

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS #8

Scripture of Lesson: Romans 8: 1 ~ 39

In Chapter 7 Paul presented the Mosaic Law as weak and transitory and therefore unable to give people victory over sin. Through this argument Paul, in effect, was telling the Jewish Christians to depart from the traditional thinking that salvation came from keeping the law. The law defines sins and the law of sin in us ruled so that we could not be victors while trying to live out the law to gain salvation. Rather, Paul claims that Christians who walk in the newness of the spirit are liberated from the law of sin and flesh as we are born spiritually as adopted children of God through Holy Spirit.

1. We are liberated from the law of flesh through Christ: v. 1~10

Whereas the law made us sinners because we were unable to have victory over sin through the weakness of flesh and because of the law of sin and flesh working strongly in us, Christians are now liberated from this law of flesh through Christ. [v. 2] How does this happen? Paul explains this miracle in the following three ways:

- a. Christ Jesus came to this world and set the example of how to walk in the Spirit of God so that the true intent of God's law and commandments are fulfilled in His flesh and life while He lived on the earth. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." [v. 3] Christ Himself declared;

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. [Matt 5: 17]

Jesus, as the Word incarnate, demonstrated how the Word [the law and the prophets] could be fulfilled in flesh because He came in the form of a human and yet led a sinless life. Indeed He lived to show us how to live righteously before God, that is, following after the guidance of God's spirit daily and fulfilling all God's commandments and will for His life. Thus, when He was on the cross dying He said this final word, "It is finished." [John 19: 30] He showed His devotion and love for God. He laid down His life for the sinners of this world. Thus, He fulfilled the two most crucial pillars of Ten Commandments—to love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to love your neighbors as yourself. Through living and dying thus Jesus Christ, the human God sent by God, empowered by the Spirit, and fulfilled 'all righteousness / purpose of the law in His flesh.' [v. 4]

- b. Secondly, Paul explains how this victory, demonstrated by Jesus Christ in flesh, can be a reality in each Christian life. He contrasts the life that seeks after the flesh against the life of seeking after the spirit. The consequences are, respectively, death versus life and peace. [v. 6] He emphasizes that, if you think you are a Christian and yet live in the flesh, be reminded that you cannot please God. [v. 8] So, a Christian life of living in spirit means to have the presence of God through Holy Spirit, which is also referred as the Spirit of Christ. [v. 9]

You might wonder how this Spirit of Christ can be within us. The Bible tells us this miracle of Holy Spirit coming into us is a gift of God granted to us as we confess our faith in

Christ Jesus with our lips and actions. In the first century the disciples experienced the descent of Holy Spirit like a whirlwind in Acts 2. In Acts 10 Peter and the accompanying Christians saw the Spirit being given to Cornelius and his family in the mission meeting Peter held in the home of Cornelius. Thus, the coming of Holy Spirit was visible to the eyes of the first-century Christians. Today it may not be so visibly evident but the effects are evident in and among Christians all over the world.

So Paul explains that when we have the Spirit of Christ in us upon receiving it as a gift from God, this Spirit becomes a new life in us through Christ. [v. 10] The power that worked in the human life of Jesus can now do the same work in the life of each Christian as he/she receives the same Spirit that was in Jesus, which empowers us to put our fleshly purposes and desires to death. We cannot effect this transformation in us of our own will and strength. It will not happen as a result of following some program. But the transformation, which Jesus described as the process of yeast working in a meal of flour and a mustard seed growing into a small tree, is God's specialty. All we have to do is to subject ourselves to the Spirit's power and control every day so that He can achieve this miracle in our life.

- c. Thirdly, God, who raised Jesus from the dead will raise us on the last day with a glorious resurrection body through the Spirit of Christ in us. This is pertinent only to those who have the Spirit of Christ, not to everybody. [v. 11] When this happens, we will be forever liberated from the law of flesh and sin. This reminds us that our life here on earth is a period of refining as gold is refined through fire and that we shall come forth as refined gold on the Resurrection Day as David and Job sang:

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness. [Psalm 17: 15]

For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;

And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God. [Job 19: 25~26]

Discussion topic: Do you firmly believe that you have been born again through the Holy Spirit? What are the evidences of this new birth in your life?

2. We are born again as children of God through Holy Spirit: v. 11~17

The Spirit of Christ we receive from God through faith makes us adopted children of God. We receive the Spirit of adoption. [v. 15] Through this spirit in us we can die in flesh and live to the spirit. [v. 13] We used to be enemies to God when we were in sin, but now we call God Abba, Father.

Because we have been adopted as children of God, we are also co-heirs of His kingdom with Christ. Thus, there is eternal inheritance waiting for us. Though we may suffer on the earth, we will share heaven's glory together with Christ in eternity. [v. 17]

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people.

God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;

there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." [Rev. 21: 3~4]

Discussion topic: How does the Spirit of Christ help you in your spiritual journey? Are you victors through the Spirit? How does the Spirit help you become victors?

3. Creation groans for Kingdom of God to come: v. 18~25

Because of the faith they professed the Christians of the first century met persecution and suffering, often being put into prisons and killed as martyrs. We should be thankful that this Christian faith has come to us through such sufferings and sacrifices. Do we face misunderstandings, social exclusions, unjustified biases and even enmity because we are Christians? It is only natural that such things occur with us because, although He was the Son of God, Christ met the same unjustness and had to go through a most cruel death on a cross. The glory and reward that await us in heaven cannot be compared to what little sufferings that come to us here. [v. 18]

According to Paul not only the humans but also the entire creation including the natural environment with all plants and animals have been subject to corruption as a result of Adam's sin. And they are groaning and earnestly waiting for the day of liberation from this bondage that will stay until Christ returns and restores all creation. [v. 20~21] Do we see signs of such corruption in the environment, plants and animals? We are acutely aware of the impact of global warming, much caused by pollution from human activities. Animals have become cruel when they see humans because they perceive people as predators. There are large floating islands of garbage in various areas of the Pacific Ocean. Schools of bottom fishes are depleted fast due to the practice of bottom drag-net fishing in many coastal areas around the world. Western areas of China are fast turning into deserts due to industrial pollution, deforestation and excessive animal husbandry. Wanton human activities contribute significantly to changes in the global climate patterns. We need to be reminded that when God created the man, He had a definite purpose in mind—wise governing of His creation as He would govern.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." [Gen 1: 26~28]

In the first century Apostle Paul could see and feel the groaning of the creation. They are much more apparent today in the 21st century. The groaning of the early Christian community coming from their suffering was felt strongly by Paul and other apostles. That is why in every epistle suffering is mentioned and they encouraged the Christians to look beyond the present sufferings towards the day of the Lord's second coming. Paul encouraged the Roman Christians to hope for this liberation through patience. [v. 24~25] In many parts of the world today the same encouragement is needed as many Christians suffer persecution and ill treatments by cruel, unbelieving authorities and neighbors. They need our daily prayers of intercession.

Discussion topic: Do you feel the groaning of the whole world including the environment for Christ's second coming? How are we performing as the caretaker of God's creation when we consider the state of the earth's environment?

4. Holy Spirit helps achieve sanctification in us: v. 26~30

In Acts of the Apostles we read the New Testament church and mission work began with the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples. Then the Spirit motivated, guided and often protected the apostles and missionaries. The mission was of the Spirit and strongly led and guided by the Spirit. Now, when a person is converted and becomes a Christian, the disciples could visually observe the Spirit of God coming to this person. When the Spirit of God enters a person, he/she becomes a child of God and is under the guidance of the Spirit. So the Holy Spirit provides guidance, help and encouragement each day to a Christian as she places herself under the influence of the Spirit.

Some Christians think prayers ought to be audible. Some pray loudly so others can hear and recognize how fluent she is in praying. Sometimes when elders are chosen in a church one of the qualifications is how capably a person can pray before the congregation. Does God hear such well-prepared oracles of prayer instead of barely-heard pitiful prayer of penitence or pleading of a poor widow or orphan? God delights to hear the prayers of those who fear Him in poor and contrite spirit.

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. [Psalm 34: 18]

Holy Spirit knows the situations and even the thoughts that are in every Christian. God the Father commissioned God the Spirit to be such a Helper to His children. When we are so grieved or pained and do not even know how to express our feelings, the Spirit speaks the deeply-felt language of prayer and presents it to the throne of grace. He pleads our case before the Father so that grace can rain down on the needy. [v. 26~27]

What is the ultimate purpose of the Christian sanctification? It is to fulfill the image of God's Son Jesus in us so that we all in our likeness may take part in the heavenly celebration of the triumph of Jesus and the victories of our lives because of His example and the help of the Holy Spirit. That is the ultimate 'good.' [v. 28~29]

Discussion topic: Why was it necessary for the Holy Spirit to come after Jesus' ascension to heaven? Is the Holy Spirit active today as He was in the first century?

5. Our very special place before God through His love: v. 30~39

Some theologians have misunderstood the concept of 'predestination' in verses 29~30. According to their doctrine a person, who is predestined by God, will and must become a Christian and no matter what kind of life she leads during her life she will eventually die as a Christian and spend eternity with God. It is an utterly wrong interpretation of the concept Paul writes in this second part of Chapter 8. In my understanding there are two parts in the concept of 'predestination.' There are only four verses in the whole Bible where this word 'predestine' is used.

*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. [Romans 8: 29]*

*Moreover **whom He predestined**, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. [Romans 8: 30]*

*He **chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, **having predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good*

*pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.
[Ephesians 1: 4~6]*

*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, **being predestined according to the purpose of Him** who works all things according to the counsel of His will [Ephesians 1: 11]*

The first component of God's predestination is in His plan of human salvation. God chose Abraham as the forefather of His chosen people who would come from Abraham. He saved them out of Egypt, gave them the law through Moses as a model of how people should worship Him. He sent judges, seers, and prophets to guide and teach the people. But they continued to be unfaithful and unloyal to Him. When their depravation reached an extreme point, He sent His Son in the form of a human person to show how to live as children of God and to die for the predestined children of all ages. Those whose hearts yearn towards God are predestined to listen to the gospel. And God's plan is to have His Spirit help them along their journey towards Heaven. [v. 28~30] All such details are in the predestined plan of God and we are thankful to be included in this plan of God. That is the first very important component of God's predestination.

Through His omniscience God sees all things, even the choices that each human would make and even our makeup. So in this sense He foreknew every one the Christians from the beginning. And God does everything that is necessary to enable such persons to hear the gospel, come to profess their faith in Christ and become Christians. However, all of us, Christians or non-believers, do not know what God sees in each individual life. Although God is well aware of how each of our lives would turn out to be, whether we would respond well to the gospel of Christ or that we would keep our faith until the end of our life or not, none of us has the same level of prescience that God has. That is why we need the faith, the faith to believe in the salvation plan, the Scripture that contains God's promises for us, and the faith that He will do all things necessary for our sanctification towards the ultimate good, and to help us finish this honorable journey well and to attain God's praise and recognition. That is the second component of God's predestination. In this part we take part with our faith. The predestination plan works as a teamwork between God and the human. What an honor and privilege to be a part of God's plan and to be included in the holy teamwork!

Our lack of knowledge about God's predestination on individuals –is that a justification for our unbelief or prejudice towards God? Because I don't know whether God has selected me or not as His child, does that make me right to refuse the hope of eternity extended by the gospel of Christ? It is a solid ground for despising the sacrifice that Christ made for me on the cruel cross on Calvary? No, it is not and cannot be a ground for such misunderstanding, bias, unbelief, prejudice and wrong attitude towards God and Christ. The human salvation plan applies to the entire humanity. It does not exclude any race, people, geographic region or background. The hope of salvation is still extended to every community and family today. If God did not spare His own Son, who can be against us from taking advantage of this glorious promise of eternal life with Him. [v. 31~32]

Paul recognizes there are many elements of the Roman world of the time that were working against the Christian community. And the Christians needed much encouragement. And through this letter Paul was encouraging those in Rome area to see clearly that even though they are killed for their faith in Christ, that could not take them away from the love of Christ, who is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for them. [v. 34~36] Nothing, not even any misguided angel, political powers, authorities of all kinds, not even deaths

can take us away from the love of God because we are God's elect, whom God foresaw and predestined to be His children. [v. 38~39]

Discussion topic: What is our special place before God as Christians? What does God's foreknowledge about us mean to us today?