



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 to my sermons recently and many of you have found them a challenge. Perhaps you've heard how we need to deal with sin in our lives, and particularly unforgiveness and you see yourself falling short of the mark. And you think to yourself – it's all fine for him. It's all fine for super-Christians but that isn't 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. Rather than growing spiritually, getting to know God in a deeper way, desiring to follow Jesus wherever He would lead them, desiring to serve, they somehow never feel that they are not strong enough or worthy enough, or have too much past form (or lack of it) to do anything more than just come to church and that's that.

And then a new Pastor comes along and he reminds everybody about what God wants us to be. And that makes it worse as we hear about sin, and repentance, and forgiveness and commitment. We feel failures, held back and tied up. We know what God's Word says, but somehow we can't get ourselves to it.

Let's put it the other way: 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.

It's as if someone has chained us up, locked us up in prison or held us back as Christians. Actually, that's exactly what it is. We become discouraged by the stresses, strains and knocks of life. And the enemy says: "you can't do that. It's because you are a weak Christian. You've tried that before and you've failed. Don't bother." It's not the stresses and strains themselves that tie us down, locked up, prisoners; but the discouragement they bring.

What's locking you out from going deeper into God this morning? What's preventing you from growing and thriving as a Christian? Let me suggest a few things.

Maybe it's health. You've not been well. You've been struggling with ill-health. Maybe it's depression. You feel a long way from God. You feel discouraged. And you feel it difficult to be spiritually healthy whilst you are physically weak. You know that's wrong to feel that way but

Maybe it's guilt. You've let God down in the past. Possibly you let Him down in a spectacular way and now you struggle from that discouragement. How can I ever be useful again?

Or maybe it's sin. You know that you struggle with sin. It may be something compulsive. Or you may just

feel that however sorry you are before God, you seem to do the same thing again and again. And it's destroying your human relationships. You know you should forgive someone and you just can't bring yourself to do it. And you feel discouraged.

It's a spiritual battle – and our enemy satan wants to make sure that we are prisoners of our discouragement, compulsions, guilt, unforgiveness or whatever – let's just sum it up as sin. We are bound. We have chains, ropes, shackles that keep us from achieving our potential in Christ. It could be satanic, but more often or not it's due to our own limitations and sin. We can do some things but unlike the apostle Paul who said "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" we don't feel we can. So we feel prisoners.

Is that you? Well join the club! I've certainly been there too! But so had the man who wrote "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" - Paul!

Let's look back at some of the verses we read this morning:

19 I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do.

20 If I do what I don't want to do, this means that I am no longer the one who does it; instead, it is the sin that lives in me.

21 So I find that this law is at work: when I want to do what is good, what is evil is the only choice I have.

22 My inner being delights in the law of God.

23 But I see a different law at work in my body--a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body.

24 What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to 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!

But God doesn't want us to live like that. He wants us to be free – unchained, unshackled.

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:

If the Law had not said, "Do not desire what belongs to someone else," I would not have known such a desire. 8 But by means of that commandment sin found its chance to stir up all kinds of selfish desires in me. Apart from law, sin is a dead thing

In other words, when we know that something is wrong, it pëaks our interest. It's rather like if someone comments to you about dodgy sites on the internet or dodgy channels or programmes on TV. What do we do – take a look! Or we hear some gossip. We know we shouldn't but we listen and it's such a juicy story that we just MUST tell someone else. We know it's wrong but.. Paul says later.

Roma 7:14 (TEV) We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am a mortal, sold as a slave to sin.

15 I do not understand what I do; for I don't do what I would like to do, but instead I do what I hate.

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. .

Praise God. This is a prison God does not want us to languish in. A slavery God does not want us to be under. It is a yoke we do not need to strain under. Why?

Roma 8:1 (TEV) There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law

of sin and death.

3 What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, to do away with sin.

4 God did this so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature.

We may feel condemned and we may 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 freed 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.

2 For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has 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?

Have you ever heard of a country called Sierra Leone? It was founded in 1787 so that slaves who fought in the US war of Independence could return to Africa as free men.. Its capital is Freetown where their freedom was pronounced under a symbolic freedom tree, the Cotton 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. Sierra Leone was a British colony and they had to obey the laws of the land they had been freed into.

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 time.

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?

24 What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?

25 Thanks be to God, who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ!

This, then, is my condition: on my own I can serve God's law only with my mind, while my human nature serves the law of sin.

When we trusted Christ we have already been made free. There is now no condemnation. None. So if you're in a prison this morning, the gate is open - walk out of that door and start to be the man or woman that God wants you to be.

We might want to condemn ourselves. We may want to even put ourselves back in through the door. But we are free.

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 of God but a child of God whom He loves.

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 and by His Spirit God can free you from the mess you've got yourself into. *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.*

However far you might feel from God - there is no condemnation on God's part - 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! These were the words of Charles Wesley when after facing failure after failure as a Christian found that God had freed Him - 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.*

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe
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