quit trying, start trusting, and the result will obtain. We are heirs of GOD because "**ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**" We are children of GOD; and if we are children of GOD, we are heirs; if heirs of GOD, we are "**joint-heirs with Christ,**" which means that we may share now in His power as we are going to share in His glory.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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