

Romans 8:1-10 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.³ 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,⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.⁹ 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.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Elsa lost her mother at a very young age. Her sisters were bigger and better prepared to enter the world and therefore were accepted more readily than she was. The separation wasn't the easiest but it got even worse when she received full blame for an incident where she supposedly scared some elephants to stampede through her village. Now she would have to leave. But she didn't have the skills to be able to survive.

For her protection, she had lived a life largely caged off from the dangers of the world. It would take hard work to get her ready to be free. Her friends helped her get ready and after much struggle and heart break Elsa was free at last to roam in the wild of the world. But she wouldn't have gotten her freedom without the help of her friend, Joy. But now she is Free at Last!

We too have freedom completely based on what others have done for us. Today we will look how Christ and the Holy Spirit have set us free from something a lot worse than a life in a cage. As we do we will see that we are free at last.

Free at Last!

1. Freedom accomplished by Christ (vv. 1–4)

Life is a miserable existence without Christ. Just think about that. Without Christ, we are all caged in and just passing each day as one day closer to the end. Each breath we take we will never get back. All of it passes by so quickly that we actually have to pause to just consider how far we have come and how far we have left to go. But always with a looming death waiting for us. Without Christ, always restlessly enclosed with a doubt of what will happen at the end.

We have to admit that the bar of death that hold of captive don't get any weaker with our sinful nature. We are born into a captivity of struggles. This sinful nature makes us unable to leave behind the cage of our death because we can't please God. Not only do the bars of death hold us in but if we were able to escape our cage we would find an equally terrible lot because we would find another way to end our freedom and once again be caged. Our death and sinful nature mean that we are going to pass through this life without having felt freedom but always have these two holding us back. They control us. So what hope is there for us who are controlled by the sinful nature? There should be no hope, only an expectation of God's condemnation and punishment.

That makes the words of Ephesians 5 even better. **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.** As Christians, we acknowledge that we are still struggling daily with the sinful nature part of us, but that we are being rescued by Jesus Christ. Now the triumphant confidence naturally follows as we see Jesus open the door to let us out. Outside of those cruel captors Christ protects from the condemnation of our sin. Christ frees of from the cage of death and our sinful nature to be inside of him. How does it work? Such a cage won't keep sharks from attacking but when they do come after the diver inside they will run into these iron bars and get nor farther. So it is with our sin. Even though we still sin daily, those who stand inside of Christ are certain that those sins run into and stick to Jesus instead of to us. Jesus, therefore, bears the condemnation for our sin so that we don't have to.

This verse not only frees us from the fear of God's punishment for our sins, it frees us from the guilt our sins heap on us. While God wants us to feel sorry for the sins we commit, he doesn't want us to crucify ourselves for them. So if you're still carrying the guilt of some past sin, let it go. Come down from your self-made cross. Jesus already gave his life for you there. **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, ⁴ 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.** Christ obeyed the law for us. Our freedom from condemnation gives us a new attitude.

As Christians, we have nothing to fear! The condemnation of the Law was removed by Christ's life and death on our behalf. Reassured of God's forgiveness on a daily basis, we can live our lives to his glory by serving others. Christ has not only taken care of us when we would have been destroyed by our sinful nature and death, but he has given us skills to live in the freedom of his protection.

2. Freedom for Spirit-filled service (vv. 5–10)

Let's begin by finding out why we need protection from sin anyway. **The mind of sinful man is death...⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.** We need protection from sin because it brings death. It does that by directing us to always do the opposite of what God wants us to do. Have you ever been around a preschooler who has decided that it's "opposite" day? When you ask him to stand, he sits. And when you ask him to sit, he stands. From the moment we are conceived that's the way we act towards God. We don't do what he wants because we are controlled by our sinful nature which is allied with the devil.

But just as "opposite" day doesn't last very long with preschoolers because their parents won't put up with it, so we, who are controlled by the sinful nature, can't escape God's wrath forever. God can't stand those who disobey him and will punish them with death and then an eternity in hell.

But are things really that bad in our lives? Are we always irritating God by doing what he doesn't want us to do? I suppose the disciples didn't think that they were such bad people either but do you remember what they were doing in the Gospel this morning that upset Jesus? They were arguing among themselves as to which one was the most important (Matthew 20). This argument didn't happen soon after Jesus had called them to be his disciples. If it had, the disciples could have at least used the excuse that they didn't know any better. No, this exchange took place at the end of Jesus' earthly public ministry. The disciples had watched and listened to Jesus for three years and should have known that if they wanted to be great in the Kingdom of God, they were to do that by becoming the least, that is serve and not demand to be served.

Although we may not sit around arguing about who is the most important person in our family, class, workplace, or church, we do show it with our attitudes don't we? We may be slow to take out the garbage at home because that's a smelly job that we don't think we should have to deal with. That's what little brothers and sisters are for right? Or when our boss asks us to clean up the bathrooms at work we wonder why he doesn't ask the new guy to do it. Instead of listening wholeheartedly to one another's ideas about ways of doing ministry here we find it easier to scoff. Are we any different than the disciples when it comes to arguing about who is the greatest among us? No, we may even have to admit that we are worse for we haven't bothered to learn from the rebuke Jesus gave the disciples for their sin.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. But why should we want Christ in charge of our lives? By putting our trust in Jesus aren't we just trading one kind of slavery for another – slavery to sin for slavery to Christ? We are but slavery to Christ brings freedom. We have to be under the control of one of them. Those who climb into Christ are freed from guilt and the condemnation of sin. Those filled with Christ are empowered to live the way God wants them to live, a life-style that brings true happiness and joy. No longer do we live in a miserable and worthless existed but we have been freed and live with the skills in which God trains us. So may we live in Christ, and he in us that we stay protected from sin's condemnation and sin's control and be free at last.

We are like Elsa from the beginning of the sermon but we don't have our freedom yet. We have moved from the cage of sin and death to be inside Jesus. But we are within the years and years of training for the freedom to come. God is using this time to prepare us for the things to come when we will be let out. Then we will be free at last. Amen.