

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Great Chapters of the Bible: Romans 8

Freedom! There is a great urge in our day for freedom, particularly among the younger generation. Let's get rid of restrictions! Why be saddled with old fashioned ideas? In other words, it is freedom to do what we like. We are reaping the consequences of this attitude all around. The whole fabric of society is being destroyed. This great chapter we are going to think about today is a mountain peak in the range of Scripture. We are to think of real freedom!! There are eight areas of freedom in this chapter.

The first is freedom from condemnation, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (verse 1). These first verses of Romans 8 are a summing up of the previous chapters, particularly chapters 6 and 7. In these two chapters, the apostle Paul deals with what we are by nature. There are very valuable lessons to learn here. In every case it is the Lord's death on the cross which is the way of deliverance. The old nature is described in chapter 6 as "the old man". The apostle writes in verse 6, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him." We also learn that we are "dead with Christ." Paul goes on to say, "For he that is dead is freed from sin." Sin is a tyrant holding sway over us all; we are powerless to deal with it ourselves. But sin has no power over a dead man! It is important that we know these things to be true. In verse 11, we are to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the way of real freedom.

Chapter 7 deals with another subject; this time it is the law. The law was given to the Jews to teach them that they were sinful. In another place we read, "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Every effort to keep it failed. It became a burden too heavy to bear. Even Gentiles who try to keep it are only brought into bondage. Paul tried it, but he failed at every attempt as chapter 7 tells us. The apostle brings in the cross as the way of escape from bondage, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God ." (verse 4). The words used here, "body of Christ", point again to the Lord's death. This may sound unusual to some, but similar expressions are used on two other occasions, having the same meaning, (Colossians 1:22 and Hebrews 10:10). This expression again refers to the cross as dealing with our old nature. Returning to chapter 8:1, we repeat, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." It is true of us now!

The second freedom is freedom from the power of sin in our lives. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (verse 2). There are many believers who are sure that they are saved from judgement. At times they are happy but at other times they despair. Alas, they find that the old nature within is very much alive. Even Paul himself learned this. At the end of the previous chapter he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The solution to this dilemma is found in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 has more to say about the Holy Spirit than any other chapter in the Bible. He is a gift given to every believer who can never lose it; He is the seal of our faith. We must however give a little more attention to the verse just quoted.

The word 'law' used twice in this verse has nothing to do with the Ten Commandments. It refers to a controlling power, like the law of gravity which always pulls in the same direction. In the unbeliever, the law of sin and death always pulls down. It is this law which causes such distress even in believers when they find that in themselves they have no power to curb its tendencies. How good it is to learn that believers have another power enabling them to overcome. Paul puts it like this "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free..." This is our second freedom! We now have a power to enable us to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (verse 4) Walk in the Bible refers to our manner of life. The flesh is another way of describing the old nature. We must not think we shall always be on the crest of the wave. Positive energy and commitment must be an ongoing matter but we do have a power in the Person of the Holy Spirit to help. Before we leave this part of our talk, there is one other mention of the work of the Spirit to think about. "...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (verse 13) This is the practical part of our subject. When the apostle writes, "ye shall live", he means it.

The third freedom in our chapter is freedom from bondage into relationship. This freedom is in verse 15. Just listen! "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." It may be that there were some among the Christians at Rome who, before they were converted, had been Jews and brought up under the law. They had first-hand experience of bondage. The apostle Peter

described the law like this, "A yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." In believing the Gospel, these believers had escaped from bondage. They were no longer servants but sons! This is like our home situation. When we leave our work at the end of the day, we go home. Now, we are in a different atmosphere altogether. We are able to relax and enjoy the warmth and love proper to home. To the believer God is no longer impersonal and in the distance, as we once thought, but having the Spirit of sonship we address him as "Abba, Father."

Christians are also said to be children in this chapter. This, of course, involves the birth tie. How intimate our relationship is! Not only this, we are fully assured of it. How is that? Paul gives the answer, "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." We will probably have to suffer for the Lord's sake, but what is it, when compared with the glory soon to be ours?

The fourth freedom in Romans 8 is freedom for a groaning creation. Let's listen carefully again! In verse 22 Paul writes, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." This condition is the result of the sin of Adam, the first man. God gave to him the place of head of the lower creation. When he fell, the creation shared his ruin. The condition in this area was never God's original plan. There is a time coming when all will be reversed. Many of the Old Testament prophets wrote of this time. As far as the physical creation is concerned we are assured that, "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). It's not like that now, is it? But it will be! Thinking of the animal creation, what a change! "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid...and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). This all spells liberty! When will this be? The answer to this question is given in verse 19. "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." Well! Who are these sons? In the earlier part of our talk today, we learned that believers are the sons of God. The world around us knows nothing of this. We do not appear to be different from anyone else. But we will be manifested as the sons of God one day. Other scriptures make it clear that this will be when Christ appears. However, in verse 19, the focus is upon the sons of God. We can scarcely credit what his grace will do through us. It was by man's sin that the present conditions came in, so by man, rescued by grace and given the dignity of sons of God, the creation will be brought into liberty.

The fifth freedom in this eighth chapter of Romans is freedom for the believer from a groaning within caused by their links with creation. "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit...groan...waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (verse 23). This link is our body. The various infirmities that we all suffer, more so as we grow older, very often get us down in spirit. However, believers groan intelligently, because they have the indwelling Spirit. This is referred to here as the firstfruits of the Spirit. Christians have a sure and certain hope. Present conditions will not always prevail. Let's think of this hope. Paul says we are waiting for the "redemption of our body." Already we possess the redemption of our souls. Doesn't Paul say in another place, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins?" We look forward to the time when our bodies will be liberated. Then the last link will be broken. When will it be? When the Lord Jesus comes again, to take all believers to be with Him, our bodies will be changed. The apostle Paul writes in another epistle "we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Philippians 3:20 and 21).

The sixth freedom in our chapter is freedom from the pressure of circumstances. This is another service rendered by the indwelling Holy Spirit: "but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (verse 26). Have you ever been in a situation when the pressure has been so great that you did not know what to pray for as you ought? You are not alone; we have all had this experience. This is exactly what Paul writes about in this passage. "And in like manner the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness, for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting." This, by the way, is from another translation. Maybe you have never thought of such a thing before; that the Holy Spirit can help you. Here is a charming thought. The figure is of someone who comes alongside and bends down and shares the burden being carried. Also, "God who searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Thus God hears and understands our prayers although we could not put them into intelligent expression. Let's think still further about this freedom from pressure and care. Towards the end of the chapter another mention is made of intercession. This time it is the Lord Jesus who intercedes for us. Just listen once more to these encouraging words of Paul, "Christ...who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." How well cared for we are. Why is it that so often we are over burdened with anxiety and care?

The seventh freedom in our chapter is freedom from uncertainty as to the future. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (verse 29). In the previous section, as to the pressure of circumstances, we thought about the words "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Just contrast this with the following verse, "For we do know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (verse 28). Many believers only quote half of the verse and stop! The second part is the most important part. What can alter the purpose of God? Also we very often limit the "all things" to the small things in our lives. It means much more than this! God controls all things with reference to those who are the called according to his purpose. We are to think now of a family secret. When we came to the Lord Jesus and trusted

Him as our Saviour, how relieved we were to know our sins were forgiven. How much more we were to learn! Foreknown, predestinated, (marked out beforehand). This is amazing isn't it? What about the future then, is there any uncertainty? Believers are marked out to be "conformed to the image of His Son." This will be when the Lord Jesus comes again. We cannot possibly leave this section without considering verse 30. It has been referred to as a chain of golden links which can never be broken. Listen to it. "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." So certain is the future that the apostle refers to being glorified as though it had already taken place! What about being justified? It means to be cleared from every charge of sin. Earlier in this letter it says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (5:1). Make sure that this peace is yours.

Let's think now of the way this striking chapter ends. It is certainly on a triumphant note. There is neither despondency nor room for doubt. The apostle does this by asking some very important questions.

Question 1

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The answer is, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all."

Question 2

"Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

The answer is, "It is God that justifieth." There can be no possible accusation.

Question 3

"Who is he that condemneth?"

The answer is "None", because, "It is Christ that died...that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Question 4

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, etc."

The answer is again "None", because, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

At the end of the chapter the apostle cites other powers arrayed against Christians. They are different from those given under question four. They are unseen powers, which often bring fear into our hearts. Full of confidence in the love of God the apostle writes, "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 creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (verses 38 and 39) In this talk today we have spoken much about freedom. The apostle puts death first in the list of unseen powers which are against believers.

The final freedom is freedom from the fear of death. For the Christian death is viewed as being "absent from the body and ... present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Other passages refer to the believer as being asleep, waiting to be awakened at the coming of the Lord.

As you reflect on this talk, can you say that you are enjoying real freedom?

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