



A Question of Choice

Romans 8:5-10

CRY FREEDOM

We live in a society of choice don't we? It's everywhere in our daily lives – having to make choices: what clothes shall I wear, what shall I have for dinner. It's remarkable but I gave up having sugar in coffee in 1979, but every time someone asks me if I want sugar, I have to think about it. Of course, we have to make our choices in the big things of life and often the decisions we make can affect us for the rest of our lives.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

It's your choice is a title heading from the NHS to tell us that we now have a choice of which hospital we are treated in. PEOPLE It's a good idea and here are some people and their reasons for wanting to choose a hospital for their treatment. "I want a hospital that serves great food" - don't worry about the competence of surgeon!

CHOICE

Choice is important for us as Christians. Our life in Christ started with a choice. I decided to follow Jesus – so did you. We made a choice. In the first few weeks of this series we focussed on all the promises God has made us in Christ, just how amazing our God has been to us and the things we can do now we are Christians. We are accepted, secure and significant in Jesus.

VIRTUALBOX

Have a look at this. If you're a computer buff, and keep you're software up to date, you find that each new version comes out with a changelog – a list of changes that have been made since last time. This one is for a program called Virtual Box.

When we became Christians, what was our changelog

WHAT CHANGED?

We have a new heart and a new Spirit within us – God has made us into people whose desires now point towards Him so we now desire to please God, to honour Him and thank Him for what he has done and is doing in our lives. We have the Holy Spirit in us so if we sin, we know about it because the Holy Spirit convicts us of it.

We have new life in Christ - God has made us into a new creation. We are no longer dead in our sins, but we have been made alive in Christ.

We have a new master - our new spiritual authority is God.

WHAT DIDN'T CHANGE?

That's what changed. But it's pretty obvious that there are a number of things that have remained the same since we trusted Jesus

Our body did not change - spiritually we have changed, but the body bit – not yet. One day we'll get a replacement, but for now this is it.

Our "flesh" was not taken away – we have been brought up and grown up independent of God. We've learned to react and cope in our strength – it's human nature. The Bible calls it "walking in the flesh" - that's what we had in our reading. So if I talk about the flesh this morning, that's what it's about – doing things the human way. We think and behave according to what is right in our eyes; and God doesn't play a part in that. In the flesh I do my own thing – that's the human way and that judgement can be very poor and inevitably

leads to sin. When we became Christians we no longer have to walk in the flesh because we've got the Holy Spirit in us to enable us to have good judgement and live in a way that honours God.

But old habits die hard. That's why last time God called us to have renewed minds (to let God mould us) – to throw out the way we have been conditioned to think as humans and to think God's way so that live in a way that honours God.

Sin did not die – we have died to sin and become alive in Christ, but sin itself has not died -yet. Many Christians live lives believing that they can never change and become more like Jesus because they can't defeat sin in their lives. We know just by living day by day, that there is always that pressure to do things that suit us, but at the cost of others, ourselves or our relationship with God.

UNDER A NEW LAW

Now here's the good news – Jesus has already defeated sin for us. Paul says we should consider ourselves alive to God and dead to sin (Rom 6:11). When we trusted Christ, we died to sin, so in that sense our relationship with sin ended. The trouble is that whenever we try to do good, sin somehow rears its ugly head doesn't it? Paul calls that the law of sin and death and it's still effective in us

Look at this verse: *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2*

In Jesus, we are put under a greater law – the law of the Spirit of life so the law of sin and death is not inevitable. Put it this way. We all have to obey the law of gravity – it keeps us firmly on the ground. But we can all fly can't we? We just need one of these – PLANE. Why can we fly? Because we discovered another law – aerodynamics which allowed us to make aeroplanes so that we could defeat gravity. The law of the Spirit of life allows us to defeat the law of sin and death. The question is – do we choose to follow it? Do we choose to fly above the law of sin and death?

OUR CHOICES

This is where choice comes in. We've been made new, but the old way of thinking and doing things is still there. Even though we no longer have to think and react according to our flesh, we can choose to do so.

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Even though sin has no power over us, we can choose to give in to it.

Likewise, sin has no power over us, but we can choose to give into it. Where does that leave us? Are we going to believe what God says is true and act on it or not.

WHAT SORT OF PERSON?

1 Corinthians chapters 2 and 3 describes three sorts of person.

NATURAL

The first is the natural person – someone who isn't a Christian – yet. They're physically alive but spiritually dead, they live independently of God and their actions are controlled by the flesh – in other words by their own judgement or the judgement the world gives them and all done without God.

SPIRITUAL

The second is the spiritual person. It's the normal state of the Christian. It's all the things I've been mentioning God has made us over the last few weeks: transformed through faith in Christ, forgiven, received into God's family, made special by God, has the Holy Spirit, is dead to sin and alive in Christ. The spiritual person should be walking in the Spirit and therefore reflect His nature so he or she bears His fruit (Gal 5:22). The spiritual Christian still as flesh but deals with it daily now that he or she is dead to sin.

Well, that's the ideal anyway and it's where God wants us to move to. But God doesn't want us to dismiss it as a pipe dream. God has given us everything to be this already. *2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.*

FLESHY

The third is a Christian who has been made spiritually alive but instead of following the impulses of the Spirit, chooses to follow the impulses of the flesh. They choose to ignore God deliberately, or are being deceived, or just don't understand. In that case Fleishy Christians often mimic Natural People – they have their minds occupied by wrong thoughts and have negative feelings with all the stresses and strains that go with that. Christians in this position often get stuck with certain sins. They manifest themselves in bad habits, compulsions, addictions. They make us feel hopeless and we conclude wrongly that we can never escape.

In reality, most Christians are fleshy to a greater or lesser extent, because we choose to give into the flesh. But it doesn't have to be like that. That isn't the way God wants us to be and as I've said, He's given us *everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.*

BARRIERS TO GROWTH

So if we are to grow we need to deal with the bits of flesh that are stopping us being what God has made us. So what stops us. Here are three of the most common barriers. The first is ignorance – we just don't realise that God has given us the get out of jail card for our problems. Most Christians just don't realise in Christ who they are because if they did, they would have a different outlook completely on their lives.

The second is deception. How do we get deceived. It's what we learned last time. We get deceived by what the Bible calls the basic principles of the world (Col 2:8). You know. "We have to achieve a certain standard or God won't accept us". "It may work for me, but I'm different". "I could never be as spiritual as that". "God could never use me".

The third barrier is unresolved personal and spiritual conflicts. How often this is the case. The truth is that we all have hang-ups that are real barriers to our spiritual growth. So many Christians never reach their potential because of issues in their life. I'm not going to deal with this specifically this morning, other than to say that later in this series we are going to explore what these are and how to deal with them permanently so we can achieve our potential in Christ.

There are so many Christians out there that think they are rubbish and can never be anything for God. Yet history is full of stories of men and women that realised that by the Holy Spirit, God had already given them power to break barriers and do amazing things for Him. Gladys Aylward.

We have a God who no longer wants us to walk in the flesh, but to walk by the Spirit. Now you've heard this mentioned a bit in the last few morning sermons: so what it?

CHOOSING TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT: NOT

Let me start by saying what walking by the Spirit isn't. It isn't giving us a fuzzy warm feeling. Or even being permanently joyful. Yes God makes us joyful and it's a great thing when something happens to fill us with joy. But God doesn't want us to chase after experiences, just to take hold of what He has already done for us.

Some Christians feel it is a licence to do whatever we want. It is true that we are free, but as you know, in order to fly you have to follow the laws of aerodynamics or you find out about gravity fast. God wants us to live a righteous life.

Other Christians do the opposite by saying we must follow all these commandments. The thing about God's law in the Bible is that no-one can live up to it. It's a recipe for failure because we end up deciding what we must do to keep God happy. And the rules get steadily more ridiculous.

All God wants us to do to live a righteous life is to choose to walk by the Spirit.

CHOOSING TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT: IS

True freedom & Being led – God wants us to live in the way we were created to be and this was to be a people who like Adam, walked with God and follow Him. Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me* John 10:27. Walking by the Spirit means that we become more like Jesus.

It also means that we walk at God's pace in the right direction. *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Place my yoke on you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls 30 For my yoke is pleasant and my burden is light."* Matt 11:28-30. It's an interesting picture Jesus uses. Oxen pulled carts and ploughs by having a yoke put around their neck. Some objected and were difficult because they didn't want to pull the weight.

Jesus said, get rid of your old load, that which weighs you down – all those problems of life, all your stresses and strains. Have some rest. Take my yoke because you'll have a pleasant time and my burdens are light. When we walk with Him, we find that His ways are not hard, that we'll cope more effectively with the stresses and strains of life.

HOW CAN WE TELL?

How can we tell if we are walking by the Spirit. I have discovered a fruit tree in my garden. It was buried under bindweed. I've tidied it up. The only thing is that I have no idea what sort of tree it is – apples, pears, cherries? I haven't a clue. But one day it will bear fruit – then I'll know. VINES. It's the same with the Spirit. If we walk by the Spirit then we'll bear his fruit: *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control*

Good isn't is. Unfortunately, if you are living by in the flesh – doing it your way without reference to God, then probably it will show in one of these ways: *Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, promiscuity, 20 idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, conflicts, factions, 21 envy, murder, drunkenness, wild partying, and things like that.* Quite a list and we could probably all attach one or more of those labels to ourselves right now.

Maybe God has been challenging you this morning. You have identified areas where you have been living in the flesh – doing what has been right in your own eyes, but you know hasn't been right in God's eyes. You need to deal with it and in a moment we are going to pray and have that opportunity.

PRAYER ITEM

Every day, specifically commit yourself to walk by the Spirit and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Pray with someone that you will renounce fleshy living and walk by the Spirit.

TITLE

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