

Freedom Series

2. Freedom from Discouragement (Acts 8:1-14)

As many of you know, I used to be a teacher in an 6th Form college in London and my main task was to try to help people re-sit exams they had failed or underachieved in. One of the biggest problems I faced was discouragement. Whether it was their own fault or bad teaching or a combination of things, I usually found myself not teaching them Geography, but showing them that they were capable of being more than they thought they were. The vast majority of them had capabilities well above how they achieved and usually showed it on re-sit.

Discouragement. We've all experienced it at some point in our lives. Whether it was at school, or at work or in our home lives, our progress or our well-being has been knocked because of something that has happened to us, or worse, by the way we have been treated. And we are discouraged.

Discouragement leads to us being less than we should be and can blight our lives - any part of our lives. It blights our spiritual lives too and we fail to reach our potential in Christ.

As a pastor I sometimes find myself doing the same things as I was doing as a teacher: persuading people that in Christ they are more than the sum of their parts. As with my teaching days I often find that people have been done down by other Christians, who criticise, back-stab or insult others. Or worse I frequently come across Christians who think they are superior to others because their theology is different or they have certain moral attitudes they don't see in other people.

Remember that when you point the finger, then three point back at you. We're all fallen; we all get overtaken by our sinful nature. Superior - I think not; we're all the same. We're all people who because of our sin and failings deserve nothing but death, but in Christ, there is no condemnation. So feel tempted to criticise and point the finger: remember the three pointing at you.

Since I have been at this church I have been told of so many people that once walked with the Lord but now no longer go to church. Why? Because they were discouraged - put off and sometimes by other Christians. And they are bound - bound by their own discouraged spirit and feeling of inadequacy - unable to function spiritually. Part of the aim of this series isn't just to help you get out of your shackles and ropes so that you walk free in Christ, but that you are able to minister to others and help them out too. And with people who have fallen away we need to get them back. As a church I believe that God wants to equip us to do that.

I'm going to show you a table and I'll make sure you get copies of it in subsequent weeks. It tells us just who we are in Christ. If you are feeling discouraged as a Christian this morning then be encouraged as we read this table.

Who I am in Christ

John 1:12

John 15:15

Romans 5:1

1 Cor 6:17

1 Cor 6:20

1 Cor 12:27

Ephesians 1:1

Ephesians 1:5

Ephesians 2:18

Colossians 1:14

Colossians 2:10

I am Accepted in Christ

I am God' s child

I am Christ' s friend

I have been justified

I am united with the Lord and one with Him in spirit

I have been bought with a price, I belong to God

I am a member of Christ' s body

I am a saint

I have been adopted as God' s child

I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit

I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins

I am complete in Christ

I am Secure in Christ

Romans 8:1-2

Romans 8:28

Rom 8:33-34

Romans 8:35

2 Cor 1:21

Colossians 3:3

Philippians 1:6

Phil 3:20

2 Timothy 1:7

Hebrews 4:16

1 John 5:18

I am free forever from condemnation

I am assured that all things work together for good

I am free from any condemning charges against me

I cannot be separated from the love of God

I have been established anointed and sealed by God

I am hidden with Christ in God

I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected

I am a citizen of heaven

I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power love and a sound mind

I can find grace and mercy in time of need

I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me

I Am Significant in Christ

<i>Matt5:13-14</i>	I am the salt and light of the earth
<i>John 15:1,5</i>	I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life
<i>John 15:16</i>	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit
<i>Acts 1:8</i>	I am a personal witness of Christ' s
<i>1 Cor 3:16</i>	I am God' s temple
<i>2 Cor 5:17-20</i>	I am a minister of reconciliation
<i>2 Cor 6:1</i>	I am God' s co-worker
<i>Ephesians 2:6</i>	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm
<i>Ephesians 2:10</i>	I am God' s workmanship
<i>Ephesians 3:12</i>	I may approach God with freedom and confidence
<i>Philippians 4:13</i>	I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

Taken from *Living Free in Christ*, by Neil Anderson ©1993 Regal Books

Amazing isn't it. We are made all these things by our God. It's all a product of God's mercy and grace. If you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord this morning then all this is yours!

Maybe you're still feeling discouraged. "I may be all these things, but I don't feel like it. Yes, I'm not condemned for my failures, but I don't feel like all this." It's not a case of feeling. If you are a child of God these are promises! But if you are feeling not quite the part and feel inadequate then you'll be pleased to know that God doesn't want you to remain like that.

This brings us nicely to our passage for this morning. We looked at the beginning of Romans 8 last week and we found that wonderful truth at there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When we feel a failure, when we feel we can't be what we are supposed to be, when we condemn ourselves, we find that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We just saw that God doesn't just save us - He does it in style and pours out His blessings on us as a product of His grace, love and mercy.

It isn't a case of knowing that we're not condemned when we fail, it's more wonderful than that. God has given us the means to follow Him and serve Him as we should. Now that's encouragement!

So when we fail, we just don't escape condemnation but we have the Holy Spirit in us, indwelling us, part of us.

In fact its a mark of being a Christian. Take a look at Romans 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

If you are a Christian this morning, if you are in Christ Jesus and know Him as Saviour and Lord, you have the Spirit of God in you. That's amazing. We have the Holy Spirit of God in us. He is part of our lives.

For people who don't know Christ, who don't have the Spirit present in their lives, then they are controlled by their sinful nature. As Christians, we saw last week how the sinful man, breaks through and makes us say with Paul - O wretched man that I am! But in Christ we have the Holy Spirit and we needn't have that frustration.

Paul contrasts what it is like to be a Christian and controlled by the Spirit against what it was like for those that aren't that are controlled by the sinful nature.

A Question of Control

Controlled by Sinful Nature

Do as sinful nature desires (v5)

Mind of a sinful man is death, hostile to God (v6-7)

Can never please God (v7)

Death - results for those who live by the sinful nature i.e don't know Christ (v13)

Controlled by the Spirit

Minds set on what the Spirit desires (v5)

Mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (v6)

Spirit lives in us (v9)

Life - we put to death the misdeeds of the body and live. (v13)

So we do have it in us to do what God desires. We have His Spirit. We don't just stand before God as innocent, but we stand before Him equipped by His Spirit to live the kind of life that honours God. We do have the ability to please God because we are people of the Spirit.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. It's the day when we remember when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on Jesus' disciples. What did it lead to? It led to transformed lives and we are looking at some of this in our evening series called First Contact.

So why should we live in the lie of satan any more that we are failures. The lie that even though we may not be condemned we can't please God as we should. We have the power of God in us. The same Spirit is in us that raised Jesus from the dead (remember that verse from our study of Ephesians?). He's the Spirit through which miracles were wrought in Acts and down the ages. He's the Spirit who had transformed the lives of men and women down the ages. He's the same Spirit that transforms people's lives today - remember all the testimonies we have looked at over the months. He's the same Holy Spirit who wants to transform your life.

If you're feeling discouraged this morning, that somehow you are inferior to the rest. If someone has done you down then remember this - you are a child of God, you are not condemned and God has placed His Spirit in you and He

wants His Spirit to work in you to put away your shortcoming, to do His will and to give you life and peace.

Let's come before Him this morning and find life and peace. As always, we stand on the promises of God. We are people of God with the Spirit of God indwelling us. We are special to God. Let's encourage ourselves by affirming who we are and claiming some of these promises this morning.

Prayer of Affirmation

Dear Father

I give You thanks that through faith, I have become Your child, and in Christ I am justified and I belong to You and am complete in You. Thank You that You have freed me from condemnation and I can never be separated from You. Thank you Father that You have given me the gift of Your Holy Spirit and that my body is His temple.

Father my desire is that my mind is set on what Your Spirit desires, that my mind may be controlled by Him and that I may put to death the misdeeds of my body. I pray that You will fill me afresh with your Spirit this morning, that I may be freshly equipped to honour You in my body, to obey You and bring glory to Your holy name.

And I ask this in the name of Jesus

Amen