

Resurrection Power and Life in the Spirit

By Jane Titrud

The resurrection of Christ provides more than just the hope that there is life beyond the grave. It also provides assurance that Christians are not doomed to live in continual bondage to sin. That is because the same power that was behind the resurrection of Christ also gives a Believer the ability to live a victorious Christian life.

One of the saddest things I have ever heard people say (who otherwise claim to be Believers) is that they are not supposed to have to worry about their sin. They seem to view it as an inevitable fact of life despite their belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior. This is sad because it shows a complete lack of understanding with respect to God's provision for victory over the power of sin in this present life.

Romans 7:18 is often cited in support of the mindset that living in sin is inevitable. In this verse, Paul himself says, *"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not"* (NASB). Hence, it is commonly believed that other Christians will fair no better. Paul also describes his condition in this context in terms of being a wretched man: *"Wretched man that I am! Who will save me from the body of this death?"* (Romans 7:24). This does not sound like victorious living.

Yet, in the very next verse, Paul gives credit to Christ for providing the necessary salvation: *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:25a). There is a subtle hint here that God actually did make provision through Christ for dealing with sin in practice and that Paul is about to reveal what that is. The need is certainly evident in that the rest of verse 25 seems to describe someone caught in a trap from which he cannot free himself: *"So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin"* (Romans 7:25b). Moreover, this summarizes the situation described in the preceding verses of being sold into bondage to sin (vv. 14-24).

Unfortunately, however, many Christians also tend to interpret what follows in Romans 8:1 as if Paul were talking about justification in terms of being released from guilt. After all, it says here that, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1), and *justification* and *no condemnation* generally go hand in hand. But since this verse follows a discussion about the power of sin in the flesh, interpreting it in terms of being released from guilt makes it seem like Paul is saying that living according to the dictates of the flesh no longer matters — just so long as one has faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Hence, this interpretation can actually become an excuse for sin.

Nevertheless, such an interpretation clashes with teachings about the power of resurrection life in the verses that follow in Romans 8. It also contradicts other verses such as Romans 6:11, 12: *"Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts."* Hence, it is not likely that Paul was talking about justification in the sense of being delivered from the guilt that accompanies sin. Instead, he was more than likely using this as an introduction to reveal the basis by which Christians are delivered from the very power of sin and death.

The verses that follow will show this. Romans 8:2-4 says: *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."* In other words, he is beginning to explain *why* there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, as he said back in verse 1. What Christ accomplished on the cross paved the way for the gift of the Spirit. So, Paul is talking about being free from the power of sin and death through the law of the Spirit of life.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. We can see this by skipping ahead a little to verses 10-14: *“And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive [or “life”] because of righteousness. But 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 indwells you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”* One can see that this is referring to the resurrection and the provision of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Believer.

The basic idea is that the same Spirit of God Who raised Jesus Christ from the dead now lives in us and is, therefore, capable of leading us to victory over the flesh by the very same power that resulted in the resurrection of Christ. There is still some responsibility here on our part. We have to follow the leading of the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit if we are to live above the control of the flesh. Similar instructions about walking in the Spirit are also expressed in Galatians 5:16: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”* This is an admonition to Believers. It is not something that God forces upon us. Nevertheless, this must be something that is possible to do by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit if the Word tells us to do so.

Of course, it is all too easy to follow the flesh instead of the Spirit. That is what we are used to doing. That is what comes most naturally. The flesh wants to have its way. We are also living in a world that tends to redefine “sin” in terms of a “disease” in order to take away personal responsibility before a Holy God. Christians can even fall into this same line of thinking if they are not careful. Yet, the world can offer nothing by way of deliverance from the bondage of sin in the flesh. The only true hope is in the power of resurrection life.

In the end, it all comes down to what one chooses to believe. The Bible characterizes deeds of the flesh as incompatible with the kingdom of God (see Galatians 5:19-21). It also says, *“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him”* (Romans 8: 9). Hence, all true believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This means that every born-again Believer must, therefore, also have access to the power of God to live above sin and its consequences of death.

We may fail at times — no one is perfect but God. But the truth remains: if we belong to Him, we can live the resurrection life He intended for us through the resurrection power of His indwelling Spirit. Learning to walk in the Spirit is a process, which takes time to develop. Even so, it is doable by faith in the power of God and persevering in that faith. It is not about the strivings of man according to one’s own ability.

The point is that setbacks are no excuse for giving up. No one who names the name of the LORD should live in complacency with regard to his or her sin. We are to press on in order to live in the power of the resurrection as God intended. Remember, *“for all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God”* (Romans 8: 14).

The ultimate goal is to be led by Him. Therefore, praise God for His provision of power according to the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to do so.