

Romans Lesson 8

Romans 8: The Rule of Life for the Christian

The Apostle Paul continued his systematic presentation of the Good News of Jesus Christ in Romans 8. In Romans chapter 1-3, Paul revealed that all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and therefore all people need Jesus as their Savior. In chapter 3:21-31, he wrote that the righteousness of God has been given to us on the basis of the atoning work of Christ on the cross, and we receive it by faith. In chapter 4, Paul uses the Old Testament examples of Abraham and David to show that salvation has always been received by faith. In chapter 5, Paul teaches that God is faithful to bring us spiritual peace, and even in the adverse circumstances of life, God is faithfully working to build our character and bring about spiritual growth. In chapter 6, Paul shifts to living the spiritual life of Christ now, and we find that the old person before Christ is dead, but a new spiritually born person is alive. We no longer live for ourselves, but we have a new master and we live in newness of life. There is a synergy in chapter 6 between all the blessings of Christ that are now ours and our responsibility to “present ourselves” to the new life in Christ. Living for Christ is our responsibility, and it is the way things should be now. Romans 7 brings up the major problem we all have in following through to become holy. The reality is that we still live in physical bodies that have powerful desires so that although you can know what you should and should not do, it is extremely difficult to live up to the standard of Christ---so much so that Paul cries out “Wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this body of death?” Romans 8 provides the answer to that question. God has not only sent His Son to die for our sins, but God has also sent His Spirit to indwell us so that we can have power over the sinful desires that are still in us.

The Trinity in Romans 8:1-4

Romans 8:1 tells us the position we proceed to live from. It is very comforting to know that in spite of our desires that Paul elaborated in chapter 7, we are totally forgiven, and in God’s eyes we are citizens of heaven. Therefore he can say that in spite of the frailty of the flesh he laid out in ch.7, “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This is very liberating as it takes all the pressure off us. We can see the Trinity at work in the life of the believer in the first four verses. God justifies us by His grace, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, and it is all on the basis of Jesus’ substitutionary atonement on the cross. In verse 2, he uses the image of the law as a way of life to lay out a contrast between living by the Spirit of God vs. living by the law in the Old Testament that they couldn’t keep but only revealed their sin. This is also a reminder that Jesus ushered in the New Covenant. The prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted that God would make a new covenant that would be different than the old because in the new He would provide His Spirit to change His people’s hearts. As Ezekiel spoke for God and said in Ezekiel 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes”. The law could not save us because of the sin in our “flesh”, but God accomplished it by sending Jesus as “an offering for sin”. What the law was incapable of doing, God did. The amazing thing now as we continue to live in this new relationship with Christ is that if we “walk” or habitually live by the leading of the Holy Spirit, we actually fulfill the law (v.4). God does not save people in order for them to do as they please, but to do as He pleases. You are free from all condemnation, but you must now leave your sin behind. God is the agent of our justification and the Holy Spirit is the agent of our sanctification.

Jesus’ Teaching on the Holy Spirit

At the Last Supper Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:16-17 that after He ascended to heaven He would send another Helper, the Spirit who would abide with them. He went on to say in v.26 that the Spirit would teach them, and in John 16:7-15 we see that God sent us His Spirit to convict us of sin, righteousness, and coming judgment. He will guide us, lead us, teach us, illuminate the Word for us, comfort us, intercede for us, seals us, and empowers us to serve God. Comparing passages like Ephesians 4:30, we see that it “grieves the Holy Spirit” when we sin, and when we stifle the ministry of the Holy Spirit it is likened to quenching the Spirit in 1 Thes.5:19.

The Flesh vs. the Spirit-Romans 8:5-8

In this section Paul lays out the reality of the battle going on within every believer between the desires of their flesh and the leading of the Spirit. The “flesh” is the word he uses for our carnal sinful nature, and when we follow its desires, it leads to separation of fellowship and intimacy with God (which Paul calls death). Paul breaks down the human race to two kinds of

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people---those who follow their natural selfish desires, and those who follow the leading of the Spirit. Paul's emphasis here is on our "mindset". What do we think about, fantasize about, and focus on as we live? There should be no doubt that the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward the things of God and will not subject itself to the Word of God. Therefore those who have their minds set on the stuff in the world and all the perceived pleasures of the world cannot please God.

Good News—the Holy Spirit Changes our Nature

If you are like me and feel that the battle between the flesh and the Spirit within me is too often being won by the flesh, then take heart that there is good news. In Romans 8:9-11 Paul makes it clear that all believers have been indwelt with the Holy Spirit with the purpose of "giving life to our mortal bodies". Your physical body is deteriorating, but your spirit is growing, and the new person is being energized and progressively changed by God's Spirit. Perhaps you were not even aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless Paul taught in v.9 that all who belong to Christ have the Spirit of God, and in v.10 since the Spirit is in you, your spirit is alive and growing even though your body still has its appetites. What kind of power are we talking about here? The Spirit of God that had the power to raise Jesus from the dead is alive in you to empower you to live as well. Christians are people whose past has been altered. They were dead in sin, but now are alive in Christ. Their present has been altered as well. They are awakened to God, to the Word of God, the leading of the Spirit, and to fellowship with other Christians. Lest we get overconfident, don't forget what Paul wrote about himself in Phil.3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained it (perfection), but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Paul was saying that in spite of any temporary failures or setbacks, he pressed on toward the goal of being conformed to the image of Christ.

Where are Your Obligations? Romans 8:12-13

Even though there are two active forces at work within us, pulling at us, each seeking control, our responsibility is to the Spirit. There is a daily battle between the flesh and the Spirit, but we are obligated to live by the Spirit. It is a matter of control. Paul equates real living and dying as being determined by who is in control of our lives. There will always be a lingering influence of the sinful flesh, but now we have no excuse for sin because of our great obligation to be controlled by the Spirit. Paul uses this formula in all his letters to list their benefits and blessings in Christ, but then he draws the application as he does here in Rom.8:12-13 that they must step up and get focused on the spiritual life, and put Jesus on the throne of their life. We no longer live for ourselves, but we live for God just as Paul said about his life in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me."

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