

The Power to Change
Romans 8:1-13
#25th in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – April 9, 2006

Objective: To ground the hope of our victory over sin in the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Introduction

You've seen or heard commercials that promise things like

- Learn a language in four easy steps.
- Lose weight in your sleep.
- Get your Masters Degree in six months.
- Make \$5000 to \$15000 a week from your own home.
- Cancel your debt with just one phone call.
- Look like this in just 3 20-minute workouts.

Our bookstores foster the idea that we can do anything easily

- The Attractor Factor: 5 Easy Steps for Creating Wealth (or anything else) from the Inside Out.
- Happy Housewives in Ten Easy Steps.
- Total Memory Workout: 8 Steps to Maximum Memory Fitness
- Verbal Advantage: Ten Easy Steps to a Powerful Vocabulary
- Anger Free: Ten Basic Steps to Managing Your Anger
- Relationship Rescue: A Seven Step Strategy for Reconnecting With Your Partner
- Always Talk to Strangers: 3 Simple Steps to Finding the Love of Your Life
- Frozen Assets: How to Cook for a Day, Eat for a Month

We want it fast, and we want it to be easy!

I wonder how much of that we bring to the spiritual dimension of our lives? Wouldn't it be great if we could create some kind of 5-step formula to being a spiritually mature follower of Christ?

When Paul leaves us with the closing words of Romans 7, he does not proceed to give us six easy steps to overcoming sin. There are certain things that we will learn about spiritual health and growth: it's not fast, it's not easy, and it's not primarily about what we can do. But we can change, we can overcome sin, we can be godly. Furthermore, if I understand Paul correctly, the presence of change, the ability to overcome sin, and the practice of godliness are indicators that faith is genuine.

So what does Paul say about the power to change? What does he tell us about how we can win the battle against sin? What counsel does he give us so that we can break free of the tension we saw in chapter 7 – I want to do right, but all-too-often I end up doing what is wrong?

What Gives A Christian the Power to Change?

Let me digress for just a moment. Why change? And what are we supposed to change? I think it is good to remind ourselves of what we're doing by reading 2 Peter 1:4-11. We're talking about adopting behavior and attitude that reflects the character of Jesus Christ.

Having said that, what gives me the ability to change?

1. I now have the freedom to choose to obey God (8:1-4).
 - a. We have been set free not only from the penalty of sin, but according to Paul, we have been set free from the power of sin. (See Romans 6:12ff.)
 - b. Christ's death broke the power of sin, so that I can live in the way God wants me to live.
 - c. There is a new dynamic that is at work in me, so that I walk (live) according (by means of) the Spirit, not by the old way of the flesh.
 - i. There are numerous ways to try to illustrate this, and probably all of them are deficient. But let me try these. Speaking in computer language, you have a new operating system. For those of you who are not computer fluent, you are connected to a power source. (Illustration of satellite radio disconnected/connected to an antenna).
 - d. Because I have this new dynamic, I have the ability to be obedient to God, which is something I did not have before Christ.
2. My mind is being shaped/molded by the Holy Spirit (8:5-8).
 - a. Paul writes that a distinguishing characteristic of someone who follows after the Spirit is that they set their mind on the things of the Spirit. What does this mean?
 - i. Paul is talking about what influences us, or shapes us. And he again, as he has in many other places, points out that our minds are a key component in our spiritual health.
 - ii. A person who sets his or her mind on the Spirit is thinking in line with the way that God thinks.
 - b. How does this happen? Simple – Scripture. The B I B L E.
 - i. There are things that bear repeating, and this is one of them. If you are a Christian, you need to regularly and systematically be exposed to what God says in the Bible.
 - ii. It is important to understand that you cannot watch several hours of television each night, come to church 2 or 3 times a month and be able to set your minds on the things of the Spirit.
 1. Does that mean that all you should do is read your Bible? No. But you need to realize that being a Christian in a world that does not think the way God think means that you are faced with the reality of two incompatible mindsets. And one of them is going to rule. If all you know is how a lost culture thinks, then you won't be able to set your mind

on the things of the Spirit because you won't know how the Spirit thinks.

2. David understood the connection between the intake of God's truth and the way he thought and lived. See Psalm 119:1-6 >7; vs. 5, 11, 17>18, 29a>29b, 37, 59.
 - iii. This is an area that is of great concern to me for two reasons. First, I care a great deal about your own spiritual health. But second, I also care about the spiritual health of your children. And if you as an adult invest little in your own spiritual life, do you really expect that your child will do more than you do? What is recorded in Judges 2:6-10 is unfortunately all too familiar throughout the history of the Church and frankly is becoming all too descriptive of this generation of children and teenagers.
 - c. But when we let "the word of Christ dwell in us richly" (Col 3:16), the Spirit of God shapes our minds, and we can learn what God expects of us.
3. Because God has made me a new person (8:9-11).
 - a. I have stuffed pheasant on the wall of my office. I can give him all kinds of instructions, but he can't do a thing because he's dead. Only living things can decide to change.
 - b. Paul tells us in this passage that a those who belong to Christ are made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. And it is his power in us that brings about growth toward holiness.

Connecting This to Our Lives

So what do we do? Do we look for ten steps to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives? No. Paul tells us what we do in verse 12. We are debtors, but not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. The implication is that we are debtors to the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit.

There is no secret plan for spiritual growth. It involves taking in truth, responding to that truth as it is applied to our lives by the Spirit of truth. And bit by bit, mostly in small steps, in some season of life more than others, we find ourselves winning that struggle that Paul talks about in Romans 7, and we narrow the gap between what we know we want to be like, and our ability to make it real. And that is because of the gift of the Spirit that God gives to all who know Christ Jesus.