

Under New Management

In Jesus' time, the Jewish people had had the Law of God for some 1500 years. As the years passed, they picked through God's laws with a fine-toothed comb. They categorized them and enumerated them. They eventually had over 600 laws and rules that people had to follow. The people of Jesus' day were burdened under this law. They lived daily with the guilt of their failure.

The laws God had given Israel were not a bad thing. They were to serve a good purpose. They were given to set the Hebrew people apart so that they would not become mixed with the heathen nations and lose the promise of the Savior. The laws defined boundaries and were a hedge between God's people and spiritual dangers. But those rules did not keep God's people from failure. They failed again and again... the same way we repeatedly break God's law. They failed and we fail because rules have no power to truly change a person.

And this is what the apostle Paul wants us to see today in Romans 8:1-10.

In Romans 7, Paul had just described his personal battle with sin. As follower of Jesus, Paul had the desire to do what is good, he wanted to do good, yet he often ended up doing bad things. The bad things he did not want to do, those he sometimes would do. Paul felt this intense conflict between his old sinful flesh which was selfish and wanted to live its way, not God's way... and the Spirit in him that only desired to love and serve God.

Have you ever felt that way? What will empower us for Godly living? What will free us from sin? Do we just need more laws? Do we need a clearer list of "do's and don'ts"? Do we just need clearer teaching on techniques and methods and habits and principals for improving your godly living? Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:

No condemnation. Set me free. God did. Righteous requirements met. So... we have a new status. New mindset. New master. New power. New ability. New spiritual life.

Romans 8:1-10 (NIV84)

1 Therefore, there is now no [not one bit] condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law [controlling principle; a reality or principle by which the world works] of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the [moral] law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us...

Are you feeling this guilt and pressure of not keeping all the rules? Then memorize Romans 8:1 and keep coming back to it again: "**there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" You see, the law is ultimately powerless to give us the freedom from guilt we so desperately need. Your sinful flesh holds you back. You are simply unable to do all that God requires of you in his holy Law. Sin has crippled us and made us powerless to save ourselves. You can make all the new laws you want. You can simplify them or break them down to more or easier steps, but you still won't see the change you desire, nor the freedom from guilt you so desperately need. The removal of guilt can only come from Jesus. The changes you seek can only take place if you have a substitute.

ILLUSTRATION: Basketball is on people's minds right now, so we'll use that illustration. Imagine Creighton Bluejays basketball player Austin Chatman challenges me to a little one-on-one basketball action. First one to 20 wins. In fact, to make it more interesting, he says he'll donate \$100,000 to help pay down our mortgage on our new addition if I win. Now, we're both about the same size. He's 6 feet tall and weighs 180. I'm 6 feet tall and weigh about 187. I figure that extra 7 lbs would give me an advantage on the inside game. Because of the \$100,000, I am HIGHLY motivated and could not be more excited to win. Do you like my chances? If you've ever seen me shoot around, you'd know there wasn't a chance. None. I have the desire, and I have the motivation. But I simply don't have the ability. I could train for a year and I still wouldn't have the ability.

But now imagine that NBA basketball star LeBron James hears about this game. He knows how unfair this matchup is, so he flies in from Cleveland and volunteers to take my place. They play the game and it's not even close. 6'8" 250lb LeBron James takes Austin Chatman to town. As LeBron scores the 20th point, I stand up and shout, "We won!!!" And I collect the \$100,000 for our church and school. I said, "We win!" but it wasn't me, was it. It was all LeBron. I certainly benefit from his victory... but he did it all.

This illustration helps us understand what Paul is telling us in this text today. The moral law of God is a good thing. It reflects God's perfect will. In fact, it's also the way that makes our life best and happiest. And God promises that if you keep his law perfectly then you would be holy just as God is holy, and you would deserve your place in heaven right alongside him. He also warns that if you do not, you will be cast out from his eternal presence in hell. So the law gives you all the information you need. You have all the incentive and motivation that you would need.

Yet how many here have kept God's moral law perfectly, without fault or failure, every day of your whole life? None. Why? Is there something wrong with God's law? No. It's perfect. Is the incentive too small? No, it couldn't be bigger! Eternal life vs eternal death. So what's the problem? You are simply unable to keep it. It's not within your abilities to be perfect. Humans lost that ability already when Adam and Eve first rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden.

But what we were powerless to do because of our sinful state, GOD DID by sending his son in the likeness of sinful man. Jesus took on human flesh and looked just like us, but was without sin. Jesus became our substitute and he did what we were powerless to do. He kept all of God's moral law perfectly his whole life. All of his actions were exactly in line with the 10 Commandments and just what God wanted. All of his words were loving, kind, encouraging, correcting... exactly what God wanted to hear. All of his thoughts and attitudes were exactly what God wanted. Jesus was perfect, and he did what we were powerless to do... keep God's law... and he did it on our behalf, as our substitute.

Then he took that perfect life and offered it up to his heavenly Father as an offering and sacrifice for all of our sins. God condemned sin in Jesus, and so Jesus took the full brunt of God's anger over sin. The full payment was made by Jesus. Jesus won the victory where we were guaranteed defeat.

Now, what comes next is extremely important. Not only did Jesus win the battle for you, but now his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, dwells in you. And he changes you. He empowers you for godly living. God is not in the business of changing your exterior and prettying you up on the outside. Or to put it another way, God is not interested in putting lipstick on a pig. No, he

changes you from the inside out. He changes your very nature. He changes you from a pig to a sheep. I'll explain more about that in a minute. First let's just listen to the rest of our reading:

And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

The Holy Spirit created faith in Jesus in your heart. The moment you are connected to Jesus you have a new nature living in you. That new nature is holy, blameless and pure... it is in the very image of God. What that means, as we just read, is you have been changed on the inside: your life, your viewpoint, your thoughts, your attitudes, your emotions, your behavior... all are *under new management*. You now belong to Christ, and he has his spirit living in you!

Apart from Christ, you are under the management of Satan, sin and death. They are your boss, and you can only do what they want you to do. But when you are brought to Christ by the Holy Spirit... when you are connected to him by faith, the Holy Spirit takes up residence inside of you. You are under new management. You are changed from the inside out. Everything is changed!

ILLUSTRATION: It makes a huge difference who owns and manages a business, doesn't it? You've seen it a restaurant is doing poorly. It's poorly kept up. The food is bad. The service is terrible. And so the owner sells it. Another owner and manager buys. They remodel the place. They change the menu. The food is great. They provide top-notch service. Although the location is the same, and it looks nearly identical from the outside, once you come in, you see the place is completely different. It's brighter, happier, the food is good, the service is great. That's why you sometimes you see signs, "Under new management" so you'll come and check it out again.

Believers are exactly that: under new management. We are no longer controlled by the flesh which is sinful, hostile to God and stands in opposition to him. We are controlled by the Spirit. And that changes everything. And although that change takes place on the inside, it is inevitable that it will also spill over on the outside in the things we say, the way we act, the way we look at things, our mood, etc. We have been changed.

ILLUSTRATION: I told you we'd come back to the pig and sheep illustration. You can pull a pig out of the mud, hose him off and put some lipstick on him. But as soon as you let him go, he will go seek the mud and wallow in it. It's just in his nature. It what the pigs likes. But sheep are different. They don't like the mud. They avoid it. Sometimes they may slip and fall into it. And when they do, if you knew nothing about sheep and pigs, and you saw both covered in mud, you might think they have a similar disposition toward mud. But the difference is the sheep is disgusted by that mud and his very upset at having fallen into it. When hosed off and

cleaned up, that sheep has every desire to avoid mud so as not to get dirty. Its attitude toward the mud is totally different than that of the pig.

This is what Paul is saying about the Christian. Christ has transformed our very nature. He has pulled us out of the mud and changed us from the pigs into sheep. We have a totally different mindset about sin. We are disgusted by it and avoid it. When we fall into it, we are very upset by it, and we go back to our Good Shepherd, Jesus, knowing that in love he washes us clean. We go with the desire to avoid sin so as not to get dirty for our good shepherd.

Now complicating this slightly is the fact that living in you is both a pig and sheep. The pig has not gone away, it's just that you also have a sheep whereas before there was only a pig. That pig part, which our text calls "the flesh" will not go away until we reach heaven. We are under a constant struggle while still here on earth to live according to Spirit... the sheep nature... not according the flesh... the pig nature.

Is your life pleasing to God? More important than a yes or no is your reason for answering the way you do. If you say, "Yes" but your reason is that you look over your life compared to the commandments and you think you're pretty good at it, you're life is not pleasing to God. You think your life is good based on rules. I'm sorry, but your life is not pleasing to God. If your answer is, "No, my life is not pleasing to God because I have broken his rules." You're right, because you have forgotten about Jesus. You've gone the way of Judas. "Yes... because I have Jesus on my team. I am in Christ. There is no condemnation, because of Jesus!" And when God says, "Stay out of the mud!" I do everything I can to stay out of the mud because I love God, and I know he has cleaned that mud off me already through Jesus Christ. I desire to avoid the sin and live for Christ. Sometimes I get mud on me, but when it's pointed out, I flee to Jesus and get it cleaned off again.

You may not look that different on the outside, but on the inside everything has changed. You are under new management. So what helps you grow in godly living... what helps you live a life that is more and more pleasing to God is not more and more rules. The rules are ultimately powerless to change you. Rather what changes you is seeing Jesus *for you* more clearly. The better you understand "the flesh", that is your sinful nature apart from Christ, and the better you understand the Jesus love for you in Christ Jesus, the more you are empowered for change... change that comes from the inside by God's power, not the power of the Law.

That's what makes **Lent** a good time for real change in our hearts and lives. It's not a season where we create and emphasize more rules. It's a season where we repent of our rule-breaking, and turn to Jesus who fully and freely forgives us. It's a season to renew our dedication to live according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh.

Real briefly, this is a good place to mention the rules some impose during the season of Lent. Should you give something up? Should you keep from eating meat on Friday? Should you work hard to go to all the extra services? If Lent is a series of "shoulds", then Lent is a season of extra rules. And rules don't change you. But if you adopt some external practices that help restrain the flesh, and focus on Jesus as the one who has declared there is "no condemnation" then those practices are good. Rules take you back to the flesh. Grace takes you back to the Spirit. Law saps away power for change. The Good News of Jesus empowers you for change.

Friends, this Lenten season, contemplate these two things over and over: There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. And in Christ Jesus, your life is under new management! Amen.