

Romans 8 (7-8) – *The Throne of Your Heart*

Today, we are going to begin a short series on living the Christian life. We will start by discussing some of the theology you need to know if you want to know why we do what we do. And how God changes us so that we can do what he wants us to do. We will look at our struggle with sin and obedience, and what your ongoing role in this is. And as we go through this series, we will apply our doctrine and see how it is to be put into practice.

At the beginning, this may be material you have never heard. Or maybe it will be material you know very well. But as we move from doctrine to practice, and from concept to concrete action, I am sure that you will find this to be enlightening, encouraging, surprising, and delightful.

You may know something about the game of basketball. But you are incapable of playing a game of basketball if you don't have a basket or a ball. But when you do have a basket and a ball, you are now capable of playing a game of basketball. And basketball players actually play the game.

This is somewhat like how it is with your spiritual life as a Christian. Before you were a Christian, you may have known something about life as a Christian. But you were incapable of truly living the Christian life, because of your sinful heart and human spirit. But when you are a true Christian, you have a new heart and a new spirit. And so, you are capable of living the Christian life. And true Christians will live the Christian life.

Most often, when the Bible speaks about your heart, it refers to who you are at your core, and what controls your will and emotions. 2 Corinthians 4:16 describes it as the "inner man". And the Bible teaches that our hearts are radically corrupt. It describes this corruption as "a heart of stone". It is hard, unresponsive, and impervious to saving truth.

And the Bible teaches that the human spirit is wrong, and dead to God. Ephesians 2:1 describes this as being dead in trespasses and sins. In their

natural condition, people don't believe the Bible, the gospel, the glory of Christ, or the peril of their own souls without God.

The old heart and spirit are described in Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 8:7-8. Jeremiah 17:9 says – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* Romans 8:7-8 says – *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.* This is the unregenerate person, and they are incapable of pleasing and obeying God through faith.

The unregenerate person is changed when God regenerates them by giving them a new heart and a new spirit. The new heart has a new ability to see and understand truth, a new delight in God and desire for him. And a new spirit means a new motivation and principle of action. The new heart and spirit are described in Ezekiel 36:26 and Romans 8:9-11. The regenerate person is capable of pleasing and obeying God through faith.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 – God promises that one day, after the Babylonian captivity, he will restore his people to the land, and to a right relationship with himself. He will gather the people from all of the places where they had been scattered (Ezekiel 11:17), remove their idols from among them (Ezekiel 11:18), and give them a new, undivided heart (Ezekiel 11:19). The result of this new heart will be obedience to God's commands (Ezekiel 11:20). Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of receiving God's Spirit, who causes us to be "born again" or regenerated. This prophecy will find its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus rules from Zion and Israel has been restored (Romans 11:26-27).

Romans 8:9-11 is talking about the changes that take place when someone is regenerated, or "born again." Let's turn there and read the passage. And here is a brief outline. You have passed from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the Spirit (vs.9). And your body, infected by sin, is going to die (vs.10). But the Spirit has given you eternal life (vs.10). And now, the Spirit enables you to live a godly life (vs.11). And when Jesus returns, you will receive a new body, free from sin and death (vs.11).

In the meantime, you are to fight your bodily passions by means of the Spirit. It isn't that your physical body is "all bad." Rather, it is that your natural appetites stand in the way of spiritual growth and maturity. As Paul said in Romans 7:18 – *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* But now, in Romans 8:9-11, there has been a change. You have a new heart and a new spirit, and the Spirit of God dwells within you. And those changes are the reason you can please and obey God through faith.

Still, even after you've been born again, you have to fight against sin. Does this mean that your heart is still "*deceitful above all things, and desperately sick*"? And do we still have a *mind that is set on the flesh*?

The answer is no, but also, in a sense, yes. The heart is the seat of sin. And in our natural state, the heart is incurably bad. But born-again believers have been given a new heart. So, the answer is no, regenerated people do not have the same heart. It is not a Jeremiah 17:9 heart, or a Romans 8:7-8 spirit. It is not incapable, inflexible, stony, and dead to God. Rather, they have been given an Ezekiel 36:26-27 heart, and a Romans 8:9-11 spirit, by which they are capable of obeying God and pleasing God through faith.

Old heart and spirit – Jeremiah 17:9 – Romans 8:7-8 – Incapable

New heart and spirit – Ezekiel 36:26 – Romans 8:9-11 – Capable

So, if you trust the gospel, that Jesus lived a sinless life and died to pay for your sins, you're saved. But you enter an ongoing process. It will not be completed until glorification, when Jesus returns and we are perfected for eternity. We are sanctified in Christ, but the full application of that is yet to come. And so, even though we have been made capable, we are not yet perfected. Therefore, our heart can still deceive us, and it can still act like an "idol factory", and we can still misunderstand it. Maturity means you know that your heart can lead you astray, and so you guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23) by carefully clinging to Christ through following God's word.

There is a difference between justification, regeneration, and sanctification. God causes you to be raised from the spiritually dead to be spiritually alive. You're given faith, by which you repent toward God and believe in Jesus Christ. And Jesus takes the punishment for your sin, and gives you the benefit of his righteousness. Based on that, you are justified, in other words, declared righteous by God. You've been forgiven of your sins, and saved by God's grace. And you have been born again, or regenerated, which means you have been given a new nature, a new heart, with new desires.

So, justification is when you are declared righteous in Christ and given a new standing before God. This changes your identity. But it does not change your inner life. However, regeneration, being born again, does affect who you are on the inside, and the way you live your life. Still, even when you have a "new heart," you have to fight against your old desires, and your old ways, and worldly ways of thinking and acting. This is what is meant by the term sanctification. It is the process of growing in God's grace.

If you are truly a born-again Christian, then Jesus now sits on the throne of your heart. But to mature as a Christian, his kingdom must spread to every area of your heart. And that means you have to root out any idols that take hold or put down those that try to set themselves against Jesus' rule in your life. And you can never just reject an idol, it must be replaced. You do this by finding the root of the idols, and by a renewed mind, forsaking those idols, and planting the flag in those areas for Christ by faithful obedience.

What does that look like? And how is that done?

To find that out, next time we will begin to examine Colossians 3:1-17, which teaches us what kind of disciples we need to be in order to live in a manner that glorifies Christ. In doing so, this will effectively deal with idols. Because idols are rooted in our hearts and minds. But we can uproot them by focusing our minds and hearts heavenward. Where Christ is.

But the question is, have you been born again?