

“Freedom: The Greatest Chapter in the Bible, pt 1” // Romans 8:1–11 // Romans #15

Memorial Day

Romans 8, if you have your Bibles this Memorial Day weekend.

Let me just say **that on this weekend that we do want to recognize not only** those **men and women fallen in service** protecting our nation, but also those of you who have **offered your lives to serve our country** in this capacity.

We know that your sacrifices **defend the freedoms** we enjoy each day--freedoms we don't ever want to take for granted--including **our ability to gather** in churches like this one without fear of reprisal.

These are **precious freedoms promised to us in our Constitution** but defended by you at great cost.

So, we honor both those who have fallen and those who continue to serve today, and we salute you.

In fact, at all of our location, if you have served or are serving in our Armed Forces, would you stand?

Summit Church, will you put your hands together as a sign of your gratitude toward them?

Introduction

Alright, Romans 8--which many regard to be the greatest chapter in the Bible:

- **John Piper says**, “The greatest book in the world is **the Bible**; the greatest letter in that book is **Romans**; and the greatest chapter in that letter is **chapter 8**.”
- *And the **best verse** is vs. 1.*

If you were **writing the soundtrack for the book of Romans**, when you rounded the corner into chapter 8 you'd probably start playing the Rocky soundtrack.

- Paul has **finished his exploration of the basics of the gospel** and now he transitions to how it transforms your entire outlook on life.

He's going to **start asking**: “*If the gospel is true, how does that change how you see your life?*”

That's a question I'd love to start pressing in on you from now to the end of the year, btw--IF the promises of the gospel are true, how does that change how you see yourself? Your problems? How you see the world? (It's **easy to believe the gospel** (out here) but never actually connect it, practically speaking, to how you see your life.)

In chapters 9 and 10, he's really going to press into the implications of the gospel for mission.

- **If the gospel is true**, he's going to ask, how can we **not be telling our friends** about it? **Think about it:** How can you claim to love, to care about someone and not have told them about this?
- If the gospel is true, how can we not devote ourselves to seeing it spread into every country on earth?
- **There's a very practical step** for you regarding that this weekend--sign up for one of these trips.
 - We know God hasn't called everyone to live permanently overseas, but he's called **all of us to be a part of the process**, and there's no better way to do that than to go on one of these trips you've heard about at your campus this weekend and see for yourself **firsthand** what God is doing.

- How can you believe the gospel is true and not be into that?

So, that's all coming in chapters 9–10, but today we're going to start chapter 8, where Paul discusses how the gospel transforms how we see ourselves. (actually be here 3–4 weeks)

One of the key themes in this chapter is *freedom*. The gospel, Paul explains, sets us free.

Most religious people, you see, **don't feel free**, because they are **caught in two traps**: we'll call them the performance trap and the pretending trap:

- The performance trap is thinking that you have to maintain a certain standard for God to accept or bless you. And if you **fail to meet that standard** God will punish you; maybe even send you to hell.
 - So, you are always wondering, “*Have I been good enough?*” and “*Have I done enough?*”
 - And, if **something bad happens to you**, you wonder, “*Is God paying me back for something?*”
 - This kind life leads to constant anxiety and eventual exhaustion.
- **Closely related to the performance trap is the pretending trap**. **That's** where you are always trying to act on the outside like you have everything together even when you don't feel like it on the inside.
 - Listen: **Church people are the worst at this**: You see some perfect-looking little family come in, they're all bows and Bibles and smiles. The **husband sticks out his hand** and says, “*Bless you, brother,*” and as he looks at you, you see a gleam in his teeth and a faint glow coming from behind his head. All the kids are standing politely in their matching outfits, holding their lavender colored Bibles. Listen, **I know from experience** there's a real good chance that on the way to church he and his wife were screaming at each other, and as they pulled into the parking lot he was swinging at one of the kids in the back seat.

- Or sometimes you say to someone at church, “**How you doing?**” And they'll be like, “*Amazing! So blessed,*” but you just looked at their Facebook page and they don't look *amazing* and *so blessed*. They look like their life is on fire!
- So, we're always trying to maintain **righteousness and happiness out here** while keeping the sinful impulses under control.
- **Joby Martin** describes this kind of religious life like trying to hold a beach ball underwater. You are constantly fighting to keep the bad part of you from popping out. (**Temper, materialism, lust of the flesh**, etc.) And every once in a while you lose control and that sin nature wriggles free and popping up, sometimes several feet in the air... and it's embarrassing. You have to grab and shove it back down under the water.

The gospel, Paul explains in Romans 8, frees you from both of these traps.

- (You know that great scene from *Braveheart* where William Wallace cries out, “*Freedom!*”? This is Paul's **great Braveheart cry**.)
- Paint face blue?

So let's dive in:

8 1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,

Has there ever been a more powerful 'therefore'? This is Paul's **answer to his dilemma** of chapter 7.

Remember throughout that chapter Paul had lamented about how much he still struggled with sin.

- He was like, “*The good that I want to do I can't make myself do; the evil that I hate is what I end up doing... Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?*” Then he answers his question, “*Only through Jesus.*”

So now he asks, “Well, *since I continue to struggle* so much with sin, how much condemnation can I expect to experience?”

- His answer: **There is therefore no condemnation** for those in Christ Jesus.
- Condemnation is, of course, a **legal term**. It means there a charge is held against you; you owe a debt or payment.
- **For those in Christ**, that debt no longer exists because that debt has been paid in full.
 - **Charles Spurgeon** used to say that for those in Christ, it would be unjust for God to hold the believer responsible for sin, because that would be requiring two payments for the same sin.
 - **Right?** If our **electric bill is super high** one month because I kept the air set on 55 degrees, and **my wife pays it in full, but then the** electric company contacts me and says, “We expect you to pay also since you were the one who kept the temp so low,” I would say, “*That’s not fair--she paid that bill in full and you have no more claim on me.*”
 - **If I am in Christ, God can’t condemn ME** for my sin because Jesus was fully condemned for it; for God to hold me accountable for even an ounce of it would be requiring two payments for the same debt.
- **THIS declaration of “no condemnation”** applies to both your past and future sins.
 - Many Christians get that Jesus paid the penalty for their past sin--he wiped the slate clean on those, so to speak; but the think that if you commit future sins; well, you can get re-condemned for those.
 - **Paul says, ‘Not if you are in Christ.’**
 - **Look, simple question:** When Jesus died on the cross, how many of your sins had you committed yet? None. He paid for them all in advance.
 - That means he has **already atoned for sins** you haven’t even committed yet.
- **Jesus’ death wiped out not only the presence of existing condemnation;** he wiped out the possibility of future condemnation.

- And that means there is **literally nothing you could do right now that would make God love you anymore**, and nothing you could do that would make him love you any less.
- You are in Christ, which means there is nothing to impede or endanger God’s love and acceptance of you.
- A lot of Christians **think God loves you more the more you become like Christ**.
 - *I love here the words of Rankin Wilbourne: “God doesn’t love you to the degree that you are like Christ. He loves you to the degree that you are in Christ and that is always 100%.”*
 - That means he’s **just as pleased with you on your very worst day** as he was with Jesus when he preached the Sermon on the Mount.
- Let that sink in.
- **See, this frees you from the performance trap.** I don’t ever have to be unsure of God’s love for me. In all my mess; in all my Romans 7 struggles, I have the unconditional love and absolute acceptance of the Father.
- **And, watch this: that frees me from the pretending trap.** I don’t have to pretend I’m something in front of you.
 - There is **literally nothing about me** that can be revealed that Jesus has not already seen and that his blood has not already covered.
 - **You point something out** and I say, “Yes, **God saw that too** and he set his love on me anyway, and has promised to change that in me.”
 - What are you **embarrassed of** right now--what is there that you would want know one to find out? God has **already seen it** and he declares: *NO CONDEMNATION--Jesus paid for that in full and I receive you!*
 - **"Long may the accuser roar, of sins that I have done. I know them all and thousands more, Jehovah knoweth none."**

Freedom!

What a verse, Amen?

Vs. 2: ² because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

- Key word here is: "Because" Here's how I know I'm under no condemnation: I see a new law in me leading me away from sin and death.
 - Now, don't let **Paul's use of the word "law"** here throw you. This is not "law" in the OT law sense. **Read that word like "principle."**
 - We used to operate according to the old "principle" that only if we kept the law well enough we would be accepted. The problem was, **that law couldn't change our hearts** and if anything it just made us more fearful and sinful.
 - But now there is *a new principle, a new law*, at work in our hearts: **the life-giving power** of the Spirit.
 - **The Mosaic law said, "Only if you obey good enough, you'll be accepted."** God now says, "I'll produce righteous behavior in you through the power of my Spirit."
 - (The Spirit is the other big theme of this chapter)
- **Again, don't miss the connection between these first two verses. How do I know there is no condemnation for me? *Because I see the Spirit of God at work in me.***¹
 - **Listen, friends: The necessary complement** to forgiveness of sin is a **release from the power of sin.**
 - It's the **other side** of the salvation coin: If you are forgiven, you'll be changed.
 - **If Jesus' death releases you from the penalty of sin; his resurrection life (through the Spirit) starts to release you** from the power of sin.
 - The **two always go together.**
- This was **illustrated in the life of Jesus** in those miracles where he would tell people, "Your sins are forgiven; now rise, take up your bed, and walk." It's **kind of an odd coupling**, when you think about it. Quite often the person coming wasn't asking for forgiveness. But **Jesus did it that way because his miracles**

illustrated the way of salvation. **When he forgives your sins**, you rise up and begin to walk spiritually.

- And **if that is not happening**, it's doubtful he has forgiven you, either.
- **So that's my question for you: *It's awesome that your sins have been forgiven, but are you walking?***
 - I've bemoaned to you before the question we always use to determine if someone is saved: 'If you died tonight, do you know for sure God would let you into heaven?'
 - It's a **great question** and you should have the **right answer** for it.
 - The right answer is...
 - But **equally important** is, "*If you get up tomorrow, will your life be different because the Spirit of Jesus is inside you?*"
 - Are **you up walking?**
 - You **prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart** and pay for your sins. But did you let him come in and take over your heart?
- Here's another example from the life of Jesus. **John 8: A woman was brought to Jesus** who was caught in the very act of adultery: "Your sins are forgiven;" he also says, "Go, and sin no more!"
 - **IOW, Start walking again.**
 - Forgiveness is **accompanied by change.**
 - And **I've told you before** that the order that he put them in is important: "Neither do I condemn you," comes before "go and sin no more." It's significant because most of us would reverse them.
 - **So, why did Jesus** put them in that order?
 - **Well, why do you think this woman was an adulterer?** I know we're not given a lot of detail about her life, of course, and there's no way I can know, but maybe this woman felt starved for love: maybe she'd grown up in a home where her father barely paid attention to her; or maybe she felt unappreciated in her marriage and this guy made her feel special and attractive her life. Or maybe she felt pressured: guy threatened her

¹ Timothy Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You* (New Malden, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015).

- **Whatever:** For Jesus just to **tell her just to cut it out** wouldn't fix the problem. The attracting power of sin was just too strong.
- Jesus had to give her a love and acceptance that was greater than whatever drew her toward the arms of a man.
- That's why he assured her of his acceptance before he gave her the command to change.
- He said, "What your **soul is craving for is not in him**, it's in me."
- The arms you are looking for in romance are actually my arms.
- We find the power to change only in the assurance of his acceptance.
- **See, the gospel message** is not just "stop sinning." That would be an **impossible message**. It is "**behold the love and acceptance of your God**--and then you'll have the power to stop sinning."
- It's why we say, "**God's acceptance is the power that liberates us from sin, not the reward for us having liberated ourselves.**"
- This is how: *He breaks the power of cancelled sin...*

Freedom!

So, in vs. 1–2, **Paul articulates the two kinds of freedom from sin** that come from salvation--by his death Jesus frees us from the penalty of sin; through his Spirit (that flows from the resurrection) he releases us from the power of sin.

And the **two always go together**.

Now, in vs. 3–4, Paul further unpacks the unity between these two kinds of freedom. He says, you see, ³ What the law (i.e. OT law) could not do since it was weakened by the flesh (IOW the law was making all these commands to a sin nature utterly unable to obey them), God did (in us). He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, ⁴ in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- **Jesus released us from the law by being** born in our flesh and living the life we were supposed to live, a life of perfect obedience to God's law that we should live.
- Then **he gave his life as** a sin offering for those of us who didn't live that way.
- That **offering, that sacrifice, freed us from the penalty of sin** and made way for the **Spirit to come into us** and start fulfilling the law's requirement in us, which means producing in us a heart that "loves God and loves our neighbor," which Jesus said was the essence of the law.
- Remember, **God is not just after obedience**; he's after a whole new kind of obedience--an obedience that grows out of our desires. Where we **obey God because we desire God**; where we seek righteousness because...
- **That desire could not be produced by the law!** It could only be produced by the life-giving power of the Spirit.
- What the **law could not do**, the Spirit does in the gospel.

And how, practically, does this change get produced in us? It happens, Paul says, when we walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

You say: What does that mean?

Great question. Keep reading.

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit.

- **Walking according to the Spirit is accomplished** by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.
- **Notice that it doesn't say, 'You set your mind on the Spirit,'** but on "the things of the Spirit."
 - A lot of **Christians are obsessed by the Spirit** like he's some kind of force that makes you feel tingly like Harry Potter's scar.
 - They're thinking about him all the time: Ooh, **my heart just tingled**, was that him?

- Or a single guy says to me, “The Spirit of God told me to ask her out.” **I was driving down the road...** Lauren Daigle’s song, “This Girl” came on
- He’s **not a force, he’s a person**, and setting your mind on the things of the Spirit means thinking about the things he thinks about, loving whatever he loves; seeking the things that he seeks.
- **That’s what you do when you are in fellowship** with someone, right? You talk about **mutual interests**--things you both love.
 - **And what are those things the Spirit loves?** *God’s glory. Truth. Beauty. Justice. Righteousness. Love for his church, love for people: Phil 4:8*
 - *The fame of Jesus and the spread of his message. People being saved, delivered and empowered.*
 - **Here’s the key: as you dwell on these things, the Spirit and you are in fellowship;** and **where he is**, so is his power, so your life begins to bear fruit spiritually.
- **Here’s what people don’t get:** the fruits of the Spirit are simply the result of the Spirit’s presence.
 - Wherever he is, **they simply pop up**.
 - And the Spirit is present in you insofar that you are dwelling on the things **that delight him**.
 - But when you think on, or participate in, something that **grieves him**, that makes your heart inhospitable for him, and as his presence goes out of your life, so do his fruits.
- **Question: What if the greatest danger of sin** was not whatever bad effect it has on you or someone else? What if the **GREATEST damage of sin was** it cut you off from the Spirit of God?
 - I ask because Christians **always evaluate sin by how bad the effects are:** “*Well, this that I’m doing is not that bad. It’s not that big of a sin. The effects won’t be that severe.*”
 - But what if the **worst effect of sin** was that it grieved the Holy Spirit and cut you off from fellowship with him?
 - The **fruits of the Spirit are produced by fellowship with the Spirit**, and you are in fellowship with him insofar as you think on, and dwell in the things that delight him..

⁶ Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace.

- **When the Spirit goes, so do his fruits of life** and peace.
- And what **drives him out?** The “mindset of the flesh”.
- **You say, “What is the mindset of the flesh?”**
- In vs. 7 Paul says it is an attitude of “hostility” to God.
- I’d summarize it in terms of **5 “selves”**:
 - **Self-will** (instead of God’s will). I want to be in charge, not him.) Doesn’t mean you are engaged in bad things, just that he is not control.
 - **Self-glory** (I want to get the credit, not God)
 - **Self-gratification** (I prioritize my pleasures and comforts above the will of God)
 - **Self-righteousness** (I’m trying to be good enough to distinguish myself and earn my acceptance)
 - **Self-sufficiency** (I have what it takes to overcome, and I can do this, even independent from God)
 - Sin, I’ve told you, is the big “I” problem: “I” in the place of God
- **Fellowshipping with the Spirit means putting** God in each of these places where you previously had self.
 - YOU think on **God’s will** (*not my will*); **God’s glory** (*not to us*); **God-gratification** (*my bread is to do the will of my Father*); **God my righteousness**; **God my sufficiency** (*I can do all things through Christ*).
- **As you think like that, the Spirit surges in you.**
- **Listen: At any given point**, you have a self-focus in your heart or a God-focus.
 - If it is a self-focus, are **grieving** the Spirit of God and driving him away, and with him the fruits of spiritual life and peace.
 - Or, you are **thinking like he thinks**, and in fellowship with him, and the result is that through his presence he is producing the fruits of the Spirit.
- **Again: What if the most devastating effect** of your sin was not the damages it caused in you or someone else, but driving out the Spirit of God from your life, and with him, his spiritual fruit?

⁷ The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

- This is more of what Paul unpacked in chapter 7. There is a "flesh" / sinful nature part of you that is totally against God--and totally for yourself.
- Saying (vs. 8) "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God," doesn't mean a person without Jesus can't ever think a good thought or perform a noble action. It just means that at the core of who they are, they are more loyal to themselves than to God--and that makes them displeasing to God.²
 - I've used a **number of examples to illustrate this**, here's one more: Imagine a man in a **rebel army** who looks after his comrades, keep his uniform clean and pressed, he's brave, has great work ethic, always truthful with his superiors, always punctual...
 - **Each of those are "good" actions**—but they are all done in the context of hostility to the rightful ruler. You **would never expect that ruler to hear** of this rebel's conscientiousness and be pleased by his conduct!

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.

- **Now, that word "live" in Greek** means he is not an occasional visitor; he lives, dwells in you as a permanent resident.
- Which addresses a question a lot of Christians have about when you get the Holy Spirit. **Some Christian traditions teach that you get the Holy Spirit** after you are saved in some kind of "baptism of the Holy Spirit," or "second blessing"--a **second experience** after you are saved.
 - Some of you **grew up in traditions** like this.
 - I've **had people say to me before**, "Well yes, you've been saved... but have you received the Holy Spirit?"
- **What does vs. 9 say?** It says that if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you are not a Christian. Which means that when you put your

faith in Christ, **you received the Spirit**. That IS the baptism of the Spirit.

- Here's how Paul describes it: **1 Cor 12:13**, "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." The Spirit baptizes you into the body of Christ. That is salvation.
 - You say, "What about those **places in Acts** where it comes later?" The best way to see those is like an **inauguration ceremony**--(e.g. water to the boroughs of NYC).

So, **if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit**. And Paul would say **the amount of spiritual power that you are experiencing in your life** has nothing to do any more with how much of him you have, but how much of you **he** has.

Are you in fellowship with him? Are you dwelling on, and thinking on and participating in, the things that please him? **How much of what you do** grieves him?

¹⁰ Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.

I see **three big takeaways** from those final verses:

1. The Christian life is not gradual self-improvement. It is fellowship with the Spirit. And that's a **game changer**. Because you are probably

used to evaluating sin based on how bad the effects are.

- But what if the **worst devastation of sin** was in grieving the Spirit of God and cutting you off from his power in your life?

Well, it would **make small areas of compromise as bad as big ones**. **Because even small sins, small areas of compromise would cut you off from fellowship with the Spirit and lead you to a place of death, away from life and peace.**

² Keller, 20.

Here's a second implication:

2. Coming to Christ is not a return to religion; it's a surrender to a person.

- I often hear people say, "Well, I'm trying to get back with God," or "get back into church."
 - And what they mean is that they want to get involved in some kind of religious self-improvement:
 - I want to be a better person; pay a little bit more attention to God.
- But listen, **Christianity, plain and simple, is surrender to a person**—all of you to all of him.
- **The nature of surrender is that it is total.** Otherwise, you only look at him like a "suggestion-giver."
 - **When I took driver's ed**, the guy beside me had the break. DRAMATIC. To let me know... I wasn't really in charge of the car.
 - **I could VOTE for** where I wanted to take the car but he got the final vote and he could always veto my plan! He **hadn't surrendered the car to me**.
- **To surrender means** "all of me belongs to you. You always get the final."
- I love how **C.S. Lewis says it in, Mere Christianity**: "Christ says, 'Give me all of you! I don't want a certain amount of your time, a certain amount of your talents and money, or a certain amount of your work. I want *you*. All of *you*. I have not come to torment or frustrate the natural man or woman, but to kill it. No half measures will do. I don't want to only prune a branch here and a branch there; rather I want the whole tree out. Hand it over to me, the whole outfit, all of your desires, all of your wants and wishes and dreams. Turn them ALL over to me, give yourself to me and I will make of you a new self---in my image. Give me yourself and in exchange I will give you myself. My will, shall become your will. My heart, shall become your heart.'"
 - **This is fellowship with the Spirit**, and it begins in total surrender.

- Have you done this? **Stop trying to be religious** and strike a bargain with God.
- **There's only one deal Christ will make**: his righteousness and his resurrection power for your total surrender.

3. I have hope even when I feel "dead."

Like Paul, even though I am still frustrated at my own personal deficiencies (context is Romans 7), **I know in Christ, I am headed to ultimate victory**.

The Spirit of God is at work in me producing **righteousness in my heart right now**, and *one day* he will deliver me physically from this body of death into a world without corruption or pain or death.

And I can't wait.

Right now I can have the beginnings of a resurrection heart; there I'll have a **completed resurrection heart** and a **resurrection body** and live in a resurrection world.

- And that means **if I am struggling with some sin**, that struggle is not the end of my story. The Spirit of God is within me, which means that struggle **ends in victory**.
- And **if your marriage feels dead**, that's not the end of your story, either. The **Spirit of God is within you**, always renewing you, always making you to mount up on wings with eagles, and no matter what happens with your marriage, your story ends in resurrection hope.
- Or **if your life is characterized by some ongoing struggle** against depression, or anxiety, or chronic physical suffering, when it's all said and done, that won't be the predominant theme. **Just as sure as the Spirit raised Jesus** from the grave, he will **raise your body** to beautiful, perfect, everlasting life! That's **your theme**.
- In all these things, The body may be dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. (vs. 10)

That's hope, and in that hope is FREEDOM.

Is that the life you want? It starts with total surrender to the Spirit and a commitment to grow in fellowship with him.

It starts by **receiving the “no condemnation!”** That's a gift--but so many people stumble at it!

- Have you ever **been to a nice dinner with someone and tried to pick up the check** and they just wouldn't let you? And maybe you **knew that person really couldn't afford it**, but their pride kept them from receiving your generosity. **As many times as you offered**, they just kept, “No, no, no, it's on me. I insist, it's on me.”
- If you **insist on picking up the bill yourself**, you can do that. If your pride stands in the way of accepting Jesus, then understand **what you are accepting** when you reject him.
- The **full debt will come due someday** and it will be yours to pay, if you insist.
- Or, there is **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You can choose that, right now, today, if you want!