

lesson nine  
AUGUST 21-28

## Freedom in **Christ**

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*“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).*



Rom. 8:9

## Introduction

# *How Do You Plead?*

I used to get excited when I got mail. Nowadays though it's almost always bills, and I'm not so eager to open them. In fact, I dislike bills so much that I usually let my wife open any mail I get; and I can judge by her reaction as to just how big the bill is. So when she gave a groan and handed me the letter, I knew it was bad. From the moment my eyes glanced upon the header, I knew I was in trouble. The logo of the Western Australia Police Department was proudly emblazoned at the top of the page.

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**There could be no doubt. The evidence had been provided.**

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My mind immediately started to process the situation. It wasn't me! Can I deny it? Maybe it was a mistake. I don't break the law! I'm a good Christian! As I unfolded the rest of the infringement, my heart sunk. There, plain for all to see, was my car in a photo. There could be no doubt. The evidence has been provided.

Romans 8 tells us that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. As I read this text, I felt a sense of perspective. It didn't matter in the scheme of things. God still loves me and forgives me. I'd pay the fine, and life would move on. Well, that is what my self-justifying nature clung to. However, as I read on, I learned that we "are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Rom. 8:9, NIV).

When we submit to the Spirit of God, we experience a change in our lives that manifests itself in real and tangible ways. Through the journey of life, we experience spiritual highs and lows, often influenced by periods of intense worship. We soar through the highs and then wonder what happened when we scrape through the lows. Often the lows come when we lose focus on the Spirit of God and wander off on our own, with results quite like when Eve wandered away from Adam and encountered the devil alone.

As we study this week's lesson, we need to examine ourselves and determine whether we're being controlled by our sinful natures or by the Spirit of God. Do we spend more time lamenting lack of time for ourselves, planning our career path through life, or partying like there's no tomorrow? Or do we submit ourselves to God and follow His will for our lives? Are we too busy to listen for the words and will of the Spirit?

***“In Christ” Makes All the Difference (John 3:16–21; Rom. 8:1–5; Phil. 2:5–11)***

Paul’s resounding statement that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, NIV) is the best news there is. The person who lives in Christ is considered innocent and therefore judged not guilty. The good news is that God has a solution for a person who “inevitably gets stuck in the mud of sin and only spins the wheels in deeper when law comes along.”<sup>1</sup>

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**The law has no power to get humanity out of the mess in which it finds itself.**

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The law has no power to get humanity out of the mess in which it finds itself. The solution is provided by the God of love who sent His own Son to earth with the same human life that others use for sin. Jesus, however, lived a flawless life while living in our humanity. His unique life on this earth—facing temptation without giving in to sin—was a living denunciation of sin. In His death on the cross, He paid for our sins. God the Father used Jesus (who was simultaneously divine) to defeat evil.

***Testing. Testing. One, Two, Three? (Rom. 8:5; Eccles. 2:1–11)***

As a king, Solomon had at his disposal wealth, power, and knowledge. He surrounded himself with pleasures of the flesh so that he “might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life” (Eccles. 2:3, NRSV).

Despite an exhaustive search of all the pleasures and fantasies available to a king, Solomon came to the conclusion that more is required than is available “under the sun.” Something else was required not of this earth.

King Solomon, recorded as the wisest human being to ever live, discovered that fulfilling the desires of the flesh was as satisfying as swallowing a mouthful of air (verse 11).

***A New Bias in the Spirit (Rom. 8:6–8; Ezek. 36:26–28)***

Humanity has a terrible bias toward sin. It’s as if we can think only of what we want. This bias is against God and wants nothing to do with His law. Paul makes it clear that this bias leads to alienation from God, destruction of others and self, and ultimately death.

However, when a believer takes a stand in Christ, there is something that happens that gives that person a new bias, a new direction of life and peace.

This is true power that goes beyond even the written law of God. The Holy Spirit directs us to God and His law.

This is consistent with the prophetic vision of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, who saw the era of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God’ ” (Ezek. 36:26–28, NIV).

### ***The Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:9–13; John 14:15–27; Eph. 1:13, 14)***

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life brings true life, energy, and power. When the Spirit lives in us, Christ is also present (Rom. 8:9, 10), as indeed we understand from John that the Father is present. All the resources of heaven are made available to the humble believer. When the Holy Spirit lives in a believer, spiritual deadness is banished, and vitality and life become a reality. Indeed, we cannot be a follower of Christ unless the Spirit of Christ lives in us. The indwelling presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit is the birthright of all believers and a sign of their redeemed status, a guarantee of their inheritance of eternal life.

Sin still causes physical death. But this is not the end of the story. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, so believers can be certain of their own resurrection.

### ***Living in God’s Family (Rom. 8:13–17; Gal. 4:6)***

Paul describes an opportunity to become intimate with God the Father through the Spirit of adoption. When we accept God’s Holy Spirit, we become His children, and He becomes our Father.

As children of God, we are able to come to Him in an intimate and confident way, calling Him our “Abba.” “Abba” is a transliteration of the Aramaic term for *father*, implying great familiarity and intimacy.

Sin seeks to enslave through fear and separation from God. Believers, however, receive the Holy Spirit and thus are able to draw nearer to a loving Father, “as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (verse 17, NKJV).

## **REACT**

1. According to this lesson, what should you do the next time your own desires conflict with God will?

2. List all the ways your desires might conflict with God’s, and ask Him to help you grow by following His desires for your life.

3. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit letting you know that you are God’s child?

4. What promises do you find for the Christian in Romans 8:16? How do these promises speak to your faith?

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1. John C. Brunt, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, Romans* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1996), p. 156.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

## Testimony *Where Is the Power?*

Rom. 8:14

“It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. . . . Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

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### “Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.”

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“The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.”<sup>2</sup>

“‘When He [the Spirit of truth] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.’ . . . Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life.”<sup>3</sup>

“The redeemed will be welcomed to the home that Jesus is preparing for them. . . . Every sinful tendency, every imperfection, that afflicts them here has been removed by the blood of Christ. . . . They are without fault before the great white throne, sharing the dignity and the privileges of the angels. . . . And there is joy in heaven in the presence of God and the holy angels over one soul redeemed, a joy that is expressed in songs of holy triumph.”<sup>4</sup>

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1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 18.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 671, 672.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 126.

Rom. 8:1, 2

## Evidence

# No Condemnation

The early church exploded with growth and experienced times of persecution (Acts 2; 8:1–3; 12:1) and peace (Acts 9:31). It encountered heresies and open sin (Rom. 16:17). Paul experienced many of these issues firsthand. Divisions (1 Cor. 1:10), immorality (1 Cor. 5:1, 2), and lawsuits between believers (1 Cor. 6:1) were but a few of the issues. Thus, he writes to encourage the church in Rome and to outline the importance of life and faith in Christ. Because there was ongoing confusion over the role of the law, Paul seeks to clarify the role of the Holy Spirit.

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**[Many] people feel that . . . you can do whatever you want, ask forgiveness, and still be saved.**

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The law condemns us. Because it is holy (Rom. 7:12), it shows that we are guilty of disobeying its precepts and are therefore worthy of death. Earlier, some Jewish converts were purporting that converted Gentiles observe a Judaist form of Christianity by keeping all the laws, including circumcision (Acts 15:5). For the Gentiles to hear that the law condemned them to death if they disobeyed it was *not* good news. After having written other letters to some of the other new churches, Paul now writes to the Romans to emphasize what freedom in Christ really means.

Therefore, his leading statement in Romans 8:1, 2, is indeed good news to this young church. The message that those “in Christ,” through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are changed from the inside to become new beings, freed from the penalty of sin (death), heirs of the promises, and children of God (Rom. 8:16, 17) is encouraging.

Today, however, people feel that freedom in Christ means you don’t really have to change your way of life. You can do whatever you want, ask forgiveness, and still be saved. Others teeter between this view and that of having to be “good enough” on their own, hoping that sufficient “good deeds” will earn them entrance to heaven.

Romans 8 is equally good news for us. Paul explains that Jesus has paid the ultimate price for sin (Rom. 8:3). His death (the price of our sin) can be imparted to us if we believe and accept Him. That, however, is not the end of it. If we are truly connected to Christ (Rom. 8:12, 13) and work at maintaining that connection, our mindset will be changed (Rom. 8:8–10), our characters will be modified, and we will be transformed both here and for eternity (Rom. 8:11), no longer bound by this body of sin (Rom. 8:13)! This, indeed, is good news for all and true freedom!

# We Are the Temple of God

Gal. 5:19–23

We often hear that our bodies are the temple of God. Romans 8:9 teaches us that the spirit of God dwells in us. When we pollute our bodies with alcohol, drugs, or other inhibiting factors, we lose our ability to differentiate between right and wrong.

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## Have a daily relationship with Jesus. Let Him be your best Friend.

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Paul encourages us to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh. He refers to a lifestyle that encourages others to be Christ's children. We are to be "dead" to the body but alive to the Spirit. Many times the Bible discusses such a situation. Read John 6:63, 1 Timothy 5:6, and 1 Peter 2:11.

How can we be alive in the Spirit? How should His presence affect our daily lives? Below are some ideas.

*Focus (Phil. 4:8).* You might want to be dressed in the most fashionable clothes, have the coolest car, or want to be a member of the popular crowd. These desires cannot only cause us to fall but also create jealousies, which can cause others to fall. Focus instead on the Holy Spirit and His fruit. Read Galatians 5:22, 23. These are all qualities Christ displayed when He was here on earth. He is our inspiration.

*Pray (Col. 4:2).* Have a daily relationship with Jesus. Let Him be your best Friend. As with your other friends, spend quality time talking with Him and listening to Him. One of the great things about Jesus is that He understands everything and will always care about you. He won't leave unless you ask Him to. When we spend time with people, we pick up their habits and actions. So when we spend time with Jesus, we will become like Him.

*Study (Ps. 119:15, 16).* The more time you spend learning about your friends, the better the chance that the friendship will last. God's Word needs to be a part of our lives, obvious in all that we do and say. God gave us the Bible so we could understand His personality.

### REACT

1. What can you do if your family doesn't understand your desire to live in the Spirit?
2. How do you explain living in the Spirit to a friend who has little or no knowledge of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God?

John 4:13;  
Rom. 8:6Opinion  
*Keep Focused on God*

To achieve a goal, it is important to stay focused. What we focus on has a dramatic influence on the decisions we make. Obstacles will arise, hazards will present themselves, but it is essential to stay focused on what we hope to achieve if we hope to be successful.

What is most important to you? What consumes your thoughts during the day? What occupies your dreams at night? Is it spiritual things or your own self-

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### To want is not the problem.

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ish desires? The things you focus on act like a ship's rudder. Your thoughts steer your life in the direction of their focus.

Read Romans 8:6. To have our minds and lives focused on physical things is death. This is a blunt statement, to say the least, but the rest of the text reads, "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" (NKJV). That is good news. *Life and peace are achievable if we are spiritually minded.* So we have a very clear choice to make. Do we want life, or do we want death? Do we want life more abundant and full or a life that continuously chases the next selfish thing only to replace it in a few months with the next fad?

To want is not the problem. It is necessary to want. The issue is, what do we want for? Do we want for the things of the world, or do we want for a closer relationship with our redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ?

In chasing our selfish desires for the world, we receive small satisfactions; but we are continually moving on, looking for the next cheap thrill. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:13, 14, NKJV). Jesus says that if we drink what He is offering, our desires will be satisfied. Maybe by drinking this water we can refocus our lives on the things that will bring life and peace.

Try to stay focused on spiritual things in order to steer your life away from the world and toward the life and peace of Jesus Christ.

### **REACT**

1. What things in life are steering you away from a closer relationship with Jesus?
  2. How can we be spiritually minded?
  3. What is the water Jesus offers?
  4. How can you drink this water that Jesus is offering?
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## Exploration Freedom Fighters

John 8:36

### CONCLUDE

The Jews were confused. They were being offered freedom from legal bondage, and they didn't know how to handle it. Instead of accepting the good news Paul brought them, their solution was to blend a mix of new and old—Christ's salvation plus a few good old Jewish laws. They fought against Paul's assurance that Christ's sacrifice had set them free from "the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2, NASB). Because of Christ, we are not imprisoned by the necessity to earn our salvation by following a list of rules. We, too, have been set free.

### CONSIDER

- Flying a kite and contemplating how the kite symbolizes our freedom in Christ.
- Offering freedom to someone else by volunteering for a program that helps to free people, whether it's from domestic violence, drugs, religious intolerance, illiteracy, or a life without Christ.
- Listening to Michael W. Smith's *Freedom* album.
- Reading about other freedom fighters in the Bible, about when people were reluctant to accept the gift of freedom, such as the stories of Noah, the Israelites in Egypt, and others.
- Explaining to someone the difference between the freedom that Christ offers and the world's definition of personal freedom. If we are free indeed, why can't we do whatever we want?
- Taking photos of anything that symbolizes the freedom you experience because of your relationship with Christ. Share your shots with a friend, explaining their significance.
- Building an altar and offering God your tendency to hold on to worldly freedom. Accept His gift of true freedom in Christ.
- Spending an hour or two with your legs shackled. Consider how the Jews allowed old laws to hobble their faith.

### CONNECT

Colossians 2:6–10.

Morris Venden, "Lawrence and Christina," in *Modern Parables* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 70–73.