
“Our Progressive Sanctification”

ROMANS 6:1-8:37

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AT A GLANCE

In this powerful sermon on **Romans 6-8**, we explore the believer’s transformation through faith in Jesus. Discover how true salvation not only secures our standing before God but also empowers us to break free from sin and walk in the Spirit. Learn what it means to be **alive in Christ**, why **there is no condemnation for those in Him**, and how we are **more than conquerors through His love**. Don't miss this life-changing message on grace, sanctification, and victory!

INTRODUCTION

If we truly come to grips with the doctrine of justification by faith alone as Paul presents it in Romans 3:21-5:21, it might leave us with a startling thought: If my salvation is secured entirely by grace, does that mean I can sin as much as I want without consequence?

Paul anticipated this very question, and in Romans 6, he begins to address the believer’s relationship with sin in light of their new life in Christ. Today, we will examine how true conversion not only secures our standing before God but also transforms our hearts, leading us away from sin and into a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 6:1-7

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin.

BY WHOSE POWER?

This is a really important concept for us to understand. We know that a Christian’s life ought to look different. We’re called to be holy for the Lord our God is holy. But how is it that our lives are changed? By whose power? And what part do we play? This is the substance of Romans 6-8, our progressive sanctification.

Paul says in **6:8-14** **⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness,**

but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Now that we've been born again, we have been released from the **dominion of sin**. We are finally free to not sin. We are now able to not sin and instead to obey from the heart. This represents a significant change, as Paul says in **verse 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed...**

Our conversion is described here as going from slaves of sin to obedient from the heart. There is a real heart change because the Holy Spirit has caused that person who was "*dead in sin*" to be "*made alive together with Christ.*" *Ephesians 2:5* When we are born again we die to our old natures and we're filled with the Holy Spirit who works powerfully within us to change our heart's desires and therefore the outcome of our actions.

IT'S A LONG ROAD

At the same time, the longer we travel this road of progressive sanctification, and the closer we get to Jesus, the more we realize how much we still need Him, and of how much further we have to go.

I believe Paul expressed this tension in the final verses of **chapter 7, verses 15-25** ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Is Paul speaking of himself in the present-tense as a converted man? Or is he using present-tense language retroactively to relate to his fellow Jews who remain unconverted? Those who argue this was Paul's experience as a non-believing Jew say that because it seems to contradict Romans 6.

I spoke to this issue more thoroughly in my sermon called, "Who Will Deliver Me," on July 16, 2023. There I made the case for understanding that Paul spoke in the present-tense to refer to his own personal on-going struggle against sin.

Here's the most compelling reason I believe he is referring to his present experience as a Christian: Had he been speaking of his past, we would expect him to go from, **Wretched man that I am in 7:24**, a recognition of his brokenness, to **Who will rescue me from this body of death?**, which is a cry for salvation, to a song of praise, **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord** then straight to **8:1, There is therefore now no condemnation...**

If the message of Romans 7 is Paul' pre-conversion experience, that's how it would go. "I am broken => I need Jesus to rescue me => Thank God for Jesus => There is now no condemnation."

However, that's not the progression he used. Paul made an interesting assertion between his thanksgiving and his exclamation of non-condemnation. Paul says in **7:25, So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.**

Let me paraphrase, "**So then**, or in conclusion, **I myself**, Paul, serve the law of God with my mind – I want to do what's right – but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. In the members of my body, if I am not constantly fighting my flesh, I am prone to sin. I feel constantly at war with my flesh. The closer I get to Jesus, the more I realize how imperfect I really am."

NO CONDEMNATION

That's what I believe Paul is saying, which makes **Romans 8:1-2** so much sweeter! Because Paul is saying that even when you sin as a Christian, **¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**

If Romans 6 describes the conversion experience and 7 describes the pre-converted experience, what do they do when *Christians* sin? Is there condemnation? This theology unfortunately wreaks havoc on tender-hearted Christians.

If Paul's conversion experience left him totally victorious over sin, what is one to do with their own ongoing struggle? Does it indicate a false conversion? The truth is, it might. But it doesn't necessarily mean that. If Romans 7 is Paul's history and not his present, then when you and I sin, is there once again condemnation?

To that I say by no means! There is no condemnation for those in Christ. This applies to Christians throughout the rest of their lives, irrespective of their post-conversion sin. Paul wrote in 8:1 in the present tense just as he did 7:15-25.

Not "there *was* no condemnation," *until you blew it*! Not, "there will be no condemnation," *as long as you don't blow it.* **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** If this were not true, if there were anything we must do or refrain from doing to keep ourselves not condemned, is that not the essence of works-based righteousness? This is why I believe Romans 7 depicts Paul's frustration with his sin nature.

If Romans 7 depicts a fleshly life, Romans 8 serves as the antithesis, life in the Spirit. If, in his flesh, Paul struggled with the war in the members of his body, the pull toward sin, in the Holy Spirit, Paul lived in victory; the two are at war within us.

THE SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU

As he says in **8:5, ⁵For 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.** And according to **verses 9-11**, everyone who is in Christ has the Holy Spirit in them.

⁹...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

If the Holy Spirit dwells in you, you have all you need to live in spiritual victory. Your body of death that wants to drag you away in sin is no longer in control and you have been given the Holy Spirit who empowers you to walk in victory, giving life where there was once only death!

And the Spirit is not just an impersonal force of good working in us. No, He is our very personal and very direct connection to God our Father. Paul says in **verses 14-17 ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back**

into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to continually remind us that we are children of God. Why would we need that reminder? One reason is that we’ve failed to live in obedience to Him and we may wonder if we’ve lost our place in God’s family.

“No,” the Spirit says, “there is still no condemnation for you, you need not be afraid, you are still loved by God. Now, let’s learn from this and let me help you. Walk with me and lean on me and trust me to empower you to resist your sin. God has given me to you as a seal of your salvation and of your promised future inheritance. You’re suffering for a little while, but glory is coming soon!”

EAGERLY AWAITING REDEMPTION

But not soon enough. We must wait for our redemption, which Paul describes in **verses 23-26**.²³ **And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**²⁴ **For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?**²⁵ **But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.**²⁶ **Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.**

While we wait with eager longing for the redemption, we do not wait alone. The Holy Spirit **helps us in our weakness**. He **intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words**. Even when we have come to the end of our rope and we have no words to pray, whether from frustration or exhaustion or fear, we know that the Holy Spirit is praying for us to the Father. What a precious gift is this Holy Spirit!

BLESSED ASSURANCE

And because we have Him dwelling within us, we can be certain that we will forever dwell with Him. **Romans 8:31-37** offers us good reason to face the world and the darkness and our sin with confident assurance that there is nothing in all of creation that can change that.³¹ **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**³² **He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**³³ **Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.**³⁴ **Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**³⁶ **As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”**³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**³⁸ **For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,**³⁹ **nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Paul tried to come up with every possible assailant against the soul of the believer and then knocked it on its face. Everyone who has called out in earnest contrition to Jesus in faith is eternally secure in Him. **Nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

As we will see next week, this is rooted in the doctrine of God’s election. Salvation is a non-refundable and irrevocable gift of divine mercy. Nevertheless, as we walk this journey of faith, we must remember that while we are justified apart from works, our lives as believers are marked by an

ongoing battle with sin. Yet, we do not fight this battle alone. The same Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead now dwells in us, leading, convicting, and empowering us to live in victory.

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