

January 4, 2009
“Life and Peace in 2009”
Romans 8 (NLT)

Romans 8:5-6 NIV

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;

There are two categories of people. There are those who live according to their sinful nature, and there are those who live in accordance with the Spirit of God. One thinks about sinful things, the other think about what please the Spirit. One way of living leads to death, but letting the Spirit control our mind leads to life and peace.

Which way will you live in 2009? Which way will you choose?

(The following is from a devotion by Greg Laurie)

I once read about a man who was reading his morning newspaper and was shocked to find his name listed in the obituary column. He called up the newspaper and was outraged that they had made such a mistake. "This is terrible," he screamed, "How could you do this to me?"

The newspaper's explanation did not satisfy the man, so he stormed down to their office and demanded to see the editor. After some time of screaming and yelling, the editor grew frustrated and said, "Look buddy! Cheer up. I'll put your name in the birth column tomorrow and you can have a fresh start."

You may laugh at a story like that, but wouldn't it be great just to start over again. In reality, as a Christian you can have a fresh start. 2009 is still a blank slate. There are opportunities ahead of you. You decide which course you are going to take.

In Jeremiah 6:16 (NLT), God says, "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.

You decide which path you are going to walk in this coming year. You decide what your priorities will be and what direction you will take. Those are decisions that each of us will make each and every day.

In 2009, choose the good way and walk in it. Only there will you find (life &) peace.

Again, as Paul said it in Romans 8:6: "So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace." Life and peace in 2009 will be yours if you let the Spirit of God control your mind, and direct your life.

Jesus came to show us Life in His life; Jesus experienced the sin, suffering and death of this life, so that ultimately sin, suffering and death could be done away with. Jesus overcame this life by His resurrection so that now Life could be given to us. Jesus lived, died, arose, and gives Himself to experience through the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, many Christians take the first three (He lived, died, and arose), but stop short of taking the fourth. This is the tragedy of present day Christian living. We emphasize His life, death and resurrection, that is, we take His history, but we do not take Him. We believe in His life, but we don't have His life.

Oh, we might have an experience with God now and again. But it soon becomes only a memory, a beautiful memory, but just a beautiful memory. This is a pre-Pentecost experience. At Pentecost God poured out His Spirit on all who believed so that Christ is ours in Personal Life and Experience, not just a Christ of history we know about, but a Christ we know. Only when we have and are being led by His Spirit will we have true Life and peace; Abundant life here, Eternal life after death, and peace always no matter what our circumstances.

Described in chapter 6 of Romans are the potentials of the Christian life in view of what Jesus did for us by His life, death, and resurrection. Let me read a few verses:

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. **6** We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. **7** For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. **8** And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him... **12** Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. **13** Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. **14** Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace... **16** You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. **17** Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. **18** Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.... **20** When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. **21** And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. **22** But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Great stuff, right? We can get pretty excited about the victories we can have with Christ that we just read about in Ch. 6. But then we come to chapter 7 of Romans. There we hear of defeat, not victory. Again let me share a few verses with you:

The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate....¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway...²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Two categories of people; one described in ch. 6, the other described in ch. 7. Why does chapter 6 promise victory, and chapter 7 talk of defeat? Well, you need to notice that the Spirit is not mentioned in the verses I read from Romans chapter 7 (and is mentioned only once in that entire chapter). And *that* is the difference. I want to move on to Ch. 8, for the Spirit is mentioned 20 times in chapter 8 of Romans. In chapter 8 the Spirit becomes a living factor, and the whole spiritual climate changes from ch. 7 to ch.8.

Chapter 8 is normal Christianity, not chapter 7. Let's take a look at the promises of ch. 8:

Christ is in you, and when you have the Spirit of Christ, and belong to Christ, there is no condemnation as you focus on Christ and what He has done for you. And because you belong to Him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin.

Sin leads to death, but God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for our sins. We who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit have power over sin. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit we think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

HOW DO WE COOPERATE WITH THE SPIRIT'S CONTROL?

Pray for greater openness and responsiveness to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Consciously humble yourselves before God.

Look to God's Word for guidance.

Obey where you have clear direction.

You have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, He will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

What are the deeds of your sinful nature: Paul lists a few in Gal. 5:16-21 (NLT)
So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions....When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

There are two categories of people-those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful nature and those who follow after the Holy Spirit. We would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out. After we say yes to Jesus, we want to continue following Him because His way brings life and peace. We must consciously choose to center our life on God, and constantly rely on the Holy Spirit.

You received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father" (Dad). For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.

We believers groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us. Then finally there will be an end to sin, suffering, and death.

The Holy Spirit also helps us in our weakness. For example, sometimes we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us. We may not know what God's will is, but the Spirit does. So, the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

31 What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? **32** Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? **33** Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. **34** Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?...**37** No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. **39** No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I would like to end with a quote from Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NLT):

19 "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! **20** You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life...."