

March 20, 2022

Scripture

Romans 8:1-10

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For 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 to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law - indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Devotional

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My Sunday School teacher once taught us to ask a question whenever we see the word “therefore” in the Bible: “What is the *therefore* there for?” So before we consider the conundrum between flesh and spirit that Paul presents in today’s passage, we need to look back to chapter 7’s discussion of sin, the flesh, and the battle that consumes them both.

First up is sin. Contrary to popular belief, sin is not simply the act of doing something wrong. Unless there is a common definition of what “wrong” means, there is no such thing as wrongdoing. The law had to be given to define what is wrong, not so that we might blindly follow the law. But, in fact, the opposite often occurs. The law can heighten the desire to do what is wrong, and here Paul seems to absolve himself of sin. Sin, he argues, takes on a life of its own in light of the law. The law comes to declare war on sin, and sin responds by doubling down.

This war takes place in the flesh, which Paul distinguishes from the mind. Sin lives in the flesh and constantly rebels against the law, while the mind sets itself on godly matters and tries to will sin away. But it fails. The mind is not strong enough to overcome the will of the flesh to sin. The flesh is in slavery to sin and cannot escape except through death.

Now back to our passage’s “therefore.” Therefore, Paul teaches, if the Spirit dwells in you, you are not condemned for your sin. Christ has set you free from the law that defined what sin is, so that you are also free from the war between sin and the law that lives in your flesh.

You don’t have to toil and strive and obsess over this battle between what you do and what you think you ought to do. You can instead bask in the peace and joy of the Spirit. The flesh has already been

condemned through Christ's death on the cross, so let that war between sin and the law go on without you. Take no part in it; find your life and peace in the Spirit who dwells within you.

Prayer

God, we thank you for the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. We were struggling in vain in the war between sin and law, but you have set us free. Teach us to live in joy and peace this season. Amen.