

Freedom *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rom. 8:1–17.*

Memory Text: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (*Romans 8:1*).

Romans 8 is Paul’s answer to Romans 7. In Romans 7 Paul speaks of frustration, failure, and condemnation; in Romans 8 the condemnation is gone, replaced with freedom and victory through Jesus Christ.

Paul was saying in Romans 7 that if you refuse to accept Jesus Christ, the wretched experience of Romans 7 will be yours. You will be slaves to sin, unable to do what you choose to do. In Romans 8 he says that Christ Jesus offers you deliverance from sin and the freedom to do the good that you want to do but your flesh won’t allow.

Paul continues, explaining that this freedom was purchased at infinite cost. Christ the Son of God took on humanity, the only way He could relate to us, could be our perfect example, and could become the substitute who died in our stead. He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (*vs. 3*). As a result, the righteous requirements of the law can be fulfilled in us (*vs. 4*). In other words, Christ made victory over sin, as well as meeting the positive requirements of the law, possible.

Because of space limitations, we will cover only the first 17 verses of Romans 8. As time allows, read the rest of the chapter, which is filled with wonderful assurances of God’s love. These verses powerfully point us to the hope we should have as people who are “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (*vs. 37*) and who, out of that love, “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (*vs. 32*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.*

Freedom From Condemnation

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). What does “no condemnation” mean? No condemnation from what? And why is this such good news?

“In Christ Jesus” is a common phrase in the Pauline writings. For a person to be “in” Christ Jesus means that he or she has accepted Christ as his or her Savior. The person trusts Him implicitly and has decided to make Christ’s way of life his or her own way. The result is a close personal union with Christ.

“In Christ Jesus” is contrasted with “in the flesh.” It also is contrasted with the experience detailed in chapter 7, where Paul describes the person under conviction before his or her surrender to Christ as carnal, meaning that he or she is a slave to sin. The person is under condemnation of death (*vss. 11, 13, 24*). He or she serves the “law of sin” (*vss. 23, 25*). This person is in a terrible state of wretchedness (*vs. 24*).

But when the person surrenders to Jesus, an immediate change is wrought in his or her standing with God. Formerly condemned as a lawbreaker, that person now stands perfect in the sight of God, stands as if he or she had never sinned, because the righteousness of Jesus Christ completely covers that person. There is no more condemnation, not because the person is faultless, sinless, or worthy of eternal life (he or she is not!), but because Jesus’ perfect life record stands in the person’s stead; thus, there is no condemnation.

But the good news doesn’t end there.

What frees a person from slavery to sin? *Rom. 8:2.*

“The law of the Spirit of life” here means Christ’s plan for saving humanity, in contrast with “the law of sin and death,” which was described in chapter 7 as the law by which sin ruled, the end of which was death. Christ’s law instead brings life and freedom.

“Every soul that refuses to give himself to God is under the control of another power. He is not his own. He may talk of freedom, but he is in the most abject slavery. . . . While he flatters himself that he is following the dictates of his own judgment, he obeys the will of the prince of darkness. Christ came to break the shackles of sin-slavery from the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466. Are you a slave, or are you free in Christ? How can you know for sure?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 8:1*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Outline the means by which Christ frees us from the condemnation of sin and leads us to become children of God through life in His Spirit.

Feel: Describe the feeling that causes us to cry “Abba, Father” (*Rom. 8:15*), as well as how and through whom it comes about.

Do: Share in the sufferings of Christ, as well as in His glory.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Free From Condemnation

A When Christ became our sin offering, the righteous requirements of the law were met. Not only are we justified, but as we submit to His Spirit, our minds and bodies are controlled by Him. What does it mean to be fully under the control of Christ, mind and body and spirit?

B What does the Spirit do that enables us to live as God’s children?

II. Feel: Abba, Father

A Not only does the Spirit make our minds and bodies over to be Christlike rather than sinful, He remodels our relationships into those of sons and daughters of God, with an intimacy that cries out in recognition of our close connection to Him. What hope does this recognition give us when we come to God after having fallen away?

B Using the intimate relationships with which you are familiar, what might you expect an intimate relationship with God to feel like?

III. Do: The Suffering and the Glory

A Those who are intimate share both suffering and happy times. In what ways do we share in the reproaches and self-denial of Christ?

B How are we more than conquerors through Christ in the midst of our suffering and trials?

▶ **Summary:** When we die with Christ, we are raised to live as Christ lived, and so we live as children of God, controlled by the Spirit.

What the Law Could Not Do

However good, the “law” (the ceremonial law, the moral law, or even both) cannot do for us what we need the most, and that is to provide the means of salvation, a means of saving us from the condemnation and death that sin brings. For that, we need Jesus.

Read Romans 8:3, 4. **What did Christ do that the law, by its very nature, cannot do?**

God provided a remedy by “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and He “condemned sin in the flesh.” The incarnation of Christ was an important step in the plan of salvation. It is proper to exalt the Cross, but in the outworking of the plan of salvation, Christ’s life “in the likeness of sinful flesh” was extremely important, too.

As a result of what God has done in sending Christ, it is now possible for us to meet the righteous requirement of the law; that is, to do the right things that the law requires. “Under the law” (*Rom. 6:14*), this was impossible; “in Christ” it is now possible.

Yet, we must remember that doing what the law requires doesn’t mean keeping the law well enough to earn salvation. That’s not an option—never was. It means simply living the life that God enables us to live; it means a life of obedience, one in which we have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (*Gal. 5:24, NKJV*), a life in which we reflect the character of Christ.

“Walk” in verse 4 is an idiomatic expression signifying “to conduct oneself.” The word *flesh* here denotes the unregenerate person, whether before or after conviction. To walk after the flesh is to be controlled by selfish desires. In contrast, to walk after the Spirit is to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. Only through the help of the Holy Spirit can we meet this requirement. Only in Christ Jesus is there freedom to do what the law requires. Apart from Christ, there is no such freedom. The one who is enslaved to sin finds it impossible to do the good he or she chooses to do (*see Rom. 7:15, 18*).

How well are you keeping the law? Putting aside any notions of earning salvation by the law, is your life one in which the “righteousness of the law” is fulfilled? If not, why not? What kind of lame excuses are you using to rationalize your behavior?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **No amount of human effort can provide the peace and freedom that Christ offers us through the agency of His Spirit.**

When a prisoner receives an executive pardon, there is a period of time between the declaration of the pardon and the actual release. After release there is a period of adjustment in which the prisoner begins the transition from jailed felon to restored citizen. During this period the felon relearns the ways and skills of being free. In cases of parole, most jurisdictions appoint an officer to assist the former felon in making the choices that will safeguard against a return to crime and ensure a satisfactory adjustment to freedom.

We have spent hours studying the process by which God, our Eternal Executive, brought about freedom. We have reviewed God's declaration and the sacrifice that makes this pardon possible. We have considered erroneous interpretations of the divine-justice system. We even have explored the struggle that the felon has undergone. Now it is time not merely to *declare* the prisoner free but actually *set* the prisoner free. We focus our attention on how the person imprisoned in spiritual death shakes off the shackles and discovers eternal life.

Activity:

Option A: If you know someone who has been imprisoned and is open to discussing the experience, interview that person beforehand and then open class with the interview. Restrict the discussion to the person's experience of confinement (loss of family contact; having a daily dictated routine; bad/inadequate food, medical services, and such; being restricted to a small space; and so on), avoiding a discussion of the specific reason for the incarceration so as to protect the person's privacy. Consider former felons, or even prisoners of war. Have him or her contrast the confinement with their current freedom.

Consider This: What happens to a person in confinement? What liberties are restricted? How does this person's experience help us to understand the ways in which sin confines and binds us?

Option B: Have members make individual lists of things that restrict their freedom (such as finances, physical handicaps, poor health, time commitments).

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Flesh Versus Spirit

“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5, 6). Dwell on these texts. What basic message comes through from them? What do they say to you about how you are living your life?

“After,” here, is used in the sense of “according to” (Greek *kata*). “Mind” here means “to set the mind on.” One group of people sets its mind on fulfilling natural desires; the other sets its mind on the things of the Spirit, to follow His dictates. Because the mind determines actions, the two groups live and act differently.

What is the carnal mind unable to do? Rom. 8:7, 8.

To have one’s mind set on fulfilling the desires of the flesh is, in reality, to be in a state of enmity against God. One whose mind is thus set is unconcerned about doing the will of God. He or she even may be in rebellion against Him, openly flouting His law.

Paul wishes especially to emphasize that, apart from Christ, it is impossible to keep the law of God. Again and again Paul returns to this theme: no matter how hard one tries, apart from Christ one cannot obey the law.

Paul’s special purpose was to persuade the Jews that they needed more than their Torah (law). By their conduct they had shown that, in spite of having the divine revelation, they were guilty of the same sins of which the Gentiles were guilty (*Romans 2*). The lesson of all this was that they needed the Messiah. Without Him they would be slaves of sin, unable to escape its dominion.

This was Paul’s answer to those Jews who couldn’t understand why what God had given them in the Old Testament was no longer enough for salvation. Paul admitted that what they had been doing was all good, but they also needed to accept the Messiah who had now come.

Look at your past 24 hours. Were your deeds of the Spirit or of the flesh? What does your answer tell you about yourself? If of the flesh, what changes must you make, and how can you make them?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Ask class members to project how their lives might be different if they were free from the impediment.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Caiaphas the high priest once proclaimed that it was best that one man die for the nation. He was thinking only about politics, not salvation; but the irony is that Jesus' death provided salvation for Israel, and the Bible writers saw it in a spiritual sense that Caiaphas never intended. Similarly, we can look back at Janis Joplin's mantra in her song "Me and Bobby McGee," which says that "freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose," and see truth that she probably never realized. In the original context, this lyric is an expression of despair, but for the Christian, it is a statement of fact. Freedom truly means that we have nothing left to lose. We have been emptied of self and therefore can experience no further loss. Ironically, it is the acknowledgment of this emptiness that allows the Holy Spirit to fill us and give us peace and freedom. Having lost all in Christ, we are finally free. Our central question then becomes "How can I experience the freedom Jesus freely offers?"

Bible Commentary

I. Freedom From Condemnation (*Review Romans 8:1–6 with your class.*)

News flash—there is no longer condemnation for those who live in Jesus. But who are those people? Here Paul introduces a key metaphor that is replayed throughout the first half of the chapter. Those who are in Jesus are those who walk after the Spirit, rather than after the flesh. English Reformer William Tyndale, cited in John Stott's *Romans*, wrote in 1526: "Now go to, reader. . . . Remember that Christ made not this atonement, that thou shouldest anger God again; neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them; neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return (as a swine) unto thine old puddle again; but that thou shouldest be a new creature and live a new life after the will of God and not of the flesh."—John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 182. The flesh stands as a metaphor for our life apart from Christ. It pictures the totality of life apart from God—the sum of our desires, interests, pursuits, and passions. The "flesh" covers every aspect of our self-focused, self-centered lives (not merely our sexual dimensions, as with some Victorian interpretations).

The Spirit is just the opposite, representing the emptied self filled with

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The Spirit in Us

Paul continues his theme, contrasting the two possibilities that people face in how they live: either according to the Spirit—that is, the Holy Spirit of God, which is promised to us—or according to their sinful and carnal nature. One leads to eternal life, the other to eternal death. There is no middle ground. Or, as Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). It’s hard to get plainer, or more black and white, than that.

Read Romans 8:9–14. What is promised to those who surrender themselves fully to Christ?

The life “in the flesh” is contrasted with life “in the Spirit.” The life “in the Spirit” is controlled by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. He is in this chapter called the Spirit of Christ, perhaps in the sense that He is a representative of Christ, and through Him Christ dwells in the believer (*vss. 9, 10*).

In these verses, Paul returns to a figure he used in Romans 6:1–11. Figuratively, in baptism “the body of sin,” that is, the body that served sin, is destroyed. The “old man is crucified with him” (*vs. 6*). But, as in baptism, there is not only a burial but also a resurrection, so the person baptized rises to walk in the newness of life. This means to put to death the old self, a choice that we have to, of ourselves, make day by day, moment by moment. God does not destroy human freedom. Even after the old man of sin is destroyed, it still is possible to sin. To the Colossians Paul wrote, “Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth” (*Col. 3:5*).

Thus, after conversion there still will be a struggle against sin. The difference is that the person whom the Spirit indwells now has divine power for victory. Furthermore, because the person has been so miraculously freed from the slave master of sin, he or she is obligated never to serve sin again.

Dwell on this idea that the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, is the same one dwelling in us, if we allow Him to. Think about the power that is there for us! What keeps us from availing ourselves of it as we should?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

God. The Spirit-filled person desires a new life that is defined by God’s standard of righteousness as revealed in Scripture. Though not yet possessing perfect character, this person is oriented by a desire to please God rather than satisfy self. Miracle of miracles, this means that what the law requires can be accomplished satisfactorily in us. We no longer “have to” beat our spouses, lie publicly, humiliate our children, cheat on taxes, murder, steal, or commit adultery! (Or gossip, slander, dominate, have our way all the time, and so on.) We are freed from that behavior in Jesus.

A key to this changed life resides in the choices we make with our mind. The Greek word *phronō*, “mind” (*Rom. 8:5*), implies more than passive thought, suggesting intent and focus. The spiritual-minded person focuses on God’s revealed will, while the flesh-dominated person accepts the *default* position of “do whatever suits me.” The first has divine purpose; the second has none. What we focus on we become. By focusing on Jesus, we become more like Him.

Consider This: How can Christians tell if they are living in the flesh or in the Spirit? What is the difference, if any, between a “flesh person” who sins and a believer who sins? What evidence exists to prove that the law can be fulfilled in us?


II. Adoption Versus Bondage (*Review Romans 8:15–17 with the class.*)

Here Paul introduces a new metaphorical pair—children versus slaves. Leaving behind the legal metaphors that dominated his earlier exposition, Paul turns to familial ones to summarize his position. Perhaps this shift signals a move from the head to the heart, as well.

Anciently both children and slaves were regular members of the household. Yet, no one would be confused about the roles each played. Children stood to inherit the family wealth, while the slaves’ role was to follow the owners’ orders.

The “flesh person” functions as a slave, doing out of fear and obligation what the law states. The believer, however, obeys the heavenly Parent out of love, seeing God’s ways as His respected desires rather than as tyrannical restrictions. Here Paul’s language mirrors his earlier letter to the Galatians in *chapter 4*, where he compares slaves and children. He rejoices (*vs. 7*) that “you are no longer a slave, but a son . . . an heir” (*NIV*).

Consider This: Is your spiritual walk a *slave walk* or an *heir walk*? Do you see God’s ways as restrictive or liberating? Why?

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Adoption Versus Bondage

How does Paul describe the new relationship in Christ? *Rom. 8:15*. What hope is found in this promise for us? How do we make it real in our lives?

The new relationship is described as freedom from fear. A slave is in bondage. He lives in a state of constant fear of his master. He stands to gain nothing from his long years of service.

Not so with the one who accepts Jesus Christ. First, he or she renders voluntary service. Second, he or she serves without fear, for “perfect love casteth out fear” (*1 John 4:18*). Third, adopted as a son or daughter, he or she becomes heir to an inheritance of infinite worth.

“The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

What gives us the assurance that God has indeed accepted us as children? *Rom. 8:16*.

The inward witness of the Spirit confirms our acceptance. While it is not safe to go merely by feeling, those who to the best of their understanding have followed the light of the Word will hear an inward authenticating voice assuring them that they have been accepted as children of God.

Indeed, Romans 8:17 tells us that we are heirs; that is, we are part of the family of God and, as heirs, as children, we receive a wonderful inheritance from our Father. We don’t earn it; it is given to us by virtue of our new status in God, a status granted to us through His grace, which has been made available to us because of the death of Jesus on our behalf.

How close are you to the Lord? Do you really know Him, or just about Him? What changes must you make in your life in order to have a closer walk with your Creator and Redeemer? What holds you back, and why?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Note that verse 2 is the only place within Romans 8 in which Paul uses first-person singular (set *me* free). This freedom was something that Paul experienced personally, not some theoretical schema that he propounded for argument’s sake. So it should be with us. We offer two options for application. If you saved your second quarter teacher’s guide, refer to the Apply section of lesson 2 (“The Power of Choice”). The sketch “The Puppet and the Wind” is based on Romans 8. (Note: That lesson is valuable as supplemental material for our current study.) The other option is described below. Either way, focus on things that set us free.

Activity: The battle for the mind is the battle for the soul. What we think about becomes who we are. Make a group list of practical methods that members use to focus on spiritual things. The list might include such things as prayer; listening to Christian music; singing, reading/memorizing scripture; nature hikes; mission trips; and sharing their faith.

Thought Questions:

- 1 If we become what we think, how can pornography advocates claim that porn is harmless?
- 2 How do we replace the tendency to focus on earthly things with a focus on spiritual things?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: The message that God’s Spirit fills us with peace and sets us free cannot be kept secret. Like the woman at the well, we are compelled to share the news. The following activity serves a double purpose, providing a visual illustration of freedom and a practical witnessing opportunity.

Activity: Purchase 100 large biodegradable balloons. Inside each balloon, insert a slip of paper with the message: *I am the heart of a balloon. Once I was tied down by fear, failure, anxiety, inadequacy, put-downs, and hang-ups; but one day a strong wind broke my strings and set me free to soar. If you want to be free, too, write me at [your address], and I’ll send you lessons on how you can be free.* Inflate the balloons with helium, tie them with string, and release them together. Recommendation: After church, have a class dinner followed by this activity.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Later English Reformers,” pp. 253–256, in *The Great Controversy*; “The Baptism,” p. 113; “At Capernaum,” pp. 253–256; “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 671, 672, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Like Unto Leaven,” pp. 95–98, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Letters to Physicians,” pp. 126–129, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“The plan of salvation does not offer believers a life free from suffering and trial this side of the kingdom. On the contrary, it calls upon them to follow Christ in the same path of self-denial and reproach. . . . It is through such trial and persecution that the character of Christ is reproduced and revealed in His people. . . . By sharing in the sufferings of Christ we are educated and disciplined and made ready to share in the glories of the hereafter.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 568, 569.

“The chain that has been let down from the throne of God is long enough to reach to the lowest depths. Christ is able to lift the most sinful out of the pit of degradation, and to place them where they will be acknowledged as children of God, heirs with Christ to an immortal inheritance.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 229.

“One honored of all heaven came to this world to stand in human nature at the head of humanity, testifying to the fallen angels and to the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds that through the divine help which has been provided, everyone may walk in the path of obedience to God’s commands. . . .

“Our ransom has been paid by our Savior. No one need be enslaved by Satan. Christ stands before us as our all-powerful helper.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 309.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read again the quotes from Ellen G. White in Friday’s study. What hope can we take from them for ourselves? More important, how can we make these promises of victory real in our own lives? Why, with so much offered us in Christ, do we keep on falling far short of what we really could be?
- 2 What are practical, daily ways you can have your mind “set . . . on the things of the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:5, RSV*). What does that mean? What does the Spirit desire? What do you watch, read, or think about that makes this difficult to achieve in your life?
- 3 Dwell more on this idea that we are either on one side or the other in the great controversy, with no middle ground. What are the implications of that stark, cold fact? How should the realization of this important truth impact how we live and the choices we make, even in the “small” things?