

Rom 8:1-17 The ministry of God's Spirit

*Tim Anderson 8/10/23*

Paul begins today's Bible passage with the words,  
"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Now apologies if you are here for the first time this morning.

At Holy Trinity this year

we've been working our way through this letter  
that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

We did the first four and a half chapters last year.

We have done the next two and a half chapters in September this year.

And so walking in on this passage is somewhat like  
walking in on the closing arguments in a court case,  
when you haven't heard all that went on before.

But none the less you'll get the thrust of it.

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Some Christian people feel very condemned.

Sometimes that's because they have lived  
with someone putting them down all the time.

Making them feel like they are worthless.

Sometimes it's because they know

that they have done some genuinely pretty bad stuff  
stuff they think is worse than what other people do.

Sometimes it's because they have been reading the Bible  
and come to the correct conclusion that God's standard is perfection  
and they know they don't live up to it.

Sometimes it's the lies of the devil.

Satan means the accuser.

He loves to accuse God's people.

If he can't make us give up our faith,

then the next best thing for him is to render us insecure and paralysed.

If we feel condemned then we won't serve God with boldness.

Instead we will hide in a corner.

If you feel condemned as a Christian Paul's message is clear.  
 “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Well a qualification.

The condemnation he’s talking about is condemnation by God.

It’s God passing his judicial sentence  
 on a person’s life on judgement day.

If a Christian person does the wrong thing,  
 that person will face earthly consequences.

That might be the legal system.

It might be natural consequences of foolish behaviour.

There is no promise from God about a get out of jail free card on earth.

Though sometimes in his mercy

he spares us the full earthly consequences of our sin.

But on judgement day,

there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

None. Absolutely none.

How could it be?

Is God’s justice more lax than our own legal system?

Well, no, it’s not.

It’s just that the penalty has already been paid.

This is how Paul puts it in verse 3.

“What the law was powerless to do ...”

that is to make people good in God’s sight –

“God did by sending his own Son

in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.”

On the cross of Calvary,

nearly 2000 years ago,

Jesus took the rap.

He did it for us.

There’s no condemnation for us,

because there was condemnation for him.

What does no condemnation mean for us now?

In previous weeks, we've spoken about how it means the certain promise of eternal life.

That is the great future we look forward to.

But right now,

what does no condemnation mean?

It means that we have changed minds.

There are two sorts of people according to the apostle Paul.

In verse 5,

There are those who have their mind set on what the flesh desires, and there are those who have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

If you're a person

for whom God has declared that there is no condemnation,

then your mind will be changed

from being set on the things the flesh desires,

to being set on the things the Spirit desires.

Now in my experience,

it's not always a radical overnight change of mind.

Sometimes it is.

On our recent holiday,

we spent time with a friend

who changed from having multiple affairs with work colleagues

to confessing his sins to his wife,

and after a long and painful journey,

saving his marriage,

and embarking on a path to undertaking Christian ministry.

That was a radical change.

He was engaged in an affair

when he started doing Christianity Expored with me.

But for many of us,

that change of mind will be very gradual.

We'll cast our minds back a decade or so,

to the time before we were followers of Jesus,

and we'll think about the direction of our lives then and now.

And we will realise that they are radically different.

Before we were focused on all sorts of ways of pleasing #1.  
Now we are living to please God.  
And yet despite the radical difference between the two,  
we can't pin point any dramatic shifts.  
But little by little,  
God's Holy Spirit has been changing our minds.

What is your mind set on?

It would be an interesting exercise to think over the last week,  
and examine what you spent most of your time thinking about.  
Did concerns about money dominate your thinking?  
There's plenty of fear around the traps on that subject at present.  
Did you spend more time thinking about what would be fun for you,  
or what would give pleasure to others?  
No prizes for guessing which way the mind controlled by the Spirit  
would lean towards here.

But I think the encouraging thing for us is this.

We have God's promise that he is at work to change our minds.

In this passage

the apostle Paul is talking about what is true of the Christian.

It is true that God's Holy Spirit controls the minds of believers,  
and that is life and peace for them.

Certainly we should make an effort to set our minds on what is right.

But I don't think that is the message of this passage.

I think this passage is telling us that God is at work in us –  
and he is setting our minds on what is right.

Who was it that took away our condemnation?

It wasn't our hard work.

God did it by sending his Son as a sin offering.

The same one who declares that there is no condemnation for us,  
he is one who sets our minds on what the Spirit desires.

And the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Those are the words of verse 6.

God is at work in us to give us life and peace.

By his Spirit he sets our minds on what he desires.  
Be encouraged.  
God is at work in you.

That's the message of the next paragraph,  
from verses 9-11.

If you're a Christian, that is someone who follows the Lord Jesus,  
then God's Spirit does live in you.

There's no way to be a Christian without God's Spirit living in you.  
8:9 "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,  
they do not belong to Christ."

There is a dangerous false teaching floating around  
that says that only some Christians have the Holy Spirit.

It's dangerous.

It's divisive.

It will lead people spiritual arrogance about themselves  
and condemnation of others.

It will split congregations that God calls to unity  
into groups of those who are 'Spirit filled' and those who are not.

Sometimes those who have fallen victim to this false teaching  
have told me that there are three 'Spirits' -

the Spirit of Christ,

the Spirit of the Father,

and the Holy Spirit.

Like some sort of weird Trinity within the Trinity.

But that's the convolutions they need to go to  
in order to evade the plain teaching of this verse.

"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,  
they do not belong to Christ."

If you are a follower of Jesus,

take no notice of anyone who says you don't have the Holy Spirit.  
Instead rejoice because God is at work in you by his Spirit.

And if he lives in you,  
then he controls you.

Not like a puppet on a string.  
But like a conductor of an orchestra.  
God's Spirit is the conductor and you are a musician in the orchestra.  
You have freedom to play your own notes,  
even to make your own mistakes in this life.  
In the next life you'll be free of mistakes,  
but for the moment you are free to make your own mistakes.  
You are free to play the music with your own expression.  
But as your conductor he will keep you in step with his vision.  
And he can see the big picture in a way that you can't.

How is it that God's Spirit controls us like a conductor?  
He controls us by our desires.  
We desire not the things that our sinful nature is focused on,  
but our desire is for the things of the Spirit.  
Think about how much our desires shape our lives.  
From the food we eat, to the clothes we wear,  
to the house we live in, to the way we spend our money,  
to job we have, to the friends we make.  
All of these in some part,  
are determined by our desires.  
So if God changes our minds so we desire the things that please him,  
then he controls our lives.  
Not in the sense that we lose our freedom.  
But in the sense of a life giving, empowering control.

To use another analogy,  
it's like the sort of control that a driving instructor has.  
They have a set of pedals to use in an emergency.  
They are giving the instructions.  
So they are in a sense in control.  
But the learner driver does not sense  
that their freedom is impinged upon.  
They sense that they are being empowered to live in a whole new way.  
And when they have their full licence,

they will enter into a whole new world of freedom.  
If you wanted to stretch the analogy a little too far,  
you could that having the full licence  
is like going to heaven.

Because when we are in heaven,  
we will enter into a whole new world of freedom,  
that having God's Spirit in the instructors seat of our heart  
has been preparing us for.  
Having God's Spirit in our hearts is life giving control now,  
and it is the promise of eternal life as well.

That's what Paul says in verse 11.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you,  
he who raised Christ from the dead  
will also give life to your mortal bodies  
through his Spirit who lives in you.”

But it's nothing compared to the gift of God.  
When God gives life to our mortal bodies,  
it's an entirely new quality of life.

For starters we are raised never to die again.  
A defibrillator can't do that.

And we are raised without the limitations that cause us frustration.  
Here's just one example.

Have you ever been misunderstood  
because someone jumped to conclusions based on your body language?  
You were tired but they thought you weren't interested.  
You looked at your watch because you wanted to know the time,  
and they thought you were giving them the hurry up.

When God gives our bodies new life,  
they will be perfectly restored.

Not just to you at your peak –  
when you were 18 or whatever.

But restored to how God designed you to be,  
before this fallen world marred God's good creation.  
And amongst other things,

that means perfect communication.  
 God's Spirit in our hearts is the down payment  
 of a marvellous heavenly inheritance.

That marvellous heavenly inheritance  
 has consequences in the here and now.

Paul says we have an obligation.

8:12 "Therefore brothers and sisters, we have an obligation."

Why do we have an obligation?

Because God has generously given us his Spirit  
 and has promised us a glorious resurrection.

When someone does something good to you,  
 you have an obligation to repay their kindness in some way.

The people who looked after our pets while we were on holidays  
 got a tasty treat from up north.

It's polite.

But what God has done for us is life changing for eternity.

And so we have an obligation.

What is it?

8:13 "to put to death the misdeeds of the body."

In days gone by, Christians used to call this mortification.

Putting our sins to death.

It's not how we are saved.

Being in Christ Jesus saves us.

But it is the evidence of our salvation.

And why wouldn't you want to put your sins to death?

These are not fun things to collect and cherish.

They are behaviours that are opposed to God and lead to death for us.

We don't shed our sin with a reluctant,

"OK, it's the price I guess I have to pay for getting eternal life.

But I am feeling the cost."

Like as if it were giving up chocolate to lose weight.

No. This is something that we are joyful to be rid of.

Like when the doctor cuts out a cancer.

Goodbye and good riddance.



In the final paragraph that we'll look at today,  
we discover that the consequence of being given the Spirit  
is that God has made us his children.

In verse 1,

God's Spirit in our hearts means that there is no condemnation for us.

In verses 5-7,

God's Spirit in our hearts means

that God is at work to transform our minds and our desires.

In verses 9-11,

God's Spirit in our hearts

is the promise of a transformed body in the new creation.

And in verses 14-17,

God's Spirit in our hearts

is the down payment of a marvellous heavenly inheritance.

The idea that Paul uses to convey our heavenly inheritance  
is the idea of being God's children.

In verse 14,

“Those lead by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

In verse 15,

“The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.”

In verse 16,

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

And one of the things that comes from being a child in the normal  
course of things  
is being an heir.

As Paul puts it in verse 17,

“Now if we are children,

then we are heirs –

heirs of God and co heirs with Christ.”

Now of course being an heir of God

isn't quite the same as our human understanding of inheritance.

You don't need to wait for God to die before you inherit.

You'd be waiting an awful long time.  
But Paul is pointing us to the kingdom that God is preparing.  
And when it is ready to come into being,  
we will inherit the kingdom.  
Did you notice that phrase,  
"Co heirs with Christ"?  
That means we will rule alongside Christ in the new creation.  
That is an incredible privilege.  
It's bigger than being told  
you will captain Australia alongside Pat Cummings.  
You will rule the world at Jesus' side.

The other picture that comes to mind  
when I hear that we are God's children,  
is that we are loved and cherished.  
I guess it would be possible to think  
that God sent his Son Jesus to die for us  
because God is immensely kind and merciful.  
That he didn't want to punish people.  
But on the other hand,  
because of what we've done,  
God doesn't particularly like us either.  
He is good to us simply because he is good.  
But this idea of being a child of God blows that away.  
If you're a child, then you're cherished.  
Parents don't forgive their children's misdeeds  
and then hold them at a distance.  
They forgive them and give them a cuddle.  
They take delight in their achievements.  
They feel their pain.  
Children come to their parents for comfort,  
for help with a difficult problem,  
reassurance that they are OK when someone is telling them they are not.  
We are children of God.  
Those things are part of how we relate to God

and how God relates to us.

“Those lead by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

The benefit of having God’s Spirit living inside of you is immense.

God’s Spirit in our hearts means that there is no condemnation for us.

God’s Spirit in our hearts means

that God is at work to transform our minds and our desires.

God’s Spirit in our hearts

is the promise of a transformed body in the new creation.

And God’s Spirit in our hearts is the evidence that we are his children,  
and a down payment of a marvellous heavenly inheritance.