

Free From Slavery

Message 8

Free at Last!

Romans 8:1-13

Introduction

Have you ever been convicted of a serious crime, like embezzlement or murder? How would you feel? How would your family react? Wouldn't it be unbearably humiliating? How could you face your mother and father after doing such a shameful thing? You would be a disgrace to the whole family. You would be forever marked as a convict. James Boice, in his sermons on Romans, tells the story of a young Russian who was caught red-handed stealing from the Czar. Here is the story as Boice tells it.

...[the] young man...was the son of a friend of Czar Nicholas the First of Russia. He had been given the job of exchequer of a border fortress of the Russian Army, a responsible position in which he was to manage the czar's money and dispense wages to the troops. But the young man fell into gambling and began to cover his losses by borrowing little by little from the army treasury. One day he received notice that a government auditor was arriving to examine the books, so he sat down and added up what he had taken. It was a huge amount. He emptied out his own meager resources, subtracted that from what should have been in the government account and noted the great discrepancy. He then wrote under the amount due: "A great debt; who can pay?"

The young man knew it was impossible for him to make up the amount, and he did not know anyone who could be counted on to help him. So, rather than await arrest, trial, and disgrace, he drew his revolver and determined that he would kill himself upon the stroke of midnight.¹

Do you see yourself in this story? Do you see that before your heavenly father you have been caught in the act – you are guilty of serious crimes – you are a disgrace to God and deserve to die? Paul showed in detail through chapters one and two of Romans that all men are thoroughly sinful and deserve to die. In chapter 7 he admitted that even now, even he, the great apostle, still struggles with sin – as you do. Some people think that the mark of Christian maturity is freedom from the struggle with sin, but that is a false doctrine. The only people who do not struggle with sin are those who have given in to it – those who are enslaved to sin and have given their lives to it. No, sin is the great enemy of our race. Our greatest enemy is not Saddam Hussein, or disease, or racism – it's sin – our constant inclination to rebel against God. Because of sin we are guilty, and because of sin we have no rest in this life. Don't you identify with Paul? Don't you also cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" I hope so. If you don't, I fear you may be blind to your sin and destined for destruction.

But what kind of message is this? How miserably gloomy! You didn't come out here to night to hear such awful news. Where is the joyful message of salvation? Praise God, it's right here in chapter 8!

No Condemnation!

Chapter 8 opens with the greatest message man ever heard. In spite of our sin, in spite of our ongoing struggle with sin, even though our best behavior is mucked up with the filth of sin – God does not condemn us! In fact, the negative here is emphatic, so the sense of this verse is more like this: "There is no ounce of possibility that we will be condemned." It's impossible that we should be convicted of the very

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 2; The Reign of Grace; Romans 5-8* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992) p. 773.

sins we know we commit. Perhaps you betrayed your best friend. Perhaps you despised your mother or father. Perhaps you had illicit sex. Perhaps you abused yourself with alcohol or drugs. Perhaps you hated your roommate or professor. Perhaps you were a rotten hypocrite. You are free, really free! Isn't this wonderful? Isn't this the best news you ever heard in your life?

Why? How? How can this be? The "therefore" at the beginning of the verse directs us back to the preceding chapters – back to chapter 3, where Paul told us that all the punishment for our sin fell on Christ. Justice was done! God is not a mushy old fogey to forget our sin. The full penalty was paid by Christ. Remember the hymn I read you several weeks ago? Here it is again.

O Christ, what burdens bow'd Thy head: our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead, did'st bear all ill for me.
A victim led, Thy blood was shed! Now there's no load for me.

Death and the curse were in our cup: O Christ 'twas full for Thee!
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop, 'Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup, love drank it up, now blessing's draught for me.

Jehovah lifted up His rod: O Christ it fell on Thee!
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God; there's not one stroke for me.
Thy tears, Thy blood, beneath it flowed, Thy bruising healeth me.

The tempest's awful voice was heard; O Christ it broke on Thee!
Thy open bosom was my ward, it braved the storm for me.
Thy form was scarred, Thy visage marr'd, now cloudless peace for me.²

Jesus bore all ill for you. The cup of cursing is empty for you. There's not one stroke for you. Now, cloudless peace for you. There is no condemnation for you, because Christ took all the condemnation there ever was and ever will be.

But there's more. The other reason there is no condemnation for us is that we are in Christ Jesus. Jesus is innocent. He always was. Now we are bound to him, and we are as innocent as He. Paul developed this point in chapters 6 and 7. When we were baptized, we were united to Him, spiritually married to Him. Before, we were enslaved to sin and married to the law. Now we are free from these and live as Christ's bride. It's a union so intimate that Paul says we are "in Christ". And just as a woman becomes joint owner of the estate of the man she marries, we are joint heirs with Christ of all He has. Isn't this the greatest deal ever?

But this deal is good only for those who are in Christ, and that intimate union comes only by believing in Him. In chapters 3 and 4 Paul showed that faith is the only way to be saved from sin. Good acts accomplish nothing, and God's forgiveness does not extend to those who are resolute in their rebellion against him. Only those who believe in Christ receive forgiveness of sins and are united to Christ.

Where do you stand? If you are here tonight and have never trusted in Jesus to save you, turn to Him now! Why should you perish in hell when you can be embraced by the love of God now and in eternity? If you do not trust in him, you are still very much condemned – and as Jesus said, you will by no means escape

² Anne R. Cousin, *Hymns II* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976) p. 64.

until you have paid for every one of your sins – which means forever. You can't save yourself. Trust Christ to save you, and be free from the condemnation you deserve.

Walking in the Spirit

Freedom from condemnation is wonderful news. But we still haven't answered the question posed in chapter 7: how shall we live a godly life when sin continually drags us down? The answer comes in verse four, but first we need to point out an important discrepancy in the way our Bibles present verse one. If you are using one of the Bibles from the back table, or any other King James or New King James Bible, you will find this clause at the end of verse 1: "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." No other version has this clause because almost everyone agrees it was added later to some manuscripts. We think it was copied from verse four where it belongs. We shall adopt the majority opinion and overlook this clause.

So we are free from condemnation, and in Christ Jesus – but how shall we live for Him? How shall we overcome the relentless influence of sin? By the Spirit of life!

Remember when we studied chapter 5? In the second half of that chapter Paul showed that those who believe in Christ are transformed into a new race. We all are born of the race of people descended from Adam. Adam is the head of this race and defines its characteristics. When we believe in Christ, we become part of a new race. Christ is the head of this race and defines its characteristics. Paul describes Adam's race as "fleshly". This does not specifically mean it is bad or sinful. We encountered this word last week. It is the Greek word *sarx*, and Paul consistently uses it to refer to humanity as originally created – that is, endowed only with human powers. Of course, since Adam sinned, all those descended from him, that is, all those who are fleshly, are also sinful. By contrast, Paul describes the race of Christ as "spiritual". This does not mean they are especially advanced Christians, nor that they are privileged to receive special powers from the Holy Spirit. It simply means that they have moved from the realm of flesh to the realm of Spirit. They are no longer Adam's sons, but Christ's. They are people who have been moved into a life in which they have powers that Adam and his offspring never had. This is true of all Christians. Everyone who believes in Jesus ceases to be fleshly and becomes spiritual. All such people cease being part of Adam's race and become part of Christ's race. They are no longer "in the flesh" or "in Adam" – they are now "in the spirit" and "in Christ". They still have bodies of flesh and blood, but now they are empowered to do what no one else can do – to obey Christ.

Why can't others obey Christ? Paul explained this in chapter 7, and he repeats the main point here in verse 3. The flesh – that is, human effort apart from the Spirit of God – is enslaved to sin. Sin – that is, the human tendency to rebel against anything God requires – is so entrenched in human nature, no one can ever escape it's grip. It's always there, as long as we live here on earth.

But Christ took on flesh and never sinned. Christ broke sin's power over mankind. For the first time ever, a man – a real flesh and blood man – never sinned, so sin's power over man was broken. Jesus faced the same temptations that we face, and He triumphed in them all. Now those who are united to Christ – who are "in Christ" – are free from the power of sin, too!

Let me say it again. No one by his own effort can obey God. All people are enslaved to sin – the natural impulse to rebel against God. But Jesus perfectly obeyed God, and is the head of a new race of people who also obey God. This race is created and empowered by God's Spirit. All those who believe in Christ are made part of this new race, and therefore they have power to overcome sin. What are the keys to a godly life? First, Jesus lived in the flesh and never sinned. Second, the Spirit binds us to Jesus so that we

can do likewise.

Living by the Spirit

All this may be fine, but I know many of you, good Americans that you are, are wondering, “What is the cash value of all this?” Practically speaking, when I am ready to open my mouth and spout hatred, or turn on the TV and look at some trash – what is there to help me turn away from sin and obey Christ? Verses 12 and 13 give us the key. You don’t have to sin. Did you hear that? Let me say it again. You don’t have to sin.

Now, this may seem like a trivial point, but it’s really the key to obedience. You see, we come to Christ with a lifetime of sinful habits. These habits have a powerful hold on us. You have always lashed out in anger to those who irritate you. You have always sought solace in possessive friendships or food or sex. You have always avoided hard work by cheating. Now you are an entirely different person. Those sinful habits don’t have their powerful hold on you anymore – but you still act that way out of habit. Christ tells you the Spirit is stronger than sin, stronger than your flesh – but you don’t believe Him. The pull of old ways *seems* so strong, you can’t accept Christ’s word that you don’t have to sin any more. But it’s true. Christ is telling the truth. You are free now from the power of sin over you.

So how shall we change? the word, prayer, sacraments

Conclusion

Isn’t God wonderful? Aren’t you shaken with wonder and delight at the amazing way He has saved us? Isn’t this news too wonderful to keep to yourself?

C. David Green
Lehigh University
March 18, 2003