

The Law of the Spirit

Sin, Salvation, and Sanctification.

Two years ago, almost to the day, when I first began looking at the book of Romans, Pastor Matt and I read through it together, looked at some commentaries and study Bibles, and then realized that for a framework, the old three-fold knowledge outline that has been in use forever to break the Heidelberg Catechism into sections would really work quite well; so, Sin, Salvation, and Service. Of course, that's a pretty high altitude look at the book of Romans, and as we reflected on it, we added Sovereignty to speak to chapters 9 – 11, and we thought about adding Sanctification (but our sanctuary only has space for 4 little banners).

Now, working from that perspective, chapters 1 – 3, after a brief introduction, had a lot to say about Sin, particularly in the light of Paul's understanding that there are only two kinds of people in the world; those who are under the law (the Jews, as he names them in Romans 3, verse 1—God's Old Covenant people), and those who are not (that would be the rest of us—the people that he describes in Ephesians 2 as, “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world¹). In the end it didn't really matter much, as Paul concluded in chapter 3, verses 19 and 20:

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:19–20 ESV

But thanks be to God! he did not just end the book right there. He went on in verses 21 – 25:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned... Romans 3:21–23 ESV

(all, both Jew and Gentile, have sinned)

...and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... Romans 3:23–25 ESV

And there is Paul's first grand statement—his first definition in the context of Romans—of the basis of our salvation. He talked about it back in chapter 1 when he said that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,²” regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. But here in chapter 3 he goes farther. Here he defines it. Let me read it again.

¹ Cf. Philippians 2:12.

² Cf. Romans 1:16.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, **although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it**— Romans 3:21 ESV

which is very important. And what is this righteousness to which the Old Covenant Scriptures bear witness? It is

²² ...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... Romans 3:22–25 ESV

If we fully understood that this is the thesis statement of the Old Testament, it would save us a lot of trouble later on.

For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... Romans 3:22–25 ESV

So, the righteousness of God (justification) is through faith in Jesus Christ, given by grace as a gift, and all through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. If that sounds a little familiar, it should. It's parallel to that other great statement of the basis of salvation found in Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 ESV

He addresses the boasting part in Romans 3 as well. Verse 27:

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. Romans 3:27 ESV

Then chapter 4 addresses a question that might not immediately leap to the mind of the average evangelical today, even though it should, and it was right at the forefront of many of Paul's original readers. It's found in the very last verse of chapter 3.

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? Romans 3:31 ESV

(Do we nullify the Old Covenant, and the promises that were made to Abraham? Do we just toss the Old Testament scriptures in the bin because of this faith?) Paul's answer (and this is important in understanding our text this morning),

By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. Romans 3:31 ESV

And of course we do, because the Law and the Prophets bear witness to justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are not antithetical to each other. There is no sense in which we need to unhitch from the Old Covenant. So, remember this verse when we come back to Romans 8 and start talking about the Law of the Spirit of Life and the Law of Sin and Death.

Now, chapter 4 ended with a clear statement about the relationship between justification—that is, salvation—and faith. Speaking of Abraham's faith (and ours), Paul wrote:

²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. **It will be counted...** Romans 4:20–25 ESV

(it will be reckoned, it will be accounted, it will be credited)

...to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:20–25 ESV

Then chapter 5 leaned even more heavily into the Salvation part of the outline, beginning with the words:

¹ Therefore... Romans 5:1 ESV

(based on everything that we has been expounded in chapters 1 – 4). Therefore,

...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 ESV

Which is another way of stating what we read earlier from chapter 8.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

Lloyd-Jones makes clear that because chapters 6 and 7 are digressions, once again addressing questions raised by this great doctrine of justification by faith alone, then these two statements really do go together.

...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 ESV

Even so,

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

Having demonstrated thoroughly in chapter 6 that our salvation, including the sanctification which goes hand and hand with it is absolutely guaranteed because of our union with Christ in His death. Chapter 7 went on to demonstrate the same thing, proving that “our sanctification is guaranteed because we have been set free from the Law and tied to, and married to, the Lord Jesus Christ.”³ Lloyd-Jones went on:

...to put it a different way, the business of chapter 6 is to show positively what our union with Christ does, and achieves, and will achieve. Chapter 7 is mainly concerned to show what the Law cannot do, chapter 6 what Christ can do.⁴

No Condemnation.

And here’s what Christ can do, that the Law never could; three things, really. Verse 1:

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans (Volume 6): The Law: Its Functions and Limits* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 261.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 261.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

We've spent some time here already just last week (in fact, if you did your homework you should have this memorized), but this is not one of those points that we could emphasize too much or too often.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

There is no condemnation for the sins that we committed before the Father drew us to Christ, and there is no condemnation for anything that we may have done since. In fact, if you belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, there will be no condemnation for anything. There can't be. Jesus paid it all. The Father will never hold you accountable for the sin that He already punished and paid for through the precious blood of His own Son. Why would He? The price has been paid in full. His wrath has been fully satisfied.

This verse is, wrote Martyn Lloyd-Jones,

...in a sense, the great good news of the gospel—that it is possible to announce a way of salvation in which there is no longer any condemnation. This is the greatest good news that has ever come into the world; it holds out the greatest possibility for man since the Fall. It is the heart and essence and soul of the Christian gospel.⁵

And we must know it, believe it, and walk in it every day. Memorize the verse, as I suggested last week. Hide this treasure in your heart, and pull it out whenever you doubt or despair of your salvation.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

And since Question and Answer 21 in the Catechism reminds us that true faith is

...a deep-rooted assurance created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, **not only others, but I too** have had my sins forgiven...⁶

you should probably personalize this “great good news of the gospel”. Learn to say it this way: “There is therefore now no condemnation for me,” (do you believe that?). There is no condemnation for I—body and soul, in life and in death—am in Christ Jesus, my Faithful Savior. You are meant to have that kind of certainty. You are meant to have this assurance.

Set Free from Sin.

The second thing that Christ can do is found in verse 2.

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

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 269.

⁶ “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21”, ed., CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church in North America), *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 19.

And this is where we have to recall what was said earlier about the Law. Some have argued that the expression “the Law” always means the same thing, that it always refers back to the Law given by God in the Old Covenant. Others have strongly suggested that Paul is using the term in three or four different ways here; that the Law of the Spirit of Life is something completely other than the Law of Sin and Death, and both distinct from the law as referenced in verse 3. I don’t think we have to choose. In Psalm 119, that great hymn to the glory of God revealed in the Law, the Psalmist wrote:

⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. ⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations... Psalm 119:89–90 ESV

And, as we have seen, Paul said in Romans 7:

¹² ...the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Romans 7:12 ESV

We are not meant then to set these things in opposition to one another. God’s Law is gracious. The Spirit of life uses it, like a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But for those who are foolish enough to imagine that the Law of God is a standard that they could achieve in their own strength, then it is the Law of Sin and death—the Law by which they will be judged, found guilty, and condemned. But for those who acknowledge their sin, and trust in Christ alone—those “who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit,”

³ ...God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, Romans 8:3 ESV

By offering up His own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,” God—by the law of the Spirit of life—has set us free from the law of sin and death. In other words, there is therefore now no condemnation, because once there was. Once, on Calvary’s cross, the wrath and condemnation of God was poured out, but it was poured out on His own Son, so if we are in Christ—if we have come to Him in repentance and faith;

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died **has been**... Romans 6:5–7 ESV

(past tense)

...set free from sin. Romans 6:5–7 ESV

So, in Christ and through Christ, there is no condemnation, and in and through Christ, we have been set free from sin—Question and Answer 1 in the Catechism assume both of those in the line, He “has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.”⁷

The Requirement of the Law.

⁷ “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 14.

But, like the man said, “Just one more thing”; one more thing that Christ can do according to our text this morning. Verse 3 said,

³ ...God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, Romans 8:3 ESV

And why?

⁴ ...in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:4 ESV

We'll be dealing with this in the weeks to come as we go on through Romans, chapter 8, but for today, understand that we are not talking about the imputation of the righteousness of Christ anymore. Now we're talking about practical holiness. Now we're talking about living in the Law of the Spirit of Life. Again, the Catechism does not ignore this. We confess:

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life...

that's the “no condemnation” part, but wait, there's more:

...and [He] makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.⁸

See, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ sets us free from the *condemnation* of God's Law and in so doing, sets us free to live in holiness and grace as we no longer walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. In Christ, we are no longer under the dominion of the Law, but the Law becomes a tool in our hands that we might live for the glory of God alone.

³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the [flesh]⁹, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:3-4 NIV8410

This is what Christ can and has done by the Law of the Spirit of life, for all those who come to Him by grace alone, through faith alone, and for the glory of God alone.

⁸ “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 14.

⁹ NIV84, “sinful nature”.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).