



This week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our series in Romans 8. We began the section from v5-11 as Paul begins to deal with some of the reasons that we struggle to make progress in becoming Christlike. Paul outlined here that we are new people and therefore will begin to think in new ways. Our struggle is that we suffer from 'identity amnesia' and forget who we now really are...

We began by thinking again about the Emancipation Proclamation that was put into effect 157 years ago in the United States. On the stroke of midnight on January 1 1863 millions of African-American slaves were granted freedom. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised but looking back in history we can see that many struggled with the new found freedom and indeed some preferred to go back to old ways. In some ways this tracks with our experience of living the Christian life - that we have an awful tendency to go back to the way we used to do things and so we forget the freedom that we now enjoy.

v5-8. A new power for thinking

Elsewhere Paul says that we change the way we live by changing the way we think - Here though he is saying something quite different; he says that. Because we are new people I was thinking will automatically change as we become more Christlike. Paragraph he makes the blunt point that there are foundationally only two types of thinking possible either to have a mind governed by the flesh or to have a mind governed by the spirit.

We might struggle with this starkness of thinking in that we can meet some very good and kind unbelievers however it's still true that route that is a mind governed by the flesh. We describe the flesh or the simple nature as the selfish self and if it is a default mode which always considers what is in it for us whenever we act. We thought about a friends episode from the 90s with Phoebe who is wrestling with the idea of trying to do a selfless good deed (and failing).

We considered three brief implications in light of these verses

1. God can change people. Where we struggle with our lack of progress we need to remember that God's plan is not failed it's simply that he is not finished. He is still at work changing us, rather than overnight zap our growth is a lifetime of adventure and walking with him and trusting him.

2. Only God can truly change people. It's only God who can change the way that we think. As we seek to prayerfully persuade friends or family or colleagues the truth of the Christian faith

we need to remember there's only so much that we can do. There are people in the day of Jesus he saw the miracles but still didn't believe. We need God to be at work on them for them to change how they think.

3. There is a danger of drifting. In these bodies and in this flesh we still have a tendency to follow the selfish self. Those questions resonate. As we asked what is in it for us. We can be like the slaves who have been given freedom yet prefer to go back to what it was like as it feels safe and familiar.

So how **are** we to change? How do we increasingly become who we now are?

v9-11. A new power for living

Paul begins to outline for aspects of the newness that we now are a part of.

... You are part of a new world (v9)

In v9 Paul describes it as a new realm, he's saying as a Christian it is as if we now live in a new place, a new land with a new passport. Rather than dwelling in the realm of the flesh we now do well in the realm of the spirit. It's a place where things are different and yet we can forget that we inhabit this new location...

... You are under new ownership (v9)

In this new realm We have a new master who is in charge. This is a reality for all believers however new or shaky our faith might feel we have God's holy spirit living in us and so we now belong to our Father.. Because we have the spirit of Christ it means we will be raised and so

... You have a new life (v10)

Bodies get old and decay and eventually die, but Christ is now in us – the one who defeated sin and death - which means we have a resurrection life now. This was always the trajectory of the Bible. Passages such as Ezk 37 say something of the hope that those before Christ had when God would come and breathe new life into valleys of dry bones

... You have a new hope (v11)

A definite future is ours because of a definite past reality. Just as Christ died on the cross and just as the tomb was empty so we too will be raised. This verse is remarkably 'bodily' and that's something that we can get muddled on. It's not just that God cares about the inside or the spiritual but rather the gospel is for all of us (not just the fish and chips but the wrapping paper too!), our bodies are a key part of who we are and you're off and we can just be led to think the bodies don't matter that much but there are souls Day.

All in all, this means that our Monday morning matters. We have life now and so we can live to please our God now.

Here are a few questions to begin to think through application of this passage

- what do you remember from last week as Paul started Romans 8? What frustrations with your Christian growth did you share?
- what does it mean for the Christian to now have a mindset governed by the spirit?
- Paul is very stark in his language, how does this make us feel?
- Why do we struggle to remember who we now are?
- What aspects of the newness ought to be front and centre but perhaps sometimes are not? How can we grow in this?