

House On The Rock Life Group Study outline 2023

October: New Creation Realities – the journey to becoming

Outlines for the month

Week 1: The war within ✓

Week 2: The reality of freedom

Week 3: The normal Christian mind

Introduction

A cornerstone of the Christian faith is that when we accept the free gift of salvation through Christ, we become a new (spiritual) being, a new creation (1 Cor 5:17) – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” This immediate spiritual transformation from death to life sparks a war within us; between our regenerated spirit that desires and thrives on the things of God, and our ‘work in progress’ soul and body that need to be weaned off the flesh.

The author Steven Cole wrote the following about this new creation experience:

I recently saw a bumper sticker with the peace symbol around the border. It showed two children with their arms around each other. The caption was, “All the arms we need.” I said to Marla, “What planet do these people live on?” When we dwell on the new earth, when all sin is completely eradicated, we won’t need arms to defend ourselves. But as long as sin is in this world, we need arms not only to hug one another, but also to fight against enemies that seek to destroy us. As unpleasant as it is, the reality of life in this fallen world includes conflict.

That’s also true in the Christian life. We all want peaceful lives. Perhaps you came to Christ because someone told you that in Him, you would find peace. That’s true. In Christ, we experience peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Christ is the basis for peace between believers (Eph. 2:14). As much as is possible, we are to be at peace with all people (Rom. 12:18). And, in Christ we come to know a sense of inner peace, even in the face of tribulation, that we lacked before (John 16:33).

But while the Christian life is one of peace, it’s also one of constant warfare. As we serve Christ and seek to extend His kingdom, we’re at war with the evil powers of darkness (Eph. 6:10-20). We’re engaged in the battle between God’s truth and the lies of Satan that captivate the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 10:3-5). And, as every Christian knows, there is a fierce inner battle that goes on between the flesh and the spirit, the old man and the new (Gal. 5:17). If we do not learn how to overcome the strong inner urge to gratify the flesh, sin will take us captive and enslave us. Paul describes this war in the book of Romans.

Intro credit: [Steven J. Cole](#) ©2011

Pilot text

***Rom 7:4-6, 21-25** 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.*

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

While there is more than one way to interpret Apostle Paul's writing in the pilot text, we will focus on this one: that these verses primarily describe a believer who, along the journey to maturity, has not yet come to understand that she is no longer under the law, but under grace.

What does this pilot scripture tell us about how to win this war within?

1. **We must understand the nature of the conflict between 'the old man' and 'the new man'**

- v5-6: The old man wages a cunning, relentless war. It masquerades as our legitimate thoughts, disguises as 'good feelings' and sneaks into our consciousness hidden within common sense. If it loses one battle, it doesn't pack up and go home, conceding defeat. Before the new birth, this was not a war, but a 'prisoner-of-war graveyard' situation. At the new birth the new man is made alive and empowered to fight back at first, and then overcome the old man.
- v22-23: The old man operates according to the law of sin, which some might describe as 'natural law'. The new man also operates according to a law, but a spiritual law (the law of God) which both precedes and supersedes the natural.
- v25: The old man operates through our bodies, seeking to elevate the demands of the flesh above that of the spirit. In the same way, the new man operates through the mind, seeking to subject the body to the spirit.

2. **Wining this war is a lifelong affair**

- v5-6: 'Winning' is not a state of perfection in thought and action, but of consistent victory over sin. A lack of perfection (in loving God, in doing all that we should) is not

the same as persistent obedience. Winning is when we choose to consistently honour God with our lives, while repenting and returning when we do get it wrong.

- v6: Consistent victory does not eliminate the struggle, but through the journey we do learn how to win faster and more resoundingly.
- v22-23: The more perfect we become, the more we become aware of our imperfections. The closer we get to God, the more we realise our complete and total hopelessness if we were to rely on our strength to be right with him.
- For more reading see bible.org
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. Why is it important to distinguish between perfection and consistent obedience?
What problems result if we don't?
 2. It is impossible for a believer to sin. Agree/disagree with reasons.

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We come to a chapter that has often been called either the greatest or one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. The Swiss commentator Godet pointed out that it begins with “no condemnation” and ends with “no separation.”

Personally, I've come to Romans 8 again and again when I've been discouraged or depressed. I don't see how you can read Romans 8 and remain down. If you struggle with guilt, read Romans 8. If you struggle with sin, read Romans 8. If you're going through trials, read Romans 8. If you don't know how to pray, read Romans 8. If you're struggling with assurance of your salvation, read Romans 8. Interestingly, while the flavour of Romans 8 is exhortation, there is not a single command in the chapter. The German Pietist Philipp Spener said that if the Bible were a ring and Romans its precious stone, chapter 8 would be “the sparkling point of the jewel”.

There is a noticeable shift from Romans 7 to Romans 8. In chapter 7, “I” is frequent, the law is prominent, and sin is dominant. In chapter 8, the Holy Spirit is frequent (18x, more than any other NT chapter), God's grace and persevering love are prominent, and victory over sin is dominant. At the beginning of the chapter, Paul deals with two very practical issues: guilt and sin. As we saw in chapter 7, believers fight an inner war. With the new man in Christ, they joyfully concur with the holy commandments of God's law. But, with the old man (the flesh, or indwelling sin), they are prone to be held captive by the law of sin. As discussed, this refers primarily to immature believers who have not learned of their new identity in Christ. They do not yet reckon themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. They have not yet learned to rely on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh. They're living like unbelievers. So sin and guilt are a major problem for them.

Even though mature believers experience consistent victory over sin, they still struggle daily against the flesh and occasionally lose the battle. So they must understand how to deal with guilt and how to overcome temptation. When we do sin as Christians, the enemy comes in to stir up doubts about our salvation: “How do you know that your sins are all forgiven? True Christians don't do what you just did! You're hopeless! You might as well admit your hypocrisy in claiming to be a Christian and quit trying to be holy.” It is to those practical issues that Paul directs these opening verses of Romans chapter 8.

Pilot text

Rom 8:1-4 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. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 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, 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.

What does the pilot text tell us about our new creation reality of freedom through Christ Jesus?

- v1: Those who are in Christ Jesus can be assured they will not be condemned at the judgment. Because of the finished work on the cross, there is NOW no condemnation for those who have truly received that free gift of salvation.
- v2: Freedom from the law of sin and death comes only through the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Religion, no matter how conscientiously we follow it, cannot deliver anyone from the power of sin and death. All the good deeds in the world will not set anyone free from the law of sin and death. To be set free, we need **new life** imparted by God's Spirit.
- v3-4: God did what the law could not do - through the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, he paid the penalty that the law demanded, thereby setting us free from bondage. In so doing, He who knew no sin became sin (took it up on our behalf) so that we may become the righteousness of God through Christ Jesus. Justification (8:1-4a) is the necessary foundation and motivating cause of sanctification (8:4b). Justification frees us from sin's penalty; sanctification frees us from sin's power. Because God has forgiven all our sins through Christ's death and because He has imparted new life to us through the Holy Spirit, we now do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- For more reading see bible.org
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. Believers who sin should not feel guilty because there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Agree/disagree with reasons.
 2. What does it mean practically to "walk in the Spirit"? Describe what it looks like in specific terms.

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The Bible is clear that salvation is a matter of God's imparting new life to a person who was dead in sin. And such new life always manifests itself in changed belief and behaviour. This is not to say that those who are truly born again cannot fall into gross sins. But it is to say that they cannot live complacently in sin. While growth in godliness is a lifelong process, there is such growth in the lives of all who have been born of the Spirit.

In Romans 8:1-4, Paul gives assurance that if we are in Christ, we will not be condemned at the judgment. Jesus paid the penalty we deserved on the cross. If we have trusted in His shed blood, the Holy Spirit who gives life has set us free from the law of sin and of death. Paul concludes that section (8:4b) by describing those who have been justified by faith: they "do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Now he explains ("for") why some walk according to the flesh and others walk according to the Spirit: It is due to their nature. Their spiritual nature of being either "according to the flesh" or "according to the Spirit" determines their spiritual behaviour of walking according to the flesh or the Spirit. In 8:5-8, he mainly describes those who are "according to the flesh." In 8:9-11 he focuses on those who are "in the Spirit." Griffith Thomas (St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans [Eerdmans], p. 208) summarizes the flow of thought: "Hence, as in verses 1-4, the Apostle has shown that until and unless a man is justified he cannot possibly be holy, so now, in verses 5-11, he will show that if a man is not holy he cannot possibly have been justified." In other words, justification is always the necessary foundation for sanctification. And sanctification is always the evidence of justification.

Intro credit: [Steven J. Cole](#) ©2011

Pilot text

[Rom 8:5-11](#) 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. 10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The pilot text tells us that, in the context of this scripture, everybody falls into one of these two groups of people: those who walk according to the flesh and those who walk according to the spirit. The two groups have very different spiritual destinies, and only one group represents the 'normal Christian mind'.

What does the pilot text tell us about the mindset that should be the norm for every Christian?

- 'Being' in the Spirit is not optional for believers. v9 tells us that we are not in the Spirit, then we are not of Christ.
- We live according to the Spirit, not the flesh. "Those who are according to the Spirit" describes believers, who are characterized by life and peace (v6). The nature of each group determines their present behaviour and their final destiny.
- We (who are in the Spirit) must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. To set your mind on the things of the Spirit does not mean that you go around with your head in the clouds, detached from everyday matters. Rather, it means to relate all of life to God and His Word. It means to develop a biblical worldview, where you think about and process all of life through the lens of the Bible. At the heart of this process is **how you think**, including:
 - Who or what informs your sense of right and wrong?
 - Whose opinion matters most to you?
 - What do you invest your time (and resources) in?
 - What timeframe to you use to view actions and their consequences – a temporal one or an eternal one?
- For more reading see bible.org
- Questions for discussion (use scriptures to support your position):
 1. How can a person know for sure that she has eternal life? What are the marks of the new birth?
 2. Is setting our minds on the things above automatic or does it require discipline? How (practically) can we do this?
 3. A Christian sister tells you, "I've tried to get into the Bible, but it bores me." How would you counsel her?