

ROMANS

Part 16: “What It Means to Be Saved”

Romans 8:1–11

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Sunday, May 15, 2022 (Easter Season)

Scripture Reading

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, 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. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:1–11).

Introduction

Throughout our journey in Romans, I have compared the composition of this New Testament letter to the composition of a grand symphony. Romans is a symphony of multiple movements and multiple themes.

For example, in the early part of the letter, Paul has told us of the cosmic crisis that faces all of humanity, in which we are all inescapably estranged from God. Then, once we witnessed the radical inability of the righteousness of man, we beheld the triumph of the righteousness of God. We learned that we are made righteous, not by the achievement of our good works, but, by trusting in the sufficiency of Christ’s work on our behalf.

Paul has shown us the theme of justification—the truth that all who believe been declared righteous in Christ by grace. And he has shown us the theme of sanctification—the truth concerning the grace-filled process through which the Holy Spirit causes us become who God has already declared us to be in Christ. We have been reminded how challenging it is to wrestle with the power of sin and how we are utterly hopeless to do so in our own strength.

And now, like the sun rising over a dark mountain of impossibility, Romans 8 breaks forth like a burst of light! All of the movements and motions—threads and themes—throughout this letter suddenly come together in a climactic crescendo of glory!

Here, Paul will bring together many of the truths that he has been building until this point to show us the wondrous reality of *“What It Means to Be Saved.”*

Exposition

1.) Redemption Is Accomplished

You may think that everyone around you has it all together. But, as a pastor, I have the privilege of walking alongside people in some of the most challenging times of their lives. And from the vantage point of that experience, let me tell you a secret: we are all vulnerable, we all face crushing insecurity, we all feel at times like a failure, we all are susceptible to the self-defeating power of shame, and we all are in desperate need of forgiveness and grace.

These experiences are true of all people. These experiences are true of all Christians.

But when life around you feels out of control, and you are tempted toward anxiety and anger; when you feel convicted of sin and hypocrisy, and you want to run away from God and hide; you need to remember that there is a massively crucial difference between what we *feel* and what is *real*.

You may *feel* like a failure. You may *feel* hopeless. You may *feel* unworthy and unlovable. But that is only what you feel. This is what is *real*: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, 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”* (Rom 8:1–4).

What Paul has described is not a hypothetical possibility—it is a *declared reality* for all those in Christ; for those who have been united to Christ.

You have been declared righteous. You have been declared free. You have been declared redeemed. And here’s the thing: that which has been declared cannot be earned. It can only be received and believed.

Does this mean that once you become a Christian should we expect smooth sailing? Unfortunately, no. As long as we are on this side of eternity, we will still be deceived by sin. We will stumble, we will fail, and we will grieve over our sin. Along with Paul, we will cry out, *“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Rom 7:24). But we will not be alone in this experience, and we will not be without hope.

There was once a young man named Jerome who felt overwhelmed by his constant failure, even to the point of despair. He would sin, and then, as soon as he sinned, he would feel an almost demonic temptation toward self-loathing and self-hatred. Jerome felt like Satan was accusing his conscience of all the ways he failed and that it was more than he could bear. So, he wrote a letter to his pastor, in which he openly confessed his failures and his shame.

His pastor happened to be a man by the name of Martin Luther, the great protestant reformer. Luther wrote back to his parishioner. In his letter, he told Jerome, when Satan accuses you of your sin and guilt, don't argue with him. Tell him he is right. And then laugh at him.

To quote Luther directly, *“Laugh your adversary to scorn and ask who it is with whom you are talking... This devil is conquered by mocking and despising him, not by resisting and arguing with him... When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!’”*

When Christ hung on the cross and, with his last breath, declared, *“It is finished!”* He meant what he said. We do not work to achieve our own salvation. We rest in Christ's work, by which our redemption is accomplished.

So, today, if you are in Christ,

*Where there was once condemnation, now, there is justification.
Where there was there was once bondage; now, there is freedom.
Where there was once impossibility with the flesh; now, there is now triumph in Christ who came in the flesh and, for us, the possibility of new life in the Spirit.*

That leads us to our second point.

2.) New Life is Possible

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not take on our humanity, live a righteous life, die a substitutionary death, and rise again so that we might be forgiven and then live according to the desires of the sinful flesh. We have delivered from the dominion of sin—sin is no longer our lord! Therefore, we are called to live according to the desires of a new Lord—the Holy Spirit.

Look at the next few verses from our reading today: *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the*

flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom 8:5–8).

When God calls us, he is not only calling us to a redeemed life in eternity. He is calling us to a redeemed life in the present. He has invited us into a new way of life that is only possible because Jesus rose again, and the Holy Spirit lives within us.

And there is a crucial distinction I want you to understand on this point. We cannot achieve this new life through our merit. Nevertheless, we are called to actively *pursue* and *participate* in the life Christ has claimed for us.

Let me say it another way: Justification is *passive*; sanctification is *participatory*. We are justified by passively trusting in Christ's work on our behalf. We are sanctified by actively cooperating with the Spirit's work within us.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13).*

Do you see how both God's work and our work are present here? *Sanctification is a work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.*¹ Yet, it is a work in which we actively participate.

In Romans 8, the Apostle tells us *how* participate in sanctification. We are to actively resist walking according to the flesh by restraining the habit of setting our minds on the flesh. Instead, we are to actively pursue walking according to the Spirit by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.

I know that is a bit like ancient and theological language, so let me try to break it down.

What are the things you are setting your mind on? What are the sources that are forming the horizons of your imagination? Are those things and sources causing your hope and affection for Christ to grow, or are they inflaming your heart to desire, meditate on, and pursue other things?

If you are constantly comparing yourself to others on social media, you are setting your mind on clothing and wealth, comfort, and popularity. And you will begin to lose a sense of passion for what it means to pursue humility, holiness, and the treasure that is in heaven.

If you are constantly watching cable news and listening to political punditry, you are setting your mind on the kings and kingdoms of this world. And you will begin to place

¹ See WSC 35.

your hope and your passion in the kings and kingdoms of this world, instead of the one Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

If you are constantly exposing yourself to oversexualized media that celebrates lust and sin, you are setting your mind on the things of the flesh. Your mind will be drawn toward lust, and you will justify sin and think less of Christ. For it is the pure in heart who are blessed to see God (Matt 5:8).

So you do need to be discerning about the voices you listen to and things you watch. The forms of media we engage in are not only informing or entertaining us. They are forming us. They are providing characters and scenery of our imagination. And they are prescribing identity to us.

But here is the really good news for Christian believers: *"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom 8:9a).*

This means sometimes we can act like we are in the flesh; we can even live according to the flesh and set our mind on the things of the flesh. But we are not *in the flesh*. For the Christian's truest identity is in the Spirit.

I have three boys who live at home. Their ages are six, eight, and ten. It is a really fun stage of life, in which they are best buddies, and they play together all the time. Sometimes they pretend to be superheroes, ninja warriors, and wrestlers. Sometimes when they act like this, things get out of hand. They might go from a pretend battle into a real battle if they are not careful.

But here's the thing. Even though they might act like warriors, they are not warriors. They are my children. And there are times they need to be reminded of their true identity.

If you are a Christian, what are the ways you need to remind yourself—to set your mind on the crucial truth—that your truest identity is in Christ?

But praise be to God that your identity in Christ is not something you earn. It is not something you achieve. It is not an identity that is based on your feelings. It is not a state contingent upon your subjective experience.

Your identity is in Christ because the Spirit of God dwells in you. And that leads us to our final point.

3.) The Spirit of God Dwells Within You

Let's read the final verses of our passage: *"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:9b–11).*

This is a beyond astonishing claim.

During Paul's lifetime, in the Jewish mindset, God was considered holy and untouchable. In the Greek mindset, the gods were considered spiritual, and matter was considered intrinsically evil.

So, for the glorious, immortal, omnipotent God to live not just *among* but *within* his people would have been considered radical, scandalous, and awe-inspiring.

But how can a holy God dwell within an unholy people? The answer is, if you are in Christ, *you are no longer unholy*. Christ's redeeming power is greater than your most enduring sin. You have died with Christ in baptism; you will be united with him in resurrection; and the same Holy Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead lives within you!

This must not be a casual thought in your mind. The same Spirit that hovered over the waters of chaos at the dawn of creation, the same Spirit that filled the temple of Solomon with so much glory the priests could not stand, the same Spirit that moved in and spoke through the prophets of old, the same Spirit that empowered Peter and the Apostles, as they declared the gospel on the day of Pentecost—that same Holy Spirit dwells within you!

The Holy Spirit that resurrected Christ from the grave can bring life out of your death. For nothing is impossible for this God.

Conclusion

But what if I sin? You may ask. Well, you will sin. And the Spirit of God will convict you (cf. John 16:8–11). But, if you are in Christ, he will never condemn you. And that legal distinction between *conviction* and *condemnation* is vital for you to understand.

In a court of law, "*conviction*" means that the accused has been pronounced guilty of his or her crime. However, "*condemnation*" would be what we typically refer to as the *sentencing*, wherein the guilty person is rendered a just punishment for his or her crimes.

So too, when we sin, the Holy Spirit will convict us. He will reveal how we have transgressed in our thoughts, words, and actions. He will confront us about the sinful things we have done and the righteous things we have left undone. He will show us how we have not loved God with our whole hearts and failed to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But the Holy Spirit will not condemn us. Why? Because the Judge of the living and the dead has stepped into the place of the accused. He has committed to pay for the crimes of the guilty. He has endured the requirement of law even unto the point of death on our behalf. And he has risen again for our justification.

There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus because *there is no more condemnation left*. Christ has already borne our condemnation that we might receive justification.

There is a moment in John chapter 8 that tells a story of the life of Jesus that I have always found deeply moving.² In the story, Jesus is at odds with the religious teachers of his day. They are scandalized by his apparent love for tax collectors, prostitutes, and the unclean. They despise Jesus growing popularity, and they desperately want to delegitimize his ministry. So, they come up with a rather cruel test.

The teachers bring a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery before him, and they ask him to pronounce judgment upon her. Conveniently, the other party in this adultery (presumably a man) is nowhere to be found.

Now, this is a trap for Jesus. If he simply lets her go, he would seem to have a low view of justice. He would seem like he is not taking the words of the Old Testament law seriously, which would give the religious leaders all the reason they needed to write him off and turn others against Jesus. However, if he condemns her according to the law, the punishment she deserves is death by stoning. In condemning her to death, he would alienate himself from the very people who seem to be most drawn to him.

What Jesus does next defies everyone's expectations. He kneels down and draws in the dirt. The leaders continue to press and pester him for an answer. They want him to render judgment. They have stones in their hands, and they are ready to bludgeon this woman to death.

But instead, Jesus gives them a directive. He tells them that the person without sin must be the first person to cast the first stone. And one by one, beginning from the eldest to the youngest, the men walk away in frustrated conviction.

Now, only one person remains with the woman caught in adultery. Who is this one person? He is the only person who truly has no sin; the only one who would be truly entitled to cast judgment and condemnation and death upon her. In fact, he is the living incarnation of the Holy God who wrote the words of the law, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" (Exod 20:14).

But rather than judging her, Jesus asks her, "*Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?*" She says, "*No, my Lord. Not one.*" To which Jesus replies, "*Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more.*"

² Note the earliest manuscripts of John do not include John 7:53–8:11. Thus, it is possible that this passage should not be considered a part of Scripture. However, even many those who deny the canonicity of this section consider this passage to be derived from an early orally transmitted tradition concerning Jesus that seems rather consistent with the character of Christ presented elsewhere within the four canonical gospels. Thus, while many New Testament scholars may debate the veracity of this passage, I believe it is still a helpful and, indeed, moving illustration of the grace of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus frees her, not to a life of sin, but a life of righteousness. And he withholds her penalty of death because he plans to take that penalty on himself.

The death of Christ is the death of condemnation for all who trust in Christ—this is what it means to be saved.

So, today, if you have been saved, rest in this truth and rejoice. Shame has been defeated, you have been forgiven, and the Spirit of God dwells within you to give you new life!

And, if you are yet to be saved, if you have yet to trust in Christ and follow him, why not today? Why not here? Why not now? May you hear the Spirit of God call you to salvation, forgiveness, and grace.

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Community

- 1.) Read Romans 8:1–4. Notice that these are all declarative sentences. What are the truths being declared here?
- 2.) Read Romans 8:5–9. Notice the link between walking according to the flesh (or Spirit) and setting your mind on the things of the flesh (or Spirit). Related to this point, what are the things you are setting your mind on? What are the sources that are forming the horizons of your imagination? Are those things and sources causing your hope and affection for Christ to grow, or are they inflaming your heart to desire, meditate on, and pursue other things?
- 3.) Read Romans 8:10–11. Consider what it means for the Spirit of God to dwell within us. Why should we be amazed at this thought? What are the implications of this truth?
- 4.) In his sermon on Romans 8:1–11, Pastor David taught that the Spirit of God will *convict* you (see John 16:8–11), but he will not *condemn* you. What is the difference between conviction and condemnation, and why is it important to understand this distinction?