

# ROMANS 8

## WEEK 6



### Historical Context & Background

The letter was written by Paul in 57 AD. Paul wrote for two main purposes: First, he wanted to garner support for his upcoming missionary trip to Spain (Rom 15). Paul had never been to Rome before, and eventually did go, but not on a further mission trip. He was taken there and martyred. Second, Paul wanted to reunify the Roman church. Because Jews were rioting over “Chrestus” (a confusion spelling of “Christ”), Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. This is mentioned in Acts 18:2. Until then, the Roman church housed Jews and Gentiles, some of whom no doubt heard Peter’s address in Acts 2 (see verses 10, 11). Unsurprisingly the Roman church quickly lost touch with its Jewish roots after this event. After 5 years, Jews were allowed to reenter Rome, but the Jews returned to a Roman church as a minority and social tensions flared. Paul writes to ensure the church unifies by understanding the deposit of faith.

Romans 8 obviously follows Romans 7, one of the most confusing passages of Scripture. Romans 7 shows us that Christians are set free from the Law to live in the Spirit, but Paul takes a convoluted trip to get there showing us that the Law is good (7:7-13), sin uses the law for evil (7:14-20), and we need a savior (7:21-25). Romans 7 helps us understand the gospel by showing us the unconverted life, ending with the rhetorical question, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” It’s here we jump into Romans 8, the fullness of that answer.



### Related Passages

Hebrews 2 & 1 Corinthians 15 — Death as Christ’s enemy

Romans 6 — How to be made alive in Christ

James 1 - Suffering and trials

Revelation 21-22 — Final consummation of redemption



### Key Terms

**Flesh:** The Greek word *sarx* is variously translated as flesh, sinful nature, body, material, etc. Be EXTREMELY CAREFUL not to misinterpret it. **Paul’s usage here does not mean the human body.** Any attempt to think that bodies are evil is heresy, since Christianity preaches bodily resurrection. He uses a different word for body—*soma*—in verse 10 to distinguish the two. Flesh is shorthand for our bondage to sin in every aspect of the human person—mind, will, body.

**Abba:** This is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word father, but it's an intimate term, something akin to "Daddy" in English. This affectionate term was used by children to their fathers and was regularly used by Jesus and thereafter by Christians.

**Law:** Often "Law of \_\_\_\_\_" is usually long-hand for the thing described: Law of the Spirit=Spirit; Law of sin=sin. Don't merely assume the Mosaic law is in total opposition to God's law. As a general rule Paul thinks the overall demand of the law (Rom. 13:8-10) is *not* in opposition to the Law of God.



## Key Themes

**Flesh & Spirit:** Paul says something that might strike us as a bit odd at first: "we have an obligation" (v. 12). Being free in Christ entails throwing off the flesh, our old master. We cannot pretend to live in the Spirit and still submit to our flesh. This can feel like an overwhelming task—indeed, an impossible one. And many faithful people have been crushed by the weight of trying to lift the burden of sin from their shoulders. But that's not God's design. The beautiful thing is that we do not, *cannot*, overcome our sin alone; the Spirit is the one who puts our sin to death. It is the Spirit who brings life where there was death, who frees us from our sin (8:11-13).

The question which follows is "Are you making room for the Spirit to work in you?" You can either make room for him or you can crowd him out of your daily life. Paul connects this with your *mind* (v. 5). What do you think about most often? Where does your mind wander when you're not occupied with something? The answers are usually good indicators of whether or not you're making room in your mind for the Spirit. And the dangerous reality is that, over time, we could actually inch the Spirit out of our life by making decision after decision to seek flesh rather than Spirit.

**Already/Not Yet:** The Jews expected the Messiah to come and institute his reign physically on earth, defeating their enemies and freeing them. And in one sense that's what Jesus did. He has already defeated death and sin, and he's reigning beside the Father. However, Jesus doesn't reign fully yet. He still has work left to do, not for salvation but for consummation. Christ must still return. This is the paradox of Christianity: Christ has come; Christ will come again. Christ declared it finished—but it isn't *complete*.

Christians live in the "Already/Not Yet." When asked if Jesus rules, the answer is "already; not yet." When asked if we're saved, the answer is "already; not yet." The point is this: The battle is won (already), but it's not over (not yet). If it were, Jesus wouldn't need to return. In one sense this is perfectly obvious when we look at the world and our lives: already justified, not yet sanctified; already made heirs, not yet inherited in full; already freed from sin, not free of sin; already given the fruits of new life, not yet given resurrected bodies. In Romans 8 Paul talks about the *not yet* (future) vs. the *already*. We suffer now, but will soon be glorified. We are conquerors now, but we still face death. The pains of now are temporary. Christ has already won and he's already with us. We're waiting for the "not yet" to end. This gives us hope.

**Hope:** The most obvious hope here is the assurance Paul gives the Christian at the end of the chapter. We can have hope because nothing can steal us from God. When we feel defeated and lost, we're not. The second way hope enters here is Paul's insistence that suffering isn't meaningless or unfruitful. Paul stresses the organic connection between present suffering and future glory, as exemplified in Christ. This is the irony of the Christian life: more life through the Spirit necessarily brings more suffering. All Christians must deny themselves and put to death sin; for some, we physically suffer, or die. But through suffering and persecution there's glory. The martyrs exemplify this. What should be a defeat is a victory. Paul emphasizes this especially in 8:28, and again by saying that despite being killed (v. 36), we are more than conquerors (v. 37). Because we have hope we can be like Christ, even to the point of death.

**Cosmic Fall and Redemption:** Sometimes we think because God created us in his image that we're the only things God is concerned with. But that isn't true! Paul here uses cosmic language, meaning all of creation. For Paul, *all* of creation fell, and so *all* of creation needs to be redeemed—not just us. This is evident in Genesis 3:17, where God curses the ground. Here, Paul declares that all creation groans for redemption. Creation was cursed because of humanity, but God's rescue plan is cosmic in scope.

Everything around us is significant—our pets, the trees, the rocks. All belong to God and will be God's. This may sound like new-age hippie stuff, but it's true. This world isn't merely temporary or insignificant. This earth will be transformed. Christ has begun that work, but it isn't completed. The world is broken. When hurricanes and tsunamis kill millions, it's not God's righteous will, but a broken creation groaning.

## BB Quotes & Illustrations

*"The whole meaning of the Christian community lies in offering a space in which we wait for that which we have already seen. Christian community is the place where we keep the flame alive among us and take it seriously, so that it can grow and become stronger in us. In this way we can live with courage, trusting that there is a spiritual power in us that allows us to live in this world without being seduced constantly by despair, lostness, and darkness."*

HENRI NOUWEN

Elizaveta Pilenko embraced atheism at a young age and quickly became a revolutionary poet and political figure in Russia in the early 10th century. Just after World War I, she entered politics and became a mayor. Elizaveta became more and more drawn to faith, eventually converting to Christianity and becoming a nun in the Eastern Orthodox church and given the name "Maria." Maria began to actively seek out those in need, taking in those seeking refuge. Upon the dawn of World War II, Mother Maria began taking in refugees displaced by the Nazis. Mother Maria of Paris became inmate #19263 at Ravensbruck concentration camp. After 2 years of labor, she was sent to the gas chambers on March 30th, 1945—Good Friday. She would later become Saint Maria of Paris.



## Three Main Points

1. Ultimately *you* don't overcome the sin that plagues your life—the Spirit does, as you let him (8:13).
2. Life through the Spirit means setting our minds on the Spirit.
3. Present sufferings will end in future glory. This doesn't make them easy or fun, but we suffer as those who have hope.



## Discussion Questions

- What do we learn about God in this passage? What do we learn about people in this passage?
- How do we read this Scripture through the lens of Jesus' life and teachings?
- Where do you see this connect with other sections or themes of Scripture?
- What are repeated ideas, words, and concepts? What is Paul emphasizing through this repetition?
- Check out the verbs used with the two principles, flesh and Spirit. What do these two different things do?
- *Why* did Christ come to earth? What was the point?
- What do we mean when we call Christ our savior? What is he saving us from? What is he saving us for? How do different answers to this question affect how we live now?
- Verse 17 - If we don't share in Christ's sufferings, will we not share in his glory? Do we need to seek out persecution? Have students read Acts 14:22, 2 Tim 2:12, Lk 24:26. How do we share in these sufferings? Is life with Christ suffering, or is it joy?
- Verse 4 - How is the law fulfilled in us? What is the law (13:9)?
- How are we in the already? How are we in the not yet? You could have them make a T chart.
- What does Paul mean when he says all of creation groans? What does Paul mean when he says the Spirit groans? Why is groaning such a popular word in this section?
- How are we both conquerors (37) and being killed (36)?
- What are the "misdeeds of the body" Paul is talking about? What are college students' "misdeeds of the body?" What are yours?
- Paul says there's no condemnation for the Christian. How does this mean we approach our sin?
- What do you think about most often? Where is your mind directed? Dating, school, money, work, how you look, etc?
- How do you actually change what you set your mind on? How do you actually put to death the misdeeds of the body? Way too often "Oh I know I shouldn't do this" doesn't actually produce change.
- How are you suffering for Christ? Do you want to suffer like Christ? Should Christians want to suffer?
- What sins are you actively putting to death? What sins are you helping your best friend put to death?

- Paul promises that you will die if you live according to the flesh. Where on campus do we see this happening?
- We're a culture afraid of death (we never talk about it) but obsessed with death (murder mystery TV shows, for example). Paul promises our bodies will have to die. Do you think about death? How does that affect how you live?

## Application & Practice

**Suffer:** Take a cold shower daily for 3 consecutive days at the beginning of the day. Reflect on what, if any, difference it makes in your ability to face unpleasant things in the rest of your life and what is its effect on your self-discipline.

**Hope:** Memorize Romans 8:38-39.

**Honor your body:** Go to the gym (or something equivalent) twice this week. Do whatever you want there: play basketball, lift weights, walk around the track, etc.

**Set your mind on God:** Go 24 hours without ANY electronic devices whatsoever. Your phone, laptop, etc. should stay turned off and locked away during this period. Out of sight is out of mind. What difference (if any) do you find this makes in your ability to set your mind on God?

## Going Deeper

Greg Boyd: "How to Overcome the Flesh Mindset" <http://reknew.org/2015/06/how-to-overcome-the-flesh-mindset/>

Carolyn Moore: "Come Holy Spirit"  
<https://www.seedbed.com/come-holy-spirit-part-4/>

*Forgotten God* by Francis Chan