

we are exploring the letter of Romans which is all about the ‘ **life changing power in Jesus**’ .

Romans is a systematic presentation of the gospel and is basically in two parts. At present, we are working our way through the gospel bit although , as you will find, the gospel itself includes about Christian life-style.

The heart of this message is the verses in 1:16-17, and it is important to keep referring back to this because we are always in danger of adding our additions to this foundation.

We have looked at the gospel in terms of how man cannot please God or attain salvation by any means other than by grace and through faith. We have seen that righteousness – being on good relations with God is obtained because Jesus died on the cross for our sins. And now we are looking at some of the issues that arise from that. James spoke about how grace does not mean that we can carry on sinning. That the Christian life is one of holiness, being dead to sin and alive in Christ.

We are here this morning to wrestle with what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Church will always be frustrating while we want the music and the friendship without the

discipleship. Romans 12 : 2 can read as “Let God change the way you think” because until he does you are incapable of living life as it was meant to be lived, the ‘abundant life’ - the love, peace, joy goodness and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that the Spirit gives.

Chapters 6-8 can be summarized as ‘Jesus brings Freedom from Sin, freedom from Law and freedom from death’. So our attention this morning moves from how we are free from the bondage of sin to how we are released from the Law.

We will start by reading 7:1-25

The theme of chapter 7 concerns ‘release from the law’, since he uses this expression three times (2, 3, 6), and refers to the law in every verse. In the last chapter we looked at release from sin and will continue to consider that.

a. The legal principle (1)

Paul lays down the principle which he assumes his readers know: *the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives* (1). Or better, ‘the law is binding on a person only during his life’ (RSV)

there is one notable exception to this rule in English history. **Oliver Cromwell** died at Whitehall on Friday 3 September 1658,

In 1661, his body was exhumed from Westminster Abbey, and was subjected to the ritual of a posthumous execution, His body was hanged in chains at Tyburn. Finally, his disinterred body was thrown into a pit, while his severed head was displayed on a pole outside Westminster Hall until 1685.

Normally in English law once you are dead, the law has no power over you. Your crimes die with you!
But taxation continues! Its called death duty!

Law is for life; death annuls it. Paul states this as a legal axiom, universally accepted and unchallengeable.

b. The domestic illustration (2–3)

As an example of this general principle Paul chooses marriage, basically because it fits what he wants to say about the Law. Death changes not only the obligations of the dead person (it is obvious that these are cancelled), but also the obligations of those survivors who had a contract with the dead person.

So ...the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he lives [literally, ‘the living husband’]; but if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her

husband.” Here it is clear that Paul is thinking as a Jew in terms of the Jewish law.

The point is that a marriage is ‘as long as we both shall live’. Just as crime is actually only punishable while you are alive!

c. The theological application (4)

Romans 7 verse 4 (NIV)

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Paul turns from human laws to the law of God. It too claims lordship over us while we live

So when Christ died, not only did he atone for all our sin, he died so that we might be dead to sin and also be freed from the Law. This is critical to our understanding of how we are to live. If we are still bound by Law then we have to follow the Law with all its regulations and God’s Law we are talking about is the Torah of Exodus through to Deuteronomy. If law still applies we can tell you to do certain things to get to heaven. Unfortunately, for all sorts of reasons the church has continually imposed rules, which

‘Christians must do’. In so doing we have negated the Gospel.

The **Act of Uniformity** in 1559 set the order of prayer to be used in the English Book of Common Prayer. Every man had to go to church once a week or be fined 12 pence.

In 1658 Bunyan was indicted for preaching without a license and was imprisoned for a period of nearly 12 years (with the exception of a few weeks in 1666). He was released in January 1672, by Charles II.

In 1950s the rules included no smoking, no dancing, no going to pubs and no guitars in church.

We must watch that we do not adopt similar laws for our time. Especially as Middle-class acceptability is so easy to make into a rule. “Surely all Christians behave like me!” – or at least like I want them to!

We and Christians around us have been released from the Law.

But we died **in Christ**. Now this is theology not anything else. Jesus died in our place, for our sins and he rose again from the dead. We therefore see **our** spiritual death and resurrection there as those who are in Christ. And through our personal union with Christ we have shared in his death (as the apostle has argued in Romans 6), and we may therefore be said to have died ‘through’ his body.

The purposes of our dying with Christ to the law are now spelled out. **The immediate purpose** is that we *might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead* (4b).

This is quite significant. A sense of belonging lies at the heart of our identity. We all have a built in desire to belong. That is properly satisfied here. You are in Christ. You are part of his family. One of his team, a member of his Union, one of his employees, a Jesus supporter with a season ticket, we are members of the commonwealth of God. Whatever we use as a means of identifying ourselves is just a shadow of our real identity We belong to Jesus. By grace and through faith and forever. And in John's gospel we have this repeated phrase:" No one can take them from my hand" John 10 verse 27 - 30 (NIV)

Listen to this, its good stuff

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

If the immediate purpose of our dying with Christ to the law is that we may now belong to Christ, **the ultimate purpose** is *that we might bear fruit to God* (4c).

What is meant? It is ‘the fruit of holiness’, the fruit of the Spirit. He concludes that the law was impotent to do this. ‘But we are now married to One who has the strength and the virility and the potency to produce fruit even out of us’, that is to say, a life which is lived ‘to God’s glory and to God’s praise’. We must be careful not to stretch the imagery too far. It is the church that is the bride of Christ not individuals.

In simple terms we are set free from the Law so that we can live for God. Not to live for ourselves because we belong to him. Not to continue in sin but to live by the Spirit in holiness. The point being hammered home here is that you cannot please God through keeping the Law. We are put right with God by grace through faith and the purpose is that we can live in a way that pleases God through the work of the Spirit of God.

Now we face a problem. We are freed from sin and the Law yet we still want to sin and do sin.

I describe this as the battle of Man Soul after a profound book on the subject by John Bunyan called ‘The losing and taking of the town of Mansoul’ normally called ‘Bunyan’s Holy War’. where he depicts our souls as a city beset by many temptations and failings. A great book if you can cope with the writing of 1682, as is Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress.

The Christian mind is a constant battle ground. We are prone to temptation so easily that Jesus made that the key element of the Disciple's Prayer. *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

As Paul says *For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

If you are struggling with sin, we all are! It is the lot of all Christians, including Paul himself! So we must get to verse 24 as quickly as possible!

24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Chapter 8 explains how we are rescued through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So lets get to it! Lets READ 8:1-11

First.

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

In a sense this reiterates what has been said already. Salvation is by grace, through faith. Jesus has paid the ransom and you are justified as if you had never sinned. Therefore you are released from the guilt and

condemnation of sin. So when past sins are regurgitated by your brain, lay them at the foot of the cross, then learn again that you are forgiven. You are set free from the law of sin and death.

This has huge implications for our mental health.

Guilt cripples our thinking. But at the foot of the cross, the burden of guilt and condemnation rolls away. The past is forgiven and now I am free but not to continue in sin but to obey the Spirit of life.

Let me illustrate this.

You are in a prison in some despotic country with no hope of release.

Then you hear the sound of gunfire, the guards run away and the doors are opened wide. What do you do? Do you stay in the prison, because it is what you know? It feels safe? Or do you go and live by a new set of rules, rules of living?

In Christ you are set free from the law of sin and death.

Are you living in the spirit of life?

Jesus has opened the door by becoming the sin offering for us. In Christ the requirements of the Law have been met and you are free.

But what is freedom?

Living by the Spirit.

When you received Christ as your personal Saviour, you invited the Holy Spirit into your life. He had convinced

you of sin righteousness and judgement. Now he seeks to transform the way that you think.

There is a clear distinction between living by the Spirit and living by natural desires. And this is the second key to Christian living. We have to set our hearts on what the Spirit desires. He desires life and peace. Sinful man is set on death. It might be envy, lying, stealing, adulterous thoughts, hatred, lack of respect for your parents, not setting aside time for God, being casual about speaking about God, idolizing people or things, or worshipping anything other than God himself. They are the causes of death. And if we continue in them, we are on the wrong track. We should be setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. To love, to have joy, to be at peace with God and our fellow man, to be faithful, to be patient, gentle, self controlled, eager that God's will is done in our lives and we act in accord with his will.

John has a shocking statement in his first letter:

1John 3:9 *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.*

In case you think it was a one off statement, he repeats it in 5:18

¹⁸ *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.*

Sin in a Christian is a denial of the saving grace of Jesus and the ability of the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. But we do sin. And when we sin we need to turn in repentance and ask God's forgiveness, knowing that Jesus is our advocate in heaven pleading on our behalf. God sends us his Holy Spirit to transform our minds so that we want to live the life of freedom from sin.

To successfully overcome sin, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is as straightforward as that. Sin creeps in the door when we are not attending to the will of the Father. If you have turned in repentance and faith to Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit living in you to enable you to live the life God wants you to live. The war of Mansoul is won. We need to be alert to the need for the mopping up operation to be finished. Bad habits of thinking, old bitterness, lack of self-control and so on have to be addressed. But not by screwing yourself up and trying to do it alone. You are saved by grace, live by grace! Lay down the habits, bitterness, waywardness at the foot of the cross. Do battle on your knees and ask for the power to resist the devil. We are told to resist the devil and he will flee from you. But you have to take on the full armour of God to do so.

There is only one way to live the Christian life. That is to be intimately connected with Jesus through the Holy

Spirit. Jesus is the only way, the only truth, the only life.
Live by the Spirit!