

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Look at Romans: Romans 8

In his autobiography entitled '*Steps along Hope Street*', David Sheppard, the former bishop of Liverpool and one-time test cricketer, writes of his conversion to Christ as a student at Cambridge University. He records the thrill of reading Romans 8 for the first time and how he wrote in his diary at that time, "Read it again. It's terrific!"

Romans 8 is one of the truly great chapters of the Bible. It begins on the reassuring note, "No condemnation" and ends on the triumphant note, "No separation". As we look into it today, whether we are coming to it, like David Sheppard, for the first time, or whether we have read it many times, may we experience that same thrill in reading it.

We should, first of all, notice its place in this epistle of Paul to the Romans. It marks the culmination of the doctrinal, or teaching, part of this epistle. In chapters 1-3, the whole world was shown to be guilty before God because of sin. In chapter 4, Paul shows that the way to be made right with God, to be justified as Paul calls it, is through faith, not by doing but by believing. Chapter 5 can then open on the grand statement, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is because of His death at Calvary for our sins that we can be reconciled to God. Chapter 6 reminds us that we should no longer live for sin but for Christ. In chapter 7, Paul describes his despair at the continuing power of sin in his life and writes, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" But then, taking his eyes off himself and looking to Christ, he goes on, "I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (verses 24 and 25). So we then move into this terrific chapter.

In the time available to us this morning, we can only read some of it and can only begin to touch its surface. Please take time after this broadcast to read it through carefully and enjoy its wonderful message. It will be helpful to focus on four areas:

1. The power (verses 1-17)
2. The promise (verses 18-28)
3. The purpose (verses 29-30)
4. The persuasion (verses 31-39).

The power

We will read the first six verses: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Even a casual reading of Romans 8 cannot fail to impress the reader with a sense of victory and the hope that this chapter inspires. This is in marked contrast to the sense of failure and despair in chapter 7. The reason for the difference is not far to seek. Chapter 7 is filled with the personal pronoun, I. It occurs some 30 times. The apostle can only look within himself. But in chapter 8, the emphasis is on the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ and the victory He gives us. There are some 20 references to the Holy Spirit in this chapter, more than in any other chapter in the Bible. Little wonder that it is such a terrific chapter!

That sense of victory is struck in the opening verse: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (verse 1). Take careful note of the fact that the words which follow in our Authorised Version: "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit", are omitted in most modern translations, although they properly appear at the end of verse 4. That glorious statement of "no condemnation" is totally without qualification. That is because it does not in any way depend on me and my doing but only on what Christ has done for me on the cross.

As born into the world, we all find ourselves 'in Adam'; he is our file leader, as it were. We share in his sinful nature and we all add to his original sin of disobedience and suffer the same condemnation for our sins, as chapter 5 makes

www.truthfortoday.org.uk Page 1

plain. But when we trust Jesus as our Saviour, believing that on the cross of Calvary He took the condemnation that we deserved, then we step out of being 'in Adam' to being 'in Christ'. We have a new file Leader! Our blessings then depend not on us but on what He has done. No condemnation!

That sense of power and victory continues in verse 2. It is helpful to note that, in this chapter, the word 'law' is used in two ways: firstly, to describe the Ten Commandments; secondly, meaning a principle as when we speak of the law of gravity. Here in verse 2, it is used meaning principle. The Christian, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has a new power within. This power sets us free from the principle, or power, of sin and death which had previously worked in us. If I let go of an apple, it falls to the ground because the power of gravity acts on it. If I hold it in my hand, it stays there securely. The power of gravity has not disappeared but a greater power now acts on that apple – the power of life in my hand. So it is with the Holy Spirit in me. The power of sin has not gone but, praise God, I am under a greater power! Not governed by the power of sinful flesh, being carnally minded as verse 6 puts it, but governed by the Spirit of God, the result is life and peace.

Before we leave this section, we must just notice verses 15 and 16: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Part of the work of the Spirit of God is to give us the sense of belonging to the family of God. Once we had "no hope and [were] without God in the world", as Ephesians 2:12 makes plain. But now by grace we have been brought into God's family. We really are children of God! What a privilege, and what peace it brings, to look up to Him and cry "Father", even though in our distress we may not know what else to say to Him. Have you looked up to Him today and said "Thank You, Father, for Your love and grace in making me Your child"?

The promise

We will read verses 19-26: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits 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, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Paul had been writing of his sufferings and his expectation of glory. But then he tells us of this astounding fact – this present inanimate creation, this earth with its rivers, seas and mountains, is also looking forward to that coming day of glory! This present creation is a sin-cursed creation. Even so, we cannot fail at times to be impressed with its loveliness although it is a loveliness that has been spoilt from its original beauty as fresh from the Creator's hand. This creation longs, Paul even speaks of it as groans, to be delivered from its bondage of corruption – its earthquakes, its volcanic eruptions, its famines, its constant cycle of change and decay. The promise is that in a coming day, the creation will also share "the glorious liberty of the children of God".

An inanimate creation longs for that day. Christian, do you also long for that day? Do you groan within yourself for it, as verse 23 puts it? One day, and perhaps soon, the Lord Jesus is coming for His Church. Then every believer, alive and dead, will be changed to be like Him! He will take up to Himself these bodies, with all their failings, and change them to be like His glorious body – the redemption of the body.

In the meanwhile, we have the promise of the help and intercession of the Holy Spirit for us. So often, in our longings, our yearnings, and in our despair, we can hardly find the right words to pray to God. But the Holy Spirit takes those unspoken longings straight to the Father.

There is one other precious promise we should notice before we leave this section: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (verse 28). We struggle, sometimes through our tears, to say this promise. In our despair, we ask, "Where is the purpose?" But God wants us to lay hold of His promise – "for good". If we cannot trace the good at the moment, then in this life or the next, God will make it plain.

*"Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver*

In the pattern He has planned."

The purpose

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (verses 29-30).

In these brief statements, the whole purpose of God from eternity to eternity is set out. Nowhere in the Bible do we read that God has predestined anyone to be lost. But of those who choose Christ as Saviour, we read here that, in His foreknowledge, God has predestined them i.e. marked them out beforehand, to be made like His Son in a coming day. We are told that this is so that He might be seen to be the firstborn i.e. in the first rank, in the prime position of glory. Think of that – our being there with Him will result in His being seen to fill the pre-eminent place! Think of the number 1. By itself, it cuts a somewhat solitary figure of little value. Then take a zero – totally valueless in itself. But set it behind the 1 and what happens? The 1 becomes a 10! Then take another zero – the 10 becomes a 100, and so on. Even so we, worthless in ourselves, dead in trespasses and sins, but loved by Christ, will one day as being with Him be used to set forth His glory! What a mighty Saviour He is!

Notice the glorious stages in God's work with each one of us: predestined – marked out beforehand in eternity; called – to faith in Christ at the right time; justified – through Christ's death for me at Calvary, I can stand before God 'just-as-if-I'd never sinned; glorified – as far as we see it, this is a future event to take place when Christ comes for His Church. As God sees it, so certain are His purposes, it's as good as done!

The persuasion

Take time to read carefully verses 31-37. Here we come to the climax of the chapter. See how Paul demonstrates that every accusation that might be brought against the child of God has been fully met by the death of Christ. Then listen to his terrific conclusion: "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" (verses 38-39). So this chapter which had begun on the joyful note of "no condemnation" now ends on this triumphant note of "no separation"! Let this be your persuasion and mine! Those who put their trust in Christ as Saviour are absolutely secure – for time and eternity. There is no power whatever that can separate them from the Saviour. Each one has been too dearly bought at Calvary for the Lord Jesus ever to lose one of them. He will see each one safely home to glory!

We'll end this morning on the triumphant assurance of Norman Clayton's hymn:

*Jesus my Lord will love me forever,
From Him no power of evil can sever;
He gave His life to ransom my soul,
Now I belong to Him;*

*Now I belong to Jesus,
Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone,
But for eternity.*

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