

9,23,21 Rom. 8 The Mind of Christ

I'll begin by reading the first 9 verses of Romans 8;

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through (it's appeal to) the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."

Before we break this down, there is something we need to keep in mind. This is from Sidlow Baxter's book "For God So Loved".

"When the New Testament speaks about believing *on* the Lord Jesus, it obviously does not mean believing certain particulars *about* Him. It means to rely upon the Lord Jesus Himself, as a real, personal Savior. When we believe on a man, we are doing much more than just believing what he says. To believe on someone is to rest with full confidence upon the man himself. That kind of believing is an act of the heart rather than of the head.

"The two acts of believing and disbelieving are really directed towards the Lord Jesus Himself. It is not just a matter of believing or disbelieving certain truths. Our believing is a believing exercised toward Jesus Christ; and our doubting or disbelieving, also, is a doubting or disbelieving Him. "

In Romans 6 and 7 we were asked to believe certain things about our relationship to sin and the Law. In Romans 8 we will be asked to believe truths related to walking in the Spirit, the purpose of suffering and our security in Christ.

So, just to repeat the last sentence of Baxter's comments,

"Our believing is a believing exercised toward Jesus Christ; and our doubting or disbelieving, also, is a doubting or disbelieving Him. "

What makes this both important and encouraging is that we may or may not understand what we're learning, we may have doubts about our own capacity to understand what's confusing to us.

But we can all be confident in Christ because we know Him well enough to know that in spite of whatever difficulties we might have, *He* can be trusted – He is absolutely trustworthy.

We aren't being asked to accomplish something, we aren't even being asked to fully comprehend all we're learning (that will come with time); we are asked *first* to trust in the integrity of our Savior.

If we can approach what we study in Romans six through eight with this as our foundation, it is more likely that we will experience what these chapters offer us.

I want to introduce this chapter with some input from Miles Stanford because he does a good job of helping us make the transition from chapters 6 & 7 into chapter 8;

"Through the years, whether we realize it or not, the Holy Spirit is developing us "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18) along His prescribed path. Romans Six is the step that deals with the principle of sin, and is the answer to its power. Romans Seven is the struggle (usually years in duration) that has to do with the principle of law, and brings the answer to its bondage.

"Romans eight is the walk based on the principle of life in Christ as ministered by the Spirit of Life. There is actually a dual application in the truth of Romans 8:1 and 2. Concerning the future, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has freed us from the eternal condemnation of the law of sin and death. As to the present, the Holy Spirit ministers the life of the Lord Jesus within for our daily walk, progressively freeing us from the power of sin and the deathly influence it spawns. 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, it is much more (certain),

now that we are reconciled, that we shall be saved (daily delivered from sin's dominion) through His (resurrection) life' (Rom.5:10, Amp.). We are saved from the condemnation of sin because of His reconciliation; we are delivered from the power of sin (by His indwelling life)."

It would be great if all this was immediate the instant we were born again, but as with all that God does in His people, this takes time. Stanford uses the word "progressively".

It takes years, sometimes decades, to realize not only that we don't have in ourselves what it takes to live this Life, but also that the resources have already been provided, and what we need is to grow in our understanding how to appropriate into what is ours in Christ.

When we get to Romans 12, we'll see that the way we think about all of this, our *mindset*, is going to be the determining factor of our experience – good or bad.

(Rom. 12:2) "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

And here's how Paul words it in Rom. 8:6;

"The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

Obviously, having our thoughts occupied with immorality and worldliness is going to sabotage a 'mind set on the Spirit'. But that's only one of Satan's techniques to keep us from Life in Christ.

The other impairment to spiritual life, which is probably more pervasive, is religion; which is why there is such an overwhelming emphasis in Paul's letters on recognizing and rejecting false doctrine.

A 'mind set on the flesh' can just as easily be a personal commitment to unsound doctrine as to immorality. They will both quench the expression of the Spirit in our lives.

And since the ultimate goal of our lives here is to be able to say with Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), we have to make sure what we are learning and studying, and the church we attend, is moving us in that direction.

One of the things that I realize is difficult to be grateful for (but we *should* be) is the *way* the Lord arranges the circumstances of our lives to create a desperation in us to understand how all this works.

If living life in Christ is only something we desire, almost casually, then we'll never have our hearts sold out for this. But bring in desperation and everything changes.

I know that for many believers the desperation isn't so much an issue of not wanting to live in immorality or rebellion; it's more an issue of wanting to glorify the Lord and experience the "rest" that has been offered to us.

(Matt. 11:28) "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Or (Heb. 4:9-10) "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works . . ."

The emphasis in passages like this is on our "labor". It's not sin alone that's causing a desire for freedom and rest, it's working our tails off in religious "duties" and "obligations" *without* the experience of God's strength. That was what was crushing those Jesus addressed in Matt. 11.

Paul said he "labored to the point of exhaustion" and that he "worked harder than all the apostles". But listen to the *whole* passage:

(Col. 1:29) "For this purpose I also labor, striving according to *His* working which works in me mightily."

(1 Cor. 15:10) "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

"His working" and *"the grace of God with me."*

Paul had learned over the years that his body might be exhausted, but at the core of his being he not only had rest, he had no doubt about who was actually empowering him and ensuring that what he did was genuinely bearing spiritual fruit.

This is what Romans 8 is really all about. Six and seven are the Holy Spirit's attempts to help us understand how to remove the hinderances to eight – and

chapter eight is what spiritual life looks like when those hinderances are out of the way.

Everything we are looking at is both interrelated and interdependent. When by God's grace, they start making sense and form a personal mindset of understanding, commitment and confidence; then we no longer have the "mind of the flesh" but instead we're moving into a life characterized by the "mind of the Spirit."

So, we walk into each day and each situation from the vantage point of trusting in the *Person* of Christ to guide and empower our lives. It's a faith position, not only in what the Lord has said, but in Who He is within us.

Again, as Stanford put it,

"It becomes a growing knowledge, by and through experience, of our crucified, risen Lord. Our confidence in the Lord Jesus develops as we realize that His grace is sufficient for all these things, and that His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor.12:9-10). We are compelled to prove His faithfulness at every point of need.

"Although we are living in our risen Lord, we are camping in this body of humiliation, and serving in this world of death. Therefore, our Father keeps us in the place of need and helplessness in ourselves. 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us' (2 Cor.4:7)."

"Take heart. The continuity of life out of death leads to the crown."

This whole concept of "life out of death" (the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying that it may bear much fruit), is absolutely essential to our understanding of spiritual life.

As I was working on this, I came across this article by David Wilkerson. He does a great job of tying this principle into actual experience;

"I believe in healing. I believe in affliction. I believe in 'healing afflictions'. Any affliction that keeps me from going astray, that drives me deeper into God's Word, is healing. As Psalm 119:67 says, 'Before I was afflicted, I went

astray, but now I keep your word' (NKJV). God's gracious healing spiritually and physically can be through afflictions.

"To suggest that all pain and affliction are of the devil is to suggest that the Psalmist was driven by the devil to seek God's Word. In my own life, I have suffered great pain. I will continue to thank God for my present condition and let it serve to remind me how dependent I really am on him. With the Psalmist, I can say, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes' (Psalm 119:71).

"Pain and affliction are not to be despised as coming from the devil. Such burdens have produced great men of faith and insight.

"Paul spoke of the 'cares' of the churches that were thrust upon him (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Every newborn church was another 'care' on his shoulders. The man that God uses must have broad shoulders. He dare not shrink from the challenge of numerous cares and responsibilities.

"Every new step of faith God leads me to take has brought with it numerous cares and problems. God knows exactly how many cares he can trust us with. It is not that he seeks to break us in health or strength; it is only that willing laborers are few, and the harvest is great. 'Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7).

"Cares are taken from those who refuse them and given as gifts to those who are not afraid of them. Every new blessing is related to a plethora of cares. They cannot be divorced. You cannot enjoy the blessings until you learn to live with the cares."

In Romans 9 Paul is going to tell us that the Potter has absolute right over the clay to mold it as He sees fit. And with what Romans 8 tells us about God's love and commitment to us, we should be more than willing to trust Him with whatever He is doing.

The Spirit didn't write Romans 8 to tantalize us with a life we can never live; He wrote it as an offer to those who will trust Him to make it happen – whether or not we understand or agree with the methods He's using to do so.

I know most of you well enough to know that you aren't "rice Christians" (I'll explain that in a minute). You have no desire to settle for less than what the Lord wants.

So, because of the testing we will be going through in the coming months, I want to make sure we understand what the underground Church in China calls "rice Christians".

"From the high altitude of the first years as set before us in the book of the Acts, the church began to decline. When we get out of the apostolic age, we find that decline steadily going on, until the church publicly, generally, becomes a thing of this world, even becoming politically attached to the earth. The battle all through the ages has been in this very connection, as to whether the church would retrieve the loss of its high position, or for any reason at all, by prosperity or adversity, accept something lower.

"What is and has been true throughout all its history is true today and is true with us. It is true in the case of every individual believer, as it is of the whole – the tendency to come down; and everything from the side of the enemy is directed towards creating a lower level of things than God intended, and therefore a lower level than that to which the Lord can commit Himself. It is only as the Lord's position for His people is held that the Lord can commit Himself.

"It is at this point that we need to recognize something that may solve some problems or just give the final answer to a lot of our difficulties. That to which the Lord really *does* commit Himself is the spiritual side of things, not the temporal side of things, even in relation to His work. He may facilitate; He may help; He may send resources; He may rule and overrule in temporal matters; but we would agree that it would be very dangerous for the Lord to make *that* His realm of complete operations. That is, whenever a difficulty arises in the temporal realm, if the Lord immediately came right in and swept that out of the way and gave an easy, clear path to His servants, it would really mitigate against true spirituality, and it would bring the whole thing down to a temporal level.

"Multitudes would come in because of the advantages. 'It is a good thing to be a Christian; God gives you everything you want, if only you will be a

Christian’, and so you become ‘rice Christians’. The Lord neither can, nor will, nor does, commit Himself fully to the temporal aspects of His own work. Spiritually the position in union with a heavenly Lord means fullness, and the measure of fullness depends entirely upon the spiritual nature of everything.”

This ‘heavenly nature of everything’ is referring to what Roman 8 calls, the “mind set on the Spirit” as opposed to the “mind set on the flesh” – in other words, having the mind of Christ as over against a focus on our self-life as being what matters most.

I know that everyone (myself included) wishes there was a single verse or ‘action’ we can take to move from where we are to complete victory, from our present Christian experience to Paul’s.

But this mindset, this way of viewing ourselves and God and life has to be worked into us over time through experience. It has to be something we become, not just something we do.

God wants this life in the Spirit to be who we are, as well as what we think – so we have to come to understand through trial and error over the course of our lives how this is meant to work in us.

We may be positionally out of the flesh and into the Spirit as Paul says in Rom. 8:9,

“... you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.”

But experientially, we are moving from infancy to maturity in our understanding of what this looks like in daily life.

So, in making the transition from Romans 7 to Romans 8, three principles must be kept clearly in mind:

1st. We must have a mindset that has shifted from self-expectation to a quiet dependence upon Christ.

2nd. We must never forget that God has shown us, by His Word and in our own experience, that apart from Christ we are morally and spiritually incapable of living the Christian life.

3rd. Each of us must make a deliberate choice to embrace God's will, but with a restful dependence upon Him to enable the accomplishment of His will in and through us.

There absolutely *is* a freedom from the dominion of the flesh available to us, but the path to that freedom is costly.

I spent the last 25 years working in the Prison System, and I came across a statement by an author (who used to be incarcerated) on the value of freedom;

"It is my earnest conviction that everyone should be in jail at least once in his life and that the imprisonment should be on suspicion rather than proof; it should last at least four months; it should seem hopeless; and preferably the prisoner should be sick half of the time. Only by such imprisonment does he learn what real freedom is."

This is just one of many reasons why God takes *time* to break us away from the mastery of the flesh – so we will genuinely desire, and be grateful for, the freedom we have in Christ.

Just as freedom is more valuable to one who has known imprisonment; life is more valuable to one who has known death.

God allows us to know slavery (or imprisonment) so that we might value freedom; He allows us to know death that we might value life. In other words, only someone who has been in Romans 7 can fully appreciate Romans 8.

So, don't despair if you seem to be spending way too much time in Romans 7 – that experience is the gateway to Romans 8. And the Lord is the only One who knows exactly how long it will take to get you where you want to be.

In John 3:14-15 Jesus gave a clear illustration of what faith means when He said to Nicodemus:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life", (See also Num. 21:5-9).

Listen to J. R. Stromberg's comments on this passage;

“The Israelite in the wilderness showed his faith by looking upon the serpent of brass that hung on the pole. In this one act of faith was expressed a confession of sin and utter helplessness and an acknowledgment that God's provision was his only hope. He did not understand the significance of the serpent, nor why it was made of brass. He did not analyze his faith to see if it was strong enough or of the right kind. He did not question the intensity of his look; he surely claimed no merit for looking. There were just two things on his mind: his own absolute hopelessness and the sufficiency of God's provision, the Object of his faith. There is no power in faith that contributes to deliverance. The saving power comes from God alone.”

In everything we've looked at in Romans six through eight, the foundation has always been faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. And without faith we can never see that which is invisible, including spiritual life.

(Heb. 11:1) “Now faith substantiates the things hoped for, and provides evidence of things *not* seen.”

Here are some passages in the section we'll be looking at in the last part of our study tonight. This part of Romans focuses on the connection between suffering and glory, and closes with an affirmation that no matter what happens to us, God's love never changes;

(Rom. 8:16-27) “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. . . For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. . . What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life,

nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sometimes the Lord responds to our appeals to Him immediately and in ways that astonish us. Sometimes there’s delay, which depending on our circumstances, can be painful.

We probably don’t need to spend time talking about how to cope when everything goes according to plan.

But when the opposite of what we hoped for happens – that’s what we might need help with.

listen to David's lament in these verses from Psalm 88;

“O Lord, God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before You . . . You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness. . . I have stretched out my hands to You; to You have I cried, O Lord why do you cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die. . . “

According to Acts 13:22 David was “a man after God’s own heart”. So, why did God cause David to go through this?

An Old Testament scholar, Leonard Mare’, wrote this in his commentary on the Psalms;

“Psalm 88 has been called an embarrassment to conventional faith. The psalm is unique when compared with other psalms of lament. In Ps 88 we find the desperate cry of someone who seeks to connect with God, but God keeps silent. The psalmist finds himself in the deepest darkness of abandonment and despair. Yet, his unanswered cry does not silence the poet. God may stay quiet, but not the psalmist. He continues to hurl his cries into an empty sky, convinced that even in the face of God's inattention, God must still be addressed. Even when confronted with the reality of death, death caused by God, the poet sticks to his protest, to be met yet again with more silence. God doesn't speak and He doesn't act. The poet feels ignored, snubbed, shunned, and rejected. The last words he speaks are of darkness. What should one do about this complete silence and this bottomless

darkness? What is this psalm doing in the Bible? What does this psalm say about the life of faith? What should one's response be when facing this dark night of the soul? Should one abandon God in the face of his desertion?

"I would contend that Ps 88 stands as a signpost for realism in the life of faith. The psalm provides a good dose of realism in the face of so-called faith that is unrealistic and romantic. Life is like that. Life can be extremely harsh. The psalms address all aspects of life, not just the good parts. Here in Ps 88 faith faces life as it is. The psalm shows that the experience of darkness also has its place in the life of faith. Suffering and loss are part and parcel of our human existence, even for people who are devoted to God. Any theology that is unwilling to face the darkness and turns away from confronting that darkness is a weakened and attenuated theology."

One of the main things we should gain from this Psalm (from *many* of the Psalms) is the absolute honesty and boldness of God's servants.

As important as it is to never lose sight of the purpose of these times of sorrow and how the Lord can use them "to work all things together for our good", it's also important to realize that we will experience them.

Anyone who *hasn't* experienced them is either a new Christian or he isn't growing, because everyone in the Bible that God has greatly used has spent significant time in Psalm 88.

Here are some more comments on this by Mare';

"In Ps 88, the darkness is the result of God's inattention. Even then, the psalmist continues to plead his case with no-holds barred honesty. He doesn't shirk away from confronting God, even if God stays silent. This psalm is not a psalm of mute depression.

"Even when God appears unfaithful as the God of deliverance, even in the face of total abandonment, David stays faithful in his speech. Prayer should continue, even when only darkness is left. Even when God is silent, and ignoring, and irrational, prayer should still be addressed to Him. Although his prayer provides no answer, but only led to more troubling questions, the psalmist kept on praying. This is faith; the pouring out of one's pain and hurt and bitterness and experiences of and apparent abandonment before God,

even when He doesn't answer; even when He is responsible for all the pain and suffering. In the face of God's silence, the psalmist does not stay silent. The psalmist prays and keeps praying even though everything in him screams that God doesn't care."

God *does* care. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father. He feels our tears.

But God sees what we can't see - He is working something deep and lasting into us; something that involves relationship not religion, that solidifies faith, courage, and integrity – the image of Christ in us.

Paul has intended, since Romans 6, to prepare us (as much as teaching can prepare us) for the implications of the life of a true disciple of Christ. He wants us to know both the privilege and joy of this calling, but he also wants us to be fully aware of the warfare that inevitably accompanies the pursuit of Christ. He wants us to understand and He wants us to not give up.

Kathleen Harmon in her essay called, "Understanding the Psalms" adds this about Psalm 88;

"The psalmist has not abandoned belief. Ps 88 may appear to indicate a loss of faith, but it in fact does the opposite. Continuing to speak to God when He keeps silent is an expression of bold faith. Someone who has lost his or her faith would stop praying, choosing not to address a God whose silence is proof that He doesn't care. Here we find the psalmist reacting to God's silence with intense prayer. God must be addressed, even if God *never* answers."

"The poet provides us with fleeting glimpses of his faith. He still speaks to God, he affirms his relationship, he believes praise is the norm and wishes to return to it, he acknowledges God's love, faithfulness, and righteousness. Rhetorically the psalm shows that it is part of believers' life experience that they will suffer and experience abandonment and despair. The psalm moves far beyond a *safe* pattern of lament."

Walter Brueggemann, another commentator on this Psalm, says we have two options;

"... either to wait in silence, or to speak it again. What one may *not* do is to rush to an easier psalm, or to give up on the Lord."

I hope that in all we've seen, the one thing that stands out above everything else is the supreme importance of two facts:

- 1) God desires and works for our best in literally everything we pass through.
- 2) That which is the highest value to God is honest, transparent relationship.

"What one may *not* do is give up on the Lord."