

**SUNDAY 21 JANUARY 2018 – CHESTER CATHEDRAL  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
BIBLICAL REFLECTION BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK  
DR JOHN SENTAMU**

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**Reading: Romans 8**

**Theme: LIBERATION FROM SLAVERY AND OPPRESSION**

On 6th January 1941, the President of the United States, President Franklin Roosevelt, addressed the Congress on the state of the Second World War.

Much of what he said that day has been forgotten. But at the close of his address, he said that he looked forward "to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms".

He named them: **freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.** These words are still remembered, even though their ideals have not yet been realized anywhere in the world.

Romans chapter 8 is the Christian's "**Declaration of Freedom**", for in it St. Paul declares the four spiritual freedoms we enjoy because of our union with Jesus Christ. A careful study of Romans 8 shows the emphasis on the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned nineteen times. As St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3: 17, "**Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**"

In verses 1-4 of Romans Chapter 8 St. Paul says, we have **Freedom from Judgment - No condemnation.**

The Law condemns but the believer in Christ has a new relationship to the Law, and therefore can't be condemned. St. Paul says three important truths about the believer and the Law, and these three truths add up to one great truth: **NO CONDEMNATION.**

Firstly, **The Law can't claim you (v.2)** - you have been made free from the law of sin and death. You now have life in the Spirit. You are dead to the Law and free from the Law.

Secondly, **The Law can't condemn you (v.3)** - why? Because Christ has already suffered that condemnation for you on the Cross: the Law **couldn't save: it can't condemn.**

God the Father sent his Son to save us and to do for us what we could not do for ourselves and the Law couldn't do for us. He came as one of us and bore our sins in his body on the Cross.

The "law of double jeopardy" states that no person can be tried twice for the same crime, unless fresh forensic evidence comes to light which could not have been discovered at the time of the first prosecution – a change to the law of "Double Jeopardy" in this country recommended by us in the Stephen Lawrence Murder Inquiry. Now then, since Jesus died on our behalf for the crimes we had committed, and since we are "in Christ" by faith, no-one can condemn us twice.

A story is told that during the American Civil War, all citizens had a choice: to go and fight or send a representative to fight on their behalf as well as paying large sums of money for not fighting personally. A Mr. Smith in the State of Virginia chose not to fight and sent a representative as well as paying large sums of money to the State of Virginia.

Tragically, Mr. Smith's representative was killed in battle. The State sent a summons to Mr. Smith to come and fight, or send another representative.

He got a lawyer who advised him not to go or send another representative. He was charged with treason. In court he was asked to plead: guilty or not guilty as charged. His lawyer stood up and said, "Mr. Smith cannot plead. He is dead." The whole courtroom burst out laughing as Mr. Smith was sitting in court.

The lawyer went on, "The law of the State is clear. Mr. Smith went to battle through his representative plus paying a large sum of money. The representative wasn't fighting on his own behalf but on Mr. Smith's behalf.

When the representative died, Mr. Smith died. Mr. Smith can't plead. He is dead."

Applying the Law of "double jeopardy", the judge accepted the argument and Mr. Smith walked out of court a dead man. And he never paid any more taxes because he was declared dead.

Thirdly, **The Law can't claim you. The Law can't condemn you. The Law can't control you** (v.4). The believer lives a life of right relationship with God and with others, not under the power of the law, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. The law doesn't have the power to produce holiness; it can only reveal and condemn sin. But the indwelling Holy Spirit enables you to walk in obedience to God's will. The life of righteousness that God demands in his Law is fulfilled in you through the Holy Spirit's power. In the Holy Spirit, you have life and liberty (v.2) and the pursuit of life abundant (v.4).

The legalist tries to obey God in their own strength and fails to measure up to the righteousness that God demands. So they remain enslaved by the law, sin and the flesh.

The Holy Spirit-led Christian, as they yield to the Lord, experience the sanctifying, the making holy, work of the Holy Spirit in their life. **"For it is God who is working in you, both to will and to do his good pleasure"** (Phil. 2: 13). It is this fact that leads us to the second freedom we enjoy as people **in Christ**.

**II. FREEDOM FROM DEFEAT - NO OBLIGATION** (vv.5-17). *"So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh"* (v.12).

There is no obligation to the old nature. The believer can live in victory.

In these verses St. Paul describes life on three different levels; and he encourages his readers to live on the highest level.

### A. You are in Christ

In verses 5-8 he contrasts those in Christ and those outside of Christ in four definite ways.

- (i) The person outside of Christ doesn't have the Spirit of God - they live for the flesh; while the person in Christ lives for the Holy Spirit (v.5).
- (ii) The person outside of Christ is alive physically, but dead spiritually. Their true-self is dead toward God and doesn't respond to the things of the Spirit. They may lead perfectly moral lives and even religious lives; but they lack spiritual life.

They need **"the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus ..."** (v.2).

- (iii) Those who have trusted Jesus Christ enjoy **"peace with God"** (5:1), while those not in Christ are at war with God. "There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord" (Is. 48:22).
- (iv) To be **"in the flesh"** means to be lost, outside Christ. The person outside of Christ lives to please themselves and rarely, if ever, thinks about pleasing God. The sort of sin is selfishness - **"I will"** and not **"Thy will"**.

To be outside of Christ and not have the Spirit is the lowest level of life. But a person needn't stay on that level. By faith in Christ they can move to the second and third levels.

**Freedom from Defeat – No Obligation.**

**The First Level – You are in Christ**

**The Second Level - You have the Spirit** (vv.9-11). "*But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you*" (v.8).

The evidence of being in Christ is the presence of the Holy Spirit within, witnessing that you are a Child of God (v.16). Your body becomes the very temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6: 19-20). Even though the body is destined to die because of sin (unless, of course, the Lord returns), the Holy Spirit gives life to that body today so that we can serve the Lord.

If we should die, the body will one day be raised from the dead, because the Holy Spirit has sealed each believer (Ephesians 1: 13-14).

You become a new world. Life in Christ is abundant. When I gave my life to the Lord at the age of ten, I couldn't stop singing and telling others about it for days. I was so full of joy and felt I would burst if I didn't give it expression.

But there is a third level of experience for which the other two are preparation.

**The Third Level - The Holy Spirit has you** (vv.12-17).

It isn't enough for us to have the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit must have us. Only then can he share with us the abundant, victorious life that is ours in Christ. We have **no obligation to the flesh**, because the flesh has only brought trouble in our lives.

We do have **an obligation to the Holy Spirit**, for it is the Holy Spirit who convicted us, reveals Christ to us, and imparts eternal life to us when we trust Christ.

Because he is "**the Spirit of Life**", he can empower us to obey Christ, and he can enable us to be more like Christ.

But the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of death. He can enable us to "**put to death**" the sinful deeds of the body.

As we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit (Rm. 6: 12-17), he applies to us and in us the death of the resurrected Christ. He puts to death the things of the flesh, and he produces the things of the Spirit. That's why **the Holy Spirit is the enemy of division.**

The Holy Spirit is also "**the Spirit of adoption**" (8:14-17). The word adoption in the New Testament means "*being placed as an adult son or daughter*". We come into God's family by the new birth. But the instant we are born again into the family, God adopts us and gives us the position of an adult son or daughter. A new-born baby can't walk, speak, make decisions, or draw upon the family wealth. But the believer can do all these things the moment he or she is born again of water and the Spirit.

We can, therefore, be **led willingly** by the Spirit (v.14). We yield to the Holy Spirit and he guides us by his word day by day.

We aren't under bondage to the Law and afraid to act. We have the liberty of the Spirit and we are free to follow Christ. The believer can also **speak: "We cry, Abba, Father"** (v.15).

Wouldn't it be amazing if a new-born baby looked up and greeted his father! First, the Holy Spirit says, "**Abba, father**" to us (Gal. 4:6), and then we say it to God - Abba, **papa**.

A baby can't sign cheques, but the Child of God by faith can draw upon their spiritual inheritance of Jesus Christ because they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (8:17). The Holy Spirit teaches us from the Scriptures, and then we receive God's abundant life by faith. What a thrilling thing to have "**the Spirit of adoption**" at work in our lives.

There is no need for the believer to be defeated. They can yield their body to the Holy Spirit and by faith overcome the old nature.

Let me use an illustration [A GLOVE]

The Spirit of life **will empower us**. The Spirit of death **will enable us** to overcome the flesh. And the Spirit of adoption **will enrich us** and **lead us** into the will of God. The Holy Spirit will also open our minds to understand the Scriptures as Jesus Christ did to the two men on the Road to Emmaus, on Easter Day, as recorded in Luke Chapter 24.

To be **in Christ** is to be completely victorious. We are **free from judgement** because Jesus Christ died for us and we have his righteousness. We are **free from defeat** because Jesus Christ lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are **free from discouragement** because Jesus Christ is coming for us and we shall share his glory (Romans 8: 18 – 23). We are **free from fear** because Jesus Christ intercedes for us and we cannot be separated from his love (Romans 8: 31 – 39).

**No Condemnation! No Obligation! No Frustration! No Separation!** If God is for us, who can be against us? Friends in Christ, with such a Gospel, how can we be ashamed. We are offered **Freedom** and **Fulfilment** and should, therefore, be **Confident in the Gospel**.

We have been **Liberated from Slavery and Oppression**. Let us therefore, live the **unity** of the **Freedom** and **Fulfilment** into which Christ has called us. And let us together make Jesus Christ visible. And delight and bask joyfully in the unity he has ushered us into as pure gift. Amen.

