

Romans: Delivered by the Spirit by the Death of Christ

Romans 8:1-4

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(previous message on Romans 7:13-25 not transcribed)

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 8. We plunge into a new section of this great book. Romans 6, 7 and 8 we've already said are part of a portion of this book in which Paul is emphasizing how grace reigns in righteousness. It's not that justification isn't on his mind anymore, you're going to be reminded that it is, as soon as you get to Romans, chapter 8, verse 1. But, it is also that Paul is interested in you understanding the principles by which God sanctifies us. He speaks about union with Christ in Romans, chapter 6. He talks about the ongoing struggle of the believer with sin in Romans, chapter 7, as well as the believer's relationship to the law. And in Romans, chapter 8, he explains again why our struggles with sin do not ultimately undercut our assurance of salvation if we are in Christ Jesus. And so, justification and sanctification continue to be considered by the apostle Paul.

But again he is concerned in Romans 8 to talk about some of the implications of our free justification in Jesus Christ and some of the implications of God's ongoing work in us by the Holy Spirit. In fact, it wouldn't be inappropriate to call Romans, chapter 8, Paul's study of the work of the Holy Spirit in the light of the believer, because Paul is concerned to show here how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians in this great chapter. And let me give you an example of how he does that. If you look at verses 1 through 4, Paul is addressing the issue of how it is that we are able to grow in grace despite indwelling sin. And, furthermore, he is addressing how we can retain an absolute sense of our assurance even as we continue to wrestle with the patterns of sin.

In verses 5 through 11, he deals with the issue of how you can tell the difference between worldliness and godliness in yourself. What's a heart that is set on things above, what's a heart that is set on things of the flesh? And he tells you how in verses 5 through 11.

In verses 12 through 17, he tells you how the Holy Spirit shows us that we are children of God. That's vital for healthy Christian growth. And he's going to tell you that in those verses in Romans, chapter 8.

Then again, in verses 18 through 25, he explains to you an issue of vital importance for every Christian. How is it that our present sufferings, our present trials, our present tribulations, our present difficult circumstances, how is it that God uses those to work for our future glory. That's an issue that every Christian here is, has or will be dealing with. And so, that's a super, super important thing for us to understand as we work through Romans 8. Paul is addressing that issue. Again, if you look at verses 26 and 27, he deals with the issue of how is it the Holy Spirit intercedes for you? We know that we're to intercede for one another. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ ever lived to intercede.

But did you know that the Holy Spirit intercedes for you, and how does He do it? Well, Paul tells you in verses 26 and 27.

Then again, in verses 28 through 30, Paul answers the question, how is it that a believer can be certain that God's promises to him will be fulfilled? How is it that we are going to be absolutely certain in every circumstance of life that God's promises will be fulfilled to us? Well, Paul tells you in verses 28 through 30.

In verses 31 and 32, Paul explains to you how you as a believer can understand how much God is for you. Every believer needs to understand that. And Paul says if you will listen to what I say here, you will understand how much God is for you.

In verses 33 through 34, he explains how we can be secure in God's justification of us. How can we be certain, how can we be secure in God's justification? Well, he tells you in verses 33 and 34.

And then in verse 35 to 39 at the end of the chapter, Paul is addressing the issue how is it that we who feel like sometimes we're limping along, sometimes all we can do is just get our feet out of bed in the morning. Sometimes we feel as if the world is going crazy. Sometimes we feel like sheep being led to the slaughter. Our hearts are being broken every day. How is it that we can be more than conquerors? That's exactly what Paul is dealing with from verses 35 to 39. How can we be more than conquerors even though we feel like sheep being led to the slaughter? Well, you can see the practicality of all those questions that Paul addresses in this chapter. So we're going to feast on his answers to those great things and look for help in our own Christian growth as we work through this chapter together. And so with that as introduction, let's hear God's Holy Word in Romans, chapter 8, verses 1 through 4:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the

requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's look to Him in prayer.

Our Lord and our God, we do ask that as we read Your word, that by the Spirit You would grant us an understanding of what it is to have the Holy Spirit of life working in us, and that we would take new confidence as we contemplate our own condition. And thereby resting in Your free justification, and Your Holy Spirit's work of sanctification, we would be able to say indeed in the midst of the trials of life and the struggles of our hearts that we are more than conquerors, and there is no condemnation. We ask, O God, that You would bring this truth home to us, savingly if necessary, and certainly for spiritual growth in all Your children, because we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Let me ask you a question. How is that you can be sure that you will not be condemned when you stand before the tribunal of God? That's a wise question for every human being to ask and answer. How is that you can be sure that you will not be condemned when you stand before the tribunal of God? Paul has been spending much of his teaching in this book making sure that we Christians know the right answer to that question, that our trust is in right place, that our confidence is not misplaced. And that question continues to be on Paul's mind in Romans, chapter 8.

And various people have given various answers to that question. Perhaps you know friends who call themselves agnostics or atheists, and their answer to that question is well, there is a god or if there is a god, it really doesn't matter, and, therefore, I don't think there's going to be a tribunal and, therefore, I'm okay. I don't need to fear about being condemned before the tribunal of God, because the tribunal of God doesn't exist. There are some people that take comfort in that particular answer. There are others, maybe more of these, who are basically universalists. They think this: The reason I don't need to fear being condemned before the tribunal of God is that God is going to bring everybody into His Kingdom. And there are different reasons they believe this. Some of them think that God is a giant Santa Claus in the sky, and He's just going to bless everybody. In other words, He hasn't been making His list and checking it twice. He's just going to bless everybody. And others think well, you know, really in us there's a spark of goodness. God is going to sweep under the rug those things that are evil, and there's a spark of goodness in us all; and surely He's a kind and merciful God. He's just going to accept us all. And that's how they come to some sense of assurance that there is no condemnation for them before the tribunal of God. God is just going to accept everybody. And then there are some people that are more defiant. This past Monday, a condemned mass murderer received capital punishment from the Federal authorities for the first time in some thirty years. The Federal government was involved in administering capital punishment

for a horrendous capital crime. And he was given an opportunity to give his last words. And perhaps some were waiting for words of contrition, words of remorse, words of expression of sorrow for those who were victims, innocent victims for his acts of violence, but none of those were forthcoming. No, instead Timothy McVeigh left us with the words of W.E. Henley's poem *Invictus*. Remember it? "Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole. I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul. In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud, under the bludgeonings of chance my head is bloody, but unbowed. Beyond this place of wrath and tears, looms but the horror of the shade. And yet the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." Now that's the answer that he gives. He fears no condemnation at the tribunal of God, because he is the master of his fate. He is the captain of his soul. Such flimsy words of bravado will appear mean and insubstantial on that great day.

But Paul is not so much asking us now to contemplate what the unbeliever takes comfort as he stands before the tribunal of God, but he is bidding us ask the question: "What do you, struggling believer, what do you, believer, who still knows the onset of sin, what do you, believer, who still wrestles with the habits of sin, the principles of sin in your own experience, what do you, believer, who from time to time can say with Paul, oh wretched man that I am, what is it that you trust in that enables you to say there is now no condemnation for me in Christ Jesus?" How is it that you get that kind of confidence? I was listening to the tapes of Joe Novenson's *John Reed Miller Lectures* at Reformed Theological Seminary. And in those lectures, what wonderful sermons they are, you would all do well to hear them, they will bless your soul, he tells the story that as a seminarian, Joe wanted to go meet with one of his fallen heroes. A man who is probably one of your fallen heroes. His name is Gordon McDonald, and he was the pastor of a very large, evangelical Baptist church in New England. He became, eventually, the president of InterVarsity Fellowship. He authored many books, books that have helped so many Christians all during your private world and others. And Gordon McDonald fell into sin. He had an affair with his church secretary, and he had to leave the presidency of InterVarsity Fellowship and the ministry for a period of time. And yet, he was a believer, and he was contrite and repentant; and he did what he could to confess himself publicly and to rectify the things which he had done wrong. Now, how does a man like that deal with this question? "How can I stand with confidence before the tribunal of God?" I've fallen, I've publicly fallen, I've seen the depth of sin in me; and Joe Novenson wanted to go talk with Gordon McDonald and learn some hard truths from him. In the course of their conversation, Gordon McDonald said to Joe, "Now Joe, you're a Calvinist, right?" And Joe sort of sheepishly said, "Um, yes." And then Gordon said, "So you understand, Joe, that there is enough evil in you to destroy the world three times over?" And Joe said, "Yes." And Gordon McDonald said to him, "Joe, I didn't believe that. And I paid the price." But the question, you see, still looms, how can a person whose seen his own sin, he's been with Paul in

Romans 7:24, he's cried out, "Wretched man that I am," how can he have the kind of absolute confidence of Romans 8:1, "There is now therefore no condemnation for me in Christ Jesus."? How can he have that kind of confidence? My friends, that's exactly what Paul is speaking to us about in Romans 8: 1 through 4. And I want you to see three things that he teaches you which will help you greatly. If you have seen yourself, and you've seen your sin, and you know how black it is, and you're trusting in Jesus Christ, that's not the issue. But if you're still wrestling with "How can I possibly be assured of the certain goodness of God to me in light of the fact that I continue to struggle with these things?" then Paul is waiting for you in Romans, chapter 8, verses 1 through 4 to help you.

And I want you to see the three things that he says. First, in verses 1 and 2, he makes it clear that the principle of sin in your life is not the whole story. He made that point very strongly in Romans 7:13 to the end of the chapter that believers still wrestle with sin. But here in verses 1 through 8, he wants you to be sure that the principle of sin continuing in your life is not the whole story. There's another principle at work in the believer's life. That's the first thing that he wants you to understand. Then, in verse 3 he's going to explain how it is, how it is that that principle works, and how it is that it helps you understand your freedom in Christ. And then in verse 4, he's going to indicate to you that Christ's victory over sin not only liberated you from the curse of the law, but it frees you to the obedience of the law. And I want you to see those three things as we study this passage together today.

I. Even the struggling believer can be assured of salvation/no condemnation/justification.

First, I direct your attention to verses 1 and 2. Paul here makes it clear that the principle of the sin in our lives is not the whole story for believers. There's another principle at work in us, and it's not simply the principle of our desires. It's the principle of the spirit of life. In other words, Paul is telling you that the story of your battle with sin is not the battle between your renewed desires and sin. It's the battle between God the Holy Spirit and sin. Now it's true that you have renewed desires, you are a regenerate person, you've received the new birth of your trusting in Jesus Christ. Yes, your desires are warring against sin, but that's not the only truth; that's not the only truth. The fact of the matter is, God the Holy Spirit is at work in you warring against sin.

And so Paul is telling us here in verses 1 and 2 that even the struggling believer can be assured of salvation, even the struggling believer can be assured that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Even the struggling believer can be assured of his justification because of two realities. First of all, the reality that his justification was accomplished by God not by himself, and secondly, because of the reality that it is God Himself, God the Holy Spirit who is working in him. It's

objectively God working in him. It's not just him working as he can; it's God who is at work in him.

And you see those truths in verses 1 and 2. Condemnation is the opposite of justification. And Paul's great theme is the complete and irreversible nature of God's justification. When God justifies you, that does it. He has already given you the end time verdict. He's already pronounced the verdict of 'not guilty' over you that you will one day hear before the tribunal of God. And it's irreversible. And so Paul glories in that fact that there is no condemnation. But, he doesn't stop there.

He says there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You see what Paul is saying. The only people who can take comfort from that particular reality that they will not be condemned, are those who are what? "In Christ Jesus." He's saying that salvation is in relationship with and through the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. And my friends, sadly, that's something that many Christians are losing today. Just this past week, a major Presbyterian denomination, not our own, refused to affirm that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Now I just don't understand that. I would understand it if a Muslim came to me, and he said, "Well, I'm a Muslim, and I'm certain about this whole — there is one god, and Mohammed is his prophet thing." I would expect a Muslim to believe that. Just as I would expect a Christian to believe that there is salvation in no other name but Jesus Christ. Paul is not confused about that. It is in Christ Jesus that salvation is experienced and is provided.

At any rate, Paul goes on to wrestle with us about this question. Here's the question: What gets me out of the mess when my renewed desires conflict with the principle of sin in my members? I'm a Christian; I long to be like Christ. I long to walk in the ways of God; I long to walk in the ways of righteousness; but I find myself struggling with sin, serious sin, at every turn. What do I do in that kind of a mess? How can I have comfort? How can I be confident? And here is Paul's answer. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." In other words, Paul says, verse 1, you contemplate your justification, God did that. Then, verse 2, you contemplate God the Spirit's work of sanctification and those things ground your sense of freedom. Paul wants you to take confidence, not because of how you feel, not because of what you are doing, not because of your circumstances, but because of what God has done, and God is doing. God has done justification; God is doing sanctification; and, therefore, you are to take confidence.

In verse 2, Paul is calling on us to contemplate how powerful the energy is that is worked within us. If you were to turn to Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 18 through 20, Paul is speaking about the same thing there. He begs, he pleads, he says, "Believers I pray that God would enlighten the eyes of your heart to understand this, the surpassing greatness of the power of work of God's work in you." And what does he say is a description of how great that power is? Well, he says this. He says that power is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead

and caused Him to ascend on high, leaving captivity captive and sit at the right hand of God from which He rules the world for the good of His people. That same power that did that in Jesus Christ is the power that is at work in you.

And here Paul is saying, when you wrestle with a sense of condemnation, you remember the justification that God has done, verse 1, and you remember that it's the Holy Spirit of life that is working in you. Don't you underestimate the power of God at work in you. Think about this. We sang about it just a few minutes ago in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, especially stanzas 1 and 2. "Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing." That's truth for justification and sanctification. And Paul is reminding you here that you may be confident not only because of God's work of justification, but because of God's work of sanctification. That's the first thing that Paul wants you to see.

II. God accomplishes what we could never accomplish and what the law could not accomplish through Jesus.

And secondly, if you look at verse 3, Paul will elaborate on how this works. How is it that you can view yourself as free from the law's curse? How is it you can view yourself as free from sin's guilt and power? In some ways it's easier for use to believe that we are free from sin's guilt, than it is for us to believe that we are free from the dominion of sin's power because we know sin in our lives day by day. And we wonder sometimes whether we will ever be able to get victory over it. And Paul tells us in verse 3 that God accomplishes what we could never accomplish, and He accomplishes what the law could never accomplish because of sin, through Jesus Christ. And he gives you five things that he wants you to think about just in verse 3. Look at them.

First, Paul tells you that the basis of your freedom is in what God has done, not in what you have done, not in what you are doing, not even in what you are not doing. The basis of your confidence of freedom of condemnation is in what God is doing. Look at his words. "For what the law could not do, . . . God did." What's he doing? He's saying don't look at what you did and what you're doing. Look at what God did and what God is doing. God accomplished this. He's the source. He's the author. How is it you can have freedom from condemnation, even though you're continuing to struggle with sin, because your confidence is not based on you, it's based on Him. So God did. That's the first thing Paul wants you to see.

The second thing is this. Not only did God do this, but He did it at the cost of His Son. Look at the phrase. "God did it by sending His own Son." Now can you imagine God sending His Son to do what He did, to endure what He underwent without intending to accomplish something? Can you imagine that God would have done that for nothing? Do you think that God would have sent His Son to endure the shame for nothing? Paul is just pressing that in your face, and He is

saying, "Now remember it's not just that God did it, but that He did this at the cost of His own Son." That's what the whole hymn *And Can It Be* is about. It's this amazing love and can it be that thou My God should die for me. How could we possibly think that God would have done that for nothing. Paul says that's why you take confidence, that God did what you couldn't do, what the law couldn't do, and He did it at the cost of His own Son.

Thirdly, he says, think about this. God did this by bringing His Son into the closest possible relationship to us. Notice the language he is using? It's shocking. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. In other words, Jesus experienced all the infirmities of living as a human in a fallen world, yet without sin. He was made in the likeness of human flesh, in the likeness of sinful flesh. Now Paul is using that phrase very carefully to emphasize two things. First, that Jesus experienced all the infirmities common to human beings living in a fallen world, and at the same time, that He was completely without sin, His nature, His humanity was not fallen. The idea that Jesus was fallen, His humanity was fallen is a heresy. But when Paul says that He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, he's telling you that God brought His Son into the closest possible relation to us, yet without sin.

Now you may be saying, "But wait a minute. How can He really understand me if He's never had to deal with the inner-stirrings of sin?" I mean isn't that a discontinuity between Him and me that keeps Him from being able to sympathize? And here's my answer. No. In fact, the fact that Jesus was perfect, and the fact that He was an unfallen human being living in the infirmities of a fallen world, made it harder for Jesus, and, in fact, makes it easier for Him to sympathize with us. Now you say how in the world? Well, let me ask you this. What would it be like to be a person with perfect pitch singing in a tone deaf choir for your entire life? Now there's Jesus. The man with perfect pitch singing in a tone deaf — He's bombarded on every side by wickedness and the effects of sin to the point that it vexes His soul every second of His earthly existence. And yet He's sympathetic toward us. You know, you think of a woman, she's suddenly fallen under conviction over gossip. She's hurt a lot of people in her life gossiping. By the grace of God, God works a real work in her heart, and she turns from that and she purposes not to tear people down with her words. And she's amongst her friends one day, and the gossip begins. She doesn't participate. But she feels filthy just hearing it. She feels like she just needs to go home and take a shower. She hasn't participated in it. She hasn't given in to it. But just hearing it bothers her, because she's worked so hard to put that away. Or a man who is trying to be clean in the way he looks at people, especially women. He's careful what he looks at on the internet, he's careful at what he looks at on the racks in the stores, in the book stores, and such. And yet one day he's walking into the grocery store. He's just going to get milk, and all he has to do is pass by the rack. And these are acceptable magazines. These aren't pornographic magazines. And he glances over there, and he says, now where do my eyes go now? Where do my thoughts go now? He wasn't trying to get himself

in trouble, he wasn't lured in the direction of doing this, but all it had to do was this bombarding from the outside, and he feels like he needs to go take a shower and confess to his wife. And Jesus lived under that kind of bombardment every conscious moment of His experience. Don't tell me that He doesn't understand. It's precisely that discontinuity between Him and us that makes Him able to sympathize with us like no one else. And Paul is telling us here that God accomplished this salvation for us by bringing His Son into the closest possible relationship to us.

Then again, he's telling us that God sent His Son into the world for the purpose of dealing with sin. Notice the phrase "and for sin God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin." We slightly disagree with the translation there. Not 'sin offering,' but He sent Him 'for sin,' and the original says 'for sin.' In other words, Paul is telling us here that God sent Jesus into the world for the purpose of dealing with sin. Here you are a Christian, you are wondering, "I wonder if I can be accepted because of my sin?" Paul is saying, "Um, excuse me, He sent him into the world because of sin. He sent him into the world to deal with sin. Do you think that somehow he left yours out? He thought of everybody else's, but no, he just doesn't factor in your sin. That's the one sin that he hasn't factored in." Paul is saying "Think about it. He came into the world because of your sin to deal with it. Don't think that you were left out of the equation." So Paul says, you take confidence. And he's not finished.

He says at the end of this verse 3 that Jesus has vanquished sin's power, and He's freed us from enslaving dominion. He has condemned sin in the flesh. Paul has given us five reasons here that we are free from the curse of the law, and why we ought to believe we are. And you say to me, but I don't feel like I'm free from the dominion of sin. I don't care. Paul says you are. Paul says you are, and you need to be on your knees saying, "Lord, help me to believe what is true even though I don't feel like it. And in Your mercy, help me to be able to feel like it one day." But it's true. Paul says, this doesn't depend on how you feel. It doesn't depend on how you are doing this week, whether you a little bit better this week than last week, this is true. Believe it.

III. God accomplishes not only our justification by but our sanctification through Jesus Christ.

And then one last thing he says in verse 4. He says that Christ came into the world to vanquish and to conquer and to condemn sin in order that, what? That 'the requirement of the law might be fulfilled,' and what are you waiting for? You are waiting for Paul to say 'for us,' but he doesn't say that. Rather, that the requirement of the law would be fulfilled in us. God justifies precisely because this is His goal to sanctify us. God grants us pardon and declares us to be free from the condemnation of sin because His goal is to work the requirement of the law within us so that we ourselves actually become those who are godly and

holy. Christ died so that we would become holy. He died so that the requirements of God's law would not only be fulfilled for us, but in us. And so Paul teaches us that God's work of justification is inseparable from His work of sanctification.

But you say, doesn't that lead me right back to where we were to begin with? Because I so struggle with the imperfection of this work of sanctification. And Paul's words to you are "Patience, God is at work. It's God the Spirit at work in you." He never promises this work to be done in this life, but He Himself is carrying it out. Now it's time for you to join in. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the confidence of no condemnation in Jesus Christ, and we ask now that You would bring about the reality increasingly of the spirit's maturing work in our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we ask *it, Amen.*

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