

Not Under Obligation to The Flesh

Romans 8:9-17

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Introduction: The phrase “the human condition” should be “the human condition in sin.” Because God did not make humanity flawed. Being human is not our problem. It is sin that has been our problem from the Garden.

Genesis 1:27-31 ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them..... ³¹ God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

So when Scripture speaks of our “flesh” it sometimes means nothing more than our humanity....but often describes our sinful nature in Adam. If we think of all things human as sinful we will make the common mistake that the body is evil and the spirit is good. We will also come to believe and teach our children that the normal needs and desires of humans are somehow evil and displeasing to God. Comfort, food, drink, marriage, music are all enjoyed in the body. All can be perverted and ruined by sin, but are in themselves sanctioned by God who made us for them.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 ²⁴ There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

Paul has been discussing our struggle with sin. He calls it the “law or principle of sin.” It brings us bondage and death. But Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to liberate you from it.

Romans 8:2 ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

It is vital that we understand two things here. You are still sinful and morally weak, but Christ has loved you and died for your sins.

Romans 5:8 ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The second thing is that Christ was perfectly righteous and sinless. He was able and did keep, the entire Law of God perfectly. When Christ saved you through grace and by faith The Holy Spirit placed you in Christ. You are in union with the holy, pure and loving Son of God. As a result you are righteous in Christ. What Christ is you are because you are in union with Him. Israel tried to keep the law but failed. Paul the Pharisee tried to keep the law but the law of sin defeated him and brought him death and bondage to sin.

Romans 8:3-4 ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Christ fulfilled the requirement of the Law and you and I are in Christ. But this is not where the story ends. It is where it starts for us. What about this burning desire that the Holy Spirit has put in us to follow Christ and to obey Him? This struggle over sin in the Christian life is summed up this way.

Romans 8:6-8 ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Let me paraphrase: If all we know and think about is our humanity we are heading for death because our sinful state in Adam is hostile toward God and His Law and no one in that state can ever please God! It is time now for Hope and understanding:

Romans 8:9-17 ⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Christ perfectly keep the Law on your behalf and then took your deserved punishment for having broken it. He crushed death! Your weakness and sinfulness is entirely swallowed up in Christ. He is the reason you will live and not die....even though you are the spawn of Adam and deserve judgment. BUT...there is more. Let me try to illustrate:

When you have a child is it enough for you that he or she is breathing or do you then set about to provide for their welfare? Do you care about their health or is it just enough that they lay there and breath? What about happiness and fulfillment and usefulness and character? Do you want them to be part of your family or are you content to just peek in on them to make sure they are still breathing? Do you want a future for them?

It is the same way with God. He has birthed us and then begins to shape us and bring us up as children of the King of Creation. Having assured our salvation and righteousness through what Christ has done, He now seeks our good and righteousness while here on earth. Like any father, He provides for that to take place.

You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you [9a]: You are no longer merely "in the Flesh" or in Adam. The Spirit of God dwells in you.

But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him [9b]: This is a statement of fact. There are no Christians without the Holy Spirit. Those who say that the Holy Spirit does not come until there is a second work of Grace have not reckoned with this verse.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. [10]: It is the Holy Spirit who is the spiritual life giver. The ESV translates this way.

Romans 8:10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Even as believers we will die. It is the consequence of Adam's fall that is left in place. At the same time however....and this is really important....The Holy Spirit is alive in us because of Christ's Work on the Cross. God is in you. God the Spirit and God the Son! This is why the next verse can be so bold!

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you [11]: Another blessed picture of Union. This time with the Holy Spirit who does for us the exact same thing He did for Christ....This is resurrection assured. This is why we can stand at a graveside and not succumb to fear. We can shout with Paul...

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 ⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh [12]: This is another way of saying that Christ has delivered you from bondage or slavery to sin. Just because you are a fallen sinner inclined to be totally self-centered does not mean that you must. You are not obliged to lie to get your way. You can decide to trust God and tell the truth. You are not obliged to cheat or steal to get the material things you want...you are free to pray and trust God to give you what He deems best and how much of it. He is amazingly generous to His children. You are not in debt to Adam. That relationship is crushed and replaced with one to Jesus Christ.

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die [13a]: The NAU captures the idea perfectly here. The present tense makes it clear that God does not mean if you, in a moment of weakness, commit a sin you are going to die. It can't mean that. Jesus came for sinners. He knew all your sins before you were even born. I died for all of them and lived to give you his perfect righteousness. THIS IS WHAT THIS MEANS: "If you are continually and only living in your sinful human nature you are heading for death."

But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live [13b]: On the other hand....you are continually putting to death these sins of the body you are heading for life. YOU WILL LIVE! This is a description of the person who is no longer in Adam but in Christ. He or she is not in debt to sin and death but to Christ

and life. Their miraculously altered nature and standing is seen in their changed hearts and behavior.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God [14]: “Led by the spirit is more active than we might imagine. The word also means “carried” and in this case it is applied to men and women who have the Spirit. It is the hallmark of children of God. They are being led continually by the Spirit of God. The Spirit is not running out ahead calling for us to follow. He is active and we are being led! All men are not sons of God. They are image bearers and are therefore of great value but if they are in Adam alone they are his sons and not Sons of the Living God. Jesus said,

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

It takes the work of the Spirit to make a human being a son or daughter of God!

John 3:6-7 ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again [15a]: Paul uses the word “spirit” here in the sense of an inner attitude or disposition. Those who are led by the Holy Spirit are not led back into slavery which leads to fear. Man and women who are seeking to perfect themselves in the power of the flesh through obedience to the Law are living in fear that they will fail. And...would good reason. They are failing and in their inner self they know it. Paul lived his life according to the law.

Romans 7:5-6 ⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

But you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" [15b]: The Holy Spirit is the liberator and He does it by changing us from slaves to sons. And this is not theological. It is not a doctrine that says...”we are the sons of God.” It is in our hearts. It is so utterly experiential that we cry out to God like a small child to their own father. “Cry out” is exploding with emotion. It means to scream, cry and even shout.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God [16]: The Holy Spirit is continually testifying to this. It is internal. Just notice. The Holy Spirit is continually witnessing to our human spirit that we are really and truly the children of God. This is needed! You need this! Because the world is saying we are nuts...that we got religion or went insane. Our own bodies are fighting us...still wanting what they have always wanted. Still preferring lying to the truth and hatred to love and on and on it goes.

When I was saved my Dad just had a fit over it. He told me that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier and the entire New Testament was made up. He claimed that all Christ's teaching were plagiarized from an obscure Jewish sect that Jesus had secretly studied with. He told me that the worst criminals in history had all been Christian and that the Christian church had committed more crimes than everyone else put together.

I, by contrast, was 15 with absolutely no Bible knowledge or training. I could not refute a single thing that my dad said to me. The only thing I had was what Paul is describing here. It was intense! It was resounding in my mind...Paul....you are my child! I have loved you and washed away your sins! You belong to me for eternity....come trust me and follow me!" My response was "Abba...My dear Father!" With no training whatsoever, I knew exactly how to cry out. Paul explains why to the Galatians....

Galatians 4:6-7 ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

The Spirit makes us like Christ and this is exactly what Jesus called His Father.

Mark 14:35-36 ³⁵ And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell to the ground and *began* to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. ³⁶ And He was saying, **"Abba! Father!** All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."

What could possibly be more fitting? This is not a command! This is a reality! It is what the Holy Spirit does to you, for you and in you. He makes you a child of God, He causes you to experience that sonship in your inner man and He gives you the very words to express it. Listen to what Luther wrote about it...

"This is a little word, and yet it comprehends all things. The mouth speaks not, but the affection of the heart speaks this way. Although I am oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be forsaken and utterly cast away from your presence, yet I am your child and you are my Father for Christ's sake; I am beloved because of the Beloved. Therefore this little word, Abba, conceived effectually in the heart, passes all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero and of the most eloquent speakers that ever were in the world." *Martin Luther*

This little word rings in the hearts and minds of God's children. Father...My Father. Paul goes on here to explain its ramifications to you. Douglas Moo says this....

"Paul shows that Christians have a relationship to God that is like [though, of course, not exactly like] Christ's own relationship to the Father. In adopting us, God has taken no half measures; we have been made full members of the family and partakers of all the privileges belonging to members of that family." *Douglas Moo*

And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ [17a]: And in the confessing of God as our Father there is this amazing realization... "I am a child of

the Living God! And if I am a son like Christ is.... and if I call God my dear father like Christ does.... then I must also be an heir of God...like Christ is.

But these are present realities with a future blessing. The day your child is born he or she is your heir, but they do not receive that inheritance until years later. Your child is “Already” and heir, but has “Not Yet” received his or her inheritance. For now, they are treated like a child. They are loved, fed clothed, taught, disciplined and brought to maturity. Some day they will inherit all that you have and will enjoy it as their own.

If indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him* [17b]: In other words you are an heir of God through Christ, but the full realization of that is in the future. Paul is going to transition our thinking to the future blessings that accompany our present standing in Christ. For now... there will be struggles and even groanings. We should not expect something different in this fallen creation.

The path to glory for those in union with Christ is Christ’s path. Jesus was hated in the world because He is the exact representation of the image of God in the world.

Colossians 1:15-16 ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.

The proof that the world hates God is found in its irrational hatred of Christ and the Jews through whom God sent Christ into the world. Jesus reveals God to humanity perfectly and their reaction was hatred and murder.

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

“Paul makes clear that this suffering is the condition for the inheritance; we will be “glorified with “ Christ only if we “suffer with him.” Participation in Christ’s glory can come only through participation in his suffering. What Paul is doing is setting forth an unbreakable “law of the kingdom” according to which glory can come only by way of suffering. For the glory of the kingdom of God is attained only through participation in Christ, and belonging to Christ cannot but bring our participation in the sufferings of Christ. . Just as, then, Christ has suffered and entered into his glory, so Christians, “fellow heirs with Christ,” suffer during this present time in order to join Christ in glory.”

Douglas Moo

CONCLUSION: Let’s review. There are two possible conditions for any man or women to be in. They have had their natural birth and are therefore heirs of the sin and death of Adam. Scripture calls this condition being “in the Flesh.” Or...they have also been born again through faith in Christ alone and by grace. God’s Word calls this condition being “in the Spirit” because this is all the doing of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If you have never given your life fully to Christ...trusting only in His righteous life and death for your sins....then you should certainly do that now. There is no formula. Entrust your life to Christ for forgiveness of your sins and for His care in this life also.

God is speaking to believers then in verse 9 when He says, “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” And because of what The Holy Spirit has done in bringing you to Christ you are no longer under obligation to the Flesh. To sin and its constant bondage over you. [Romans 8:12] Instead we are being actively led or sometimes even carried by the Spirit of God toward Christ’s image and glory. [14] God has adopted you as a child. Adopted children are sought by their parents and not the other way around. The parent wants them. The parent spares no expense to make them his child. And when the adoption is done they are heirs to their parents. This is who you are in Christ...In the Spirit.

Do not despise your inheritance because it comes at the end of a long life in this fallen world. DO NOT let phony prosperity preachers lie to you about the road to Glory. It leads past the foot of the Cross! Few of us die as martyrs of the faith, but we all suffer in a fallen world. Do not expect what cannot be true. There is sickness and sadness and loss and death in this world, but it all leads strait to glory. In closing, I want to give you a different prospective on suffering and trials in this life. If you take it you will be able to say with James....

James 1:2-4 ² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The greatest joy in creation is to know God intimately. The greatest commandment is to Love Him with all your heart. The greatest gift that God can give you is His Love. How do trial enter into all of this? Do you know how much Christ loves you? It is an academic question until we face trials and difficulties in this life. How we dislike them, but now consider this....Jesus willingly left a perfect heaven to go through these things for you. He could have just come, died and left, but then you would have never known how perfectly sinless he is.

As we make are way down the same path something is happening to us that can happen in no other way. We are experiencing how much Jesus has loved us. It is no longer a point of doctrine, but a shout of the heart....He loves me! He willingly suffered for me....to bring me to eternal glory. What a glorious and precious Savior. Hebrews said this....

Hebrews 2:10-18 ¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." ¹³ And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." ¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.