

Romans 8: 1 -- 16 (5 -- 17); John 3: 1 -- 8
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Spiritual Living

Introduction 1

When I was on cadet camp some of the officers asked me how they should read the Bible. I suggested they started with the book's that followed each other -- John --Acts -- Romans.

John -- because it was one of the four Gospels and told the story of Jesus and his teachings.

Acts -- because it continued the story after the death and resurrection of Jesus -- the story of the early church -- the first Christians and their message about Jesus.

Romans -- because it encapsulates the main principles of what Christianity is about.

Now -- because of what it attempts, Romans is a difficult book to understand.

It is one of the letters of St Paul -- this one obviously to the young church at Rome.

We have been looking in the last two weeks have Paul journeyed across the Empire telling the good news of Jesus and planting churches across what is now Syria and Turkey and Greece and Italy.

Paul was obviously concerned that these churches would follow the right way even when he wasn't there -- which is why he wrote his letters -- to strengthen and encourage the churches, and to give practical as well as theoretical teaching about following the way of Christ.

These next two weeks in our essential 100 Reading list you will look at portions of five letters written to different cities -- Rome, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae.

And the reason these letters are in the New Testament is that Christians recognised that what was a valuable to the early church is valuable to Christians throughout the ages -- and today.

Introduction 2

So -- today -- the book of Romans -- which can be divided into three parts.

First part is about how we can please God and it put right with him -- not by keeping the commandments -- but by faith in Jesus.

The second part goes on from here and talks to Christians about leading the Spirit filled life -- which was what our reading covered today.

The third part covers practical matters plus also Paul's concern for his own people -- the shoes -- has God abandoned them now that Christianity has come along or is there a place for them?

The Spirit and the Flesh

In our passage (8:1 -- 16) Paul first sums up everything he has said in chapters 1 to 7 (in NIV) "therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free for the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do... God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man -- to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man -- in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.

Explanation -- covered while I was on holiday.!

In a nutshell -- being good isn't good enough to save you from the judgment of God. Even your best goodness is pretty bad by God's absolute holy standards. But if someone who was absolutely holy -- i.e. God's son took our judgment on our behalf, and if we had faith in what he had done -- and

trusted in him, and came to him and gave our lives to follow him... then there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But there's more to being a Christian than this wonderful beginning.

Jesus promised that those who trust in him would not merely have their sins forgiven -- but that he would forge a new spiritual bond between him -- God and us. He talked about a new spiritual life brought about by a supernatural force coming to us.

In that second passage that we read -- from St John's Gospel -- Jesus says that there is potentially two births for every one person. Born physically -- that we all get -- whether we want it or not. But then, for those who choose it and only they, a second birth -- the awakening of our spirit.

Harry Potter analogy -- a normal boy -- until he discovered that he also had "magical" powers. Thereafter he lived in two worlds. The ordinary world and the invisible wizarding world.

The Christian also lives in two worlds. The ordinary physical world -- but added to this is a new awareness of spiritual things -- things that transcend this world -- things that ordinary people who are not Christians just cannot understand.

Following the lead of Jesus, Paul writes also about this spiritual existence.

And he makes this very sharp distinction.

There are two kinds of life -- the spiritual and ordinary -- or carnal or fleshly in some translations.

The carnal -- is the life which is dominated by sinful human nature; whose focus and centre is itself; whose only law is its own desires; which takes what it likes where it likes. In different people that life will be differently described. It may be passion controlled, or pride controlled or ambition controlled. Its characteristic is its absorption in the things that human nature, without Christ set its heart upon.

Then there is the life that is dominated by the Spirit of God. The person who is Spirit controlled, Christ controlled, and God focused.

These two lives are going in diametrically opposite directions. The life that is dominated by the desires and activities of sinful human nature is on the way to death. In the most literal sense, there is no future in it --because it is getting further and further away from God. To allow the things of the world completely to dominate life is self extinction; it is spiritual suicide. By living it, a person makes them self totally unfit ever to stand in the presence of God.

The Spirit-controlled life, the Christ-centred life, the God-focused life is daily coming nearer heaven even when it is still on earth. It is a life which is such a steady progress to God that the final transition of death is only a natural and inevitable stage on the way.

Paul's plea is severely passionate -- forget the old way of trying to please God by keeping rules and regulations -- learn to walk in the spirit and open yourself up to the spirit of Christ so that (as Paul writes in chapter 12) we will not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your minds.

God wants to do so much in us -- are we content to stay as just saved Christians.

Or will we let him empower us, and fill us and control us through his Spirit.?