

Freedom Series

1. Freedom from Condemnation (Romans 7:14 - 8:4)

Have you ever watched those DIY programs on TV? I'm sure most of us have. You know - Changing Rooms or Ground Force. Here we see the experts transforming people's homes from something they liked into something they either like better, or they end up loathing. What always impresses me is how easy they make it look. They say, just do this, this and that and you'll be laying bricks in no time.

Get real! It never works for me. Just go around my house and see some examples of my DIY! So when someone comes on the telly and says do this it's really easy - I say to myself - for you maybe, but not for me!!

You've listened patiently to my sermons these past 8 months and many of you have found them a challenge. But as we look say at the last three chapters of Ephesians and as Paul explains to us what our Christian lives should be like our reaction is rather like a TV DIY programme. We read what the Lord requires of us, but we say "I can't do that. That isn't me. It's alright for Paul - but me? I'm just ordinary." Worse we look at what God requires and we feel failures, struggling and not good enough to be part of God's kingdom, or maybe not even part of the church. I know of people who have deferred being members of a church because they felt a failure, inadequate. They knew Jesus as Saviour, they desired that He be Lord of their lives BUT somehow they found themselves falling short of the mark. They desired to serve Him more, to worship Him more, to follow Him more closely but it didn't happen for them. They felt a failure. They stayed on the fringe of the Church.

Or I know of many Christians who have been stalwarts of the church for years, yet in their heart, they feel a failure because somehow they don't feel they have met God's high standards.

And then a new Pastor comes along and he reminds everybody about what God wants us to be. We saw in our study of Ephesians that God wants us to be **mature**. He wants us to grow up into Him who is the head, even Christ. To be like Him. And He has equipped us to do it. Look at:

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

"Oh no! It's all very well for him to go on about maturity in Christ and following Jesus but I just can't. I'm not good enough. I have this issue or that

issue in my life to sort out. I want to please God...BUT.” So we think that this sort of stuff is for Pastors, or at the very worst the deacons or people who attend the Prayer Meeting! We feel failures, held back and tied up. We know what God’s Word says, but somehow we can’t get ourselves to it.

Christian writers down the ages have called this problem bondage, and as I said a few weeks ago, the word itself has unfortunate connotations in modern society and different and equally unfortunate connotations in some Christian groups in connecting bondage only to the satanic or demonic.

But all it means is that we are bound. We have chains, ropes, shackles that keep us from achieving our potential in Christ. It could be satanic, but equally as we shall see in a minute, it can be due to our own limitations. We can do some things but unlike the apostle who said “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” we don’t feel we can.

We are in a spiritual battle against the world, the flesh and the devil and we find it hard to cope. It may be coping with doubt, coping with fear, coping with guilt. It may be coping with ill-health, or coping with loss, or coping with money problems, or problems in our families. How can this preacher be telling me about living as Christ wants me to live when I have all these problems?

Good point - but don’t shoot the preacher - yet! This is what this series is all about: to help us to live free of chains that bind us and stop us living as children of God.

I was at Woodberry Down for the induction of their new pastor two weeks ago and he repeated a catch phrase that I’ve heard somewhere before but I think it applies well to the series I want to do over the next couple of months. He said this “we are not people who need to be challenged by the Word of God, but to be changed” Not challenged - but changed. So over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at some of the issues I just mentioned because I believe that God wants us not just to cope in areas where we don’t feel we cope very well, but to find victory there.

So you feel your Christian life is a struggle. You’ve heard all my sermons on Ephesians and all that encouragement to be mature and get those things out of your life that displease God. But you look at your Bible and you look at yourself and you say “oh”. Oh that I would want to live my life this way. I wish I was like him, or her, or the apostle Paul. It’s alright for him - he was an apostle. I’m just ordinary. Let’s look back at some of the verses we read this morning:

22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

O wretched man that I am! Is that how you feel this morning? You want to please God but find that difficult? Welcome to the Christian life! You are not alone, we **all** experience this weakness - even Paul.

Paul puts it this way. As we look into scripture we see the righteous demands of a holy God. We look in scripture and we find the law. There it is, all contained in the first 5 books and summed up nicely in the 10 commandments. It's God's law so it's a good law and it gives us the difference between right and wrong. That's good. The trouble is we have a sinful nature. We may have Christ, but still in us we have our fallen human natures. So Paul says:

7 For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.

In other word, because we know what coveting is, we covet because our sinful nature seizes the opportunity. So that good law which we desire to do in our inner being is a law of sin and death. We desire to do it but we actually do the opposite.

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Sound familiar? You want to do what God wants you to do but you end up doing the opposite? That's the issue. We know what we should be doing but we fail. We struggle with sin. And how do we often feel. Wretched. Demotivated. Discouraged. And find the Word of God difficult to cope with. Before I even embark on a series about dealing with freedom we need to understand that this is a burden we don't have to carry. It is a yoke we do not need to strain under. Why?

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, 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.

We feel condemned and we feel a failure - but if you are a Christian this morning, if you know Jesus as your Saviour - there IS no condemnation. You may feel a failure because you tried and failed, but in God's eyes you are still one of His children. There is no condemnation.

There is no condemnation. It means just that. I'm sure many of you have read Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (or as one Church magazine once misprinted it as the progress of John Pilgrim's Bunion). It charts the progress

of a pilgrim called Christian carrying a huge burden. However, he is free of that burden when he comes to the cross.

What about the law that makes us a failure? We saw that the good law of God is to us in our sinful natures a law of sin and death because it brings failure and condemnation. But we're not under that one. We've been freed from the bondage that it brings.

Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

We have become free by coming under another law, the law of the Spirit of Life - and it sets us free. A law of freedom? Yes - how can that be?

I was reading about Liberia recently. It was the first independent African country - gaining independence in 1824. It's capital is Freetown and it was there that slaves fled and where their freedom was pronounced under what was called the Freedom Tree. They were free from all their masters' rules and regulation and his yoke of slavery. But it didn't mean the freed slave could do as he liked. There were still laws that he had to live under as a citizen of Liberia.

It's the same with us. When we came to Christ, we came to our freedom tree, the Cross and Christ set us free from the law of sin and death. It does not mean we can do as we like. Christians are not-antinomian - anti-law. We are now citizens of heaven and the law of the Spirit applies. We come under a new law. And what is that law? We live according to the Spirit - His wishes, His desires. And His wishes and desire for us is the same as the Father's wishes and the Son's wishes. Be holy as I'm holy says the Lord. It's a more stringent law, because it's more personal because the Spirit indwells us. But by His presence and power it is more likely to make us like Christ than any legalism or attempt to be Christ-like in our strength.

We don't have time this morning to see how different living according to the Spirit makes in our lives - that's for another week.

What I want to leave with you this morning is this. If you are feeling a failure as a Christian this morning. If you are carrying a burden of sin, fear, guilt, depression, doubt or whatever. Maybe you've even got to the point where you doubt your faith, where you are asking why me Lord? *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* What was Paul's reply to that question? *25 Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

We are rescued. There is now no condemnation. None. We might want to condemn ourselves. But if you are in Christ this morning; if you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour and your Lord then here is the message of God's holy Word - there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That means you. No condemnation means no condemnation. We are

the people of God. His children. Chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, sealed by His Spirit. You are a child of God - there is no condemnation. So therefore in your weakness this morning, find strength in knowing you are not condemned but a child of God. As you look at your sin and fallibility, know that in Christ there is forgiveness, there is no condemnation - you are a child of God. However far you might feel from God - there is no condemnation - you are a child of God so draw close to Him.

Come to the foot of the cross again this morning because the Lord wants to take that burden off you. Don't just be challenged, be changed. Jesus died so that you may no longer carry it. Come, find forgiveness afresh so that you can walk as He intended you.

What wonderful assurance! Praise God! I am His eternally. No condemnation now I dread!

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

*Preached at Swaffham Baptist Church 1/6/03
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