

### **You Are Not Controlled by the Flesh, but by the Spirit**

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, 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,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.<sup>6</sup> The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;<sup>7</sup> the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.<sup>8</sup> Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.<sup>9</sup> You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.<sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

In general people like to think that they are in control, at least they want to be: in control of their finances, their career advancement, their retirement, and, unfortunately, sometimes people want to be in control of other people. People want to be in control of their health, they eat right. They exercise regularly. They take their vitamins and prescriptions faithfully. But without warning their health takes a turn for the worse and suddenly they find that they are not in control.

Sadly there are also many people of the world who are of the opinion that they are in control of their spirituality and spiritual destiny. They feel that they can choose whatever religion they want or none and all, and eventually they, along with most of the people of the world, will end up in a "better place" when they die. Even in Christianity there are those who feel that they are in control. They believe they can choose to accept Christ as their Savior. They decide to take the first step in their faith and their relationship with Christ. These Christians explain that God has given everyone the free will to make this decision. In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit reveals that God does indeed give all human beings free will. The human will has the freedom in the choice of works and things that reason understands by itself: keeping hands from theft and murder, obeying the government or parents and holding back from adultery.

In our lesson, from his letter the Christians living in Rome, the Apostle Paul says that this is not the case in spiritual matters. We have no free will in regards to our spiritual destiny because of this thing that every single one of us is born with. In the original language of the New Testament (Greek) Paul calls it *flesh*, and rightly so. In the Garden of Eden the LORD created Adam and Eve in his image, in his likeness. This means that

man and woman were holy and perfect. They had the natural desire and ability to please their Creator in everything they did. That image of God in man was ruined when man and woman disobeyed. They passed that lost image on to their children. This is why Jesus said, "**Flesh gives birth to flesh.**" (John 3:6)

First of all, let's define what Paul calls the *flesh*. Our NIV translation says here *the sinful nature*. In Lutheran dogmatics (the study of Biblical doctrine) we refer to it as original sin or the Old Adam. Our Lutheran confessions (*Augsburg Confession Art. 2 Original Sin* and the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession Art. 2 Original Sin*) calls our sinful flesh a disease. Scripture says that this disease is passed down by our parents. We cannot say that the actual sins of our mother or father are passed down to us. Scripture does not speak of that. God's Word does tell us that each individual is responsible for his or her own sins, whether committed intentionally or out of ignorance. What is passed down to us from our parents is flesh. This disease of sin thoroughly corrupts our bodies and souls. It is who we are and what we are from birth: sin.

We could compare our infection of the flesh with the AIDS disease. AIDS is out-of-control in Africa, Indonesia and India. Women who are infected pass the disease to their children. Through no fault of their own, those children are infected. That child also has to face the sobering fact that there is no man-made cure for this disease. Because they are infected, AIDS will weaken their immune system and shut down their body and eventually kill them. It doesn't matter is a tiny infant or an adult has this disease. It changes their quality of living and the way they live. The same is true with you and me. Through no fault of our own, we contract this disease. The sinful flesh is a disease that has no man-made cure. And it changes your life, both here on earth and in eternity. It controls everything you are and do.

First of all, the Apostle Paul says that our flesh controls us by making us incapable of keeping the Law, as if the flesh wanted to keep God's Law! In vs7,8 Paul says, "**The flesh is hostile to God.**" Just by being born into this world with sinful human flesh you are at war with God, at war because he is holy, sinless and perfect and you, by birth, are corrupted with sin. Sin repulses God. The result is, as Paul says in vs5 (literally), "**Those who are of the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.**" By birth you don't have the natural desire to do good but evil.

Since, by birth, all we want to do is please our sinful flesh, we are unable to keep God's law. Paul says in vs7-8, "[**The flesh**] **does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the flesh cannot please God.**" God's law tells us exactly what to do and what not to do in our lives. And God also tells us that if we keep his 10 commandments perfectly in every way in the way we act, think and speak toward God and others, then we will have earned eternal life. God also warns us in James 2:10, "**Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.**" Just by being born in sinful flesh, we cannot keep God's righteous requirements. In Acts 13:39 Paul says, "**You cannot be justified by the Law of Moses.**" No one can be declared innocent by obeying God's commandments. This is why Paul

says in vs3 that **the Law was powerless in that it was weakened by the flesh** (sinful nature).

Your sinful flesh ruins your chance at salvation. Your flesh lures you and entices you to commit wrong. When you do, sin is quick to haul out the Law and points out a long list of condemnations. In vs6 Paul says, “**The mind of the flesh is death.**” Just by being born with a sinful flesh, that sinful flesh alone condemns us. But we are doubly damned because that flesh causes us to do, say and think sinful things. In Romans 7:5 Paul says, “**When we were controlled by the flesh, we bore fruit for death.**” And in Romans 6:23 he says, “**The wages of sin is death.**”

I don't know about you, but when I wrote this sermon, my sinful flesh said to me, “Ok, Mr. Paul Horn, let me get this straight. Through no fault of my own, just by being here, without doing anything, I and all people are deserving of death, not just a physical death, but an eternal death, eternal separation from a holy God? That's not fair!” That's how your sinful nature reacts. Yet every Sunday, you and I all publicly agree that this is a just punishment when we say, “**I confess that I am by nature sinful. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity.**” Who will save us from this condemnation? Who can free us from the control of our flesh?

Do you remember the first word of this lesson from Paul? *Therefore*...every time you read *therefore* in the New Testament, ask, “What is it there for?” Everything that follows the word *therefore* is based on a previous argument. In chapter 7 Paul talked about the struggle with sin. And so he cries out, “**What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**” (7:24) He provides the answer in vs1 “**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**”

Like an out-of-control spy satellite that has to be destroyed by a heat seeking missile, you appeared to be out-of-control. Your sinful flesh controlled you and you were hell bound and hell bent. Christ needed to destroy your sinful flesh. Paul confidently tells us that he did exactly that in vs3,4. First of all, the Son of God came into this world in the flesh, so that he, like everyone else born into this world, would be required to obey the same principles of God's law. The law could not accuse Jesus because he fulfilled every single last one of its requirements. The sinful flesh could not accuse Jesus because he had no sinful flesh. By his death he put the consequence of sin to death. Through the flesh, Jesus put the law and the flesh to death.

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** You, my dear friends, are those who in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit connected you to him through faith, which was given to you through the washing with water and the Word. Because you are in Christ you are connected to everything he accomplished by his sin-free life, his complete sacrifice for sin and his resurrection from death. Connected to Christ he has freed you from the control of your sinful flesh. It can no longer accuse you. The charges against you have been dropped. The consequences of your sinful flesh have been removed. As Paul says in vs10, “**If Christ is in you, your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**” Jesus gave you his righteous life. Because you are right in God's eyes, Jesus has cured your disease of the flesh. Instead of death he has given you life, an

eternal life in heaven, where there will be no struggle with the sinful flesh, where there will be no more death, no more law.

And as for the Law, it no longer applies to your new life. You don't have to do the 10 commandments anymore. Christ fulfilled its requirements for you. But now, you want to carry out God's 10 commandments, because you are controlled by the Spirit of God. Vs6 **"The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."** You are at peace with God. He has set you free from the law, set free from the flesh, set free from death. You are now set free to live for him. Now you can do things that are pleasing in God's sight. Now you have the desire to live for him. Now, controlled by the Spirit, you have your mind set on the things the Spirit desires. You will stop living to gratify the desires of the sinful flesh. Yes, that sinful flesh still lingers around, and tries to condemn you, it tries to point out where you still need to fulfill the Law, it tries to make you live according to the sinful flesh. Now that the Spirit controls you, you will tell your sinful flesh to be quiet and go away. You tell that it cannot condemn you any more. You are in Christ Jesus. You don't want to live for yourself, but for Christ. The way you can do that is by doing those things he has revealed to you in his holy Word. You will live according to the Spirit, now that you are controlled by him.

I don't know if you know this, but pop singer Britney Spears recently released a new perfume labeled "In Control." I don't know about you, but maybe we should rename this perfume to "Out-of-Control." Brit has been in and out of rehab, lost custody of her two children, shaved all her hair off and attacked photographers. The media has called her out-of-control. To God you once looked like someone who was out-of-control. Your sinful nature took control of you and did not allow you to have the desire or ability to live for God. But that has changed. You are in Christ. May we live for the Holy Spirit this week in everything that we do or say, since we are controlled by him. May God grant it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.