

# Studies in Romans-06

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald explores the conflict between the old and new natures in believers, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in achieving victory over sin and living a holy life.*

**Duration:** 38:08

**Scripture:** Romans 8:1-2, Romans 8:4, Romans 8:19-20, Romans 8:31-32

**Topics:** "Studies"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the unbreakable links in the chain of our redemption. He emphasizes that if God is for us and has marked us out for Himself, then no one can successfully be against us. The preacher highlights the incredible sacrifice of God giving His own Son for us, and how this demonstrates His willingness to give us any lesser gift. The sermon also addresses the suffering and groaning of the world, and the hope of being delivered from the bondage of corruption. Additionally, the preacher explains how the Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by enabling us to love God and our neighbor.

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## Transcript

Continuing our studies in Romans, we come to chapter 7, verse 20. We might paraphrase this verse as follows. Now if I, the old nature, do that which I, the new nature, does not want to do, it is no more I, the person who does it, but sin that dwells within me.

Again, let it be clear that Paul is not excusing himself or disclaiming responsibility. He's simply stating that he has not found deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, and that when he sins it is not with the full consent of his will. Verse 21, he finds a principle or law at work in his life, causing all his good intentions to end in failure.

When he wants to do what is right, he ends up by sinning. Verse 22, as far as his new nature is concerned, he delights in the law of God. He knows that the law is holy and that it is an expression of the will of God.

He wants to do God's will. Verse 23, he sees a contrary principle at work in his life, striving against the new nature and making him a captive of indwelling sin. George Cutting said, the law, though he delights in it after the inward man, gives him no power.

In other words, he's trying to accomplish what God has declared to be an utter impossibility, namely, making the flesh subject to God's holy law. He finds that the flesh minds the things of the flesh, and is very enmity itself to the law of God, and even to God himself. Verse 24, now Paul lets out his famous eloquent groan.

He feels as if he has a decomposing body strapped to his back. That body, of course, is the old nature in all its corruption. In his wretchedness, he acknowledges that he is unable to deliver himself from this offensive, repulsive bondage.

He must have help from some outside source. Verse 25, the burst of thanksgiving which opens this verse may be understood in at least two ways. It may mean, I thank God that deliverance comes through Jesus Christ our Lord, or it may be an aside in which Paul thanks God through the Lord Jesus that he is no longer the wretched man of the preceding verse.

The rest of the verse summarizes the conflict between the two natures before deliverance is realized. With the renewed mind, or the new nature, the believer serves the law of God, but with the flesh, or old nature, the law of sin. Not till we reach the next chapter do we find the way of deliverance explained.

Chapter 8, the subject of holy living continues. In chapter 6, Paul had answered the question, does the teaching of the gospel, that is salvation by faith alone, encourage or even permit sinful living? In chapter 7, he faced up to the question, does the gospel tell Christians to keep the law in order to live a holy life? Now the question is, how then is the Christian enabled to live a holy life? We notice right away that the personal pronouns that were so prominent in chapter 7 largely disappear, and that the Holy Spirit becomes the dominant person. This is a key to understanding the passage.

Victory is not in ourselves, but in the Holy Spirit who indwells us. So we come to verse 1 of chapter 8. From the valley of despair and defeat, the Apostle climbs the heights with a triumphant shout, there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. This may be understood in two ways.

First, there is no condemnation as far as our sins are concerned, because we are in Christ. There was condemnation as long as we were in our first federal head, Adam. But now we are in Christ, and therefore we are as free from condemnation as he is.

So we can hurl out the challenge, reach my blessed Savior first, take him from God's esteem, prove Jesus bears one spot of sin, then tell me I'm unclean. But it may also mean that there is no need for the kind of self-condemnation which Paul described in the preceding chapter. We may pass through a Romans 7 experience, unable to fulfill the law's requirements by our own effort, but we don't have to stay there.

The following verse explains why. Incidentally, the last part of this verse, that is verse 1 in the King James Version, should be omitted. The words, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, are not supported by the best manuscript authorities, or by the sense of the passage for that matter.

Verse 2, it is the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus that has made us free from the law of sin and death. These are two opposite laws or principles. 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's like the law of gravity. When you throw a baseball 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.

Verse 3, the law could never get men to fulfill its sacred requirements, but grace has succeeded where law failed. Let us see how. The law could not do it because it was weak through the flesh.

The trouble was not with the law, but with fallen human nature. The law spoke to men who were already sinners and who were without strength to obey. God intervened by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Take careful notice that the Lord Jesus did not come in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. He did no sin, 1st Peter 2.22. He knew no sin, 2nd Corinthians 5.21. And there was no sin in him, 1st John 3.5. But coming into the world in human form, he resembled sinful humanity. As a sacrifice for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

He died not only for the sins which we commit, but also for our sin nature. In other words, he died for what we are, just as much as for what we have done. In so doing, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Our sin nature is never said to be forgiven, it is condemned. The sins we have committed are forgiven. Verse 5, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

As we turn over the control of our lives to the Holy Spirit, he empowers us to love God and to love our neighbor. That, after all, is what the law requires. We should pause here to point out that in these first four verses, the Apostle has gathered together the threads of his argument from 5.12 to 7.25. In 5.12-21, he had discussed the federal headships of Adam and of Christ.

Now in verse 1, he shows that the condemnation we inherited from our identification with Adam is removed by our identification with Christ. In 6-7, when he discussed the horrendous problem of sin in the nature, now he announces triumphantly that the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. In chapter 7, the whole subject of the law was brought up.

Now we learn that the law's requirements are met by the Spirit-controlled life. Verse 5, those who are after the flesh, that is, those who are unconverted, are concerned with the things of the flesh. They obey the impulses of the flesh.

They live to gratify the desires of the corrupt nature. All of their plans end at the grave. Those who are after the Spirit are true believers.

They rise above flesh and blood and live for those things that are eternal. They are occupied with the Word of God, with prayer, with worship, with Christian service. Verse 6, the mind of the flesh is death.

It is death as far as present enjoyment and ultimate destiny are concerned. It has all the potential of death in it, just like an overdose of poison. The mind of the Spirit, on the other hand, is life and peace.

The Spirit of God is the guarantee of life, that is, life and deed, of peace with God and of a life of tranquility. Verse 7, the reason why the mind of the flesh is death is because it is enmity against God. The sinner is a rebel against God and in active hostility to him.

If any proof were needed, it is seen most clearly in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. The mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God. It wants its own will, not God's will.

It wants to be its own master, not to bow to his rule. Its nature is such that it cannot be subject to God's law. It is not only the inclination that is missing, but the power as well.

The flesh is dead toward God. Verse 8, it is no surprise, therefore, that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Think of that.

There is nothing an unsaved person can do to please God. No good works, no religious observances, no sacrificial services, absolutely nothing. First he must take the guilty sinner's place and receive Christ by a definite act of faith.

Only then can he win God's smile of approval. Verse 9, when a person is born again he is no longer in the flesh but in the spirit. He lives in a different realm and in a different sphere.

Just as a fish lives in water and physical man lives in the air, so the believer lives in the spirit. He not only lives in the spirit, the spirit lives in him. In fact, if he is not indwelt by the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Though there is a question whether the spirit of Christ here is the same as the Holy Spirit, that explanation seems to best fit the context. Verse 10, through the ministry of the spirit Christ is actually in the believer. It is amazing to think of the Lord of life and glory dwelling in our bodies, especially when you remember that these bodies are subject to death because of sin.

Someone may argue that they are not dead yet, as the verse seems to say. No, but the forces of death are already working in them and they will die if the Lord doesn't return in the meantime. In contrast to the body, the spirit is life because of righteousness.

Though once dead toward God, it has been made alive through the righteous work of the Lord Jesus in his death and resurrection, and because the righteousness of God has been credited to our account. Verse 11, but the reminder that the body is still subject to death need cause no alarm or despair. The fact that the Holy Spirit indwells our bodies is a guarantee that just as he raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, so he will give life to our mortal bodies.

This will be the final act of our redemption when our bodies are glorified like the Savior's body of glory. Verse 12, now when we see the stark contrast between the flesh and the spirit, what conclusion do we draw? We owe nothing to the flesh to live according to its dictates. The old, evil, corrupt nature has been nothing but a drag.

It has never done us a bit of good. If Christ had not saved us, the flesh would have dragged us down to the deepest, darkest, hottest places in hell. Why should we feel obligated to such an enemy? Verse 13, those who live after the flesh must die, not only physically but eternally.

To live after the flesh is to be unsaved. This is made clear in verses 4 and 5. Why does Paul address this to those who are already Christians? Does he imply that some of them might eventually be lost? No, but the Apostle often includes words of warning and self-examination in his letters, realizing that in every congregation there may be some who have never been genuinely born again. The rest of the verse describes what is characteristically true of genuine believers.

By the enablement of the Holy Spirit, they put to death the deeds of the body. They enjoy eternal life now and enter into life in its fullness when they leave this earth. Verse 14, another way of describing true believers is to say that they are led by the Spirit of God.

Paul is not referring here to spectacular instances of divine guidance in the lives of eminent Christians. Rather, he is speaking of what is true of all the sons of God, namely, they are led by the Spirit of God. Not a question of the degree in which they are yielded to the Holy Spirit, but of a relationship which takes place at the time of conversion.

Sonship implies reception into God's family with all the privileges and responsibilities of adult sons. A new convert does not have to wait a certain time before he enters into his spiritual inheritance. It is his the moment he is saved, and applies to all, both men and women.

Although all believers are sons of God, we should be clear that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense. When he claimed to be the Son of God, the Jews rightly understood him to be claiming equality with God. Verse 15, those living under law are like minor children bossed around as if they were servants and shadowed by the fear of punishment.

But when a person is born again, he is not born into a position of servitude, he is not brought into God's household as a slave. Rather, he receives the spirit of adoption, that is, he is placed in God's family as a mature son. By a true spiritual instinct, he looks up to God and calls him Abba Father.

Abba is an Aramaic word which suffers in translation. It's an intimate, familiar form of the word Father, such as Papa or Dad. While we may hesitate to use such familiar English words in addressing God, the truth remains that he who is infinitely high is also intimately high.

Verse 16, as mentioned above, there is a spiritual instinct in the newborn believer that he is a child of God. His spirit tells him that it is so. But there is another witness.

The Holy Spirit bears witness with the believer's spirit that he is a member of God's family. How does the Holy Spirit do this? Primarily, it's through the word of God. As a Christian reads the Bible, the spirit confirms the truth that because he has trusted the Savior, he is now a child of God.

Verse 17, membership in God's family brings privileges that boggle the mind. All God's children are heirs of God. An heir, of course, eventually inherits his father's estate.

That's just what is meant here. All that the Father has is ours. We have not come into the possession and enjoyment of it all as yet, but nothing can prevent our doing so.

And we are joint heirs with Christ. When he returns to take the scepter of universal government, we will share with him the title deeds to all the Father's wealth. When Paul adds, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together, he's not referring to some elite inner circle of those who have suffered for Christ.

He sees all Christians as being co-sufferers, and all Christians as glorified with Christ. Of course, there are some who suffer more than others in the cause of Christ, and this will result in differing degrees of reward and of glory. But all who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior are seen here as incurring the hostility of the world with all its shame and reproach, and thus suffering for Christ.

Verse 18. Any blush of shame we may endure for Christ down here will be a mere trifle when he calls us forth and publicly acknowledges us before the hosts of heaven. Even the excruciating pain of the martyrs will seem like pinpricks when the Savior graces their brows with the crown of life.

Elsewhere Paul speaks of our present sufferings as light afflictions which are only for a moment, but he describes the glory as an exceeding and eternal weight. Second Corinthians 4.17. Whenever he describes the coming glory, his words seem to bend under the weight of the idea. If we could only appreciate the glory that is to be ours, we would count the sufferings of the way as trivia.

Verse 19. Now in a bold, literary figure, the apostle personifies the whole creation as eagerly looking forward to the time when we will be revealed to a wondering world as the sons of God. This will be when the Lord Jesus returns to reign and we return with him.

We are already the sons of God, but the world neither recognizes nor appreciates us as such. And yet the world is looking forward to a better day, and that day cannot come till the King returns to reign with all his saints. Verse 20.

When Adam sinned, his transgression affected not only mankind, but all creation, both animate and inanimate. The ground is cursed. Most wild animals die violent deaths.

Disease afflicts birds as well as fish and serpents. The results of man's sin have rippled like shockwaves throughout all creation. Thus, as Paul explains, the creation was not plunged into futility, frustration, and disorder by its own choice, but by the disobedience of man's first federal head.

The words, in hope, in this verse, at the end of the verse at least, should probably be connected with the following verse, in hope that the creation also itself shall be delivered. And that's the way it's rendered in the American Standard Version. Verse 21.

Creation looks back to the ideal conditions that existed in Eden. There it surveys the havoc that was caused by the entrance of sin. Ever and always there has been the hope of a return to an idyllic state when it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and when it will enjoy the freedom of that golden era when we, as God's children, will be revealed in glory.

Verse 22. We live in a sighing, sobbing, suffering world. All creation groans and suffers pain like that of childbirth.

Nature's music is in the minor key. The earth is wracked by cataclysm. The blight of death is on every living thing.

Verse 23. Believers are not exempt. Although they have the firstfruits of the Spirit, guaranteeing their eventual deliverance, they still groan for that day of glory.

The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits. Just as the first handful of ripened grain is a pledge of the entire harvest to follow, so the Holy Spirit is the pledge or guarantee that the full inheritance will be ours. Specifically, he is the guarantee of the coming adoption, that is, the redemption of the body.

In one sense, we have already been adopted, which means we have been placed in God's family as sons. But in a fuller sense, our adoption will be complete when we receive our glorified bodies. That is spoken of as the redemption of our bodies.

Our spirits and souls have already been redeemed. Our bodies will be redeemed at the time of the rapture, spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 through 18. Verse 24.

We were saved in this attitude of hope. We did not receive all the benefits of our salvation at the moment of conversion. From the outset, we looked forward to full and final deliverance from sin, suffering, disease, and death.

If we had already received these blessings, we wouldn't be hoping for them. We only hope for what is in the future. Verse 25.

Our hope for deliverance from the presence of sin and all its baneful results is based on the promise of God, and is therefore as certain as if we had already received it. So we wait for it with patience and steadfastness. In the meantime, we are often perplexed.

As we read in verse 26, we are often perplexed in our prayer life. We don't know how to pray as we should. We pray selfishly, ignorantly, narrowly, but once again the Holy Spirit comes to assist us in our weakness.

He intercedes for us with groanings that cannot find expression. There is mystery here. We are peering into the unseen spiritual realm where a great person and great forces are at work on our behalf.

Although we cannot understand it all, we can take infinite encouragement from the fact that it is so. Verse 27. If God can search the hearts of man, he can also interpret the mind of the spirit, even though that mind finds expression only in groans.

The important thing is that the Holy Spirit's prayers for us are always in accordance with the will of God, and because they are always in accordance with God's will, they are always for our good. That explains a lot, as the next verse goes on to show. Verse 28.

God is working all things together for good to those who love him, to those who are called according to his purpose. It might not always seem so. Sometimes when we are suffering heartbreak, tragedy, disappointment, frustration and bereavement, we wonder what good can come out of it.

But the following verse gives the answer. Whatever God permits to come into our lives is designed to conform us to the image of his Son. When we see this, it takes the question mark out of our prayers.

Some ancient authorities read, God worketh all things with them for good, instead of all things work together for good. In other words, our lives are not controlled by impersonal forces such as chance or luck, but by our wonderful personal Lord, who is too loving to be unkind, and too wise to err. Verse 29.

Now Paul traces the majestic sweep of the divine program designed to bring many sons to glory. First of all, God foreknew us in eternity past. This was not a mere intellectual knowledge.

As far as knowledge is concerned, he knew everyone who would ever be born. But his foreknowledge embraced only those whom he foreordained or predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. So it was knowledge with a purpose that could never be frustrated.

It is not enough to say that God foreknew those whom he realized would one day repent and believe. Actually it is his foreknowledge that ensured eventual repentance and belief. That ungodly sinners should one day be transformed into the image of Christ by a miracle of grace is one of the most astounding truths

of divine revelation.

Not of course that we will have the attributes of deity, or even that we will have his facial resemblance, but that we will be morally like him, absolutely free from sin, and will have glorified bodies like his. In that day of glory he will be the firstborn among many brethren. Firstborn here means first in rank or honor.

He will not be one among equals, but the one who has the supreme place of honor among his brothers. Verse thirty. Everyone who was predestinated in eternity is called in time.

This means that he not only hears the gospel, but that he responds to it as well. It is therefore an effectual call. All who are called are justified or given an absolutely righteous standing before God.

They are clothed with the righteousness of God through the merits of Christ, and are thereby fit for the presence of the Lord. Those who are justified are also glorified. Actually we are not glorified as yet, but it is so sure that God can use the past tense in describing it.

We are as certain of the glorified state as if we had already received it. This incident is one of the strongest passages in the New Testament on the eternal security of the believer. If, let us say, a million people were foreknown and predestinated by God, then that same million will be called, justified, and glorified.

Not one will be missing. Verse thirty-one. When we consider these unbreakable links in the chain of our redemption, the conclusion is inevitable.

If God is for us, in the sense that he has marked us out for himself, then no one can be successfully against us. If omnipotence is working on our behalf, no lesser power can defeat his program. Verse thirty-two.

He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all. These are marvelous words. We must never allow our familiarity with them to dull their luster or lessen their power to inspire worship.

When a world of lost mankind needed to be saved by a sinless substitute, the great God of the universe did not hold back his heart's best treasure, but gave him over to a death of shame and loss on our behalf. The logic that flows from this is irresistible. If he has already given us the greatest gift, is there any lesser gift that he will not give? If he has already paid the highest price, will he hesitate to pay any lower price? If he has gone to such lengths to procure our salvation, will he ever let us go? How shall he not with him also freely give us all things? C. H. Macintosh comments, The language of unbelief is, How shall he? The language of faith is, How shall he not? 33.

We are still in the courtroom, but a remarkable change has taken place. While the justified sinner stands before the bench, the call goes out for any accusers to step forward, but there is none. How can there be? If God has already justified his elect, who can bring a charge? 34.

Another challenge rings out. Is there anyone here to condemn? Impossible, because Christ has died for the defendant, has been raised from the dead, is now at God's right hand interceding for him. If the Lord Jesus, to whom all judgment has been committed, does not pass sentence on the defendant, but rather prays for him, then there is no one else who could have a valid reason for condemning him.

35. Faith flings its final challenge. Is there anyone here who can banish the justified from the love of Christ? A search is made for every adverse circumstance that has been effective in causing separations in

other areas of human life, but none can be found, not the threshing flail of tribulation with its steady pounding of distress and affliction, nor the monster of anguish bringing extreme pain to mind and body, nor the brutality of persecution inflicting suffering and death on those who dare to differ, nor the gaunt specter of starvation gnawing, wracking, and wasting down to the skeleton, nor nakedness with all that it means in the way of privation, exposure, and defenselessness, nor peril the threat of imminent and awful danger, nor the sword cold, hard, and death-dealing.

36. If any of these things could separate the believer from the love of Christ, then the fatal severance would have taken place long ago, because the career of the Christian is a living death. That is what the psalmist meant when he said that, because of our identification with the Lord, we are killed throughout the day and are like sheep that are doomed to slaughter.

Psalm 44, verse 22. Verse 37. Instead of separating us from Christ's love, these things only succeed in drawing us closer to Him.

We are not only victors, but more than victors. It is not simply that we triumph over these formidable forces, but that in doing so we bring glory to God, blessing to others, and good to ourselves. We make slaves out of our enemies and stepping-stones out of our roadblocks.

But it is not through our own strength, but only through Him who loved us. Only the power of Christ can bring sweetness out of the bitter, strength out of weakness, triumph out of tragedy, and blessing out of heartbreak. Verse 38.

The apostle has not finished his search. He ransacks the universe for something that might conceivably separate us from God's love, then dismisses the possibilities one by one. Death with all its terrors, life with all its allurements, angels and principalities, supernatural in power and knowledge, things present crashing in upon us, things to come arousing fearful foreboding, powers, whether human tyrants or angelic adversaries, height or depth, those things that are in the realm of dimension or space, then to make sure that he is not missing anything, Paul adds, anything else in all creation.

And the outcome of the search is that Paul can find nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No wonder that these words of triumph have been the song of those who have died martyrs' deaths, the rhapsody of those who have lived martyrs' lives.

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