

Lent 4
March 26, 2017

"Your Life Is Controlled by the Holy Spirit"

ROMANS 8:1-10

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

It happened in Paw Paw, Michigan about ten years ago. Twenty one year old Ben Carpenter, who has muscular dystrophy, was crossing a busy four lane intersection with his motorized wheel chair. He didn't make it across before the light changed. The driver of the big eighteen wheel truck did not see Ben in front of his truck as he pulled forward. The truck began pushing the wheel chair down the road with its handles stuck in the front grill. It gained a speed of 50 miles per hour before it finally was stopped by the highway patrol four miles down the road. Ben hung on for dear life and he was unharmed. Later a news reporter asked him what it was like to be going fifty miles an hour down the road in a wheel chair. With a smile on his face he said, "It was quite a ride."

My dear Christians, because of who you are in Christ and because of the Holy Spirit at work in your life you are on quite a ride. You are controlled by the Holy Spirit and because of that your whole life is changed. You are no longer under the control of your sinful flesh that brought death into your life.

This morning it is my privilege to be able to take you into these first ten verses of the great chapter of the Bible, Romans 8, and see how special it is that your life is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

We turn our attention to verses 1 and 2. **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."** There are two laws or two rules that dominate the lives of all people. There is the law or rule of the Holy Spirit that brings life and the law or rule of the flesh that brings death.

It seems at times our sinful flesh dominates and rules our lives much more that it should. Paul confessed to having this problem in chapter seven with the well known words, "I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my flesh." He goes on to say, "So, I find this law at work: When I

want to do good, evil is right there with me." He cries out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death." We can relate to what Paul was experiencing. This problem of struggling with the sinful flesh is there every day in our lives. It might seem that our sinful flesh is in control of our lives more than the Holy Spirit.

That is why these words from Romans 8 are so important to us. They assure us that the law or rule or dominion of the Holy Spirit has set us from the law of sin and death. The dominant force in your life is not your flesh but the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who bring us into Christ. With Jesus there is no condemnation. This word for condemnation is a strong word in the original Greek. It takes the word for condemnation which is krima and then adds kata in the front of the word to intensify it. Instead of a verdict of guilty that sends us to hell for all the times we have given into our sinful flesh, we have the verdict of not guilty. We are justified through Christ and that means declared not guilty.

Now let's look at verse 3 and 4. **"For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."** Here the word law is used to describe the ten commandments. We cannot be saved by keeping the ten commandments because there is no way we can them perfectly. We are weakened by our sinful flesh. I want to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul and mind, but I fail miserably because of the sinful flesh that leads me to not put the Lord first in my life. Imagine a teacher that demands a 100% on every test to not fail the course. God's law demands 100% perfect. Our sinful flesh leads us to fail again and again.

What does the Lord our God do for us? God sent his own son it says in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. In a great sermon on John 1:14 about Jesus, the Word made flesh, Martin Luther said of Jesus. "He had our eyes, ears, mouth, nose, chest, stomach, hands and feet, just as you and I do. He took the breast. His mother nursed him as any other child is nursed... the only difference was that he was not born in sin as we are."

Here is Jesus, with human flesh similar to ours, yet always perfect in everything he did. Then God our Father puts on Jesus our sin and makes him suffer for that sin at the cross. 2 Corinthians 5 says that Jesus became sin for us. In his flesh he made the perfect sacrifice that enables our sin to be forgiven. He paid for it completely. He condemned our sin in his flesh. The Holy Spirit leads you to trust in Christ instead of your flesh. That means the righteous requirements of God's law have been fully met for you through Jesus. This is a powerful force that dominates your life and controls you and brings great joy every day.

Permit me to illustrate what it means to be in Christ and not in your flesh with these sponges. I can take this sponge and put it into a bucket of really dirty, filthy, toxic water. Even if I squeeze out the sponge as best I could, I would not want to suck on the sponge that had been in the contaminated water. And if the sponge is placed back into contaminated water again and again, it will remain contaminated. That's a way of understanding what it means to be in the flesh. Now look at another sponge that is absolutely pure and clean. That represents Jesus who never contaminated his life with sin. However, there came a point in his life when all the sin and filth of the world was placed on him. Miraculously he was punished for that sin, paid for it and took it away completely. The Father even raised Jesus from the dead to show us the sin put on Jesus has been paid for. The Holy Spirit has led you into Christ. Everything Jesus has done for you is now yours. "Therefore, there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ."

Now let's turn our attention to the next verses that draw a strong contrast between those who live

in the flesh and those who live in the Spirit. First verse 5. **“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”** The sinful flesh is like a GPS system that always keep directing you to yourself and what your sinful flesh desires. You have heard people say, “Just follow your heart.” That’s scary because Jeremiah 17:6 says, “The heart is deceitful and beyond cure who can understand it.” The sinful flesh will always lead people to think that sin is something beautiful and a far better way to live than God’s ways. The sinful flesh will always lead people to set their minds on thinking they can compensate for the bad they have done by a little good here on there.

How different it is when you have the Holy Spirit constantly controlling and dominating your life. The Holy Spirit leads you to want the things that God wants and what God desires. You are led by the Holy Spirit to be saved by what Christ has done in his flesh not what you fail to do in your flesh. You are led by the Spirit to say with the Apostle Paul, “For me to live is Christ.”

What will happen to those people who follow the desires of their sinful flesh? Let’s turn to verse 6. **“The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”** If people listen to their heart and to their flesh when it comes to trying to save themselves by what they do, they will die eternally in hell. However, those who are governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit who directs them to Jesus, they will have peace with God and they will live forever in this kingdom.

There is more about this striking contrast between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. **“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”** The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not want God’s plan to rescue us. It loves to sing along with Frank Sinatra, “I’ll do it my way.” Try and take a bone away from a mean dog and it will bite you. Tell someone that their whole plan of trying to save themselves is worthless. This past week at our SM Terrace Bible study we were going John 10 where Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd.” How did the Jewish leaders react to this? They accused Jesus of being demon possessed and they want to put him to death.

We have covered this already but take a look at the next verse, verse 8. **“Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”** In the book *The Little Engine that Could*, the little engine began climbing the mountain and saying, “I think I can, I think I can.” Those who are in the flesh have no concept of how dreadful far they have fallen short of God’s glory and how much they need Jesus to rescue them.

The next verse is so comforting. Verse 9: **“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”** You are not in the realm of the flesh. The sinful flesh that is inside of you is not the dominate force in your life. You are in the realm of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit drives again and again into Christ. And that my dear Christian is the ride of life time. You know you have the Holy Spirit dominating your life because you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. No one can believe this without the Holy Spirit present in their lives. A few verses later it says “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” How many thousands of times this past week has the Holy Spirit reminded you of who you are in Christ, a dear child of your heavenly Father.

Now we close with the words of verse 10. **“But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.”** Because of my sinful flesh I know that someday I will die. But that is not the last chapter in my life or your life. Because Christ is mine through the work of the Holy Spirit I will live. The Holy

Spirit gives me Christ's righteousness. With these royal robes I can stand before God in the final judgment and hear the words, "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth. It's quite a ride that you are one dear Christian because the Holy Spirit controls your life. Get to know this 8th chapter of the book of Romans and it will help you see how blessed you are to be in the Holy Spirit. Amen.