

## How Do We Change?

### Romans 8: 1 - 4

- If you are in Christ, trusting Christ in faith, hiding your life in him, your sins are removed as far as the east is from the west, or as the song goes, as far as one nail scarred hand to the other. And, if your sin is removed, then the guilt is removed, and if the guilt is removed, then all condemnation is removed.
  - No condemnation means you are free from any further debt or penalty for your sin. No one has any charge against you.
- But I want you to notice here that Paul is not simply saying that Christians are not condemned, he is saying much more than that. He is saying that for a Christian there is no condemnation at all. It is not just saying that we have been temporarily moved out from condemnation and it could return. He is saying it doesn't exist anymore and it never will.
  - Do you realize what this means for your life? You may have things to be ashamed of, Satan can whisper his accusations against you all day long, but God has nothing against you. He finds no fault in you. There is nothing left to punish you for because Christ has taken all the punishment.
    - The reason I stress this is because so many Christians live life as if they are only temporarily out from under condemnation. This is why so often people feel the need to get saved over and over again.
    - Many believe that a person confesses their sin, and they become a Christian, so far so good. But the problem is they believe that it is only in that moment, that they are forgiven and not condemned, and they wrongly believe that should they sin, they will fall back under condemnation until they confess and repent again.
    - So that feeling of condemnation keeps coming back. But this view doesn't fairly represent what Paul is saying. Paul is quite literally saying that condemnation no longer exists for those who are in Christ.
- Because of Christ finished work on the cross, everything in our life has changed 180 degrees. Because of Jesus we not only free from condemnation, but we are also found by God to be completely righteous in his sight.

**2 Corinthians 5: 21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- If you really believe those words, then how can you feel any condemnation? At the cross, Christ took your sin and gave you, his righteousness. The condemnation is gone. No further sacrifice for sin that is necessary.

**Romans 8: 33 – 34** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

- Think about those words. In Christ, there is no one who can bring any charge against you. Why? Because God has justified you. Through Christ he has forgiven your sin and clothed you in robes of righteousness.

- Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at you. But who is the only one who is without sin? Jesus. And Jesus went to the cross for you and is interceding for you.
  - Jesus isn't pleading for mercy for you. God has already shown you mercy by sending His son to die for you. So now Jesus is interceding you for by pleading for justice for you.
  - Yes, Jeff is a wretch, a guilty, vile sinner, but I stood in his place and took the condemnation he deserved, the debt is paid in full, and he stands clothed in my righteousness. Father it would be unjust to condemn Jeff when I was already condemned for him.
- This is the Gospel. The penalty for your sin is forever gone.
  - Now you may at times feel guilt and shame for wounding the one who loved you and gave his life for you. You may and should feel the need to ask forgiveness, but in Christ, you should never fear, feel, or dread condemnation again.
- We must believe that and rejoice in that good news, but we also must live it out in our lives. How do we live our lives in Christ? How do we live in the righteousness that God has already declared us to have in Jesus?
  - We don't need to get saved again. We need to learn how to live again. The penalty for sin is gone, now how do we live in a way that destroys the power of sin in our lives?

**Romans 8: 1 – 4** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- In these verses Paul is talking about a change that takes place in the life of those who have hidden their life in Christ. It is not just a change in our legal standing before God in which we move from being guilty and condemned to righteous and free, but it is also a change in how we live.
- Again, I want to declare to you in the strongest possible terms that in Christ there is now no condemnation, but I want to declare to you in equally strong terms that there is an expectation on your life.
  - Through Christ God has declared you to be righteous, and the expectation is that day by day each of us will learn to live a life that reflects that declaration of righteousness that God has made over us.
    - In Christ, you are holy to God, now we must go and live in holiness.
- But of course, from our previous study in Romans we see that this is not easy. On a daily basis the Spirit of Christ that is in us is at war with our sinful flesh.

**Ephesians 4: 21 – 24** assuming that you have heard about him (Christ) and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your

former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- Think what Paul is saying there. Assuming you are in Christ. What does that mean? If a person is in Christ, trusting Christ to pay the penalty for their sin, then they will behave in a certain way—a way that puts off the old self and puts on the new self.
- If that is not happening, if change isn't occurring then we shouldn't assume we are in Christ. As Paul said earlier in Romans, we died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?

### 1. The change that is necessary

- We never want to make grace cheap.
  - The term “cheap grace” can be traced back to a book written by German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called *The Cost of Discipleship*, published in 1937. In that book, Bonhoeffer defined “cheap grace” as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”
- Jesus cannot simply be savior. He is also Lord. Kings of kings and Lord of lords.
  - In grace, he died on the cross to be your savior, but he rose from the grave to be your Lord and King. One day, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Every knee, every tongue.
    - The only difference between a Christian and non-Christian is that by grace the Christian has decided to willingly bow the knee today, whereas the non-Christian will not bow their knee until:

**Psalm 2: 9** You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

- So much for gentle Jesus, right?

**Psalm 2:12** Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

- Oh, would that you do that today, if you have never done it. But if you have kissed the Son, if you have embraced Jesus as your savior, you also must see him as Lord. His call isn't to receive him merely as savior and then go on your merry way and live however you please. It is to take up your cross daily and follow him.
- What does that phrase take up your cross mean? Let's go back to Paul's language of Ephesians 4. It is taking off the old and putting on the new.

**Romans 8: 4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- God has saved you through Jesus Christ for a purpose. And that purpose is not just so you can go to heaven. It is so you can fulfill, that is live out, the righteous

requirement of the law. In other words, that we live out the righteousness that God has already declared us to have in Christ.

- Now, why is that necessary? Because this is how we glorify God. What is the righteous requirement of the law? It is to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as our self. Our old self loves our self. Our new self is created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
  - What good works? Living a life of love.

**Ephesians 5: 2** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- God saved you for a purpose—that you would walk in good works, living a life of love, bringing glory to Him.
  - Are you doing that?
- This is a battle for everyone of us. Remember previous to these verses Paul has been talking about what a wretched man he is. How he still struggles with his sinful flesh. It seems like Paul felt that he was not all that he ought to be, so if you feel that way, you are not alone, so take comfort in that but not too much.
  - A Christian accepts the fact of their wretchedness, but they don't wallow in it. They strive to live as becomes a follower of Christ.

**Philippians 3: 13 – 14** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- But as we look at this passage, we can see that it is not enough to just strive or press on to live as becomes a follower of Christ. How we strive matters.
  - There is a right way and a wrong way. Let's look at the wrong way first. To see that look what Paul writes in:

**Romans 8: 3** the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

## 2. Why the law can't change us

- There are three kinds of people.
  - There are the irreligious who care nothing about the law. Think of the prodigal son before he came to his senses in the pigpen.
  - There are the people of Christ who look to Jesus as being the means of fulfilment of the law in their life. This is who we are supposed to be in Christ. We'll talk about those people in a moment.
  - And then there are the religious people who want to use the law as a means and measure of righteousness. A means and measure of obtaining God's blessing. Think of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son.
    - Too many who call themselves Christians fall into this third group. Looking to the law for their righteousness, and the means of receiving blessing from God, rather than looking to Jesus.
- But you can clearly see here in Romans 8: 3 why we cannot do that. The law is good, but when our sinful flesh gets a hold of it, we weaken it.

- In the pride of our sinful flesh, if we look to our performance under the law as the means of establishing our righteousness, only one of two things is going to happen, and neither are good.
  - If we think that we are performing well under the law, we are going to become self-righteous and puffed up. We are going to think that God owes us. God doesn't owe anyone anything.
    - In fact, the pride of self-righteousness is revolting to God. Because in our self-righteousness we are glorifying ourselves rather than God. Furthermore, self-righteousness doesn't proclaim Christ to the world, it proclaims ourselves to the world. In a very real sense, in self-righteousness, we become the epitome of sin, because we aren't doing what we do out of love for God or love for others but rather out of love for self.
  - On the other hand, if we think our righteousness depends on our performance, and if we are failing in our performance of the law, then we are going to grow depressed and despondent over our failure.
    - How many Christians are walking around feeling this way? Depressed and despondent is the opposite of what we are to feel as Christians. Depressed and despondent is just as self-absorbed as self-righteousness. It is just expressing itself in a different way.
- In his commentary on Romans, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that: "Most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of the words there is now no condemnation."
- Think what happens if we forget that there is now no condemnation? On the one hand, we will feel far more guilt, unworthiness, and pain than we should. And then out of that sense of guilt and unworthiness, will come a deep desire to try to prove ourselves, a great sensitivity to criticism, a defensiveness; a lack of confidence in relationships; a lack of confidence and joy in prayer and worship.
- That is not a life that brings glory to God. But along with feeling more guilt, we will also have far less motivation to live a holy life. Christians who don't understand "no condemnation" only obey out of fear and duty. That is not nearly as powerful a motivation as love and gratitude.
- The law is weakened by the flesh because our flesh uses the law to its ends. If we rely on the law to change us, we will never change at all, because the root of our problem isn't that we occasionally lust or hate. The root of our problem is our pride and love of self and relying on the law for our righteousness doesn't kill that root sin, it only feeds it.
- Now I will be the first to admit that it seems to be true that people can change apart from Christ, for instance they can break a bad habit or create a new good habit, but are they really changing, in a way that pleases God?
  - Like I said before, any changes that occur in a person's life that don't come as a result of real repentance won't result in righteousness but rather self-righteousness, which in God's eyes is no righteousness at all.
- So, if the law can't change us, then what can?

**Romans 8: 3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh

### 3. What God did to change us

- Our salvation, and the means to real change in our lives is work of the Trinity— God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Godhead, the three in one is the means by which sin is condemned or put to death in our lives.
  - It is God the Father who planned your salvation.

**Ephesians 1: 3 – 6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

- Why did God the Father plan your salvation? Verse 6, “For the praise of His glorious grace.” He saved you to change you so that would walk in righteousness doing good works in His name, not your own, good works that glorify Him. That’s what makes a work a good work.
  - God chose you before the foundation of the world for the praise of His glorious grace. He predestined you for adoption according to the purpose of His will, for the praise of His glorious grace. And then to work out that plan, so He alone would get all the glory, He sent his Son to accomplish your salvation, and His Holy Spirit to apply that salvation to your life.
  - It is not about you; it is not about me. It is all about God, and what God is doing in you and me.
- You can see the Trinitarian work of salvation here in Romans 8.

**Romans 8: 3 – 4** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh so that sin could be condemned rather than you being condemned.
- Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh to accomplish the condemnation of sin. How?
  - Well, first notice the phrase likeness of sinful flesh. Paul chose his words very carefully. Jesus didn’t come in the likeness of human flesh, which would mean he was something other than human. That is not what Paul is saying. He is saying Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. It was flesh just like you and I have, but it was flesh without sin.
  - In his humanity, he was like us, in every way, but without sin. Now this is why that phrase in the likeness of sinful flesh so important. If Jesus had

sinful flesh, he could not have accomplished his work of condemning sin. Just like us he would have stood condemned for his own sin.

- But being made in the likeness of sinful flesh meant that he was one of us, but sinless. Since he had no sins of his own to carry to the cross, he could carry our sin to the cross.

**Isaiah 53: 6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

➤ Think of how John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world.

**John 1: 29** “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

- In Christ, sin was condemned. It was put to death, destroyed. The penalty of sin was condemned, because there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. The Bible promises that one day even the presence of sin will be condemned. It will be no more. Look at Revelation 20, Satan, death, Hades, and all who do not belong to God are thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed. When that day comes the presence of sin will be condemned.

#### 4. How God changes us

- But how is the power of sin condemned in our lives today? In context, I think that is what Paul is talking about here, when he talks in verse 3 about the Christ condemning sin in the flesh, because look what follows in verse 4.

**Romans 8: 4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- In verse 4, Paul is calling us to live a life in Christ that slowly but surely condemns the power of sin over our lives.
- Certainly, in Christ, we still sin every day, but we no longer have to. Before Christ all we could do is live for self and love self. But now in Christ we can chose to live for God and love God. We no longer have to do things to try to earn our righteousness. We already have it Christ, so now we are free to love and serve God out of gratitude and love, and that is a powerful motivation to change—to walk in newness of life.

**2 Corinthians 5: 14 – 15** For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;<sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

- What is it that is changing how Paul lives his life? What is transforming him? The love that Christ has shown Paul through his death for Paul.
  - But how does the love of Christ control a person? The same way the love of a spouse does. If you really love your spouse, the last thing you want to do is hurt them. So, you try to live your life in a way that won't do that. Love for your spouse controls your actions. The more you love them, the more it will hurt you when you do something that hurts them. So, you seek to avoid doing those things, and when you do things that hurt them, you immediately

seek forgiveness. Not because your spouse is going to condemn you and kick you out, but because you don't want anything to hinder the relationship.

- This is exactly how it is with our life in Christ.
- Love that grows from gratitude is the key to change. A life of righteousness doesn't come from pursuing the law, but rather from pursuing the love of Christ. If the law could control us, we would not need Jesus. But it can't.
- How do we get to where the love of Christ controls us? Through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that applies to our lives what God has planned and Christ has accomplished. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to show us the love of God and draw us into that love.

**Romans 8: 2** the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

**Romans 8: 4** walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Notice in both cases that the word Spirit is capitalized. Paul is clearly speaking about the Holy Spirit.
  - What does Paul mean when he says the law of the Spirit? Sometimes when Paul uses the word law, he is referring to the law of God, sometimes he is referring to a general principle, but in this case, I think he is thinking of the law as a force or a power.
    - So, we could translate verse 2 like this, "The power of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the power of sin and death."
- How does the power of the Holy Spirit do that in a person's life? By using the ordinary means of grace that God has given us: His word, prayer, the sacraments (communion and baptism), and the fellowship of believers to show us the glory of the salvation He has given us in Christ.

**John 14: 26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

- The work of the Holy Spirit is to use the ordinary means of grace to apply the salvation that God has planned for us, and Christ has accomplished for us.
  - The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and reminds of God's love and mercy and Christ's sacrifice, and as we consider all of these things our love for Christ grows, and as our love for Christ grows, Christ and his will for our lives takes control over our lives, so we walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh.
- To walk by the Spirit is not to seek to live a life of perfection, in your own strength. But to know how high, wide, deep, and long is the love of Christ for you, because knowing that love will change your life.