

## “New state of existence.” Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

If only we can understand what Paul writes to Christians in Rome, it blows our mind. What is it? The message of wonderful freedom and incredible hope! In the verses we heard, Paul compares these two very different states of existence.

They both shape our lives now, and they both determine how we will stand before our Maker on the Day when He returns in His glory. Paul calls the first one “**under the Law**”, or “**according to the flesh**”. That is the state of existence where everyone is born into. The second state of existence Paul calls “**in Christ**”, or “**according to the Spirit**”. This one is where the Triune God transfers us into when He enters our lives and makes us His own.

Let's see what is so different about these two. **We will briefly examine what it means to live “under the Law”, and then what it means to live “in Christ”.**

First state of existence is “under the Law”. What is this Law? It is the Law of God, God's unchanging will, or we could say God's good and wise design for our lives. Is there anything wrong with God's Law? No, not at all! It is good and holy and beautiful.

But... there is everything wrong with us. And because of that we are slaves and prisoners in that first state of existence. Yes, we are! How come, we may wonder? Since the Fall, since our first parents turned away from their gracious Creator, we have this problem – not only we don't know God's Law, but worse, we resent and despise it.

We are incapable of living according to God's good design. Natural desires and inclinations of our hearts are hostile to what our Creator intended for us and they keep us captives. We can't change our hearts; we can't erase those desires and that makes us their slaves.

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Slaves of the passions of our own hearts. But we are also prisoners. How are we prisoners? God in His goodness doesn't want the evil potential of our hearts to spill over and cause total havoc in our lives. Therefore, He restrains us by means of His Law.

How does He do that? This is how. God has built His Law into the very fabric of His creation and enforces it upon us in several ways. First, it is written on our hearts. [Rom 2] This is about our conscience, about that annoying voice in us that accuses us when we have done something wrong or failed to do what we were supposed to.

Then the Law works through our parents. What do parents do when their babies grow up and begin to express their selfishness in actions? Wise parents restrain and discipline them and teach them what is right and what is wrong.

Next the Law enforces itself through society. Not only parents, but extended family, kindergarten, school and other communities keep teaching the young human beings what is good and what is not. How to behave. What is permissible and what is not. What will lead to our flourishing and what will be destructive for us and for others.

Then, as we grow up, the law of the land steps in, sets its boundaries and threatens to punish those who will break it. But then God's Law keep us straight in positive and encouraging ways too. If you do what is right, you may receive praise and rewards. As a child and as an adult, and to live that way most likely will be good for you.

Do you see what this means? In that first state of existence, "under the Law", we all are slaves to the passions of our hearts, which rebel against God's will, and therefore we are also prisoners of God's Law as it restrains us in numerous ways.

This explains why there are so many decent people. The Law forces us! The wiser parents you had, the better was the community you grew up in, the more external rewards and encouragement you received for doing what is good, the tighter the Law imprison your natural sinful inclinations.

And we know it well, what happens if these multiple fences of the Law are not erected to restrain our sinful nature. What happens when people grow up without parents, when they are not disciplined and raised by a good community? Then we can see the worst of our potential on display. It is ugly and scary what we are capable of.

Therefore, for someone who has been blessed to grow up with good parenting, in good neighbourhood, who has been shaped and moulded by the force of the Law in so many ways, to claim that they are such good people - that is equivalent to someone, who had been imprisoned behind many fences and bars, to boast that they are good because they haven't recently committed any crime.

And why is that? Only because the force of the Law had restrained them.

That is our natural state for all of us. Now think what it means on the Last Day. Even if you have led an outwardly decent life, you will still need to stand before Holy God – on your own, alone, and you will be held accountable according to God's Law not only for your outwardly actions, but also for your secret thoughts, desires and sinful inclinations.

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How will it be when all that for your entire lifetime is fully revealed, when there is nowhere to run or hide, no one else to blame? How should we feel?! But that is exactly where this first state of existence “under the Law” leads everyone who rejects God’s gifts in Jesus. As Paul puts it: “**Such person cannot please God**”. Terrible future and terrible end for those who live and die in this state “**according to the flesh**”.

But... Here comes the Good News, the Great News! You are not in that state of existence anymore. You are “**in Christ**”, you are now “**in the Spirit**”. It means that the Triune God has rescued you from our natural state of existence and has transferred you into the Kingdom of His Son, under His reign. That is true!

You are no longer slaves, and you are no longer prisoners, and you are no longer on your own come the Last Day. You and your life won’t be judged “under the Law”. For you are in Christ. And that means that when God the Father looks at you, regardless of what sort of person you may have been, what He sees is – His beloved Son.

In Christ God the Father sees you as His dear child. Being in Christ means that everything that is good, perfect, beautiful and holy in Jesus Christ, is now counted as yours and belongs to you. If you are in Christ, then before the God’s judgement throne you stand pure, holy and innocent. Which means, as Paul puts it, no more accusations, no more condemnation, no more fear, no more judgement.

But remember, that is not because Christians are better than others. It has nothing to do with our goodness; it has everything to do with God’s grace and Jesus’ goodness. Thus, it is entirely possible that there are people who live under the Law who have led 100x more moral and virtuous lives than some wretched sinners who are now in Christ.

Still, on the Last Day that moral person will have to stand on their own, and all the secret thoughts and desires of their hearts will be judged against the holy Law of God, but the wretched and forgiven sinners, just like me and you, will joyfully stand with Jesus.

Can you see what a wonderful gift our God has prepared for us! Jesus takes upon Himself all responsibility for whatever wrong we have done, and in exchange grants us forgiveness, and the Father now looks at us as His innocent and dearly loved children!

That is not all. You are “**in Christ**” and you are “**in the Spirit**”. As Paul wrote, the Holy Spirit indwells in you. Yes, in you! Being in Christ isn’t just an empty phrase. We, God’s baptised people, are intimately united with the Triune God.

As Jesus and God the Father are one, so we are one with them by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Joined together. You are welcomed and embraced in the divine fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is our reality.

When the Father unites us with Jesus, when the Holy Spirit indwells in you, He makes you a new creation. He creates in you new and clean hearts, and those new hearts desire to please their Creator and Redeemer. Who you are is no longer defined by the sinful flesh, but by the Spirit of God who dwells in you.

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You are no longer slaves. Your new and true self is no longer enslaved to sinful passions and cravings of the old self. The desires and longing of your new heart are now in harmony with the will of your Father. And you are no longer prisoners of the Law.

Of course, the Law will keep restraining your sinful flesh, but your new self “in Christ” delights in the Law of God and gladly keeps it. Instead of being your unpleasant prison guard, the Law of God now becomes the source of joy and delight.

Just read Psalm 119. **“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day.”** See, not a prison guard anymore, but the source of sheer joy and delight..

**Here we come to our last point.** This your new state of existence “in Christ” and “in the Spirit” makes your future incredibly bright and attractive. Remember how Jesus was raised from the dead? In the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let this sink in [!] - the same Spirit of God now dwells in you. The same Spirit will raise you from the dead, but not as you are now, not tainted with our old sinful nature and bruised by this rough life, that would be such a disappointment.

No, you will be raised for this new life with the Risen Lord Jesus in His New Creation in a new, beautiful, overflowing with energy body which will be perfectly fit for the life eternal radiating divine glory and majesty. This is what awaits you “in Christ”.

Do you see why our new state of existence “in Christ” is so different from the old state “under the Law” and on our own. By God’s grace you are rescued from the slavery to sin and freed from imprisonment under the Law and from the fear of death.

Not a slave anymore, but God’s child. Not a prisoner to the Law, but a new creation free to life in harmony with the Triune God and all His chosen people. Sure, as long as we live, we will still be burdened by the pains, tribulations and losses of this life.

But we are also incredibly hopeful, we know what awaits us, new life with our Risen Lord, in blessedness and divine joy. And all of that, not because of your goodness, but because of the gift of new life in Christ. May the Spirit of Christ in you keep reminding you how blessed you are, how much your God has done for you and for every human being, and what glorious future awaits you!

May the Spirit of Christ drive you to tell everyone what it means to live “under the Law” and what wonderful freedom and new life are offered and given to everyone “in Christ”. May the Lord of the Church bless us and His efforts through us that we may see many slaves of sin liberated and many prisoners of the Law set free, so that together with them we can thank and praise our God for everything He has done.

Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.