

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Lent 4 -- March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008

### **Romans 8:1-10**

**“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. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.**

**Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

**You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”**

Dear children of God who have been freed from the slavery of sin, death and the Devil.

As you watch the news you see that there are lots of people who are in prison. These are people who have committed crimes that are so bad that they need to spend time locked up away from everyone else. Some of these prisons are low security and some of these are high security prisons where only the worst of criminals go. Most of these prisoners will spend big parts of their lives behind bars. When it is time to get out of prison, some get to leave without any stipulations, while others have strict rules that they have to follow. It is not uncommon to hear that certain prisoners who are released from prison have to wear little tracking devices wherever they go. They are under a form of house arrest. But I bet that most of these prisoners are just happy to be outside the walls of prison. They are more free than if they were behind bars.

If I had my choice, and I imagine that you would say the same, between living in prison or outside of prison, I'd choose outside of prison every time. In prison, a person will get the basic necessities of life-- food, clothes, shelter, maybe some education, a little recreation area for exercise, visitation from family and friends, even a job at times. But how limited all of these things are! Think also of the freedoms that are lost! Want a bowl of ice cream before going to bed? I doubt it! Want to drive to the mall to go shopping? Nope! How about a walk in the park with your wife? Nah! Want to go to your son's little league baseball game? Can't do that either! If you do the crime, you have to pay the time, spending time behind bars! It's a life that I don't think many people would choose over a life of freedom on the outside.

As we think of that contrast, let's put it into a spiritual context. As Paul thought about his sins and his struggles against them, he knew he was guilty as charged! He said, **“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing....What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death (Rom. 7:19,24)?”** Paul felt like a prisoner to his sinful nature, unable to do what he knew he wanted to do and guilty of those sins he didn't want to do in the first place. But as true as his guilt was, and as true as his deserving condemnation in hell was, he also knew that there is **“no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** As we study that truth, how it is to be and what it means for you and me, Paul tells us today,

## Sermon Theme: Enjoy Your Freedom in Christ!

1. Freedom from the sentence of death
2. Freedom to live a new life

Maybe you and I have never done anything “criminal” that would put us in prison, but in a sense we are still deserving of the same punishment as the worst criminal that history has ever known. That’s the punishment of eternal death and damnation in hell. It’s what everyone deserves, because we’ve all sinned against God. We’ve all gone against God’s will in thought, word or deed on a daily basis. It’s pretty obvious. Paul says, **“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires....The mind of sinful nature is death....the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”** Let me read you a list of things that the sinful nature leads a person to do. **“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal. 5:19-21).** Hear any that you’ve done? This isn’t an exhaustive list by any means, but is a list to show and teach us that any natural desire for that which God prohibits is sin, which we are guilty of no matter what that desire may be. Such desires can’t do what God wants and actually make a person an enemy of God! I’m not sure that that’s a place where any of us would want to be!

As you connect yourself to those or other sinful desires, it’s impossible to clean our slate before God by denying them or making excuses for them. That won’t work, because even if you could, there’s also the problem that you were born sinful. At birth, you inherited a sinful nature from your sinful parents! So standing on trial before God on the basis of God’s law means only one thing: GUILTY!

Paul gives us the solution to our problem when he says, **“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. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”** The simple fact is that the law cannot save us. No one can keep the law perfectly in order to be saved. No one except Jesus, God’s Son. God sent him here **“in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”** Jesus came **“in the likeness of sinful man”** because he was like us in every way—flesh and blood, emotions, tempted, suffered, the whole works—but with one exception. He was without sin.

At least without sin of his own! He came **“in the likeness of sinful man”** with sin when he inherited our sins and the sins of the world in order to pay for them! Such a payment was made when Jesus became **“a sin offering”** when he was crucified and died on the cross. For that reason, all believers in Jesus are **“freed from the sentence of death.”** Standing in God’s courtroom, expecting to be sentenced, we are declared not guilty. The charges are dropped! That’s something to enjoy, a freedom from the guilt and penalty of our sins that is priceless, too great to ever think we could repay!

If you were freed from prison after being there for a period of time what would you do when you got out? Would your life be any different? Would you go back to that life of crime that put you in prison in the first place? Would you make some changes in your life, appreciate each day of freedom a little more and work hard at doing things so that you won’t have to go to prison again? As Christians freed from the sentence of death and damnation in hell, we not only will enjoy that declaration and knowledge of “not guilty” but we will also **“enjoy the freedom of a new life.”**

When Paul describes the life of a sinner who is sentenced to death by his sin with one who is freed from that sentence by his connection to Christ in faith, it’s easy to see a difference, a change, a new life.

First there is a new way of thinking. Paul says, **“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”** When you live to satisfy the desires of the flesh, your sinful nature is in control and you think only about yourself, not God or your neighbor first as God wills. When you live to please God, loving him first and putting others before yourself, then the Spirit of God is at work! That’s the **“new life”** we enjoy and find great pleasure in living!

Second there is a different result. Paul says, **“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”** When a person lives without faith in Jesus as their Savior, I would imagine that each day would have a haunting fear concerning their future, especially death. They know death is a certainty, they read about it, hear about it and maybe know someone who dies regularly. But what then? Is there a hell? Is there a day of reckoning? What if all this Jesus stuff is true?

**“Enjoy your freedom in Christ with a mind controlled by the Spirit”** and **“life and peace”** is the result. I mean eternal life, but also an earthly life that is at **“peace”** with God. That doesn’t mean that your life is sin-free! We know that we often slip into that life of crime against God daily, but we also know God forgives our sins. We know that God strengthens us to overcome temptations, gives us his Word as a road map for living as God wants us to, and that God blesses us as His children when we follow his will.

It’s God’s will that we will want to follow as we remember what God has done for us! Remember when you were a little child? When Dad is out mowing the lawn, a little child often runs outside to “help.” Or when mom goes shopping, you want a cart to shop with too. When a child grows up, that “want to” attitude seems to change. In order for those same tasks to be done, it becomes a “have to” attitude.

There’s really a difference between having to do something and wanting to do something. When we hear the gospel, the good news of Jesus as our Savior, by whom we are declared not guilty by God, does our life become a “have to” or a “want to”? Do you find yourself coming to church because you “have to”? Do you only give your offering because you “have to” because it’s a due you owe? Do you only come to the Lord’s Supper because you “have to”? Are you kind or helpful to others because you “have to”? If so, then we are simply living under the law, slaves to the law, living because we “have to” otherwise we will be punished, otherwise God will be angry.

If so, then we have forgotten what Jesus has done for us! We’ve forgotten that we have the freedom to live for God because he lived for us first. Jesus has not only given us freedom from sin and its condemnation but also freedom for living a new life, one that “wants to” instead of “has to;” one that is a joy to live and not a burden to live. Live because **“your spirit is alive because of righteousness”** a righteousness that means you are “not guilty” and a righteousness that Jesus has freely won for you and which the Holy Spirit has given to you by bringing you to faith in Jesus.

As terrible as having to be locked up in prison would be, the thought of living under the control of sin, and charged with the condemnation of eternity in hell is much worse. Thanks be to God we aren’t under sin’s control and won’t be do the time in hell we deserve. Thanks be to God for his Son Jesus Christ. We are free! **“Enjoy your freedom in Christ!”** Amen.