

EDITED FROM THE STUDY BY
TIMOTHY KELLER
ROMANS 8-16
FOR YOU



Romans 8 – 16 For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Romans 8 – 16 For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary toward the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

Bible translations used:

- NIV: New International Version, 1984 translation (this is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated)
- NIV2011: New International Version, 2011 translation
- AV: Authorized Version (also known as King James Version, KJV)
- ESV: English Standard Version
- NRSV: New Revised Standard Version

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS 8 - 16

The book of Romans is the most sustained explanation of the heart of the gospel, and the most thrilling exploration of how that gospel goes to work in our hearts.

The first seven chapters explain the wonderful truths of the gospel: of justification by faith, of union with Christ, of salvation through Christ alone and not through our works. Those chapters have it all there, and have it in great depth. You'll find them unpacked, enjoyed and applied in the first volume on this book, *Romans 1 – 7 For You*.

Then comes the second half of the book. In chapters 8 to 16, Paul is going to continue to answer a question he began to ask in chapters 5 to 7: *How does faith in the gospel of Christ actually lead to change in real life?*

Paul was writing to the church in Rome in about AD57, during his third missionary journey, quite likely from Corinth, Greece. This was a church made up of Jewish and Gentile converts, a church of committed but young Christians. Though Paul had not yet met them personally, he knew that what they most needed was the gospel. But he did not merely want them to understand the gospel. Rather, he longed for them to love and to live the gospel. Christianity is not primarily a matter of the head or the will; it is a matter of the heart, a heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells and which is saturated in the gospel. That's the heart that leads to real change in thinking and behavior.

In one sense, Romans 8 – 16 comes in two sections, each beginning: "Therefore." First, in 8:1, Paul tells us: "*Therefore*, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is a summary of the whole ground of Christian assurance. For the believer, there can never be any condemnation by, nor separation from, their heavenly Father. Why? Because of the work of his Son on the cross and the work of his Spirit in our hearts. As Paul goes on to show in chapters 9 – 11, our salvation is all about God's choice, and so we can be both humble about ourselves and confident in him.

Second, in 12:1-2, Paul says: “*Therefore*, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... Do not conform ... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This is a summary of the whole of the Christian life. The believer’s life is to be lived out of gratitude. We live to please our heavenly Father by obeying him, even at cost or inconvenience. The rest of Romans shows how we can offer ourselves “as living sacrifices” in all parts of our lives.

The great 20th-century Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote of Romans:

“It is one of the brightest gems of all. Someone has said that in the whole of the Scriptures the brightest and the most lustrous and flashing stone, or collection of stones, is this Epistle to the Romans, and that of these [chapter 8] is the brightest gem in the cluster. The most moving [chapter in Romans] is this chapter 8.”

(Romans Chapters 7:1 – 8:4, pages 258-259)

For me, perhaps the most wonderful part of the book of Romans is 8:5, where Paul summarizes how you change from the inside out; how you change deeply. “Those who live in accordance with the Spirit,” he says, “have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” To grow in Christ and to be changed into people like Christ, we need to set our minds on spiritual things, on things above. We need to learn how to

meditate and think about the gospel until it becomes real to our hearts and the foundation of everything we do.

I have always believed that at the heart of Romans 8 you have the secret to really using the gospel in your heart to change yourself in a profound

I have always believed that at the heart of Romans 8 you have the secret to profound change.

way; and that the rest of Romans will show you what that change will look like in a practical way. My prayer is that as you read the second

half of this wonderful letter, you will find your heart thrilled by the gospel, your mind shaped by the gospel, and your life changed by the gospel.

Romans is perhaps the most written-upon book in the whole of Scripture. It is tightly argued, and so included in the appendices is a detailed outline structure for the last nine chapters of the letter. And chapters 9 – 11 are some of the most difficult in the whole Bible, both to understand and to appreciate; so there is an appendix giving a lengthier treatment of the doctrine of God's sovereign election.

But this resource is not intended to be an exhaustive, or final, word on this letter. It is not a commentary: it does not go into the depth that a commentary would, nor does it interact in detail with historical and recent scholarship. It is an expository guide, opening up the Scriptures and suggesting how they apply to us today.

I. FIGHTING SIN WITH THE SPIRIT

In Romans 7, Paul showed us that Christians still wrestle with remaining, indwelling **sin***. He says: “But what I hate I do” (7:15). But, at the same time, Christians have experienced a revolution in consciousness—a real disgust over sin and (now) an inability to find any lasting pleasure in it: “But what I *hate* I do.” These two facts keep us from either the legalism that says: *Real Christians don’t struggle with sin anymore*, or the permissiveness that says: *Real Christians are human; they sin just like anyone else*. The Spirit of God has come in and transformed our “inner being” and self (7:22) so we want God and holiness, but our “flesh” or “sinful nature” is still powerful enough to keep us from doing what our new desires want.

But Romans 7 does not say everything about the Christian life. Our new condition—a “double nature”—can actually lead to more distress unless we “live ... according to the Spirit” (8:4†). Paul gives us directions on how to live in the Spirit. Unless we do, we will find ourselves continually doing what we hate.

No Condemnation

Before showing us how to live according to God’s Spirit, though, Paul wants to show us how God’s Son has given us life. **Verse 1** begins “therefore”—he could be reaching right back to sections such as 3:21-27 (as John Stott suggests) or to the previous two chapters

* Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 185).

† All Romans verse references being looked at in each chapter are in **bold**.

(Douglas Moo's position), where Paul has characterized the Christian as one in whom sin is still powerful, but whose inner "true" self is "a slave to God's law" (7:25), and who can look forward to being rescued "from this body of death ... through Jesus Christ our Lord".

However far back in his letter Paul is looking, the great truth of **8:1** is captured in two words: "no **condemnation**." These two words tell us of our position as Christians. To be "not condemned" is, of course, a legal term; it means to be free from any debt or penalty. No one has any charges against you. A person who is in Christ Jesus is not under any condemnation from God. Paul already said this in Romans 5:16 and 18.

This is tremendous! It means God has nothing against us! He finds no fault in us. He finds nothing to punish us for.

However, the phrase Paul uses is not simply that Christians are "not condemned." This is a much stronger phrase than that. He says that for Christians there is no condemnation at all. It doesn't exist for

us. It's not that we have moved out from under it for a while, but that it could return. No; there is no condemnation for us *at all*—it doesn't exist anymore.

The reason it is important to mention this is that many think that a Christian is only temporarily out from under condemnation. Many want to

limit the meaning of this phrase to our past, or to our past and present. But Paul is saying categorically that condemnation no longer exists at all for a believer. It is not waiting in the wings to come back and cloud our future!

Many believe that Christians who confess sin and then live a good life are forgiven and are, at that moment, not condemned. But they believe that, should they sin, they are back under condemnation until they confess and repent again. In other words, if a Christian man were

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to sin, he would again come under condemnation and could be lost if he died in that state. If this were true, then Christians would be people who are always moving back and forth, in and out of condemnation.

But this view doesn't square at all with the comprehensiveness and intensity of Paul's statement. Paul says quite literally that condemnation itself no longer exists for us—"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (**8:1**). Thus, the moment we come into Christ Jesus, condemnation is gone forever. There *is* no more condemnation left for us—it is gone. There *can never be* condemnation for us. There is nothing but acceptance and welcome for us!

The Problem Of Forgetfulness

The great twentieth-century Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that: "Most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of this verse." What happens if we forget that there is "now no condemnation"?

On the one hand, we feel far more guilt, unworthiness and pain than we should. From this may come drivenness from a need to "prove ourselves"; great sensitivity to criticism, defensiveness; a lack of confidence in relationships; a lack of confidence and joy in prayer and worship; and even addictive behavior, which can be a reaction to a deep sense of guilt and unworthiness.

On the other hand, we will have far less motivation to live a **holy** life. We have fewer resources for self-control. Christians who don't understand "no condemnation" only obey out of fear and duty. That is not nearly as powerful a motivation as love and gratitude. If we don't grasp the full wonder of "now no condemnation," we will understand each word of the rest of **8:1-13**, but completely miss the sense of it! Lloyd-Jones summed this up with a useful illustration:

"The difference between an unbeliever sinning and a Christian sinning is the difference between a man transgressing the laws of ... [the] State, and ... a husband [who] has done something

he should not do in his relationship with his wife. He is not breaking the law, he is wounding the heart of his wife. That is the difference. It is no longer a legal matter, it is a matter of personal relationship and ... love. The man does not cease to be the husband [legally, in that instance]. Law does not come into the matter at all ... In a sense it is now something much worse than a legal condemnation. I would rather offend against a law of the land objectively outside me, than hurt someone whom I love ... [In that case] You have sinned, of course, but you have sinned against love ... [so] You may and you should feel ashamed, but you should not feel condemnation, because to do so is to put yourself back 'under the law.'"

(*Romans Chapters 7:1 – 8:4*, pages 271-272)

No Slavery

Verse 1, then, reminds us of the central argument of Romans 1 – 7: there is no condemnation for sin for believers. **Verse 2** explains a second aspect to God's victory, on our behalf, over sin—there is now no **bondage** to sin, either. "Through Christ Jesus" (**v 2**)—through faith in him—"the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." As we saw in Romans 7 (see *Romans 1 – 7 For You*, page 168), Paul uses the word "law" to mean:

- (a) God's law or standards.
- (b) A general principle.
- (c) A force or power.

So in **8:2**, "the law" seems fairly clearly to carry the third meaning. The Holy Spirit comes to free us from bondage to the sin within our hearts. So **verse 1** tells us we are delivered from the legal condemnation of sin; **verse 2** that we are being delivered from the actual power of sin. Put another way, salvation deals with our legal guilt (**v 1**) and our internal corruption (**v 2**).

Some people wonder about the relationship of **verse 1** to **verse 2**. Paul basically says: *There is no condemnation for Christians because*

the Holy Spirit frees us from sin. This could be read to mean that our **sanctification** by the Holy Spirit is the cause or the ground of our **justification**—that it is as we fight sin and obey God that we are made right with God.

But all of Romans up to this point denies that. Instead, Paul is likely saying: *We know we are out of condemnation because God has sent the Holy Spirit into our life to free us from sin.*

How God Did It

In **verses 3-4**, Paul shows us how God has achieved the two aspects of salvation (no guilt, no bondage). First, God sent his Son to become human (“in the likeness of sinful man,” **v 3**) and become a sin offering. In other words, the death of Christ defeats sin legally, by paying the debt. Second, God did this not simply to defeat sin legally, but to wipe it out actually in our lives: “in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who ... [live] according to the Spirit.” The work of the Holy Spirit within us empowers us to obey the law (albeit never perfectly, and thus never in a way that contributes to, nor undermines, our salvation). The great British pastor John Stott explained it this way:

“We are set free from the law as a way of acceptance, but obliged to keep it as a way of holiness. It is as a ground of justification that the law no longer binds us ... But as a standard of conduct the law is still binding, and we seek to fulfill it as we walk according to the Spirit.”
(Men Made New, pages 82-83)

But why did God send his Son to bear our condemnation, and send his Spirit to break our bondage? **Verse 4** tells us that everything Christ did for us—his **incarnation** (“sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man,” **v 3**), his death and his resurrection—was all in order (for the purpose) that we might live a holy

Everything Christ did for us was in order that we might live a holy life.

life. This is an amazing point. The thing Jesus lives for, the purpose of his entire life, is to make us holy, fulfilling “the righteous requirements of the law.” This is the greatest possible motive for living a holy life. Whenever we sin, we endeavor to frustrate the aim and purpose of the entire life, death and ministry of Jesus Christ! If this doesn’t work as an incentive for living a holy life, nothing will.

Mind Matters

In the rest of this section (indeed, in the rest of the chapter), Paul is going to focus on the second great benefit of being “in Christ”—overcoming sin in our lives. After all, as he has shown in heartfelt detail in chapter 7, not only is there no hope in ourselves for our salvation, but there is also no hope in ourselves for our obedience. For any real change, we cannot rely on our own efforts, but only, as Paul now explains, on the work of the Spirit.

How do we overcome sin with the Spirit? Or, to put it another way, how do we “live in accordance with the Spirit” (8:5), in the way that our inner self truly desires (7:22)? The people who do this are those who “have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (8:5). Paul says that the connection between living and thinking is a tight and close one. Literally he says: “For those being according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh, but those being according to the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit.” In other words, whatever you have set your mind on shapes your lifestyle and character. What does it mean to “mind” something or “set the mind”? Even in English, when the word “mind” is used as a verb, it has a stronger meaning than simply “to think about.” It means to focus intently on something, to be pre-occupied with something, to have the attention and the imagination totally captured by something.

The twentieth-century Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple once said: “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.” In other words, wherever your mind goes most naturally and freely when there is nothing else to distract it—that is what you really live for. That is

your religion. Your life is shaped by whatever preoccupies your mind. The overcoming of sin in our lives begins in our minds; and victory over sin is only ever the result of having minds set on the Spirit.

Questions for reflection

- 1.** Do you ever feel under condemnation? What causes you to feel this way; and how will you make sure you remember “there is now no condemnation” next time?
- 2.** In what way(s) will knowing that Jesus’ ministry was in order to make you holy motivate you to live differently today?
- 3.** What do you do with your solitude? How will you fix your thoughts on the gospel today?