



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"The L Words"

Romans 8:1-4

Life, Leading, Love.

Those three powerful 'L' words provide a map of where we are headed as we navigate Romans chapter eight.

Life...

...is the predominant word in verses one through thirteen. "Life" or "live" occur seven times. Your spirit is alive to God but, more importantly, God the Holy Spirit lives within you.

Leading...

...is only directly mentioned once, in verse fourteen, where you are told, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." But the Holy Spirit's leading is the theme all the way down through verse thirty. Through God's *providence* and through God's *predestination*, the Holy Spirit is leading you along the path prepared for your life. You can expect the leading of God by His indwelling Spirit.

Love...

...is the focus of the concluding verses. You read, "Who shall separate us from the **love** of Christ?...Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who **loved** us..." The chapter ends with "the **love** of God which is in Christ Jesus." You can experience the love of God by His indwelling Spirit.

Life, leading, and love are a good way of understanding what it means to be a Christian.

- You have eternal life in Jesus and you can live it abundantly even now thanks to the empowering of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Since it is God Who has given you such life, you can count on His leading you at all times.
- And, even when His leading is obscured by sufferings in this life, you can be certain of His unfailing love for you!

As you are probably already aware, the Bible as it was originally written had no chapter breaks. The translators added them later for convenience.

Chapter eight continues Paul's discussion from the previous verses.

The last image we had in chapter seven was of what was called “the body of death.” We established from historical sources that the literal body of death was a form of torture attributed to Etruscan pirates by which they tied a dead, rotting corpse to a living victim and watched them both deteriorate.

The apostle Paul, familiar with this form of torture, applied it to the Christian life. He showed how the new creation I am in Christ is still tied, as it were, to a body of death.

The body of death is *not* my physical body. It is a principle I find at work within my body which influences me to sin by yielding the members of my body to fulfill lusts. We call this influence, this principle, the **flesh**.

Until we are free from our physical bodies and with the Lord we will struggle against the flesh. Are we to spend my our lives frustrated by defeats in this struggle against the flesh?

Not at all! Chapter eight delineates how we win that struggle. It announces that there is a power by which we may always achieve victory over the flesh.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

As a stand-alone verse this is often quoted to establish that because you are “in” Christ and have therefore been justified and declared righteous, you possess eternal life that cannot be forfeited.

While I believe that to be true, this verse is better understood in the context of what Paul has been discussing - which is not salvation but after-salvation sanctification.

If you were captured by pirates and tied securely to a body of death you were condemned and it was just a matter of time before you succumbed.

Ah, but as a Christian “there is therefore now **no** condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” You walk around *with* the flesh but you need not be *in* the flesh, as it were, because you are “in Christ Jesus.”

Some of the better manuscripts from which the Bible is translated do not include the phrase, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” That’s fine; we can leave it out because it **is** in the best manuscripts when we get to verse four!

If I must carry around the body of death until I’m out of my physical body, how is it I am not condemned?

Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

A believer is “in Christ Jesus” and that means he or she has received “the Spirit of life.” For sure your human spirit, which was dead at birth, has come alive to God. But this is really referring to the fact that God the Holy Spirit is living within you; He is indwelling you. Since you are “in Christ Jesus,” God the Holy Spirit is “in” you.

Paul contrasted the Holy Spirit living within you and “sin and death” which cling to you in the form of the flesh. He referred to them both as “laws.” William MacDonald picks up on this and offers the following illustration to highlight what Paul meant:

The characteristic principle of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers for holy living. The characteristic principle of indwelling sin is to drag a person down to death. It is like the law of gravity. When you throw a ball into the air, it comes back down because it is heavier than the air it displaces. A living bird is also heavier than the air it displaces, but when you toss it up in the air, it flies away. The law of life in the bird overcomes the law of gravity. So the Holy Spirit supplies the risen life of the Lord Jesus, making the believer free from the law of sin and death.

In chapter seven there were a ton of personal pronouns as Paul discussed his struggle against the flesh. Chapter eight abandons personal pronouns and focuses on the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

God's law "was weak through the flesh" means that though it told me what to do I had no power to do what it said. For example, the Law stated, "Thou shalt not covet." As soon as I read that, I realize that I do covet, that I have coveted, and that I will go on coveting. There is something about me that is "weak," i.e., powerless to do what the Law states.

I've often quoted this little poem, which begins,

Do this and live, the Law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands.

God's Law was given to men who possess a fallen, sinful human nature. They are without the ability to fulfill it. They may keep some of its rules and rites and rituals. They may observe diets and days. But even in these mankind falls short - to say nothing of the problems we find in our hearts!

Here is the whole poem:

*Do this and live, the Law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands.
A better way the Spirit brings. He bids me fly and gives me wings.*

As believers, as Christians, we find that God's commands are also His enablings.

Jesus was sent from Heaven to the earth. He took a body that was “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” It was a real human body, but without a sin nature like you and I are born with.

This, of course, was accomplished by the virgin birth.

He came “on account of sin.” That is, He came because you and I were condemned sinners to take our place. Instead of you being condemned by your sin, Jesus took your condemnation.

Not only that, Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh.” This means that not only did Jesus die for the sins we commit, but He died for our sin nature. He died to resolve who we are, not just what we have done.

Something that is condemned can still exist and be very dangerous. A condemned bridge can fall at any time. Our flesh is condemned but is still very dangerous.

Think of a death row prisoner at Corcoran State Prison. He may be condemned and awaiting death but that doesn’t mean he won’t cause trouble for the guards. He’s biding his time violently until his execution.

Whether we call it a law or an influence or a principle, the flesh resides in your current physical body.

But so does God the Holy Spirit reside within you. He makes verse four possible.

Romans 8:4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

As a Pharisee Paul could say he had kept the letter of the Law. But he had never “fulfilled” its “righteous requirements.” A life of absolute holiness was what the Law required. And not just with regard to outward obedience. No, the Law of God required an inner righteousness that we would call perfection.

It is impossible to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law without God's help.

Ah, *but we have God's help*. In fact, we have God's Helper - which is the job description Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit when He told us He was leaving but that He would send us the Spirit, "another Helper."

Language scholars point out that verse four is in a tense they the passive voice. It means that the Holy Spirit produces a life of obedience which the Law commanded but could not produce. The Holy Spirit furnishes the power; the decision is ours.

We're talking sanctification. After salvation God has promised to conform you into the image of Jesus and to complete the work He has begun. You and I must cooperate with that work.

Here is another way of approaching verse four. Once Jesus was asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

Matthew 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

Matthew 22:39 And the second is like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

Matthew 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

It is the Holy Spirit within us Who can empower us to love God and to love our neighbor and therefore fulfill the "righteous requirements" of God's Law.

You and I walk around *with* the flesh but you need not be *in* the flesh. We also walk around hosting God the Holy Spirit by whom we can cooperate with God's sanctifying work.

The Spirit bids me fly and gives me wings!