

## *“Life in the Spirit”*

*Psalms 121; Romans 8:1-8*

February 20, 2022

Years ago, when one of my kids was just a little thing, we had a ceiling fan in the living room. One day, my kid was sitting there with a little plastic ball. Out of the blue, I was watching him, he threw it up. PING it ricocheted right off the fan back down to the floor. We both laughed. BIG MISTAKE. He grabbed the ball and did it again only this time it hit the window, hard. I was worried about him breaking something so I told him to stop. A few moments later, I hear, PING, he’s done it again.

This time, I’m serious. Ben, you’ve got to quit. BING. Finally, I go with my best DAD’s IN CHARGE VOICE. BEN STOP THAT NOW. And it worked...for a bit.

After a while, I went into the kitchen. After a few moments of fixing dinner, what should I hear? BING!

It’s funny but I think, wow, that’s really my kid.

But it highlights a problem we have with sin. We say we don’t want it but, oh my goodness, how often do we find ourself treading the familiar path. How often are we just waiting for the opportunity for us to fling our own plastic balls up towards the ceiling fan?

There is good news for us today in this morning’s new Testament reading, especially if you find yourself backsliding into sin.

**Romans 8:1-8** – *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

I confess that this particular illustration presumes something. Now, I don’t think it’s the kind of assumption that will limit the number of people who understand it. It isn’t as though I’m assuming that y’all have read Karl Barth’s 10-volume Church Dogmatics, I know I haven’t.

But the assumption is that every single one of you here has been to a particular restaurant indigenous to the Southern United States. It’s a magical place where you can actually watch your food being made by machine. I speak, of course, of Krispy Kreme doughnuts. And that’s spelled D-O-U-G-H-N-U-T in case any of you were wondering.

Yes, Krispy Kreme. I begin there because there’s a sensation that I get that I’ll bet you do, too, every single time you walk in the door to a Krispy Kreme doughnuts. You take a big ole’ smell walking in the door.

“AHHHHHH”

Isn’t that how you feel? I mean, it doesn’t matter that the kids have been acting up or that your boss is on your case or the stock market is in the toilet, walk in a door at a local Krispy Kreme and, ahh, there it is. That warm, wonderful sensation that everything is going to be all right. After all, if there is something in this world as good as a Hot DOUGHNUT NOW, then everything I say about God from the Bible makes perfect sense, doesn’t it? I mean, if there is something as good as a freshly fried and glazed KK doughnut, there simply has to be a good God and a good God would come up with a solution for the problem of sin.

AND HE HAS.

That’s why Paul can begin chapter 8 of Romans with such a supreme, relieving declaration – “There is therefore NOW, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

In Romans chapters 7 through 9, Paul is answering a fairly thorny theological problem. He’s explaining the role of God’s salvation to the Jews. After all, God has made promises to the Jews and Paul wants to show that the new covenant doesn’t simply negate the old covenants with God. But, to that end, Paul is going to write some of the most comforting Scriptures in the entirety of our canon. Romans 8 is, for those who know it, pure comfort for us who stand within a world broken by sin.

And it begins with a simple declaration – *“There is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

Now means exactly what it says. Right now, for those of us in Jesus Christ, there is, NOW, no condemnation. Are you still a sinner? Are you still held in thrall by some dark power? Be overjoyed. There is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Have you done something this week that you know wasn't right? That you know, deep down in your heart you shouldn't have done. Well, you can still make things right but know this, there is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Being in Christ Jesus is a significant location in the New Testament. The phrase is used several times by multiple New Testament authors.

**Philippians 1:1** – *“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons...”*

**1 Peter 5:14** – *“Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”*

**Colossians 3:3** – *“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

Do you see? This location, being “in Christ,” is the means by which we know that there is no condemnation for us, even though we are yet sinners. The point that's being made is a good one for our souls to take in.

Sniff. AAAAHHHHHH.

Because we all are going to make mistakes. That's a nice way of putting it, isn't it? Calling sin a mistake makes it seem relatively harmless. The fact of the matter is that sin is deadly stuff. But perhaps worst of all is just how it separates us from God, the Father. I mean, when we're really doing something we shouldn't be, how often are we in prayer?

Now look, I need to be cautious here, being in Christ, is, by no means, a license for sin. Paul answers that question at the beginning of chapter 6 – **Romans 6:1-2** – *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”*

But the point of Romans 8 is that those of us who are in Christ Jesus, do not have to worry about eternal condemnation. There is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Then, hearing the good news, Paul answers exactly why this has happened: Jesus Christ.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus but how do we get there? Well, good news, it isn't up to us. IF it were, we'd fail miserably, that's the whole point of the failure of works-based righteousness. You see, if it is all about us being righteous, then we're hosed because we're just not capable of doing it. Ever tried to be perfect? How did that work out for you? My point exactly.

We are grafted into Christ through his death and resurrection, the new covenant.

What's important to note is that we do not work or earn our way into heaven. In fact, even though this is often an operative belief in the minds of Christians, nothing could be Biblically further from the truth. We do not earn

“Notice that this point is where Paul goes in his letter. He wants us to consider how we are living our lives and who we are serving. Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. What does this mean? Paul is speaking about those whose lives are directed by the rule and values of sin. When we put our minds on the things of this world and world of sin, then we are walking according to the flesh. Paul wants to know what our interests are. Paul wants to know what our ambitions are. What are the things that we think about and hold as important in life? What is our mind set on? What are we preoccupied with? What do we value? Jesus spoke of having our minds on the things of the flesh when we have a worldly perspective. When Peter denies that Jesus is going to deny, Jesus replied, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matthew 16:23)*. Selfish thinking is having our minds set on the things of the flesh. The mind set on the flesh is all about me. Even religious people who seem to be followers of Jesus can have their minds set on the flesh. Seeking after the things of the world rather than the things of God reveals the problem. When we are more concerned about ourselves than the lost, we have minds set on the flesh. When we try to justify our sins rather than being heartbroken and repentant of our sins, we have our minds set on the flesh.

Paul offers a grave warning. To set the mind on the flesh is death (8:6). When sin controls our lives, we are separated from God. When we are thinking about ourselves and seeking after the things of the world rather than thinking about God and seeking after him, there IS condemnation. We have made ourselves enemies of God (8:7). Paul drives the point further in verse 8 by telling us that we cannot please God. Why can't we please God? Go back to verse 7: because we do not submit to God's law. We are choosing ourselves over God. We cannot please God when we are living with our allegiance to another master. When sin is exercising dominion over our lives, then we will not obey and love God. We may think we can, but we are deceiving ourselves. When the flesh is in charge of our lives, we cannot please God, we are hostile to God, and we are separated from God. This is why this point is so important. Yes, all of us are fighting against sin. But those only those who are fighting by seeking after God before self are those who now have no condemnation. If we are not seeking after God in all we do and making the determination to serve him, then we are living according to the flesh.

It should be pretty obvious what it means to "live according to the Spirit." There is nothing mystical or supernatural about this act. It is the opposite of living according to the flesh. We place our life focus on God and his commands. God is in charge of our lives. He is the master, not sin and not self. We are following his covenant. We are submitting to God's law, not perfectly, but submission to God is the rule of our lives. When our allegiance is to Jesus is to receive from God life and peace (8:6). Living according to the flesh is separation from God. Living according to the Spirit means we are joined to God and we have peace with God. We are reconciled and God's wrath is not against us. We are able to have a relationship with God because Jesus has brought peace to the relationship. We are in Christ not in Adam, to bring in the thoughts of Romans 5. Paul is teaching that we need to change the way that we think about living and how we think about the world."

It's hard not to be happy at the Krispy Kreme!

Life in the Spirit.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.