

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 then 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?

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?

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?

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?

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, 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 in 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?

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?

The Search: Part 1

by CREPIN AGBODEDJI

I live in the country of Benin in West Africa. My father died when I was little, so my uncle raised me. He practiced voodoo and animism and wanted nothing to do with Christianity.

When I was old enough, my uncle apprenticed me to a builder so I could learn a trade. But as I neared the end of my training, my uncle became insanely jealous of me. He threatened me and cursed me. My aunt took me to a voodoo priest to perform a ceremony to protect me, but my uncle continued to persecute me.

I told my aunt that I doubted that the voodoo had worked and pointed to my friend who had studied with me. He was a Christian, and he already had his own shop and was married. I didn't even have a job. I wondered whether attending a Christian church could help me find work. My aunt warned me that if I went to a Christian church I would lose the protection that the voodoo priest had bestowed on me.

I discovered that my uncle's son had a little New Testament that he read. And he sneaked away to attend a church on Sunday. Somehow my uncle never knew. Then my cousin became seriously ill. My aunt told me, "See what happens when you sneak away and go to church?" My cousin wasn't expected to survive, but he did. Even the doctor said it was a miracle.

About that time a man came to my uncle looking for a room to rent. My uncle rented him a room in a house far from where he lived. He told me to go live in that house as well.

I noticed that this new renter was somehow different. He was well dressed and kept his room very clean. I often heard him talking alone in his room, but I couldn't hear what he said. I also noticed that he read a lot from a certain book. I discovered that he was a Christian.



(continued next week)

Crepin Agbodedji (left) is a builder living near Cotonou, Benin.