
FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

A long, straight asphalt road stretches into the distance, flanked by grassy fields and mountains in the background. The words "GOD'S WAY" are painted in large white letters on the road surface.

**GOD'S
WAY**

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE GOD'S WAY

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. –Romans 8:5

When Jesus Christ saved you, He gave you a new nature. You are a new creature in Christ Jesus. But sometimes it doesn't feel like it. The old nature has been in control for so long that it often takes over. Your new nature wants to follow after God, but your old nature drags its feet. It doesn't want to serve God, doesn't want to pray or worship. It wants what it always has gotten—its own way.

Here's a radical thought: You can't depend on your new nature. Just to say you want to live for Christ won't get you anywhere. Your relationship with God is not a do-it-yourself kit.

You need Jesus. You need to turn your life over to the Spirit of God, yield to Him, and let Him do for you what you can't do for yourself.

Generations of saints have never understood this and accept defeat as normal Christian living. They are satisfied to continue on the low level of a sad, crushed life. God doesn't want us to arrive in heaven by that route.

Paul becomes very personal in Romans 7 and 8. He documents his internal struggle as he tried to live for God in the power of his new nature. He found it impossible. In essence, he said, "*I don't understand my own actions. I am baffled and bewildered by them. I don't do what I want to do, but instead do the very thing I hate. I'm yielding to my human nature, my worldliness—my sinful capacity*" (see Romans 7:15).

What a perfect picture of the conflict between our old nature and our new nature.

Can you relate? Do you do something, then hate yourself because you've done it? You cry out, "God, oh, I've failed You!" Every child of God has had this experience.

Paul shares his own experience. First he was a proud Pharisee under the Mosaic Law, kidding himself by doing what he thought would make him right with God. But the Law was condemning him all the while.

Then Paul met Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. This proud young Pharisee turned to Christ as his Savior. But still Paul felt he could live the Christian life on his own. His new nature said, "Now I'm going to live for God!" But he struggled and failed for a time.

Then there was the day when Paul didn't win, but Christ did. Paul learned it was all about yielding to God and letting the Spirit of God live the Christian life through him.

That's what we're going to learn about in Romans 8—how to live the Christian life God's way. We'll learn about the great deliverance that is ours. There's something here to help every Christian, even if you're discouraged. The purpose of the gospel

of Jesus Christ is to lift the shackles from the human family so all might come into the place of salvation, and also to give power to those who want to live for God.

Romans 8 is a lofty, wonderful chapter. It opens with “no condemnation,” it closes with “no separation,” and in between “all things work together for good to those who love God.”

Now it opens like this:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. –Romans 8:1

The clause “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” is not in our better manuscripts. The King James Version was made from the best manuscripts that then existed. But since 1611, other manuscripts have been discovered that are superior to the ones used way back then. It’s remarkable how few differences there are—but this happens to be one. You may ask, “How did these additional words get into the manuscript?” Well, you must understand that before printing was invented by Gutenberg in 1453, the Bible was a difficult book to get. You could not buy a printed one like the one I have before me. All Bibles were written by hand. One scribe would read aloud while a dozen others sat around him writing down what he read. Now, evidently, the scribe got to the eighth of Romans, and he may have been a little sleepy or he may have been watching the page so long that he dropped down a few lines to what is verse 4 in our Bibles, where he read, “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” And, as he read that off, the scribes wrote it that way. Others have thought that because the first phrase in the chapter is such a glorious statement, some scribes read it over and said, “Say, that couldn’t be true,” and so they added this phrase from verse 4. But, friend, it doesn’t belong in verse 1. This is just a declaration of the great truth Paul has given us up to this point that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

This, by the way, is the sum total of what Martin Luther discovered in the Word of God. It was this Epistle to the Romans he was reading and studying that brought him to the place where he saw that no religious ceremony, no church, no *thing* he could do could bring him to God. The story has been found now to be accurate that Martin Luther went all the way to Rome and up the Sancta Scala, trying to *do* something to make himself acceptable to God. And at that time the tremendous words came to him: “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17) and that it’s not by the good works we have done, but it’s by “His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

The declaration, therefore, that introduces Romans 8 is:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

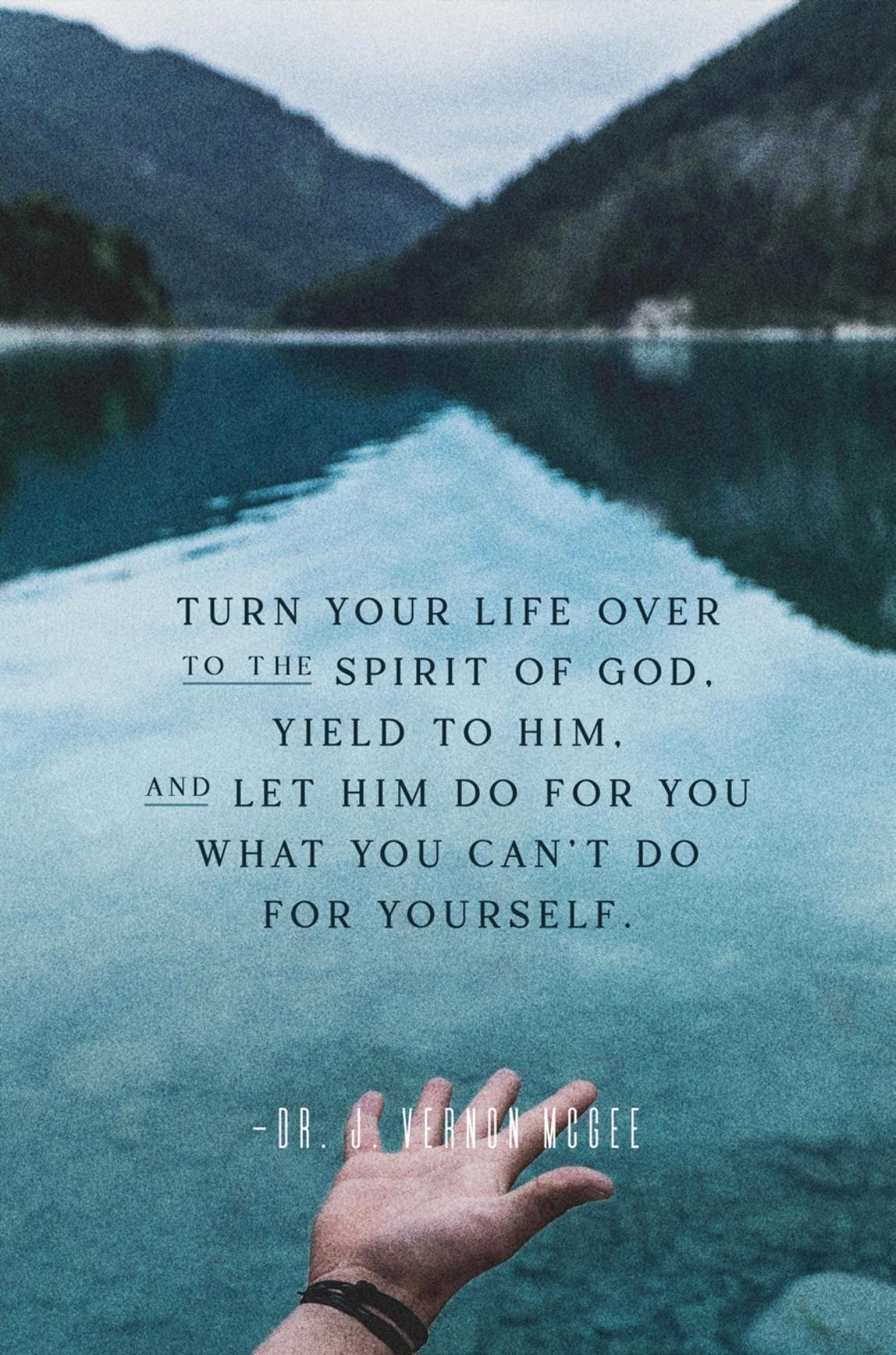
Now *that* is what salvation is. Salvation means to be *in Christ*. It does not mean to join a church or to *do* something. It means to be in Christ. Theologians have been looking for 2000 years to find a word that would describe our salvation. They have come up with the words propitiation, repentance, substitution, atonement, redemption, and justification, but the interesting thing is that the Bible also has a very simple word: The little preposition “in.” What does it mean to be saved? It means to be *in Christ*. And that is what justification is.

Let’s look now at the expression “justification by faith.” What does it mean?

Well, first of all there is the negative aspect. It means you and I were hell-doomed sinners. You say, “Now look here, preacher, don’t you talk to me like that!” Oh, no, friend, *I’m* not talking to you like that—*God* is talking to you like that. He says,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

—Romans 3:23



TURN YOUR LIFE OVER
TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD,
YIELD TO HIM,
AND LET HIM DO FOR YOU
WHAT YOU CAN'T DO
FOR YOURSELF.

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You say, “Now don’t you try to tell me that I’m as bad as thieves, alcoholics, or murderers.” No, perhaps you are not. They are sinners, no doubt. We are all quick to agree to that when it’s about the other fellow, aren’t we? But you also are a sinner and have come short of the glory of God—maybe not as much as those fellows, but you have come short of the glory of God nonetheless.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose you came to me and said, “Let’s play a game. Let’s see which one of us can jump from downtown Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley.” Since I like jumping games, I agree to play. You say, “Well, McGee, I don’t think you would be able to jump very far. Let’s get others in the game.” So a lot of people get in the game. Now I’d run and jump. I’ll be honest with you, I don’t think I would jump as far as I’d like to, and you might say, “Look, I jumped farther than you did.” That probably would be true. All of us would jump, but we would all come short of the San Fernando Valley. No one can jump that far.

You may be better than somebody else, but regardless of who you are, you have come short of the glory of God. You have nothing that is acceptable to God. You and every other person stand before God as a lost sinner. Therefore, when you and I come to God, we don’t come offering Him anything. It is not by works of righteousness. We come to Him empty-handed, as lost sinners, and we trust Christ as our Savior.

There is also the positive aspect of justification. God not only subtracts our sin, He not only paid the penalty for our sin, but He does something else—He puts us *in Christ*, and God looks at us in Christ. My friend, you are completely saved in Christ or completely lost out of Christ. You are in Him 100 percent or out of Him 100 percent. If you are in Christ, God sees you in Him, and you are as much accepted by God as Christ. In fact, you have as much right in heaven as Christ—or you have no right there at all, because you and I have none in and of ourselves. But *in Christ* we are accepted. As Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Now, friend,

you can't get any more saved than that. The poor lost sinner, the moment he trusts Christ, is as much saved as he will be a million years from today.

Earlier chapters in the Epistle of Romans have covered this tremendous truth; now the eighth chapter just reaches back and encompasses what has been said before. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

You see, there is no judgment for sin to those who are in Christ. If you are in Him, God sees you in Christ, and He accepts you because of Christ. Christ's righteousness is your righteousness. Certainly you and I have none of our own.

This is the great truth that gripped Martin Luther—the tremendous truth of justification by faith. And it shook the shackles off a darkened Europe. The Dark Ages rolled back like a flood, and the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ broke over Europe. How to be righteous in God's sight has worried many men down through the ages, including Paul. But when Paul came to Christ, he made this discovery which he passed on to the Philippians:

And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through the faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. —Philippians 3:9

This is the righteousness of God which comes to us by faith only. And, friend, this is the righteousness that is available to you and me now. If today you have Christ and are in Christ, there is no condemnation.

Paul is talking from experience, because he fell on his face as a Christian. In Romans 7, he tells of this experience. He made such a blunder of everything and failed miserably. Now he goes on to talk about that:

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

Here he mentions the Spirit for the first time. We know that back in Romans 5 he mentions eight wonderful results of our justification by faith, one of which is that we *have* the Holy Spirit. But he doesn't mention the *work* of the Holy Spirit in the believer until he gets to Romans 8. He mentions it here because this is the way of Christian living. You see, Paul discovered in Romans 7 that even after he was converted, he could not live the Christian life in his own strength.

A great many of us find this out the hard way. That was my experience. I thought when I got converted that I'd be walking on top of the world, but that is when I fell flat on my face. Never did I fall so flat as I did after conversion. Nobody had told me I could not live the Christian life. In fact, they patted me on the back and told me I could. But I could not, and I found that out.

The Christian life is the Holy Spirit working through the believer, producing the life of Christ and what *He* wants. And anything the Holy Spirit does not produce is of the flesh. It is no good at all, and it is not Christian living. Christian living is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is no good in the old nature. Paul found that out. He said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells ..." (Romans 7:18).

Also, he found there was no power in the new nature. In verse 24, he cried out in despair, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" In other words, "*I find I can't do the things I want to do. I'm a newborn Christian, and I want to live for God, but I can't do it!*" Well, that is exactly what God said. He said you couldn't. Paul found it to be true, and I think everybody else has found it to be true. Just recognize it and realize it instead of trying to set your own goal. It is not what you want and what I want that is all-important; it is what the Spirit wants and what Jesus Christ wants in our lives. That is the Christian life—not some goal you and I might set for ourselves.

Now the apostle Paul explains:

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 requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

–Romans 8:3, 4

Here the Spirit is mentioned again. In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit has been mentioned only one time, but in the eighth chapter the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times. Obviously, Paul is putting great emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

Notice he says, “*what the law could not do because of the weakness of the flesh.*” I want you to see a wonderful truth in this. There’s nothing wrong with the Mosaic Law. When we say we are not under the Law, we do not mean the Law isn’t good. It is good. It is God’s Law. But, you see, rules can’t save you. They won’t lift you up. That’s what God sent His Holy Spirit to do. The Holy Spirit in you can lift you up and enable you to live for God. That is the thing God is saying in this verse. The Law could not do it because of the weakness of the flesh; now there is a new method, a new process, and that is by the Holy 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. –Romans 8:5

That word “mind” means “to obey.” Those who live according to the flesh obey the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit obey the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

–Romans 8:6, 7

IF YOU ARE
in Christ,
GOD SEES YOU
in Him,
AND YOU ARE AS MUCH
accepted by
God as Christ.



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

The carnal mind is enmity against God. That is, man in his natural state is an *enemy* toward God. That old nature we were born with is in rebellion against God. I wonder if you have ever felt this. Possibly at this moment you are enjoying the comfort of home, but God wanted you to perform some service for Him. That is the weakness of the flesh, is it not? You could have gone if you had wanted to. The flesh, you see, did not want to go. Now, I have that kind of nature, you have that kind of nature—every child of God has that old nature. But if you live by that nature, everything you produce is just dead works. It won't amount to anything as far as God is concerned. You cannot live for God if your motivation comes from the old nature. The carnal mind you and I have is enmity against God.

Have you discovered this? Years ago, a song was written with these words, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Is this your experience? Have you ever felt that? Well, somebody came along and said, "I don't think that is the experience of a child of God. I want to change it." And the words were changed to "Prone to *worship*, Lord, I feel it, prone to *serve* the God I love." Is that your experience? Well, which is correct? The fact of the matter is, friend, both of them are correct. Every child of God, if he is honest, would say, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it." Then there also are the times (thank God for those times) when we are living by the Spirit of God and can say, "Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it, prone to serve the God I love." You see, you have two natures. To be carnally minded is death; to be spiritually minded—that's life and it's peace.

The interesting thing is that the carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God, nor can it be. Not only is our old nature an enemy against God, but it always will be that; it *cannot* be subject to the Law of God, and it never will be. God never has had an arrangement to save the old nature. He does not intend to save the old nature at all.

Now do not misunderstand me about this old nature that we have. All of us have it, we were born with it, and you would be surprised how limited that old nature is. I do not know about you, but when I was born into this world, I was born ignorant. I didn't even know A from B, nor did I know anything about manners at all. You talk about being in the darkness, we certainly are when we first arrive. I read recently a quotation from a scientific book in which it was pointed out that humans are the only creatures born into this world helpless; we don't know how to do anything except one thing—weep. That is all we can do without being taught! We have to be taught everything else. That's the old nature.

We come into this world ignorant, don't we? We have to be educated how to do things. We need to be taught to be gracious, to be considerate of others, and to be respectful. I remember as a boy how my mother used to try to instill manners into me. Oh, I thought I never would learn to be polite. It is something we've got to learn; we are not born that way.

This old nature we were born with is against God. It will blaspheme, turn its back on God, deny Him in a minute. I've got a nature right now that, if it were not for His marvelous grace, would deny Him within the next five minutes. But don't worry, I've found God's grace sufficient. Yet I have that old nature, and you have an old nature. We'd better reckon on it. We had better realize that we have it.

Now God has no arrangement to salvage the old nature. God says it will finally die, but we won't lose it until we die physically. God has no program to restore old natures.

This is the reason He has given us a new nature, one that can become obedient unto God. One characteristic of the new nature is that it *can* be obedient unto God, but it needs empowering—it needs the Holy Spirit. So Paul says here:

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

—Romans 8:8

I do not know how much good you do—that is, what your neighbors call good—but regardless of what it is, if it is not of the Spirit, it cannot be pleasing to God. You may be called upon tomorrow by the Chamber of Commerce of your town and be given a silver loving cup. They may say you are the outstanding citizen of your community, that you are philanthropic, that you are a good neighbor and you exemplify everything your community stands for. They may even go so far as to say that since you are a church member you are their idea of what a Christian should be like. But, my friend, if what you are producing in your life is just the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit, none of that is pleasing to God. You see, it has to be of the Spirit of God working in your life. Therefore, you and I cannot boast of anything we do because if there is any good, it is of the Spirit of God; it is not of us. If we do it, brother, it is not lovely at all.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. –Romans 8:9

A Christian might say, “I don’t think I have the Holy Spirit.” My friend, if you have trusted Christ as your Savior, you *have* the Holy Spirit. “But,” you may say, “I don’t feel like it.” Well, you don’t know you have Him by the way you *feel*. You have Him because God’s Word says you do. In the fifth chapter of Romans, it says when you are justified by faith, the Holy Spirit is given to you and you are indwelt by the Spirit of God. That is the mark of a child of God.

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

Notice it says the body is *dead* because of sin. Somebody will ask, “When did it die?” Well, that was about 2000 years ago when *Christ* died for sin.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. –Romans 8:11

The moment you trust Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit is given to you. The Spirit of God, the third Person of the Godhead, comes to dwell in your heart and life.

Someone will say, "I'm not worthy of that." No, we certainly are not. God used three chapters in this letter to the Romans to tell all of us that we are not worthy of it. He doesn't give the Holy Spirit because we are worthy; He does it because of His grace. He doesn't go into a community and say, "I'm looking for the outstanding people here that I might indwell them." Not at all. It seems to me as if He does the opposite, that He looks for the worst lost sinner who knows he is a sinner and will trust Christ. When one does that, the Spirit of God dwells in that person's heart and life.

Then we are told in verses 12 and 13:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die

The natural man says he owes it to his flesh to satisfy it. He may rationalize his dishonesty or immorality by saying he has to have his needs met. But God says we as believers are not debtors to the flesh. My friend, the flesh—and we all have it—is a low-down, dirty rascal. And we don't owe it anything.

... But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. –Romans 8:13

You shall live as a *child of God*.

Paul is not talking here about salvation; he is talking about Christian living. We will live as children of God if we are walking in the Spirit, you see, and if we are putting to death the doings of the body. I get so weary of hearing people talk about having crucified the flesh. I ask you, can you crucify it? Every time I do, it gets up and lives again. I have tried to beat it to death, but that doesn't do any good. My friend, that is not the way it is to be done

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- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

at all. It is the deeds or doings of the body that we are to put to death. That is, we are to condemn and deal with those things in our hearts and lives that are wrong.

Now notice this wonderful statement:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. –Romans 8:14

If you are led by the Spirit of God, you are a child of God. The Lord Jesus gave the same picture when He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). You see, He leads His own. The picture is of a first-century shepherd and his flock of sheep. Perhaps a half dozen shepherds leave their flocks for the night in one fold. In the morning, their sheep are all mixed up. One shepherd goes up over the hill there and calls his sheep. All of the sheep that know him come out of the fold and follow him. And Romans 8:14 speaks of the same thing. May I say to you, friend, that is the real test. Are you led by the Spirit of God? Some sheep may wander away, but it knows who his Shepherd is. It’s not going to follow the wrong shepherd. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

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.” –Romans 8:15

That word *Abba* was carried over from the Aramaic rather than being translated, and I’m glad the translators handled it that way. It’s such an intimate word, such a personal word, they felt that they would be irreverent, almost blasphemous, if they translated it literally. You see, the Holy Spirit within us cries up to the Father, and the word He uses is *Abba*, simply meaning “my daddy.”

My friend, may I say to you that the Spirit of God cries out from the heart of a believer to God the Father, especially in times of trouble. When you are going through a struggle, when it looks dark for you, when you’ve been misunderstood, or when your

friends have turned on you, it is at those times that the Spirit of God will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, and the Spirit just cries out, “Abba, Father.”

Thinking of John Knox—my, how that fellow stood up against the hierarchy of his day! He is the man who said, “One with God is a majority.” How could he stand against so many? Well, the Spirit was bearing witness with his spirit that he was a son of God. In that dark hour John Knox, Martin Luther, and others tell us that they just cried out to God.

Have you had that experience? A very fine Christian, an outstanding man, was telling me the other day about a struggle he went through. I said to him, “I don’t see how you were able to go through it.” And he said, “When it looked like everything had fallen in upon me, when it seemed that everything had turned out wrong, my spirit just seemed to cry out to God in that dark hour. God has never seemed so close to me as He was at that moment.” That is the mark of a real child of God. How wonderful it is!

Perhaps you haven’t had a trying experience, but sometimes God lets us have these trials so we will turn from placing our confidence in man. We’ll just look up to our Father and cry out to Him, “Oh, my Father, my intimate, personal Father.” And He is interested—He sees you, knows you, and understands.

Then we are told:

And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. –Romans 8:17

Somebody is apt to get some wrong ideas at this juncture. They may say, “My, if we are children of God like this, indwelt by the Spirit of God, we can do anything we want to do.” No, you can’t, friend. You are still in a frail human body. Our bodies are limited. Many of God’s children are set aside for physical reasons, and it is not God’s will for them to be healed. Listen to this passage:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. –Romans 8:18

One of these days you and I are going to get over yonder and look back on this scene down here—on the struggle that seemed so difficult, on the suffering we went through. I know there are a lot of folk who have suffered in a way I know nothing about. Perhaps you have gone through the very fire. But when you look back on it, friend, I think you will say with me, “Oh, that’s nothing compared to what He had reserved for me. I wish I hadn’t complained like I did.”

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. –Romans 8:19

Why is it that we are suffering down here? Well, we are waiting, friend. God is working out a plan and program. He hasn’t finished it yet, and that is the reason it is going as it is.

Not only did the curse of sin come upon man in Adam’s disobedience, but the physical world came under the curse also.

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 labors with birth pangs together until now. –Romans 8:20-22

The creation is not delivered yet. All of it is travailing in pain until now. Nature sings in a minor key. The wind blowing through the pine trees on a mountainside or the breaking of the surf on some lonely shore, both emit the same sob. The frightened cry of some wounded animal pierces the night air. All about us is death and decay, in both the animal and plant worlds.

We will be healed someday, but we don’t have it yet. We are waiting for that time.

Not only that, but we also have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. –Romans 8:23

When Christ comes, we are going to get rid of these feeble, infirm bodies and get new ones. In the meantime, we groan in these old bodies, waiting for the day when our redemption will be complete. Between now and that glorious day, God has made every arrangement to *keep* those who are His own. Thank God, we have been indwelt by the Spirit of God, and we have been given a new nature. Now God wants us to live for Him.

When you and I go out on our own, asserting our own wills, trying in our own strength to live the Christian life—what happens? Why, we just fall right on our faces! We make a failure of it all. Even if you and I do produce something in the flesh which men may applaud, it is no good to God. It is the flesh. Only that which the Holy Spirit produces in our lives can He accept. And that ought to be our prayer and our concern. Whatever we produce ought not to be the works of the flesh—not this backscratching, backslapping, parading kind of Christianity—but a deep, abiding faith in Jesus Christ which brings us to the place where we are dependent upon Him, where we look to Him and rest upon Him.

All this is ours in Christ when the Spirit of God is in control. And there's even more to come.

At its heart, salvation is a love story. We love Him because He first loved us. Nothing can separate us from that. We entered Romans 8 with “no condemnation,” we end it here with “no separation,” and in between “all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28). Now, friend, you cannot have it any better than that.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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