

FREE TO WALK ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

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

This chapter is the climax of Romans. What is the great joy and hope that belongs to Christians? It is joy of new and unimagined freedom that comes from being a child of God. A child of God lives in the absolute and unshakable security of the love of almighty God. We have a right relationship with our Creator that transforms and blesses all the other relationships of life. As children and heirs of God, we may share in Christ's suffering and share in his glory. This suggests to solution to life's two most important problems: One is where we are going and the other is how we get there. The first part of this chapter talks about our walk in the Spirit and the second part, the glorious hope we have in God's kingdom. The last part of this chapter is Paul's confession of love for Jesus.

1. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (1-4)

Verse one says, "Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This points back to chapter 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 begins, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God..." We are not condemned because we have been justified by faith—we have been forgiven. In chapter 6 we find that we are united with Christ in his death and united with him in his resurrection. We are no longer slaves to sin because we died with Christ. "Anyone who has died has been freed from sin." (6:7) So we have been set free from sin. The Law was given to help people to live the useful and fruitful and happy lives that God created us to live. But because we have a sinful nature, we cannot live according to God's good and holy Law. The law gives good advice, but it is powerless to help us. We have to be strong--but we are weak. Chapter 7 describes this struggle and ends with a cry to Jesus, who alone can deliver us. Chapter 8: 2-3 tell us that through the death of Christ on the cross God did for us what the Law could not do. God sent his Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Jesus lived a sinless life and died on the cross as a sin offering for us. When I accept Jesus' death personally, my sins are forgiven and I am set free from the power of sin and death. In Chapter 7 we find that we are free from the law because, "by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, not in the old way of the written code." (7:6) So, through the death of Christ, we have been set free from sin, set free from death and set free from the law. No one can condemn us because Christ Jesus has justified us. We are free to travel the pilgrim road to the heavenly kingdom.

We are pilgrims, for this world is not our real home. The Spirit of God leads us through a world fraught with all kinds of temptations and dangers, sorrows and joys to claim our inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that we are slaves to sin. People have a false idea of freedom. They think that freedom is doing everything the sinful nature desires--with no restraints from parents, society or even from God. This is a deception perpetrated by the devil who wants to make us his prisoners. We want to be free to follow the Spirit, but we are

slaves. How then can sinful man be free to live according to the Spirit of God? Verse 2 says, "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

So we are free to follow the leading of the Spirit. But as a matter of fact, our sinful human nature is in us as long as we have mortal bodies, and it continues to make demands. This means that life is a struggle between the spiritual nature which longs for God and the sinful nature which was corrupted in the Fall.

The good news of chapter 8 is that the Spirit of Christ is living in us to help us and lead us to victory. What then, must we do? We must set our minds on Jesus. When we set our minds on Jesus and the things of his Spirit, we have life and peace. We have freedom from fear and sin and death. But if we have our minds set on what our sinful nature desires we will die. The original meaning in Greek of the word translated "sinful nature" is "flesh." To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Furthermore, when we only think about the demands of our sinful nature, we become hostile to God. The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law--indeed, it cannot. Man was created for God's glory and we should make it our aim to please God. But if we are controlled by the sinful nature, we cannot please God. (8)

But we who belong to Jesus are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit of Christ who lives in us. The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is working in us. He gives us life. We should not be fooled by the demands of the sinful nature--we have no obligation to the flesh or to the sinful nature. We must put to death the deeds of the body by obeying the leading of the Spirit.

When we are led by the Spirit of God, we may claim the inheritance that belongs to us as children of God. We are set free from fear. We know God's love so personally that we call him "Daddy". and his Spirit in us renews and confirms his love for us. As children we are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. We share in Christ's suffering as we seek to bring the gospel to the lost world; we share in the glory of the kingdom of God.