

## Life in the Spirit

### Romans 8:1-11

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The majestic eighth chapter of the letter of Paul to the Romans begins with the gospel's astonishing conclusion: "There is therefore now no condemnation." The death sentence hanging over all humanity has been removed for those who are in Jesus Christ. **Steven D. Paulson**

The brief opening line is nearly unbelievable: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). Anyone who has lived has done things for which we deserve condemnation. Maybe "condemnation" is not a word we use, but surely "blame" and "guilt" are words we do use. We receive word that a member of the church, a friend, is sick, and we promise to hold him or her in our thoughts and prayers. Life gets hectic and days go by without our uttering a single prayer or even having a sympathetic thought of our sick friend. The next week in church, we learn during announcements that our friend's health has worsened, and we wince at our own unfeeling, our failure to have allowed our friend's illness even to pierce our consciousness. Now we pray, "O God, help me

remember to prepare a casserole or at the very least to send a card" If you are not guilty of a shortcoming like this one, there are undoubtedly other actions for which you and I feel guilt. All of us are deserving of some condemnation.

The phrase by which we confess sin "by what we have done, and by what we have left undone" covers just about all the things for which we are deserving of condemnation. If there is a boatload of guilt for the things we have done, there is surely an ocean full of guilt for the things we have left undone.

So how are we to believe this nearly unbelievable thing—that there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ? The key is perhaps found in the tiniest phrase: "in Christ." To be "in Christ" or Life in the Spirit, is categorically different from not to be "in Christ." It is not simply a difference of degree, but a genuine difference of kind.

To be "in Christ" or Life in the Spirit, is to be a part of something far larger than oneself. It is to encounter a power astronomically greater than the sum of all the willpower you and I have ever mustered, added to all the physical power you and I have ever exerted, added to all the clout you and I have ever had. Add all those up, and it is infinitesimal, compared to the power of God in Christ or Life in the Spirit. There is a severe power shortage on our side. It is not that we are powerless, for surely, we have the power to hurt others and ourselves, as well as to help others and ourselves. It is just that our power is so bound by our capacities, so limited by our perspectives, so tied to our locale. This may be what Paul means by the phrase "in the flesh." **David M. Greenhaw**

"Flesh" could be described as the fallen human condition, our focus on the self rather than on God. It is rebellion against God, idolatry or worship of things that are not God. "Flesh" also includes what Paul describes in Romans 7, our inability to "do the right thing" or what we want to do. As Paul puts it, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (7:15).

Money, financial security, youth, health, work, good looks, busyness, and technology are just a few of the things we worship instead of God.

Remember, Paul believes that all of us are obedient to something. If we are not obedient or "slaves" to God and God's ways, we are "slaves" to sin or whatever is not of God. This is hard for us to understand, as we live in a culture that prizes autonomy and independence, and in which we understand ourselves to be largely self-made. By contrast, Paul argues that we give our allegiance to and are thus formed by God or what is not of God. If we are not obedient to God we are living in the realm of "death," even in this life. Through Jesus' resurrection we all have the possibility of moving from death, or life without God, to eternal life—life in the Spirit with God forever. Paul, like Deuteronomy 30:19, exhorts us to "choose life." **Blair Alison Pogue**

To be "in Christ" and have life in the Spirit is to be swept up in the power of the Spirit and be free from what has bound us, limited us, tied us. To be "in Christ" and have life in the Spirit is not the result of something we do; it is something God does for us. Paul does not exhort us to "get our act together" and get "in Christ." Instead, he announces and boldly proclaims: "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you" (v. 9). This proclamation is the good news.

It is difficult for us to believe this good news, but it is not impossible to believe it. To believe it is to reorient our lives toward a power greater than ourselves. Even more, it is to have our lives reoriented by a power greater than any power we know in this world. Perhaps the greatest power we know in this world is the power of death, which ultimately conquers all of us and everyone we know. Death's power is not simply at the moment of our dying; it is a power that creeps into our lives, our communities, and our bodies long before the moment we breathe our last.

Ask any alcoholic or person addicted to drugs or addicted to other harmful activities, about the power of death, and if he or she can speak truth, the words will be about the living death they know. Ask any parent of a child who is dying from a devastating disease, and you will hear of the power of death to break a heart even before the child's body gives up. However, even this power is not enough when compared to the power of "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead" (v. 11).

Paul proclaims that this Spirit "will give life to your mortal bodies" (v. 11). By this Paul could mean that our bodies can get the air it needs, the coursing blood required to keep it going, even the food and water to nourish it. Undoubtedly Paul means at least this; but there is most likely something more expressed here. Giving life to our mortal bodies is not simply giving the body the essentials of bodily functions. It is to bring to our bodies, bound as they are to time and space, a power that is able to connect them to a movement of God's Spirit greater than ourselves.

This Spirit that we have "in Christ" is able to do so much more than we are able to do. On our own, we are not able to get it all done; so much is left undone. By this tiny phrase, life in the Spirit or "in Christ," Paul has said that we are not constrained by our limitations, shortcomings, failings; we are not even condemned by our cruelties, hurtful ways, hateful actions. Instead, we are free. *Free*.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). This freedom is nearly unbelievable, but not completely unbelievable. It is the freedom given to us to go beyond our limitations. It is the freedom of being part of God's movement with the world that transcends our locale and our lifetime. This freedom does not transport us out of our bodies into a netherworld beyond the pearly gates. Instead it frees us to live fully in this world, in this mortal body we have. This freedom is ours in Christ, to live in the Spirit. It is the result of the

power of God, a power greater than the sum of all the powers. **David M. Greenhaw**

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