

Sermon for March 30, 2014 – Lent 4

Romans 8:1-10 (AAT)

Theme: God's Power For Living!

- 1) *Our sins were condemned with Christ.*
- 2) *A new spirit governs our life.*

So those who are believers in Christ Jesus can no longer be condemned.² The rule of the Spirit, who gives life, has in Christ Jesus freed you from the rule of sin that kills.³ What the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do God has done by sending His Son to be like sinful flesh and to be a sacrifice for sin. He condemned sin in the flesh⁴ so that we who don't follow the flesh but the spirit will be as righteous as the Law demands.⁵ Those who follow the flesh have their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who follow the spirit have their minds on the things of the spirit.⁶ What the flesh thinks kills; what the spirit thinks gives life and peace.⁷ This is so because the fleshly mind hates God. It refuses to obey God's Law because it can't obey it.⁸ Those who are in the flesh can't please God.⁹ You are not in the flesh but in the spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. But anyone who doesn't have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to Him.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, even though your bodies are dead because you were sinful, your spirits are alive because you are righteous.

“How do I stop sinning? I love God and believe in him. I constantly remind myself of His law, but that doesn't seem to prevent me from falling into the same sin over and over again. I feel so trapped!”

Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever felt the temptation to lust, laziness, anger, or some other sin hit you like a tidal wave that you just can't seem to avoid? And, after being swept away by strong temptation, you feel like a failure, don't you? You might wonder: “Why do I continue to sin when I believe in Jesus? Where can I find power to stop sinning and live for my Lord?”

If you have ever felt this way, you are not alone. Every Christian experiences it – even strong ones! The great apostle Paul dedicated most of Romans chapter 7 to describing how he still struggles with sin. He concluded by saying: ²⁴ *What a miserable man I am! Who will rescue me from the body that brings me to this death?* ²⁵ *Thank God — He does it through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us learn how Jesus' work for us is **God's Power for Living**. How so? Because 1) *Our sins were condemned with Christ.* 2) *A new spirit governs our life.*

Part One: Our sins were condemned with Christ.

Before telling us how to overcome temptation, God wants us to know that *those who are believers in Christ Jesus can no longer be condemned*. In other words: even though every sin deserves a punishment, and God utters repeated condemnation upon all who refuse to repent; He utters absolutely no condemnation upon those who believe, no matter how often they have fallen into sin. And why not?

Because *the rule of the Spirit, who gives life, has in Christ Jesus freed you from the rule of sin that kills*. The Holy Spirit rules over every believer's heart. How? By means of the Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit has created a faith in us that looks to Christ alone for salvation. Through His life, death, and resurrection, the Son of God has freed us from all sin; and: *If, then, the Son frees you, you will really be free.*ⁱⁱⁱ Elsewhere Jesus says, “*Anyone who believes in the Son has everlasting life.*”ⁱⁱⁱ

How did God accomplish this miracle for us? Paul explains: *What the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do God has done by sending His Son . . .* God's Ten Commandments offer eternal life to those who keep them perfectly. The problem is that no one is able to do this. Why not? Because all people have inherited from Adam and Eve a sinful nature (which the Bible calls the sinful "flesh").^{iv} From the moment of conception, our sinful flesh prevents us from keeping God's law and obtaining the eternal life it promises as its reward. We deserve the punishment the law threatens: eternal death in hell!

But what we were unable to do, this God did for us. How? *By sending His Son to be like sinful flesh and to be a sacrifice for sin.* Jesus was human in every way that we are with two big exceptions: 1) He was also true God, and 2) even though he was tempted in every way – just as we are – he was without sin! For these reasons, Jesus was able to perfectly keep God's law for us.

God placed all our sins on Jesus – so much so that he appeared as sin personified before His Father. Jesus suffered and died for the sins of all mankind. He rose from the dead to show that every sin has been paid for in full. This is how *He condemned sin in the flesh so that we who don't follow the flesh but the spirit will be as righteous as the Law demands.* Jesus took our sin away and gave us His perfect record of keeping God's law. Now, when God looks at us who live according to the spirit, that is, in faith and love towards God, He sees His Son's perfect record of keeping His Law.

The Devil tries to make us feel lonely and helpless. He wants us to think that we've sinned one too many times; that God is so displeased with us that we won't forgive us unless we do something to get right with Him. Dear Christian: that is a lie! Yes, according to our sinful flesh, we are slaves to sin, but God has already condemned our sinfulness when he condemned Christ! When He brought us to faith, He set us free and gave us a new spirit that loves both Him and His law. This is God's power to live for him: He condemned our sin with Christ. He gave us a new spirit to govern our lives.

Part Two: A new spirit governs our life.

Our text continues: *Those who follow the flesh have their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who follow the spirit have their minds on the things of the spirit.* In other words: Those who desire sin are controlled by sin. People, without faith, are consumed with things pertaining to our flesh like wealth, pleasure and an easy life. They merely think about how they can make life better for themselves, and not how they can honor God.

But we, who have been given the spirit of faith, concern ourselves with spiritual matters like God's work of saving us, sharing the Gospel, serving Christ by serving others, etc. . . We are consumed by such matters and want to glorify God in all we do.

Of course we still have a sinful nature that works against the new spirit God created in us. We won't be fully rid of our sinful flesh until the day we die. This is why we need to constantly go back to the cross in repentance. We may sin 1000 times a day, but Jesus will also forgive us 1000 times a day when we turn to him in repentance and faith. He does this through the Gospel, which is the means through which He also strengthens our faith and increases our desire to keep his Law out of thankfulness for what He has done.

What the flesh thinks kills. Our sinful flesh is constantly trying to separates us from Christ and his salvation by trying to get us to desire sin. But *what the spirit thinks gives life and peace.* Faith in the Gospel transforms us in such a way that our minds are now under the Spirit's control. We are at peace with God and are united with him. We are spiritually alive and look forward to the eternal life in heaven that God promises to everyone who believes in him.

The fleshly mind hates God. It refuses to obey God's Law because it can't obey it. ⁸ *Those who are in the flesh can't please God.* Those who do not believe in Jesus are enemies of God and want to have nothing to do with him. This may not seem evident at first, but the more a hardened unbeliever is exposed to God's Word, the more vehemently he rejects it. The sinful flesh does not want to hear that sex outside of marriage is wrong, that coveting is wrong, that it can't do whatever it wants to do, etc. . . . The sinful flesh does not want to believe it is bad and can't earn heaven on its own. The sinful flesh, in no way, can please God. Why? Because God looks for a contrite heart that longs for a Savior.

You are not in the flesh but in the spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. But anyone who doesn't have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to Him. Believers are not controlled by the sinful flesh. "But how can this be?" you might ask, "I find myself sinning all a lot. Doesn't this prove that the sinful nature still has control over me?" Not necessarily. And why not? Because if you run to God for forgiveness and help. This proves that the Spirit of God lives in you. Without Him you would not care whether or not you sin. You would not have any desire to keep his commands. The fact that you care shows that the Spirit himself is working in you.

[And] *if Christ is in you, even though your bodies are dead because you were sinful, your spirits are alive because you are righteous.* In other words, even though we have an evil nature inside of us, and will never be rid of the sinful flesh until the day we die, we still stand forgiven, freed and righteous before God. And why? Because our sins were condemned with Christ when He died. And, through faith, God has placed the spirit of Christ inside of us – a spirit that looks to God for all help to thank Him for his wonderful salvation.

Now no one will be perfect in on this earth. Our struggle with our pet sins makes this crystal clear. So how do we keep from sinning? Where do we find the power for living the way God wants us to live? I want you all to look at the hymn we sang before the sermon: hymn 121. This hymn contains the answer to our question! As we go to the cross in repentance, trusting in God's mercy for forgiveness, we can be confident that God will answers our pleas for help. By focusing on Christ's work for us, we will soon find ourselves *mastering each wild temptation, calm in prayer and meditation.* This is God's power for living. Amen.

ⁱ Romans 7:24,25 (AAT)

ⁱⁱ John 8:36 (AAT)

ⁱⁱⁱ John 3:36 (AAT)

^{iv} cf. John 3:6