

GOD WITH US

Part 10: EARLY LETTERS

Message 14 – Romans Growing as a Child of God Romans 6 - 8

Introduction

Forgiveness of *all* my sins, past, present and future! Made right with God, by an act of His love and mercy. That's amazing grace. That's how a person becomes a child of God. But what about growing as a child of God? What about change, about becoming more like Christ? Romans 6-8 is the most comprehensive discussion of the doctrine of SANCTIFICATION (the process by which God "cleanses us" and "grows us" as His forgiven children) found anywhere in the N.T. "Justification" deals with our release from sin's penalty (Romans 1-5). "Sanctification" deals with our release from sin's power (6-8). Thus, this is an important section for every child of God on the journey toward spiritual maturity.

No longer slaves to sin: 6:1-23

When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, He not only paid the *penalty for sin*, but He also broke the *power of sin* over our lives. Thus, God's grace does not give us a free ticket to sin . . . it gives us a new power to say 'NO' to sin's demands on our lives.

"Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives . . . We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin . . . So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus" (6:1-4,6,11).

There has been a change in the power structure of my life. My "operating system" runs differently now. My ability to overcome sin and to live a life pleasing to God has gone to a whole new level. I was a slave to sin before the Holy Spirit entered my life; but once

He is my new master, I can say NO to the temptations of sin and YES to the promptings of the Holy Spirit Who lives in me.

“Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace . . . Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living” (6:12-15,17-18).

So many amazing transactions happened at the CROSS that are hard to comprehend! Christ died FOR our SINS; but He also died so that we could “die” TO THE POWER OF SIN. In a sense, we were BURIED (BAPTISED) into His DEATH, and we were RAISED WITH HIM TO A NEW LIFE where the SIN NO LONGER HAS POWER OVER US. As a result, I can now say “No” to sin, and “Yes” to God. I can “use my whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.” Now, I am free to live as a slave to God. I can wake up each day and say a simple prayer to God: “Here I am, my Father, my Master. I am available to be used for your purposes. Take my mind, my heart, my eyes, my hands, my feet, my stuff . . . and let’s do LIFE together and I desire to do Your will today.”

Still fighting a battle within: 7:1-25

Romans 7 and Galatians 5 both make it clear that there will still be an ongoing battle inside of us between the old sin nature and the Spirit Who dwells in us. In Romans 7, Paul uses himself as the example, describing how he struggled to overcome old sin patterns. But before Paul gets into his own personal struggle with sin, and the solution (walking in the power of the Spirit, ch.8), he reminds us that simply “trying harder and harder” to obey a Law code is not the way to victory over sin.

The Law is not the answer: 7:1-13

“So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were

controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit” (7:4-6).

That last line is a good summary of Romans chapters 7 and 8. There are two ways to try to grow as a believer: The *wrong* way is to take God’s Law and try to obey it in our OWN STRENGTH. The *right* way, the new way, is to let God come and live inside of us, and cooperate with God to produce a godly life from the inside out.

Picking up a self-help book is often our go-to method when we’re trying to change something in our character. While these books might have helpful ideas, they usually rely on the concepts of will power, or positive thinking to help us achieve our goals. God’s way is different, in that He is not asking us rely on our own strength and take up a new discipline gleaned from a book of rules. He is asking us to walk “in the new way of the Spirit” – the Spirit-directed, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-led life. Paul will discuss this in more detail in ch.8. But for now, ask yourself this simple question: Am I trying to bring about changes in my character and conduct in my own efforts, without relying on the power of God’s indwelling Spirit to help me? Am I trying to obey “the letter of the law” – a list of do’s and don’t’s – rather than trying to “keep in step with the Holy Spirit?”

The war inside of me: 7:7-25

Paul next describes the very real struggle with sin that every believer faces, especially when we try to follow God’s laws *in our own strength* (which is Paul’s focus here). The Law of God, instead of serving as a tool to sanctify us, serves as a mirror to show us our sin and our need for God’s help (7:7-13). Paul describes how his sin nature kept defeating him as he tried harder and harder to obey God’s laws.

“So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want

to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me” (7:14-23).

Even as a child of God, I have a sin nature that wants to rise up and control me and make me do *the opposite of what the Law (the Word of God) says*. Paul concludes this self-reflective section with a cry for help:

“Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:24).

They say that “misery loves company.” How does it make you feel to know that the apostle Paul often “did the very things he hated to do?” When you feel like you are alone in your struggle to overcome negative, self-destructive patterns, read Romans 7 – to see that you are NOT alone in this struggle, that it is very normal. Then, it is also important to continue reading on into Romans 8 – where Paul describes the path to prevail that he found so necessary for his own growth. Let Romans 7 comfort you. Let Romans 8 give you hope!

No Condemnation: 8:1-4

Jesus Christ paid the penalty for my sins. But how does He help me gain victory over the ongoing power of sin? The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit is the main subject of Romans 8. But before Paul gets to that, he reminds us that even as we struggle to overcome sin, we will *never be condemned by our Father!*

“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The Law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins” (8:1-3).

Because Christ took the full condemnation for our sin, we can take comfort and courage to live without shame before God and others. We always need to be reminded of our security in Christ, especially after a Romans 7 kind of day! We will have times of defeat; nevertheless, we must move forward with the strong assurance that God's love for us never changes. Our status with God *never changes*. We are secure in His amazing love for us. AND, we can be sure He has placed within us *the power to prevail*.

Whenever you hear the condemning, mocking voice of your own conscience, or the master of condemnation, the Evil One, open your Bible to Romans 8 and read the first few verses. Read also 1John 2:1,2. And for further encouragement, read Zechariah 3:1-5. As a child of God, you can be sure that your heavenly Father will 'discipline' and 'train' you; but He will NEVER, EVER CONDEMN YOU (because He placed ALL condemnation on His beloved Son). We need to receive these assuring words, especially on our worst days!

Walking in the Power of the Spirit: 8:5-17

“Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you

received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children" (8:5-16).

Paul refers to the Holy Spirit 14 times in 13 verses. How do we gain victory over sin? We walk in submission to His Spirit, seeking to allow the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and empower us every day. We can't please God in our own strength. We can only please Him by walking in submission to His Spirit. (This was Paul's message in Galatians 5:16-25, a key parallel passage to Romans 7&8.)

This means that the Christian life is primarily a life of *surrender*. We are to constantly yield to the guidance, the voice, and the power of the Holy Spirit Who lives inside of us. The Christian life is not a life of will-power; it is a life of Spirit-power. "*Letting the Spirit control your mind leads to a life of peace*" (8:6).

One key point about the doctrine of sanctification: The deeper you allow sanctification to work, the more effective it is. The 1st and foremost step is a willingness to pay attention to yourself being guided by the Holy Spirit. Let's say you find in yourself a repetitive sin problem (Paul mentioned the sin of coveting in his own life). If you just say: "I will stop coveting," that doesn't work very well. If, however, you ask the Holy Spirit to show you the roots of your sin pattern, then you can begin the process to gain freedom over that repetitive pattern (deep sanctification).

Here are the kinds of questions I have been learning to ask, about repetitive sins that the HOLY SPIRIT is setting me free from.

"LORD- Why did I just react? What button in me did this just push? Why is that sensitive spot, that wound there inside of me? Where did that wound begin? Have I adopted some sort of lie about myself that still runs through my head? What vow did I make, and strategy have I adopted to protect myself? What TRUTHS from GOD'S WORD can I memorize so that the HOLY SPIRIT can continually remind and empower me, as I WALK IN STEP WITH HIS PROMPTINGS?"

These sorts of 'beneath the iceberg' questions help me to see the roots of my sin patterns. When I take the truth of Romans 6 (that I have 'died' to my old self, and I have begun a new journey of freedom in Christ) and I pay attention to my actions and reactions (Romans 7) and I live in the 'NO CONDEMNATION' and 'LOVE OF GOD' (Romans 8), this is deep sanctification that really changes my life . . . and my actions. This is God's way to pursue spiritual growth (sanctification.)

Note: For additional comments on what it means to walk in the power of the Spirit, refer to pages 1200-1204 of this commentary: Message 2 – Galatians: In Defense of the Walking in the Spirit; Galatians 5-6.

Final Destination: 8:18-25

Salvation comes to us as a package deal with three parts: Justification, Sanctification and Glorification. Each aspect of salvation deals with our sin problem in a different way.

Justification: I am saved from sin's penalty.

Sanctification: I am being saved from sin's power.

Glorification: I will be saved from sin's presence.

Justification and glorification happen at a single point in time. They are instantaneous. Sanctification, on the other hand, is *progressive*. It occurs during the interval between justification and glorification; between the moment a person says "Yes" to Jesus, and the moment Jesus calls that person home forever. Glorification is God's endgame with us. He wants to bring us back to where we belong-forever with Him in His Glory. This is what Paul writes about next.

"Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us" (8:18-23).

God has bought us for Himself, through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has declared us to be His own. He is working to purify us from sin's pollution and power in our lives. He is making us new people. He wants to show us off to the world and, ultimately, to take us home to be with Him forever. Glorification is what the entire

creation is longing for, not just humans. This is God's promise to us: One day, we will be back with Him in a world where there is no sin!

Does the certainty of eternal glory bring hope and assurance to your life? Someone once said: You're not ready to live until you're ready to die. I think there is truth in that statement. The hope of eternal glory did much to undergird Paul in the midst of the battles in this life. "The sufferings now are not worthy to be compared with the glory that comes later" (8:18). Take a moment to listen to the song, "I Can Only Imagine". It will change your perspective on whatever you are going through!

On the journey: 8:26-30

As Romans 8 moves toward a conclusion, Paul says that there are some things we can be sure of as we journey with God toward our final home.

1. Never alone. We have a Helper every step of the way. I will not take one single step of this journey alone.

"In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will" (8:26,27).

In every weakness, the Holy Spirit will be with us to make us stronger. As an example, Paul takes the issue of prayer. We often don't know exactly how God wants us to pray about things. So the Holy Spirit will help us. The Holy Spirit will intercept our thoughts and concerns and He will begin to intercede for us with groanings too deep for words (literally, "wordless groanings"). The Father knows exactly what the Spirit is groaning about. So, when you don't know what to pray, pray anyway!

2. No mistakes. God will take everything this journey throws at me and weave it together FOR GOOD results – to make me more like Jesus. No matter what I face, it can only ultimately make me more like Jesus. Genesis 1:26,27 describes how God created human beings "*in His IMAGE*" or "*LIKENESS*". As we walk through life and its many situations, God is re-creating us into the image (likeness) of His Son, Jesus.

“We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. We know this because God knew them in advance, and he decided in advance that they would be conformed to the image of his Son. That way his Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters” (8:28, 29).

3. Finished work. God promises to FINISH the work He has started in us. He does not do things halfway. God will glorify all those He justifies. He never gives up on me!

“Those who God decided in advance would be conformed to his Son, he also called. Those whom he called, he also made righteous. Those whom he made righteous, he also glorified” (8:30).

4. Secure in Christ. The same God Who gave us His Son, will be on our side, to the finish line.

“So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He didn’t spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all. Won’t He also freely give us all things with Him? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect people? It is God who acquits them. Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus Who died, even more, Who was raised, and Who also is at God’s right side. It is Christ Jesus Who also pleads our case for us” (8:31-34).

5. No separation. Nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God, that we now stand in.

“Who will separate us from Christ’s love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written: We are being put to death all day long for your sake. We are treated like sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the One who loved us. I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created” (8:35-39).

This book of Romans began in ch.1 saying that my fundamental problem was separation from God. Now, it comes to this mountaintop where it says I can *never be separated from God again*. In case I might question if *I can separate myself* from God’s love,

remember that each one of us is “a created thing” or being, and Paul wrote that *no created thing can separated us from God’s love*. Jesus declared in the Gospel of John 10:27-30, that His sheep are secure in His and His Father’s hands, and no one can snatch them out. They are secure for eternity. Romans echoes the same message: God has bridged that separation permanently through Jesus. I am now reconciled to God. I am a forgiven sinner in the process of change and on a journey toward glory. And nothing can ever take that away from me, or take me from God’s strong and loving purpose and grip. This is truly amazing grace! Take time to thank God, and honor Him with your life.

No wonder Paul was so eager, so unashamed, so obligated to take this message to his whole world. No wonder he wanted to give everyone a chance to hear. He knew he had the news that was “the power of salvation” (1:16) for all who would accept it, Jew or Greek, young or old, male or female, slave or free.