

Romans 8:1-11

Have you ever met people who claim to be Christians and yet seem so weighed down by their Christianity? They talk about Christ and church and keep trying to say prayers and read the Bible and attend church and keep all the rules but they are so burdened by it all. They seem so anxious and miserable you might think they would be better off without their religion.

Well there is a form of Christianity, so called, which does exactly that. It is not true Christianity. There are two ways to live before God. We can live what Paul calls “living in the flesh”. That life is a life that is always trying to win God’s favour by doing good works. We try to live a good moral life. We try to tell the truth and to love our neighbour. We try to do good religious things. We try to say our prayers and read our Bibles and go to church Sunday by Sunday. We try to be good enough for God to accept us. Bluntly put this is the arrogant way to live. The fact of the matter is that all of us are sinners and we cannot please God by our own good works. They are not good enough.

The other way to live is to hear what God tells us. He loves us. He loves us so much he has given us life as a free gift through his Son. This is what Paul calls “living in the Spirit”. God graciously has set his love upon us. He forgives us and treats us as his children. We do try to live a good moral life and do good religious deeds but not in order to win his favour but because we already have his favour. We enjoy the favour of being his children and so we love to represent our Father in heaven here on earth.

It is these truths that Paul expounds in today’s epistle reading.

The Situation of People in Christ: v1-8

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We were condemned

Before we came to Christ we recognised that the law and, especially the Ten Commandments, came from God and we could see that if everybody kept them we would all enjoy his wonderful life together. However when we tried to obey the commandments we just couldn't do it. In fact it was even worse. The Law not only showed us what sin was but it also provoked us to sin more. Have you ever seen the sign "wet paint do not touch"? There's something inside us, our sinful nature, our flesh, which makes us want to touch it when if there was no sign there we wouldn't be bothered. The law of God is good but our sinful nature causes us to sin. The problem was not with the commandments but with us. We were hopelessly condemned before God. We could only look forward to the judgement of spiritual death. It could be said at that time we lived "under the law of sin and death".

In Christ we have life

Now that we have received Christ we are no longer under the Law of sin and death. We have moved out of that realm of living into a new realm. We now live in realm of the Spirit.

God sent his Son into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was truly man but not sinful man. In fact he kept the Law perfectly, fulfilling the just requirement of the Law. This meant that he could die for us. We could then be accounted righteous because of his righteousness.

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When we received God's love, when we received God's Son, two things happened. Firstly we were liberated by God from the burden of trying to keep the law to win God's favour, we were set free from the law which kept showing us we were sinners and kept condemning us to death. Secondly we were incorporated into Christ by God's Spirit. We were united to Christ. Christ dwelt in us and we dwelt in Christ. This means when Christ died on the cross we died with him. When Christ rose from death we were raised with him to the new life, the resurrection life. Since this is the case we have peace with God. He has given us his favour. In truth we have been given his life. We now live under a new law. It is the law of the Spirit of life.

Paul then becomes very direct in his address to the Christians in Rome. We may hear him speaking equally directly to us.

You are in Christ: v8-11

The Spirit of God dwells in you

If you are trusting Christ for your salvation then you are not "in the flesh". You are not trying to win God's favour by your feeble attempts at doing good. If you are trusting Christ you are "in the Spirit". The Spirit of God has brought you to this trust in Christ. He dwells in you. Two things inevitably follow.

Your spirit is alive

If you trust in Christ then you are trusting in the righteous one. You have received Christ and so you have been united with him and received his righteousness. Because you have his righteousness your spirit is alive. You are not spiritually dead.

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Your body will be resurrected

Because you are united with Christ by his Spirit then because his body has been resurrected your very mortal body will also be resurrected.

So

Don't live in the flesh. Don't live under the burden of trying to do good to win God's approval. It shows us our sin and provokes us to sin and ends up in despair and death.

Rather live in the Spirit. Rejoice in the favour of God shown us in Christ. Enjoy the peace with God and the life he gives now and exult in the great hope of the future.