HIS SPIRIT WHO LIVES IN YOU

Romans 8:1–17

Key Verse: 8:11

**No Condemnation (1-4)**

Look at verse 1. Paul begins this chapter with, “Therefore.” Why “Therefore”? Well, he’s bringing into conclusion what he’d just been saying in Chapter 7. But also, Paul is concluding everything that he has been saying thus far in his letter to the Romans. So here it is, the conclusion of everything we’ve been studying in Romans this summer so far—“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

The word “condemned” is a forensic term used in court that includes both the sentence of guilty and the execution of that guilty sentence. In Chapter 6 Paul says our sentence for our state of sin is death (6:23a). In Chapter 7, Paul says not only are we condemned to death because of our sins, but we also condemn ourselves (7:21). So, apart from God, we are condemned as guilty with the sentence of death, with a guilty conscious of what we’ve done. Imagine you’re in a courtroom. God is the judge. You’re on trial, sitting in the chair of the accused, and charged with being separated form God. As the case begins, all the evidence against you of living separate from God is read aloud. It’s a long list. Every thought, every action of a life apart from God. Video tapes are shown. Every single thing you’ve thought and done wrong reverberating in the courtroom. Who would want to stand there, listening and watching all that, especially with the Holy God standing there as judge? Not only are we condemned for being in sin, but also we condemn ourselves for all we’ve done wrong. So, all that stuff that we feel guilty about, all those things we’ve thought and done that we’re ashamed of, we try not to think about them. We pretend like they never happened. But the guilt of those things can eat away at us, can even define us. If you just do a survey class on psychology, you’ll find that the main cause of depression, stress, schizophrenia, and many mental and emotional disorders, physiatrists find through therapy, taking patient history and psychoanalysis, is a troubling sense of guilt. And many times this guilt is an “imagined guilt,” meaning people with these disorders can’t even pinpoint in their minds what it is they feel guilty about, but the guilt overwhelms them and they feel trapped by it. The thing is, we *are* guilty. We all have done things, thought things, that we feel horrible about, that we have a deep sense are wrong. We’re guilty just in our state of being, in our separation from God. So this guilt, we try to bury it deep.

But, this is Paul’s conclusion, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” Once we are “in Christ Jesus,” we live in a state of “no condemnation.” We are not condemned. That’s awesome! How is this possible? Paul says all we have to do is to be “in Christ Jesus.” Let’s read together verses 1-4. We’re back in the courtroom. Our sentence of immediate eternal death is announced. But something amazing happens. God the judge steps down form his judge’s chair. He takes our spot in the accused seat as Jesus, saying, “Condemn me.” He’s led away and is put to death in our places (3). Our sentence is served for us by God himself. Then, even more amazingly, God raises Jesus to life and sends himself to us as the Spirit. So, now, not only are we freed from condemnation, but we’re given a new state of being. In Jesus, we no longer have to live under sin and death, but are freed to live by the Spirit (4). Living by the Spirit, is living with the presence of God himself.

To be honest, this is hard to believe. “Really? I’m not guilty? I’m freed from everything I’ve done, and will do? No condemnation?” Yes. Look again at verses 1-4. It’s hard to believe. So God the Spirit works in us to convince us of this truth. He convinces us that Jesus’ death was a “sin offering.” He convinces us that this offering was “enough” to pay for everything. The Spirit helps us to actually realize and accept, “I’m forgiven.” As the Spirit convinces us, the Gospel begins to sink into our hearts and our consciousness. There’s this scene in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes,* where an enlightened ape opens the cage of a silverback gorilla. The gorilla was born and raised in that cage. That’s all he knew. Even though the door to his cage was opened, the gorilla didn’t know what to do. So the enlightened ape had to help convince the gorilla that it was okay for him to come out. Then the gorilla runs out of his cage and begins to beat his chest, run and twirl around. Similarly, the Spirit helps us to realize that we can come out of the cage of self-condemnation that we’ve become so familiar with, and realize that we’re free, that we don’t have to sit there anymore, that we can come out.

And, as we continue through the rest of this chapter, Paul shows us what it means to live outside of the cage of condemnation, what that freedom and dance look like, and how who we are begins to change.

**The Spirit Transforms the Heart (3b-4)**

Let’s read verse 3b and 4 together: “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.” We see here that the Spirit not only helps our freedom from condemnation to really sink it, *but the Spirit actually helps us to change.* Look at verse 4b. The Spirit changes us so that, who we are *fully* meets the righteous requirement of the law.

If you’ve ever read the Old Testament, you can see that there are a lot of requirements. The bar was set pretty high. God gave the requirements of the law to the Israelites so to teach them what kind of people he wanted them to be. But to *fully* meet all the requirements of the law was simply impossible. Paul gave his own experience of this in Chapter 7. He was an expert in all the law. He kept all of them flawlessly. But when it came to the Ten Commandments, which are like the basics, he found that there was one he couldn’t keep—coveting. He couldn’t fully keep this law because this one was more than just an activity; it had to do with what was in his heart. Some people may be really good at keeping rules outwardly, doing a lot of good things, but what the law required from within, no one had ever been able to fully keep.

How can we hope to be the kind of people God wants, to fully meet the righteous requirements of the law? Look at verse 4. Paul says that the “righteous requirement of the law” would be “fully met in us” when we live according to the Spirit. It’s through the Spirit. God promised long ago to his people, through the prophet Jeremiah, that there would be a new kind of law, that he would write his law “on their hearts” and that they would no longer have to teach each other what to do but that they would “Know the Lord.” This prophecy was fulfilled through the gift of the Spirit. In Chapter 1, Paul talks about how the Spirit enlightens our darkened hearts (1:21). In Chapter 2, Paul talks about how the Spirit actually circumcises, or “brands,” our hearts. It’s as if God, through the Spirit, takes our hearts, shines a light on them, and says, “this now belongs to me.” And Paul says here, in verse 4, that a heart belonging to God, through the Spirit, meets the full requirements of the law.

What does a heart like that look like—a heart that meets the “full requirements of the law”? When asked, “’Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. ‘ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments’” (Matthew 22:36-40). Love God and love others. This is the kind of heart God wanted to show us through the law, and the kind of heart the Spirit gives—a heart that is in love with God and loves others. This is more than tasks or deeds, and even more than a personality or sentiment change; it’s a complete change of heart. It’s a transformation of what we love. Instead of loving ourselves relentlessly, the Spirit transforms us to be in love with God, to give him all our hearts, our souls, our minds, and to love others as much as we love ourselves. When the Spirit does this, the kind of heart required to have a relationship with God, is given to us.

Has your heart been transformed? Can you say that the sole desire of your heart is God and to love others? You see, it’s impossible for us to love God and love others by our own strength. We can’t just say, “I’m a Christian, so I’m good. I believe in Jesus, so I’ve okay now. I go to church and I know some basic theology and some of the Bible, and God and I are good. I’m nice to people, I’m good.” But are you in love with God? Is your heart transformed that you love God with your everything? This kind of love only happen when we spend time with God through the Spirit. It’s the same thing if you meet someone for the first time and say you’re in love with them—“Hey, my name is Abe… oh-my-gosh I love you!” That would be strange. But, it’s easy for us to keep our relationship with God to just casual encounters. We see him once a week at church and say, “Hey, wassup,” and listen to him once and a while. But, with that kind of relationship, our hearts will never be transformed. Look again at what Paul says in verse 4. It’s when we live, “according to the Spirit.” So, with God, he wants us to spend time with him, in his presence. Outside of the cage of condemnation, he wants us to bring anything we want to him through prayer, listen to what he has to say through his words in the Bible. As we spend time in his presence, the Spirit helps us to fully fall in love with him, until we realize that God becomes everything to us. And when we do, he transforms our hearts, so that they become more like his. We begin to actually, love others as we love ourselves. We can’t do this on our own. God himself through the Spirit transforms our hearts.

**The Spirit Transforms the Mind (4-8)**

I like to think that I’m in control of my own mind, my own thoughts. They’re private; no one here knows what I’m thinking right now. So I could just hang out in my thoughts. Everybody enjoys just thinking, daydreaming, mulling over whatever you want in your mind. But are we in full control? Look at verse 4. Paul says that we’re actually not in control of our minds. Our minds and desires are governed. And, separated from God, our minds are governed by our flesh (4).

Minds governed by the flesh: a lot of thinkers have come to this realization, that there is a part of our minds that gives up reason for physical desire, and is driven by self-gratification. This can distort they way we think and can be destructive. So, a lot of people have given advice on how to overcome this; mottos like “Mind over matter.” Nietzsche, for example, gave six tips to “combating the vehemence of a drive.” One tip he gives is, “Give oneself over to the wild and unrestrained gratification of a drive in order to generate disgust with it” (*Daybreak*, Section 109). Pretty bad advice.

Is there any other way to think other than by the flesh? Let’s read verse 4 again together. Paul says that our minds can be governed by either the flesh, *or* God the Spirit (4). And we see in verses 5-8, Paul compares the two kind of minds. Look at verse 5. All the things that either the flesh, or the Spirit desire, Paul says, our minds are “set on” them. These things become our single most important goal, what we have to have, what we hold on to. We’re either fixed on what the flesh desires or fixed on what the Spirit desires. We’ll go to whatever lengths to fulfill them and see nothing else except for them.

What are some of the things a mind governed by the flesh is “set on”? Look at verse 5a. As Paul says elsewhere, what the flesh desires is “obvious.” We all know what the flesh desires, because most everybody lives governed by the flesh—“sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21). If you look at this verse, pretty much all these “fleshy” desires share one thing in common—extreme, and destructive excessiveness. And that’s the nature of the flesh, a drive and thirst that is never satisfied, no matter how much you have. You see, physical desires aren’t all bad; we don’t have to deny food or any physical pleasure once we become a Christian. But without God, our minds become almost possessed with satisfying only our unquenchable physical desires that we don’t care about anything or anyone else.

Now, let’s look at 5b. What are the things a mind governed by the Spirit is “set on”? Paul explains also in Galatians the desires of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). When our minds are governed by the Spirit, more than satisfying ourselves, we desire the same things God the Spirit desires—“love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” We begin to think like God does. Who doesn’t want a mind like that?

So the question is, how can our minds be changed from living for flesh? How can the governing force of the way we think be changed from the flesh to the Spirit? First, very simply, we have to want to change. In other words, we have to repent. The Apostle Peter preached in Acts, “’Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38). Before God the Spirit can govern our thoughts, for us to even receive the gift of the Spirit, we have to really turn away from our sins and living for ourselves. We have to turn away form a life without God. Then, we have to turn to God through the way given to us in Jesus. And when we do that, God sends his Spirit to us as a gift. There are no real mind exercises that can change the governing of our minds, it begins with the simple decision to turn away form living for myself and turning to God, and realizing that, “God, I’m giving you control of my mind now.”

But, is that it? Do we just say, “God, posses my mind” and we’re then above being governed by our flesh? I wish. If that were the case, we’d have a lot of holy people up in here. Paul will say later on in Romans 12, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This continual, “renewing” of our minds is a process of sanctification through the Spirit. There are some important things to note about this renewal of our minds: First, we have to realize that, in Christ, we live as nonconformists. We don’t just desire things because of what everybody else is doing, or our own automatic, “natural” desires. We rather, allow what we desire to be transformed, and our minds renewed by God. So, instead of just going with it, we stop and think, “Hey, is this a desire of the Spirit?” Secondly, this desiring what the Spirit desires is like restarting our brains, a relearning of how we were meant to desire things, before being under the rule of flesh. It’s a renewal. So, really, it’s like being re-taught how to think, how to desire things. We have to learn humility when it comes to our desires and thoughts. We have to be willing to learn, like a child, how to desire, how to think about things. David says in one of his psalms, “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” (Psalm 25:4,5). Thirdly, desiring what the Spirit desires isn’t automatic. We don’t just one day believe in Jesus and then our minds and our desires are changed. It’s an active process on our part. Paul says in 2 Corinthians that we need to “demolish” the desires of the flesh, and instead, actively, “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Our thoughts and desires can very easily “run away” from us and automatically go towards what the flesh desires. And when that happens, even as Christians, we can be ruled by the flesh. We become “hostile to God.” We both “won’t” and “can’t” submit to him. We can’t “please God.” We can be doing a lot of outwardly good things, but if our minds are ruled by the flesh, then Paul is saying that we essentially can’t really be in a relationship with God. So Paul says we should “take captive” of all of our thoughts, and allow our minds to be governed by God.

This transforming our hearts and our minds by the Spirit—it doesn’t sound very easy does it? Actually, it sounds almost painful. How can we hope to have this happen to me? Really, my heart and my mind can be changed from all of the dysfunction and selfishness and flesh?

**The Spirit Who Lives in You (9-13)**

There’s this scene in movie *The Lion King.* Simba is a struggling young lion. He doesn’t know what he wants, what’s the right or wrong thing to do, or what to do with his life. What he really wants is to ask his dad for help, but he can’t, because his father died when he was just a cub. Then this monkey shows up named Ralfike, and he assures Simba that his father didn’t really die, but is actually alive. So he tells Simba to follow him. So Simba runs after Ralfikie the monkey through thorns, through fields, to see if what he said is true, in a hope that his dad was actually alive. But then the monkey stops at a clearing and there’s a lake. Simba is disappointed because he doesn’t see his dad. But then Ralfikie motions over to the lake and tells Simba to look. Simba does, and all he sees is his own reflection. Ralfikie says, “Your father is alive. He lives in you.”

You know this battle over our minds, to be governed by our flesh or the Spirit, seems like a daunting task and a lonely struggle. The way we think, we’ve developed that over a lifetime. The good and the bad way of thinking in us, those neural connections in our brains are set, those well-traveled pathways of thinking are engrained, and to change is near impossible. How can we hope to have our minds transformed? Wouldn’t it be awesome if God could actually “help” us? But like Simba looking for his father, God can seem distant and too far away to actually help us. But Paul leads us, to see something amazing. Look at verse 9. He says, “we are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.” Wait, what, God himself can live in us? Yes! How is this possible? How can the eternal God live in us? Let’s read verses 9-11 together. Paul says that it’s through Christ. When we “belong to Christ” when we accept him, and the freedom from condemnation through the Gospel, God comes to reside in us as the Spirit. He makes his our heart his dwelling place.

This changes everything. Look at verse 10. In the realm of the flesh, we were subject to death because of sin. But God’s Spirit in us gives life. I think this is can be understood literally, but also God the Spirit gives us spiritual life when he lives in us. Ruled by the flesh, we’re like *The Walking Dead,*we’re like zombies, who just walk around for the sole purpose of feeding our own desires. But when God lives in us, he gives life to us spiritually. Our minds become not bent on ourselves and our own cravings, but rather our minds are opened to God and what he desires, we become spiritually alive, we even begin to think as God does. This life that the Spirit in us gives also implies spiritual strength. We don’t have to depend on ourselves, on doing anything, on religious activities. We always instead turn to the Spirit. We turn to him, simply ask him for guidance. Now, let’s read verse 11. “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus form the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of the Spirit who lives in you.” There might be some things in you that you feel like you have no hope to change. You may feel like your enslaved by certain cravings, desires, enslaved and powerless to parts of you, of ways of thinking that you can’t control. But Paul is saying in verse 11 that if we actually believe that God could raise Jesus from the dead, that same God who lives in us can give new life to our minds and hearts. He can raise us spiritually from the dead. Look at verse 11 again. This is a promise of victory. We don’t have to live for our flesh anymore. We don’t have to feel “obligated” to living for our flesh anymore (12). God is with us, and through his Spirit, in us, wants to help transform our minds and hearts form the inside out. All we have to do is give up thinking that we’re all alone still. We’re not. We have God with us, helping us along the way. We can turn to him any time. We can share what’s on our minds and our hearts, ask him to govern them. And through his Spirit, he will begin to sanctify us.

**Children of God (14-17)**

This dependence on God, Paul says, changes our identity completely. Look at verses 14. The Spirit in us gives us a conviction of our new identity as “children of God.” (14). We’re no longer enslaved, we no longer are flesh-driven, encaged, by ourselves. The Spirit of God convinces us that now we are God’s children.

You see, separated from God, we were orphaned. And all this we caused, we ran away because we accepted that life would be better if we lived by ourselves. We were enslaved in sin, we were controlled by guilt and fear. We learned that behavior. And we have the subconcious identity of being a slave to ourselves and sin. But when we turn to God through Jesus, and his spirit resides in us, God works to show us that we’re no longer slaves. Let’s read verse 15 together. “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” We’re don’t have to live like slaves. We’re children of God. And we can approach the Almighty Creator of everything, the being so beyond us in every way, in the most intimate and personal way, more personal than any relationship. We become connected to God like children are connected and depended on their parents. We can call God our own “*Abba, Father.”* He’ll accept us every time when we come to him. He’ll listen to us, he’ll embrace us as we are, and he’ll guide and help us when we depend on him.

And this identity is not just an idea. Look at verse 16. The Spirit of God testifies with our Spirit that we are God’s children. Our identity as God’s children, through the Holy Spirit, becomes ingrained in our spiritual DNA. And look at verse 17. Like children, we become heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. We inherit the lifestyle of Christ—sharing in his sufferings of living not for ourselves, but to love God and love others, and the inheritance of future glory of being with God forever.

We’re freed from condemnation, and get to live as children of God. May we all abide with God, allow his presence into our lives, allow him to transform what we love, the way we think. And may we live lives that are truly free in him.