

A Study in the Book of Romans

16

Romans 8:1-8

Key Verses

“ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. ”

Romans 8 is the climax of all that Paul has been saying. Step by step, truth by truth, he has been unveiling the Gospel, confounding all the arguments of self-righteous, religious man in the process, and showing how, through Christ’s death and resurrection, God has dealt with every area of need in man.

Set Free!

Paul ended his description of life under the Law with a statement of helplessness in **7:25**:

“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s Law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

A slave to two opposing, incompatible masters! What a hopeless predicament! But Paul’s whole purpose to this point has been to declare the Gospel – the good news! He has shown how *both* masters have been done away with in Christ. In **Romans 6** he revealed how we have been set free from the master, sin; in **Romans 7**, from

Introduction

The Gospel’s Three Revelations

▶ The Gospel’s Three Answers ◀

The Gospel’s Answer to Israel

The Gospel in Action

Conclusion

the master, Law. “Therefore,” he now triumphantly declares, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Jesus Christ has changed the whole situation. For those who are in Christ, the **Romans 7** condition is no more! He has set us free, not only that we might be forgiven and go to heaven, but that we might live a holy and victorious life now.

The Biography of a Christian

According to **Romans**, the biography of a Christian has three parts – past, present and future. Take a moment to review these verses:

Past - “Out of Christ”

- ☞ Dead (6:23; 7:9-11)
- ☞ Under God’s wrath (1:18)
- ☞ Unrighteous (3:10,23)
- ☞ Instruments of wickedness (6:13)
- ☞ Slave to the master sin (6:17; 7:25)
- ☞ Slave to the master Law(7:25)
- ☞ Condemned (2:1-5)
- ☞ Struggling in self-effort (7:15-21)
- ☞ Living according to the flesh (7:22-25)
- ☞ A slave of fear (8:15)
- ☞ In continual defeat (7:23-25)

Present – “In Christ”

- ☞ Made alive (6:4-11,23)
- ☞ Justified (5:1)
- ☞ Righteous (3:21-22)
- ☞ Instruments of righteousness (6:13)
- ☞ Set free from sin’s mastery (6:18)
- ☞ Set free from bondage to the Law (7:1-4)
- ☞ No condemnation (8:1)
- ☞ Empowered by the Spirit (8:1-4)
- ☞ Living according to the Spirit (8:5-9)
- ☞ A child and heir of God (8:14-17)
- ☞ Victorious in all situations (8:31-39)

But all this has been accomplished for you not only to enjoy in the present. Paul goes on in **verses 18-30** to reveal a glimpse of the glorious future that awaits you:

Future – “With Christ”

- ☞ A sharer of his glory (8:17-18)
- ☞ A mature son of God (8:19)
- ☞ Physical body redeemed (8:23)
- ☞ Conformed to the likeness of Christ (8:29)

The Missing Factor

What a contrast **Romans 8** is to the previous chapter. This is Paul's description of the normal Christian experience, not **Romans 7**! For the salvation of the Cross outworked in reality in our daily lives. What makes it possible? What takes Christ's Cross and Resurrection from the records of history and the pages of the Bible and makes them living reality in our experience now? **Romans 8** reveals the missing factor – the factor unmentioned in **Romans 7**, (and, indeed, scarcely through Paul's whole letter to this point) – the Holy Spirit. His is the ministry of impartation – to take what Christ has done and impart it to those who believe.

Romans 8, simply put, is the chapter of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times in the first 27 verses! Take a look at these verses:

- The Law of the Spirit (**8:1-3**)
- The Walk in the Spirit (**8:4**)
- The Mind of the Spirit (**8:5-8**)
- The Indwelling Spirit (**8:9-10**)
- The Resurrection Power of the Spirit (**8:11**)
- The Life of the Spirit (**8:12-13**)
- The Leading of the Spirit (**8:14**)
- The Cry of the Spirit (**8:15**)
- The Testimony of the Spirit (**8:15**)
- The Goal of the Spirit (**8:17-25**)
- The Ministry of the Spirit (**8:26**)
- The Intercession of the Spirit (**8:26-27**)

The Two New Laws

Read Romans 8:1-2

Whereas **Romans 7** revealed the two laws which control man outside of Christ – the outward law (God's commands) and the inward law (our sinful nature) – **Romans 8** reveals not only our liberation from these two contradictory laws but also declares the two new laws that now operate in the life of the believer:

- **The law of faith (our part)** – “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (**Romans 3:27**, KJV).
- **The law of the Spirit of life (God's part)** – “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (**Romans 8:2**, KJV).

These two new laws totally revolutionize the Christian experience. The “law of faith” is a completely new approach to life and the “law of the Spirit of life” is an utterly new dynamic. As J. B. Phillips translates **Romans 8:2** in *The New Testament in Modern English*:

“...the new spiritual principle of life ‘in’ Christ Jesus lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin and death”!

The Message also provides a unique view of this dramatic turnaround for the believer in Christ. At the end of **Romans 7**, there was the briefest glimpse of the good news to come, when Paul wrote:

“I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.”

Now, in **Romans 8:1-4**, *The Message* introduces Paul’s grand answer to the grand dilemma:

“With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ’s being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death. God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn’t deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a band-aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn’t deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.”

The Law of the Spirit

Read again Romans 8:2

Man desired to walk on the moon for many centuries, but the law of gravity constantly held him back. In 1969, man finally achieved his desire and Neil Armstrong took the first step on the moon. What made this possible? Somehow he had to be set free from the law of gravity. The answer was to put him in a rocket with a power greater than earth’s law – a power that would shoot right out of that law into a whole new dimension.

In the same way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the power that “rockets” us out of the law of sin and death and brings us into a new dimension – a dimension where the Spirit of life is now the law (or power) that operates in our lives. Paul vividly describes this for us in **Ephesians 1:18-21** and **2:6-10**:

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is

like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus..."

Read also Colossians 2:9-15

The Promise of the Father

Following his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples in **Luke 24:49**:

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Many interpret this "promise of my Father" (KJV) as being the giving of the Holy Spirit, and this in one sense is correct (note **Acts 1:4**). But notice how Jesus says two things:

- ☞ "I am going to send you what my Father has promised..."
- ☞ "...but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

In this verse, Jesus refers to "what my Father has promised" and being "clothed with power from on high" (the empowering of the Holy Spirit) as two distinct, though related, things. So what exactly is this promise of the Father?

In **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, we have recorded the special promise the Father gave – the promise of a whole new covenant that would fulfill and supercede the old covenant of Law. The Father promises:

"I will put my law in their hearts!"

Ezekiel also emphasizes this in his description of the New Covenant in **Ezekiel 36:26-28** (KJV):

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

So what was this "promise of my Father" that Jesus was referring to? Yes, it was the Holy Spirit, but it was much more than just the indwelling presence of the Spirit. It was a new heart, a new spirit and a new walk. It was the law (God's righteousness) on the inside – all through the inner action of the Holy Spirit. For this promise was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16-18; 16:7,12-15; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,5; 2:1-18**) and is the seal in our lives of Christ's finished work, as Paul expresses in **Ephesians 1:13-14**:

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory."

Read also 2 Corinthians 1:22

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to each believer. When we believe in Christ's work for us (in other words, receive it as applying to us personally), the surging power of the Spirit of God comes into our lives. This "law of the Spirit of life" thrusts us from a defeated existence of constant inner struggle into a victorious life in relationship with God.

God Did It!**Read Romans 8:3**

Paul has proved already the powerlessness of the written code to help. The Law revealed the right way to live, but gave no power to be able to live it, for man's sinful nature weakened its effect. It was the diagnosis, but not the cure.

But, says Paul, what the Law couldn't do, God did! God condemned sin in man's nature (for rather than turning a blind eye to sin, he dealt with it decisively on the Cross) and set us free. Now, in the same way that the law of sin and death had been a power within us that caused us to sin, God places another power on the inside – his own Spirit – enabling us to live according to his righteous standard! It is all his work – both in dealing with sin through Christ, and in enabling us to live a holy life by giving the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. Our responsibility now is simply to believe it. What we believe is what we experience. As we believe and receive what he has done, so we are launched into a life of victory over sin – God's "norm" for the Christian.

The Law Fulfilled in Us**Read Romans 8:4**

In **2 Corinthians 3**, Paul contrasts life under the Old and New Covenants. Whereas Moses' Law was written on tablets of stone, now, through Christ, God's righteousness is written by the Spirit of the living God on the "tablets of human hearts." Through Christ, we have become partakers of the divine nature" (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). And what is the divine nature? **1 John 4:8** sums it up for us: "...God is love!" As Paul says later in his letter, "love is the fulfillment of the law" (**Romans 13:10**). It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who imparts the divine nature of love to us.

Read Romans 5:5**Into the Orbit of the Spirit**

Just as the powerful thrusts of a rocket launch it into orbit in space, so the revelation of Christ's completed work for us "launches" us into "orbit" with the Spirit. Once there, we are called to a continual "walk in the Spirit" or, in other words, to live according to the Spirit who is indwelling us. As Paul says in **Galatians 5:25**:

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"!

Throughout **Romans 8**, there are two words in the original Greek language which Paul uses repeatedly.

One is the word *sarx*, which when translated literally means “flesh.” Paul’s use of the word “flesh” depicts man without the indwelling Spirit of God – his whole being corrupted by sin. Indeed, in **Romans 7:18** (Amplified Bible), Paul has already described his condition outside of Christ and under the Law:

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh.”

The other is the word *pneuma*, which means “Spirit.” Because God has dealt with the problem of sin in the flesh through Christ (**8:3**) and has given us his Spirit, we are now called, not to “walk in the flesh” any more, but to “walk in the Spirit.”

Walking in the Spirit

To walk in the Spirit is a definite choice (see again **Romans 6:12-19**). Paul also makes this clear in **Colossians 3:1-15**:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God...”

Having contrasted the difference between the “walk in the flesh” and the “walk in the Spirit” in **8:4-11**, Paul directly addresses the Romans in **8:12**:

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation...”

And our obligation, he says, is not to the “flesh,” to live according to it, but to the Spirit. In the letter to the Hebrews, this obligation – or choice – is emphasized at least 15 times. As the writer declares the wonder of all that Christ has accomplished for us, he exhorts us with the words “Therefore let us...”

Read Hebrews 4:1,11,14,16

Read Hebrews 6:1

Read Hebrews 10:22-2

Read Hebrews 12:1-2,28

Read Hebrews 13:13,15

Free to Choose!

As a result of the Civil War in America (1861-1865), slavery was abolished. A legal declaration was signed proclaiming the emancipation of all slaves in the United States. But many continued to live as slaves, even though they were now legally free. One reason for this was that many could not read and their masters kept the news from them. So, in their, ignorance they continued to live as slaves. Another reason was that some, even though they heard the good news of their freedom, remained slaves by their own choice. In a similar way, these are the two main reasons why some Christians do not live in the freedom and victory that has been

won for them by Christ. Many times as Christians, either through ignorance of all that Jesus has done or through willful disobedience, we continue to live as slaves to the sinful nature even though “legally” we have been set free!

The Lord Jesus declared in **John 8:32**:

“...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Once the revelation is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, the freedom of choice lies before us – the choice to live according to the new way of life now open to us – life in the Spirit. The revelation of Christ’s completed work for us launches us into a life of victory in the Spirit. Now, by our own choice, we continue to walk in the Spirit, or, in other words, to lead a life of continual yielding to the Spirit who is dwelling within us.

How Does it Work?

Let’s provide the simplest of definitions for these two phrases used by Paul throughout **Romans 8** – “walking in the flesh” and “walking in the Spirit”:

- To “walk in the flesh” simply means to live controlled by the five physical senses which, without the Spirit, are corrupted by the sinful nature. In other words, what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell are the governing factors in our life, dictating what our reactions will be to various circumstances. So, our minds, emotions and will are “fed” by our five senses, and that is where we then put our faith.
- To “walk in the Spirit” means that the governing factor in our lives is now the Holy Spirit indwelling us. So we react to the circumstances we face, not according to what we see and hear, but according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit within. He takes God’s Word – his promises to us – and reminds us of them. Thus, our minds, emotions and will are “fed” by God’s Spirit, and our faith is then placed in his word for that situation.

The Scripture is full of examples of men and women who either walked in the flesh or in the Spirit. One such example is that of the 12 spies who were sent by Moses to spy out the Promised Land (**Numbers 13:17-14:11**). God had already promised them complete victory over the enemies in the land (**Deuteronomy 7:1-2**), but when the spies came back, ten of them, though they acknowledged the goodness of the land itself, said the enemy there was too powerful for them to overcome. Two of the spies (Joshua and Caleb), however, though acknowledging the strength of the enemy, said, “We are well able to take it!”, for they remembered God’s promise and knew the Lord they served was far greater than any power that the enemy had.

The ten spies believed what they saw. They fed their minds with it – and the result was unbelief in God’s word. They fed their emotions with it – and the result was fear. They fed their wills with it – and the result was they decided to go back to Egypt! They were walking in the flesh.

But the two spies believed in God's Word *despite* what they saw. They fed their minds with it – and the result was faith. They fed their emotions with it – and the result was courage. They fed their wills with it – and they were ready to go in! They were walking in the Spirit!

The Christian's New Bias

Because of the new “law of the Spirit” within us, to walk in the Spirit is not a difficult task or a continual struggle. On the contrary, to walk in obedience to the Spirit is now the most natural experience for those in Christ, for this is now our nature in Christ. As Paul goes on to declare in **8:9** (Amplified Bible):

“But you are not living the life of the flesh, you are living the life of the Spirit, if the (Holy Spirit) of God [really] dwells within you – directs and controls you...”

So unnatural is sin now to us that if we sin (**1 John 2:1-2**) we feel so out-of-place, so miserable, that we cannot put it right with God quickly enough in order that we can once again be in that life in the Spirit that has become our natural experience! Our bias has changed from sin to righteousness – not because of any inner capability of our own, but because of the empowering of the Holy Spirit living within us.

The Two Minds

Read Romans 8:5-7

Two possible inner laws can control a person's life – the law of sin and death or the law of the Spirit of life – and either one will shape our way of thinking or how we “see” things in life. The two laws operate from two entirely different viewpoints.

Imagine living in a house on a high hill, with a city stretched out in the valley below you. But one morning, when you wake and look out your window, you discover that a low undulating cloud has covered the valley below you like a white carpet. The sky above is bright blue – not a cloud to be seen – and the sun is shining in all its glory. But for the people in the city below, just getting out of their beds, they think it to be a dull, dismal day, for they are right in the midst of the cloud. From your viewpoint, however, it was a bright, beautiful day. You can see the beginning and end of the cloud and know that it wouldn't be too long before the fog is dissolved by the bright sun above.

In the same way, there are two definite and distinct ways of “seeing” everything in life, and one of these two “minds” – or ways of thinking – will govern how we approach situations in life. **Proverbs 23:7** says: as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he...” (KJV).

Let's take a look at these two “minds”:

The carnal mind

The carnal mind is our old way of thinking when we were outside of Christ. It belongs to those who live according to the sinful nature – who “walk in the flesh.”

As Paul says, “they have their minds set on what that nature desires” (8:5). And in **Philippians 3:18-19**, he describes the extreme outworking of the carnal mind graphically:

“...many live as the enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”

In **Ephesians 2:3**, Paul states how this carnal mind is the attribute of everyone who is outside of Christ:

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath”

The Bible paints a vivid picture of the life that is ruled by the carnal mind. It is:

- Blinded (**2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:4; 1 Corinthians 2:14**)
- Corrupted (**1 Timothy 6:5**)
- Deceived (**2 Corinthians 11:3; Titus 1:15**)
- Depraved (**2 Timothy 3:8; Romans 1:28**)
- Futile – (**Ephesians 4:17; Romans 1:21**)
- Ignorant (**Ephesians 4:18**)
- Foolish (**1 Corinthians 3:19-21**)

The product of this carnal mentality, says Paul, is death. This is not only death in its ultimate expression (eternal separation from God), but in its spiritual effect right now. Outside of Christ, man’s mind (the thoughts of his heart) is without spiritual life. It is hostile to God (8:7). It cannot be brought into subjection to God – for it is rebellious (8:7). Those controlled by this way of thinking cannot please God or be acceptable to him (8:8).

The Message phrases **Romans 8:5-8** in Eugene Peterson’s distinctive prose, casting a clear light on Paul’s description of the carnal mind:

“Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn’t pleased at being ignored.”

The spiritual mind

The walk in the Spirit, however, gives us a totally new viewpoint on life and a whole new mode of thinking. For those who have been set free into new life in the Spirit, our way of thinking produces life and peace (8:6) As Paul describes it so beautifully in **Philippians 4:7-8**:

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

Our new “mind” involves four aspects:

A new focus

Our mind is now set on what the Spirit desires. Jesus Christ has become the focus of our life (**Colossians 3:1-2; Hebrews 12:2; Psalm 27:4**).

A new concept

The Holy Spirit imparts a whole new way of thinking. With Jesus as the central figure in our thoughts, we now see things the way he sees them. As Paul says in **Colossians 1:9**, in the beautiful translation of J. B. Phillips:

“We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding.”

A new source of knowledge

The knowledge that is feeding our minds is now coming directly from God. Whereas before we could only receive knowledge by means of the five physical senses (we learnt from what we saw and heard and smelled and tasted and touched), now we have a new source of knowledge – coming to us from God Himself, via the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Peter is a good example of this. When the disciples were asked by the Lord who they thought he was, Peter blurted out, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” Jesus told him, “This was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (**Matthew 16:15-17**).

A new vision

God’s wonderful future plan for those who love him is revealed to us by the Spirit. Paul describes this in **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**:

“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began...as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

Note Paul’s description of the carnal mind as not being able to please God (**8:8**). In **Hebrews 11:6**, we discover the one ingredient that attracts the pleasure of God – faith. When we place **Romans 8:8** and **Hebrews 11:6** side by side, we discover that the most important attribute lacking in the carnal mind is faith. Conversely, the principal attribute of the spiritual mind – that which brings great pleasure to God – is faith.

The Mind Transformed

Again, we are free to choose which “mind” controls our lives. Just a short time after Peter received direct revelation from God concerning the divine nature of Jesus Christ, he allowed his natural thinking to take over again. For when Jesus was sharing with his disciples about his death and resurrection, which would take place shortly, Peter took the Lord aside and rebuked him, declaring that what he was saying would never happen! This time Jesus said to him, “you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”! (**Matthew 16:21-23**).

Walking in the Spirit means living a life in which the mind of the Spirit, that now is ours in Christ, is in control. So Paul exhorts us in many of his letters to be “made new” in our minds – or to be “renewed” in our thinking (**Ephesians 4:23; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8**). For, as he says in **Colossians 3:10**:

“you...have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”