

Walk in the Spirit  
Romans 8

Romans 6:1-11

Romans 6:12-23

Responsive Psalm 111

This morning we are going to be entering into chapter 8, in many ways the culmination and the point of Paul's argument in this letter, especially the end of chapter 7. Again we see another instance where the chapter divisions break up a flow of thought that would not have been originally divided. In the last half of chapter 7 which we looked at last week Paul describes the war within the lives of God's people. A constant struggle and battle to put to death the sinful nature in the flesh that is yet in an inherent part of who we are. And though, this is a struggle that each and every Christian must fight, Paul in chapter 6 instructed his readers to consider that part of themselves already dead. The sinful nature, desires, and temptations that is a part of this life have been defeated, their penalty paid, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When talking about our justification and sanctification before God, we like to use the term, already and not yet, we have been justified, and sanctified by the work of Christ on the cross, but it is not yet fully realized until that day when we are gathered together with him around the throne.

So to it is with our sinful nature and our redemption. Though we are redeemed, though as scripture says we are seen as God's just and holy bride, we yet are walking in the mire of this world stained by its sin. In the same way our redemption is already and not yet, we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but we have not yet been delivered from this body of death in which we wage war against as Paul described in chapter 7. But in Christ, though the spirit we are no longer a slave to that nature, we have been given power over it so that it no longer rules and reigns within us, but rather by the spirit we are able to wage war against it. In chapter 7 when Paul is talking about this struggle in the flesh against the inherent sinful nature that exists even in the redeemed of God, He writes about this struggle as if it is almost a hopeless endeavor. And I think there are times within our own lives that we can relate with Paul, with a sense of hopelessness in the fight against sin, The tactic of Satan in this internal struggle against our sinful nature is a war of attrition. What I mean by that, is that through a constant onslaught he seeks to wear us down, make us weak, so that we forget the power we have over his temptations and we stumble and fall and he then stands to accuse us. I think that is what Paul is getting at in verse 24 of chapter 7, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Satan can no longer have us, but he still loves to mess with us. He is like an abusive husband whom we have been delivered from and are divorced from, and though we are now married to another, a kind, just, and merciful one, he still shows up to antagonize, and seek to cause trouble in our current marriage. But his accusations ring empty, for those who are the bride of Christ, the answer to that accusation from the Lord is, Yes, I see, yes I know, but I have already forgiven.

This is the hope that we have, this is the victory that we have over this body of death, the promise of redemption and deliverance through the blood of Jesus Christ. That was Paul's answer in verse 25, it is Christ who delivers us from this wretched body of death, to be made alive in him. And this is what he is getting into here in chapter 8, the victory we have in Christ, through the spirit over this body of death, over the inherent sinful nature we must wage war against, and the accusations of Satan against us. And it is this very present and real reality that we see Paul addresses here in verse 1. Let us go ahead and read (chapter 8:1-11)

For those who are in Christ, for those who as Paul described in the last half of verse 7, those who are steeped in the conflict between spirit and flesh, for all of us, who like Paul could say the very same thing in verse 15, “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate I do.” But look at what he says in verse 1 of chapter 8 again, “There is therefore NOW no condemnation to those who are Christ Jesus.” He does not say there was, or that there will be, but that there is, now. This reality has a 2 fold effect upon the sin in our flesh, it is first off all the more condemning, The sinful nature that you carry, the very thoughts in your heart and mind have been paid for by the death of Jesus Christ, know what Christ has endured for us, the Son of God, the taking on the likeness of sinful flesh, walked among us, was tempted in every way we were tempted, suffered separation from the Father, so that sin which we have in our mind, or act out in the flesh is covered. That thought of Christ should make the sin within us seem all the less desirable and more vile, for he died for you so that sin which you are waging war against, or that takes you by surprise, those intrusive thoughts, or feelings....yes, he died for those, so that you may stand before God redeemed, and spotless without blemish, not because you are, but because God claims you to be by the blood of the spotless lamb who was shed for you. The 2<sup>nd</sup> aspect of this reality, is the freedom it brings. As Paul said in chapter 6, reckon yourself dead to these sins, for they have been forgiven, and there is now, no condemnation. There is no reason to dwell upon our sins and failures, or as some religions believe punish the body because of sin, for in Christ they have already been forgiven.

Look what else Paul is saying here in verse 1, the last half of it,” there is no condemnation for those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.” A life in Christ is more than physical reform, it is more than an outward appearance of sinless holiness, it is more than a physical striving for righteousness, but is instead an inward, spiritual, intrinsic part of all who have been born again into the newness of a life in Christ. So much in the christian world is focused upon our outward appearance, and yes, our conduct and that outward appearance is important, but not because it creates holiness, but because it should reflect the holiness that is coming from within. Salvation, and belief is an inward spiritual reality that reflects upon the outer physical reality. This seems to be the case throughout every step of the faith does it not? God says that all men are slaves to sin, that all have fallen, and there is none who seek after him. We see this in the Jewish leaders of Jesus day, striving, and pushing to live by the law, creating an outward appearance of holiness but Jesus says inside they are full of dead men's bones, rot, decay, and sin. The good works, and outer appearance of the Christian is the reflection of the inner reality. That is what is meant, by walking in the spirit, instead of seeking physical reform, resting upon Christ and his grace and mercy, basking in this loving forgiveness and carrying on praising, and worshiping him giving testimony to him, and the hope that is within us.

Verse 2 should be a mantra for all believers, for it is who we are in him, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” In Christ, you are found to be precious to him, and loved by him, so much so that he laid down his life for you so that you may be freed from the condemnation and punishment of the sin that is inherent in you. Essentially, speaking in human terms as an example, what Christ has done is he has gone to the streets, has taken a lost, drugged up prostitute, one who even our own society and humanity rejects, and he has taken her, cleansed her, made her his bride whom he loves and cherishes, This is each and every one of us, vile, wretched, people lost in our sin, stuck in a situation with no way out, to prideful and arrogant to recognize the throne that we think we are sitting on, is nothing more than a pile of refuse. But God has come, taken us from this state and made us his children, the bride of his Son, and brought us into his house and showers us with every good gift.

Our status in Christ can not be stated enough, there is nothing more freeing, and full of hope than the knowledge of the reality that in him, there is no condemnation. That we are children of the most high God, heirs to the kingdom, but not only children and heirs, but precious, loved children. I don't think that we can fully grasp this, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians “ So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be all filled with the fullness of God. “ It is in the width and length, height and depth of Gods love that we should be fully planting ourselves, by that I mean a recognizing of our state in him and through him as ones forgiven, as heirs, and as his children, and living our lives fully planted and centered upon this reality. You want to mortify the sin that so plagues you, you want to put to death the flesh which so weighs you down? Meditate upon Christ and his love for you, and it will change your life. As the hymn we sang this morning said, “ Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.”

When we reckon ourselves to be within the love of God, and we focus our hearts and minds upon him and his loving grace and mercy, the temptations, the desires, the cares and worries fade. I say to reckon ourselves to be within the love of God because we can at times forget, our dull minds need to be reminded daily of his love and care over us which is why the reading of his word and time of prayer is so important. We must root ourselves in these truths, and if we are it changes how we deal with sin in our lives, it changes how we deal with our friends and family, it changes how we deal with the world around us. We have been justified in him, we are loved by him, so let us live boldly as we are on this earth, having confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ that though we fall, though we fail, we can come to him and find forgiveness, and we can rest in him knowing that we do not stand before him condemned, but rather we are loved, and cherished. If God has forgiven us, then who are we to consider ourselves unworthy of his love, if God has forgiven us who are we to consider ourselves needing to suffer for our sins, and if God has forgiven us, should we not all the more forgive with the same love and forgiveness he has given? God's love is not vengeful, he does not repay our sin and failure with wrath, the story of the prodigal son returning home is our story, we drift away, we fall into sin, we spend time in the mire with the pigs, but when we come home to the father, he does not dole our wrath upon us for our stupidity and rebellion, but greets us with open arms, feeds and nourishes us, and showers us in love.

There is no greater hope, and no greater peace that can be found than this reality, that God loves us, desires the best for us, and is willing and able to forgive us when we fail him, so much so that Paul says, there is therefore NOW no condemnation. When we who are his children rise to meet him one day, shedding our old nature like a filthy robe to be clothed in robes of righteousness we will be arriving to the open arms of God who will say, “ well done, my good and faithful servant.” This is what Paul means to be spiritually minded, having our eyes set upon him, recognizing, and understanding that our place here on this earth is a temporary state, and this flesh which is stained by the sin of this world, and of our natural lives in the end is of little consequence. One can read these past 2 chapters of Paul here and without the spirit come away with the conclusion that nothing we do in the flesh matters as long as we retain God in our minds, and such a statement is both true, and false. Yes, ultimately in the end if you are truly in Christ this life is of little consequence, for our sins have been paid, have been forgiven and will not be held against us, but this does not give a license for sin, for the reality is those who are truly in him will desire at there very core to be free from the bondage that sin has upon the flesh, not reveling in it and seeing the temporary nature of our lives here on earth as a license to excuse away to sin.

As long as we are in this world sin is a reality of our lives, but what we do with that sin, how we handle it, reveals our true nature. By that I mean, sin in the life of the believer leads to repentance, a recognition of that sin, a repenting and turning away. Paul described this struggle in chapter 6, a constant battling against the sinful nature that is inherent in the flesh, if there is no struggle, if there is no battle then there is no spirit for the spirit convicts, instructs and guides God's people. And will always point to the forgiveness that we find in Christ. Just like salvation is an inward work of the heart, much like sin itself starts in the heart and mind, so to is the repentance of sin, the heart cries out to God for forgiveness upon recognizing how we have failed him yet again. Paul is writing here to a group of people, Jewish believers in Rome, who for their entire life was ruled by an external law, but that law is of little effect in creating holiness, for its concern is of the action but sin takes root in the heart, the action is only an expression of the sinful nature and desire. What Paul is getting at here in verse 5, "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, the things of the Spirit" In the life of the Christian, it is an outward reflection of an inward reality. For those who are spiritually minded, their lives will reflect that reality

God is not interested in a mere reformation of the body, but it is, and always has been about the very core of our nature, and without the new birth, giving us a new nature having been given the spirit to convict and to guide, no amount of law keeping, morality based living, and outward reformation is going to make you righteous enough to stand before this Just and Holy God. That is the beauty of salvation, that God has taken what was broken from the fall of mankind in Adam, and has made it whole and complete again in him. Having now that curtain of separation torn so that we have access into the very presence of God. So, we can come to him, our loving father as children who as children do, have moments of disobedience, stumble and fall, but we can approach him and repent and we are not met with wrath for our disobedience, but love and forgiveness, because there is no condemnation for those who are Christ Jesus, he has taken the wrath of our sins upon himself and bore them on the cross so we may be reconciled to God, so that we may approach him without judgment and wrath, for the part of us deserving such has been covered by the blood of his Son.

What a glorious state we Christians live in, from the gutters of humanity we have been lifted up to be sons and daughters of the most high God, from living in the filth and squallor of this sinful world, to one day be in his very presence in paradise, no longer stained by sin, no longer weighed down by this sinful flesh. Paul said to reckon this as already a reality, live as one who has been redeemed, glory in the God of your salvation who has taken you from the gutter and lifted you up to his heavenly court, where he has appointed you as sons and daughters, heirs of his kingdom. Though it is all yet to come, we can consider it to already been done for God will not go back on his promises, if you are his, then you are forgiven, and you will one day rise up to see him face to face, the heavenly Father who loves you and who has rescued you from destruction. So what do we do today while we await that glorious day? We rejoice in him, looking toward that day, walking in the newness of life given by him through the spirit, as we await his pending return, putting our faith, and our trust, and our hope in the one who has promised to return. And it is this reality, that governs our lives, it is this inward reality that reflects outwardly into our lives in how we conduct ourselves, we a forgiven people, should be a people of forgiveness, we a loved people, should be a people of love, not because it gains us favor, but because it is who we are in him. And against such there is no law, nor condemnation. We as humans always seem to want to complicate salvation, scripture has 2 requirements, repent, and believe, yet we want to add on entire lists of expectations, and requirements, creating for ourselves new laws and regulations, but those who walk in the spirit are free from such for it is God working in you through the holy spirit to will and to do that which is pleasing to him.

It is as simple as that, repent and believe, and it can be this simple for it is the work of God who has chosen you and who puts it on your heart to do so, and if chosen when the sinful nature of the flesh is revealed and you are faced with the reality of your sin, the natural response that will follow is repentance and belief. IF you are hearing this convicting call of the spirit today, repent, believe, lay to rest all your guilt, sin, and despair before the feet of the one who died so that you are able to repent and believe, and walk in the spirit, in the newness of life given to those who have been washed by the blood of Christ, reckoning yourself dead to the sinful nature and desires of the flesh, and alive in him.