**Be Free**

Romans 8:1-4 (part 2)

Here is our summary for this short series, ***The Invitation***.

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| **God’s Astounding offer of Eternal Life in Jesus Christ:** |
| * Be Forgiven (v. 1)
* Be Free (v. 2)
* Be Filled (v. 3-8)
* Be Fruitful (v. 9-11)
* Be Family (v. 12-17)
 | “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.” Romans 8:1-2 |

We are walking through the first part of ***Romans 8*** to see the five free gifts God offers us in the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. **And all of them are available in Christ Himself**. The place where there is no condemnation is ***IN CHRIST JESUS***. The place where we find freedom from the law of sin and death is in Christ Jesus. The way we experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit is by being united with Jesus. The only way to be fruitful in this life is in and through Jesus. And the only means by which you can be adopted into the family of God is by first being united with Jesus.

At first glance ***it may seem like the gospel is just about the forgiveness of sins***. And that is certainly central to the offer! But having your sins paid for and washed away just opens the door into a relationship with God IN Christ Jesus. And there, **in Christ, you will find EVERY spiritual blessing**. Love, joy, peace, power, fulfillment, acceptance, security - everything.

Let’s be reminded - and remind others - that the good news is far better than any of us can fully appreciate, because ***it is wrapped up in the PERSON of the Lord Jesus Christ***. To know Him and be united with Him in relationship is to become one with God, with the Creator, with the Sovereign Ruler over all things. We can’t begin to totally comprehend all this means - which is why we will need eternity to really know, love and serve Him!

Last week we saw the invitation to be forgiven. You can trust in yourself and what you can do or **trust in what God has DONE for you in Jesus Christ**. Today we will see that one of the wonderful things God has done for us in Christ is to set us free from sin and death. Today we are going to delve more into the PROBLEM - the bad news. We saw last week the STRUGGLE we all have since there is good and bad inside of us. And the REALITY that we all sin and fall short of God’s standard. This morning we are going to do a bad news/ good news thing to be sure we fully understand how good the good news really is.

First notice what the apostle Paul says ***we are FREE FROM***: he calls these two things **a LAW**. Not two laws - but a single law - “the law of sin and death.” This takes us back to the book of Genesis.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it ***you shall surely die***.” Genesis 2:16-17

There in the Garden of Eden God provided every kind of plant - all the fruits and vegetables for Adam and Eve to enjoy. There were no carnivores so even the lions and tigers and bears ate only plants. But there was **one tree that was off limits** - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And look at the warning. “In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.”

Adam and Eve had no concept of death. ***Nothing in the Garden died.*** Everything flourished and existed in perfect harmony. But look what happened as soon as they took a bite of that forbidden fruit.

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” Genesis 3:7

By the grace of God, ***Adam and Eve did not drop dead right then and there***. But something very bad did happen. ***The law of sin and death was activated.***

The couple didn’t die physically right then, but **they DID die spiritually in that exact moment**. The sign of that spiritual, internal death is presented in Genesis 3:7 - their eyes were opened. Suddenly they experienced exactly what the tree was called - the knowledge of good and evil. And to know that experientially was to suddenly know GUILT and SHAME. They felt exposed. They covered themselves up, ran away and hid.

***Their innocence was dead. And so was their freedom.*** Ironically, the serpent tempted them with the illusion of freedom and autonomy - and by exercising “free will,” they surrendered it. In place of the freedom of shalom in the original creation, the law of sin and death took over. Because where there is sin, death is the result.

The word Paul uses in Romans 8 is “the flesh.”

“Weakened by the flesh… in the likeness of sinful flesh… he condemned sin in the flesh… who walk not according to the flesh.” Romans 8:3-4

Four times in two verses we see this reference to flesh. ***It’s the Bible word for our sinful nature*** - the self-centered, **rebellious corruption inside us** that we inherited from Adam. We got our human DNA from Adam and Eve - but along with these human bodies we got this virus, this deep, internal twistedness called the flesh.

Before we can appreciate the redemption Jesus accomplished to set us free from the law of sin and death, we have to first understand **the controlling power of sin**. The Bible describes our condition apart from Jesus as blind, lost, enslaved and dead. Not very flattering. Let’s look at the ***BAD NEWS*** first, then we can appreciate the good news of what Jesus freed us from! 

 Listen to these **Biblical descriptions**:

* “the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers.”
* “No one understands; no one seeks after God.”
* “Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”
* “You were dead in your trespasses and sins.”

Did you catch that? **You were IN sin**. That was your position, the condition of your heart. You were stuck in the selfish desires of your sinful flesh, and you were blind to that reality - which means you thought you were fine. But you were not fine - you were spiritually dead and therefore deserving the judgment and condemnation of God. Ephesians 2 goes on to say that ***“like everyone else on earth we were by nature objects of WRATH.”***

Think of your heart as a **bowl of oatmeal**. Some people think of sins as bad choices - like little pieces of GRAVEL you drop into the oatmeal. They are unfortunate, and you certainly don’t want to eat them - but you think to yourself, “***It’s just a little lie***, I can get around it later. I can make up for it and take that out here soon.” Or “It’s just a little glance here and there - not really affecting me or anyone else.” Or “Sure, I worry about things, but doesn’t everyone? Is it really that big a deal? Just a little piece of gravel. Shouldn’t be there, of course, but how much does it really hurt? I can always take it out later.”

Do you see the problem with this thinking? I’m not a huge fan of oatmeal personally, but to most people ***this analogy means your HEART is basically GOOD***. This would work better for me if it was a bowl of Peanut Butter Captain Crunch. But that would be a hardship for the health nuts in the room, so I’m trying to work with you all here.

This is the common understanding today in our culture - that people are basically good, they just make bad choices once in a while. But we shouldn’t be judgmental and define people by one or two poor decisions here or there.

***But is that the way the Bible describes people?*** Does that fit your own personal experience and observation of others?

Here is a better way to think about sin in Biblical terms. Sin is not just bad choices we make. It’s baked into us - infused into the makeup of our hearts and minds and lives. So it’s more like **a whole container of SALT** that is dumped into the bowl of oatmeal and stirred in real good.

One or two pieces of gravel - you might still eat the oatmeal. ***But who wants a bite of this now?*** Who thinks this meal can be salvaged? We know how salt operates - once it is mixed in, you can’t get it out. It bonds chemically with the oatmeal. You can’t get it out.

Do you see the point? Sin is not just something outside of you that you sometimes stumble into. ***Sin is something INSIDE you*** - inside your FLESH - that you have to deal with every second of every day. It’s called the LAW of sin and death. And it’s been operative in every human being since Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s law. Look at Romans 5.

**The Bad News:**

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” Rom. 5:19

Since Adam and Eve chose to sin, **every human has been born IN ADAM** - with a nature that is sinful. By that one man’s disobedience, all of us were MADE sinners. Sin was baked into our hearts and minds and flesh. And where there is sin, death always follows.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Rom. 5:12

And so ***the LAW of sin and death was placed into human hearts***. Paul sums it up in Romans 5 as the **dominion** of sin and death.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“Death reigned through that one man… Sin reigned in death…” Rom. 5:17,21

Quite the lovely co-regents there: ***sin and death***. Imagine the **Grim Reaper** with his black cloak and skeletal hands, symbolizing death. In his hand is the sharp sickle by which he strikes people dead and claims them for the grave. That sickle is the weapon of SIN. “The wages of sin is death.” ***Everyone who sins BELONGS to death.*** The Grim Reaper has a rightful claim on them. Thankfully, that is not the end of the story!

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“As **in Adam** all die so also **in Christ** shall all be made alive.” 1 Cor. 15:22

We will get to the good news shortly. Are you feeling the reality of the bad news?

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“As **in Adam** all die so also **in Christ** shall all be made alive.” 1 Cor. 15:22

* Blind
* Lost
* Slaves
* Dead

Before the doctor can prescribe treatment, you have to ***diagnose the disease***. Before the general can map out a strategy to defeat the enemy, you have to ***know the enemy’s strength*** and position. Our disease of sin is deeply embedded and severe. Our enemy is well established both inside us and around us. In Adam, people are blind, lost, enslaved and dead.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

* **Blind** - unable to **See** the truth

“They became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Rom. 1:21

Romans 1 describes the whirlpool of sin that leads to death. Though people know there is a God, they suppress that truth by their own unrighteousness - and by refusing to worship the Creator, refusing to give thanks and praise to Him, the result is that their thinking is confused and their hearts become dark - more and more unable to see and understand what is true about God and themselves.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

* **Lost** - unable to **Find** God

**“**For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Titus 3:3

We were led astray by our own sinful desires, making us foolish and rebellious. We were LOST - not knowing where we were or how to get out of our situation. The result: we became slaves.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

* **Slaves** - unable to consistently **Do** what is right

“God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.” Rom. 1:28-29

Three times in Romans 1 ***people EXCHANGE God and truth*** for the world and for lies. And three times ***God GIVES THEM OVER to their sinful desires***. This is the final one and notice the result: They are FILLED with all manner of wickedness. Doesn’t that describe modern America? Romans 1 reads like a recent news report.

What other result could there be for people who are filled to the brim with this kind of corruption?

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

* **Dead** - unable to **Change** spiritually

“Desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” James 1:15

***Where does temptation come from?*** James makes it clear it does not come from God! He is altogether holy and righteous and good! Then where does temptation come from? It comes from our own selfish, sinful hearts. “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own evil desires.” **Desire is CONCEIVED** - that first tiny desire gets embedded in the lining of your sinful heart. That little covetous, lusting zygote grows and multiplies in your heart and mind until it gives birth to the actual SIN. Then sin is like this greasy monster that grows and grows from baby size to full grown grizzly bear size - and the sin monster does the only thing it can do: destroy.

If you came to Christ a long time ago, these descriptions may seem very distant to you. But try to remember how lost and confused you were. Try to remember how stuck you were in your own selfishness. **Pick your deadly sin: pride, sloth, gluttony, lust, greed, envy, wrath.** They like to team up. Probably you had two or three battling it out inside you. Lust and envy eventually teamed up with pride to produce a very destructive sin-monster in my later teen years.

***I wanted attention and affirmation from everyone*** - parents, teachers, church leaders, and especially girls. I lusted for attention. And I was desperately jealous of others who got the kind of attention I wanted, especially from girls. Later in my teen years, when I developed some confidence, pride happily joined the party along with lust and envy and then I felt entitled to all the attention I could get.

Apart from Jesus, people are **in Adam**:

“As **in Adam** all die so also **in Christ** shall all be made alive.” 1 Cor. 15:22

* Blind
* Lost
* Slaves
* Dead

In my early teen years, ***I was blind and lost*** - struggling to figure out what was going on in me and around me. In my later teen years, I knew full well what was going on, but still struggled with leftover bad habits and ingrained patterns from when I was a full-blown slave to my sin. I tried and tried to change and do better and live differently. But I mostly tried on my own, apart from Jesus - relying on my own willpower and ability, which is just another expression of the flesh called PRIDE.

So that sin monster was still there in the background of my “Christian marriage,” and my “Christian ministry.” It was restrained and hidden away. But it would come out every so often in the form of selfishness, jealousy of the success of others or pride in my ministry “achievements.”

I look back and ***I’m so thankful for the grace God gave me*** - first and foremost in Jesus, of course. But a close second for me was Kristin. God knew that I needed a strong, godly, patient woman who would walk with me through my immaturity in dealing with my sin and who would not tolerate what I pretty much considered “reasonable, periodic failure.” I was better than most guys I knew so my standards were not as high as they should have been. God protected us in a number of ways from the destruction that sin was aiming for. John Owen reminds us that sin always aims for the highest levels.

“Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head.” John Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin*

***The aim of every sin is death.*** The greatest lie of the devil is the one he used in the garden and still uses today, “You will not surely die.” It’s a lie. Every sin kills some part of you and would destroy all of you if given its way. There is no “little sin.”

Ok, can we move on from the bad news? ***Are you ready for the good news?*** Thanks be to God, at every point that sin would destroy us, Jesus is there to save and redeem and transform us. Hallelujah, thank you Jesus!

**The Good News:**

* In Jesus you can have:
	+ **Clarity** - understanding of the **Truth**

“The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Rom. 8:2

For the believer in Jesus, there is a new LAW that takes over from the law of sin and death: the law of the Spirit of life. The first gift of this new gospel law is CLARITY. ***Finally, you see.*** Finally you understand the truth about God and yourself. Look at 2 Cor. 4.

* In Jesus you can have:
	+ **Clarity** - understanding of the **Truth**

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Cor. 4:6

What a gospel gift! The devil blinds the minds of unbelievers so they can’t see how good and merciful Jesus is. But that veil is lifted as spiritual scales fall from your eyes just as they did for Saul the pharisee. Just as Jesus healed several people who were physically blind, he saved hundreds, even thousands of people who were spiritually blind.

And every time a blind sinner suddenly sees the truth about Jesus it is ***a miracle of God’s CREATIVE grace***. Just as God said, “Let there be light,” and the work of creation began, so God must say, ***“Let there be sight”*** for a sinner to repent and believe in Jesus. Wesley called this prevenient grace. Calvin called it regenerative grace. They agreed wholeheartedly that it was a necessary work of God to prepare the heart of a blind sinner and move them to repent and believe. Listen to 1 Corinthians 2.

* + **Clarity** - understanding of the **Truth**

“These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God… Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” 1 Cor. 2:10,12

Here Paul is contrasting the natural person who is still in Adam with the spiritual person who is in Christ and under the new law of the Spirit of life.

* + **Clarity** - understanding of the **Truth**

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one… But we have the mind of Christ.” 1 Cor. 2:14-16

Did you catch that? **The natural person** who is under the dominion of the law of sin and death is NOT ABLE to understand spiritual truths. But the spiritual person - under the law of the Spirit of life - is able to judge and discern all things BECAUSE **we have the MIND of Christ.**

The Law of the Spirit of life connects us with ***the wisdom and perception of King Jesus***. By being united with Jesus in faith we are united with His mind, His thoughts, His very Spirit. The light of the knowledge of Jesus fills us, and the blindness of the flesh, the confusion of Adam is increasingly driven out like shadows when you turn on the light.

* In Jesus you can have:
	+ **Direction** - constant internal **Guidance**

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” John 14:26

What a promise from the Lord Jesus! The disciples freaked out that Jesus was leaving them. But he assured them over and over again that ***it was BETTER for them that he leave so the Holy Spirit could come***. Jesus could only be in one place at a time, so he could only be with a small number of people. But the Holy Spirit can fill and guide and strengthen every single Christian all at the same time, everywhere!

He teaches us and reminds us of all Jesus taught and helps us understand what it means and apply it to our lives!

* In Jesus you can have:
	+ **Direction** - constant internal **Guidance**

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” John 16:13

***This is “the law of the Spirit of life.”*** It is the new governing power in the heart and life of the believer in Jesus. The gifts of Jesus are a package deal. You can’t have Jesus’ salvation and refuse His Spirit. They come all together or not at all. That’s why it’s a silly distinction to think you can have Jesus as Savior now and Lord later. Jesus is Savior and Lord - all at once, unified, inseparable. If He is not your Lord then He is not your Savior - don’t kid yourself.

***The Holy Spirit is a constant internal presence***, a comforter and helper, a guide. His voice is the one that warns you when you stray into something dangerous or tempting. His voice is the one that encourages you when you have an opportunity to love or serve or share the gospel with someone.

Remember, **the Holy Spirit is a PERSON**, not a force. As much as I like Star Wars, George got this one wrong. The Holy Spirit is not just the power of Jesus, He brings us into the very presence of Jesus. Look at this part of Romans 8.

* + **Direction** - constant internal **Guidance**

“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.” Romans 8:9-10

Three times in two verses we hear about the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of GOD, the Spirit of Christ and just Christ Himself being in us. This is a great example of the Three-ness and One-ness of God. Which is it? Three or one? Yes.

So, the reason you have clarity and guidance once you are united with Jesus by faith is that **in Christ you have GOD**. The Spirit of God who fills your heart is the fullness of the Godhead, living in you. So, it’s not just clarity and direction, it’s love, joy, peace, power, purpose - EVERYTHING. Ephesians 3 describes us as being “filled with all the fullness of God.” So, let’s press on. Two more:

**The Good News:**

* In **Jesus**, you can have:
	+ **Freedom** - from the **Controlling** power of sin

“The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Rom. 8:2

Before you gave your life to Jesus you were under the law of sin and death. That was the controlling power in your life. ***Sin reigned over you.*** You were a slave to your own selfish, sinful desires. And so was I. We all were.

But, at the moment of your salvation, a new law took over for you - the law of the Spirit of life. Now your sinful desires are not your master anymore, Jesus is your master.

**Imagine yourself in a prison cell**, chained to the wall, with the cell door closed and locked. The warden of that prison is your master, and every order he shouts at you, you must obey. You are under his authority.

But then ***a hero comes into that prison***, defeats the warden, and throws open your prison door. He breaks the chains off of you and takes your hand to guide you out of the cold, dark, oppressive dungeon into the sunshine and fresh air of a whole new life.

If you belong to Jesus by faith, then ***the Great Hero has rescued you from the dungeon of your sin*** and brought you out into the freedom of His Kingdom. You are no longer a slave to your sin. It used to be your master, but that is a master who has been dethroned. As Pastor Colin Smith has said so well:

“Sin is no longer your master, but it is still your enemy.” Pastor Colin Smith

That old slave master, that old prison warden will still shout in your ear. He will still come after you to intimidate and deceive you. But if you ever feel that you CANNOT stop, or you CANNOT change, or you CANNOT do something you know the Holy Spirit is leading you to do - ***you can know for sure that is the voice of your flesh***, the voice of your old master. That used to be true, but in Christ, it is not true anymore. A new law now operates in your life. You now live under the rule of King Jesus. And sin does not reign in His kingdom. He does.

* In **Jesus**, you can have:
	+ **Freedom** - from the **Controlling** power of sin

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you… But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” Rom. 8:9-10

Brother, sister - hear this truth from God’s word. You are no longer IN the flesh, but now you are in the new reality of the Spirit, which means Jesus Christ lives in you. “The body of sin” - the old YOU has been crucified with Christ. And now the Spirit of God gives life to the new you.

In Christ we have clarity, guidance, freedom and:

**The Good News:**

* In **Jesus**, you can have:
	+ **Life** - new **Desires** and ability to serve God

“He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Rom. 8:11

You were DEAD in your sins, but God raised you up with Jesus from the grave. And that same power of the resurrection operates in you now, through the Holy Spirit who lives in you. He gives LIFE and love and power and wisdom - and everything else we need to serve and honor God.

More could be said, but here is the summary:

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| **The Bad News:** | **The Good News:** |
| Apart from Jesus, people are in **Adam**:* **Blind**
* **Lost**
* **Slaves**
* **Dead**
 | In **Jesus**, you can have:* **Clarity**
* **Direction**
* **Freedom**
* **Life**
 |

***Notice that key word “can.”*** Jesus has all of those things and every other spiritual blessing. We CAN have them - but that doesn’t mean you definitely WILL have them. That requires faith, discipline, obedience, support, encouragement, humility and more.

Unfortunately, ***we CAN fall back into our old ways*** of thinking and acting. We can revert to the old patterns of our flesh. We can become blind and lost and re-enslaved to old addictions and habits. We can live again like those who belong to that old master.

But in Christ, that is not possible for long. With the Holy Spirit we should walk in the newness of life. Come back next week to see how we can walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the next section of Romans 8.

“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.” Romans 8:3-4

That’s your preview of next week. We’ve seen the first two gifts God offers us in Christ - forgiveness and freedom. Next week we look at the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Who can you invite to process this incredibly good news with us?

Let’s pray.