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## Romans 8:1-4 “Freedom from Sin by the Spirit”

Intro. Chapter 7 paints a picture that is clearly the experience of every person to varying degrees. Paul describes indwelling sin as a master that all too often exerts its control over our thoughts & actions. This can even be true of a Christian, for sin is still present within us. Haven't there been times when you wanted to give up certain sins, only to find that you have committed those same sins again. It seems you are caught in an endless cycle of sin, confession, forgiveness; sin, confession, forgiveness. You may wonder if the Lord keeps on forgiving you. What you would really like is to end the cycle, and live free from sin's control.

This control over us by the sin nature is literally referred to by Paul as “the law of sin” in chapter 7, vv.23 & 25. Likewise, it is called “the law of sin and death” in v.2 of our text. The word “law” is used in this context of a controlling authority. Now in this whole context, Paul mentions different types of influences upon human behavior. In 7:22 he spoke of the law of God. It has authority over us & we should obey it. In the next verse he spoke of the law of the mind. Our mind should be in control of our behavior. Yet in that same verse he spoke of the law of sin. All too often he found that sin was in control of his life rather than the law of God, and his mind. In fact, at one time Paul felt that sin had such a control over him that he was a prisoner or slave of the “law of sin which is in my members.” He personally knew of the controlling power of sin. All too often we also find ourselves committing sin in spite of the voice of conscience, and in spite of the desires of our better self. We have experienced Paul's statement of 7:19 all too often, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

There is a clear implication in v.1 that when sin is our master, it leads to condemnation. What does he mean by “condemnation?” I believe that in this case the word does not refer to the sentence of “condemnation,” but the punishment following the sentence.<sup>1</sup> For example, suppose you commit some violation of the law & are brought before a judge. After finding you guilty, he condemns you to 100 hours of community service. In this case the condemnation is 100 hours of servitude. Even so, because we are guilty of sin against a holy God, we have been condemned to a life of servitude to sin, at least until we are set free from that terrible master.

Notice that according to the last of v.2, this slavery to sin leads to death. Just as a slave was condemned to a living death, even so slavery to sin is a form of death even while we are physically alive. And through the work of our cruel master Sin, we also face physical death, and the unbeliever faces eternal spiritual death.

Knowing this, we should join Paul in crying out as he does in the last of 7:24, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Well, I have good news for you. You can be liberated from your natural slavery to sin. Don't you want to be free from the terrible control of your sin nature, and the death that it imposes? Don't you want to have more success against sin than failure? Many even wonder if deliverance from the power of sin is possible. Yes, it is possible. I believe that if you listen and learn the meaning of my text, and follow what it teaches, you will begin to have victory over the sin nature which is in you

Let's begin as Paul does in our text today. I want you to notice first of all:

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<sup>1</sup> William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT & Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957). The *-ma* suffix supports this contention.

## I. THE PROCLAMATION OF YOUR FREEDOM FROM SIN

We have heard of the emancipation proclamation that President Lincoln signed. It declared the freedom of all slaves in Confederate States that did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863. Even so, in v.1 of our text Paul joyfully & triumphantly makes a declaration of freedom. He indicates that we have been set free from our condemnation to the slavery of sin. He says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” In the Greek Paul strongly affirms this “no condemnation.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, he declares in v.2, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” I will talk about the first part of that verse later. For now, simply focus on the fact that God has freed us from the control of sin. The verb tense (aorist) no doubt points to an accomplished fact.

Paul is not just declaring our liberty from some future penalty of sin that takes place upon our physical death. This verse is not stated in chapter 5, where he talks about the blessings of justification. Chapter 8 is in the context of the doctrine of sanctification, declaring how we can live the Christian life. He is not talking about how we can be set free from the guilt of sin, but how we can be set free from the power of sin. Furthermore, chapter 8 begins with the word “therefore” or “consequently” (*ara*). This surely points to the immediate context of chapter 7. So Paul is declaring our liberty from a present form of condemnation, namely slavery to sin that I have already described to you. For every true believer in Jesus Christ, Paul declares that you can experience victory over the control of sin if you will only claim & appropriate the freedom that you have been given. Sin is no longer your master. You no longer have to obey its voice.

Have you come to experience liberation from the power of sin? When I yielded my life to Christ at age 17 there was an immediate difference in my life. The power of sin over me was broken, and I immediately was able to quit many of the sins of my youth. Have you had a similar experience? I believe this spiritual emancipation proclamation is indeed true.

How can you claim your liberty over sin? After all, even after you become a Christian, sin is still present in your body. Its authority over you has been broken, but it remains within until you die, or until Jesus comes again. It continues to seek to control you. So how can we move the declaration of freedom into personal experience? First of all, you need to make sure you are “in Christ.” Notice there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” When you trust in Christ as your Savior, you become one with Him. You are in Christ. Paul talked about this in chapter 6. Also notice the “in Christ Jesus” in v.2. It probably modifies “has freed.” We are set free only in union with Christ. There is no reason why those who are “in Christ Jesus” should go on doing penal servitude as though they had never been pardoned and never been liberated from slavery to sin. So the question that you should answer is this, “Have you placed your faith in Christ?” That is the only way to be in Christ, and you must be in Christ in order to claim this proclamation of freedom as your own.

Secondly, we must believe what God says here through His apostle. Believe it. Act upon it. The moment you placed your faith in Christ, you were made free. Therefore live like it; stop serving sin. As Paul says back in chapter 6, v.12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” As long as you believe that you can’t resist temptation, and that you must obey sin, then you will not be free from sin’s control. But if you believe that

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<sup>2</sup> The negative is much stronger than the ordinary word used for “no” (*ou*). It is an emphatic form (*ouden*-neuter of *oudeis*), rendered even more emphatic in that it is the word used for the beginning of the sentence.

God has set you free, then you are much more likely to act upon that belief, & exercise your freedom from sin's control.

Now to strengthen your faith in this declaration of freedom, let's move on to my second main point. I want you to understand:

## II. THE POSSIBILITY OF SECURING YOUR FREEDOM FROM SIN

God says you are no longer condemned to serve sin. How is this possible? Well notice:

A. Our Freedom Does Not Come Through the Law - Paul says in v.3, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh..." The original language literally reads, "The impossible thing of the law." I believe, based on what follows, that Paul is saying that it was impossible for the law to condemn sin & set us free from its control.<sup>3</sup> Then he gives a reason why the law could not help us. He says it is because of the weakness of the flesh. In other words, the Law had to depend upon sinful human nature to carry out its precepts. The imperfect tense highlights the fact that this was an ongoing weakness. Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The law that says, "You shall not steal," is not able to prevent you from yielding to the temptation to steal. It does nothing to change our inclination toward sin. It is as impossible for the law to make any man holy as it is for a ten-foot pole to make a man ten feet tall. This weakness of the flesh of which our text speaks has made it impossible that any divine demand shall ever be fulfilled in us without the intervention of divine grace to provide the means of fulfillment.

God gave His law to Israel. Did it cause them to stop sinning? No. The law alone utterly failed at producing righteousness in the nation of Israel. And the law alone will not liberate you from the power of indwelling sin.

So do not look to the law to set you free from the control of sin. A legalistic approach to living the Christian life will not work. What, then, is the answer? How is it possible to live the Christian life free from sin's control?

B. Our Freedom Is Possible by the Work of God through His Son - The only way to live the Christian life is by the intervention of God in your life. I mentioned earlier the Emancipation Proclamation. It was not effective, for though the Federal government declared the slaves free, the Confederate government upheld their bondage. The freedom of the American slaves was only obtained by the sacrifice & shed blood of many soldiers, and the defeat of the authority that held them captive.

Even so, a declaration of freedom is not enough. In order for us to be set free from the power of sin, a greater power had to intervene. And in this text of Scripture we see that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned as working together to liberate us from the power of sin.

Notice what Paul says in v.3, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son..." God the Father knew that the only way sin could be condemned was by sending His Son to die for our sins. What a sacrifice on the part of the Father to give up His Son!

We also see from v.3 that Christ was willing to come to earth "in the likeness of sinful flesh." God sent Christ in a manner that brought him into the closest relation to sinful humanity that it was possible for Him to come without becoming Himself sinful. It should be noted that it

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<sup>3</sup> It is a nominative absolute in apposition with the divine act - "condemned sin."

does not say that He sent His own Son in the “likeness of flesh,” but in the likeness of “sinful” flesh. He was incarnate in human flesh, & in many ways He appeared to be no different than other men. There was no halo around His head. He was susceptible to pain, weariness, & sorrow. Hebrews 4:15 says He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

We also see that God sent His son “on account of sin,” or literally “concerning sin.” Likewise Gal. 1:4 says that Christ gave Himself “concerning our sins.” If we did not need to be saved from the penalty & power of sin, Christ would not have come. There would have been no need. Christ came on a mission to deal with sin.

Furthermore, notice in the last of v.3 that Christ “condemned sin in the flesh.” By the death of Christ in the flesh, God passed His sentence upon sin, viz. He broke its power over those who are in Christ and consigned it to destruction when we die or are raptured. Oh, what a wonderful day that will be when sin is done away with forever! Instead of the condemnation being upon us, Christ took our place, & bore our condemnation. But He rose again. He defeated sin & death. Now, the condemnation is not upon us, nor upon Christ, but upon sin! Sin has been condemned through the work of Jesus Christ. I believe this is the main reason why Paul says in v.1, “here is therefore now no condemnation....” When Paul says “now,” he means, “now that Christ has come.”

Oh friend, if you want to be free from sin’s condemnation & control, turn to Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for your sins. He came to set you free, and deal a death blow to the terrible master called sin. Have you placed your faith in Jesus?

But wait, there’s more! Not only has God worked through Jesus, but we also see from our text that:

C. Our Freedom Is Possible by the Work of God through His Spirit - The word “Spirit” occurs more frequently here than in any other chapter of the New Testament. It occurs 19 times! The Spirit is the agent of our salvation. Paul says in v.2, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” It is the Holy Spirit that applies the freedom secured for us by Jesus Christ. Likewise, he said in 2 Cor. 3:17, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” In v.9 we see that every born again Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So the potential for experiencing liberty from the power of sin is equally available. How, then, does the Holy Spirit free us from the control of sin?

First, we must answer the question, “What is ‘the law of the Spirit of life’?” Though some say it is a reference to the Gospel, the answer is supplied by the context. Just as the “law of sin” refers to the control of sin over us, even so the law of the Spirit refers to the control of the Spirit over us. The last of v.4 further expresses the meaning of the law of the Spirit; it is to walk dominated by the Spirit. I say that because the word translated “according to” is from a word (*kata*) that has the root idea of “down upon” and suggests domination or control. To walk according to the Spirit is to be led by the Spirit. Though the Spirit may use the written law of God to lead us, He also writes His law upon our hearts.

The Holy Spirit has not only been given to lead you into the paths of righteousness, but also to empower you to live right. The law could not give you the power to obey, but the Holy Spirit can. I believe this is indicated by the connection of the Spirit and the “life” we have “in Christ Jesus.” Spiritual death gives no power whatsoever. But there is power & energy in the life of Christ within us. In fact, it is the power of resurrection life. Paul said back in chapter 6, v.4, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Thus, by the power of that life we can experience freedom from the power of

sin. We only can live the Christian life by means of the life of Christ within that has been breathed into us by the Holy Spirit. We received this new life & the Holy Spirit when we were born again. Because of our new life in Christ, and because of the power of the Spirit within us, we can reject sin & obey God. Gal. 5:16 says, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

God has done everything that needs to be done to liberate us from the power of sin. Our responsibility is stated in the last of v.4. We are not to “walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” We are not to live under the domination & control of the sin nature. Instead, we are to live under the leading & empowerment of the Spirit. This phrase, “walk according to the Spirit,” is probably the most eloquent of all the symbols of the life of sanctification. “Walking” speaks of taking one step at a time. Sanctification is not an overnight process. Furthermore, walking suggest forward progress. It is wonderful to know that certain things are to be left behind, and that we are to stretch out to the things that lie before. Christ wants you to know Him and to walk with Him moment by moment. Furthermore, we have seen that as we walk with Christ, we are to yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit each & every day, relying upon the strength He provides.

We have seen the proclamation of our freedom from sin, and the possibility of our freedom from sin. Now I want you to understand:

### III. THE PURPOSE OF SECURING YOUR FREEDOM FROM SIN

God does not set you free from the slavery of sin that you may live as you wish. No, He sets you free that you may live righteous lives for Him. According to v.4, God sent His Son & gave His Spirit “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.” When Paul says that the law cannot set us free from the controlling power of sin, is he throwing out the law? Is he saying that Christians will live lawless lives? No! Someone said, “Freedom is not a license to do what you want, but the power to do what you should!”<sup>4</sup> In fact, we are the only ones who are truly capable of fulfilling God’s moral law. “Righteous requirement” is *dikaioma*, a regulation, requirement, commandment, that which is deemed right. It is used in Luke 1:6, Romans 2:26, & Hebrews 9:1 of the moral precepts & commandments of God’s Law. Here it may be used collectively, of the moral precepts of the law. Ezek. 36:27 gives the following prophecy, “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” The result of the giving of the Spirit is that we not only desire to live right, but that we also have the power to live right.

How do you know you are “in Christ?” How do you know that you are indwelt by the Spirit? You should be fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law. There should be a positive change in your life leading to righteousness. If not, it could be due to ignorance of what you have in Jesus Christ. Do you not know that you have been set free from the power of sin? Have you failed to act upon this wonderful news? On the other hand, if you are not living right, and if you are constantly living in defeat, repeating the same sins, then perhaps you need to be saved today.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, “God’s Heirs” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on*

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Barber, “Bulletin Inserts” in *Pulpit Helps*, page 13, September 2007.

*the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes on Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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