

Jesus and the Spirit of Life

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 20*, Pentecost, May 24, 2015

Romans 7:21 - 8:6 (ESV adapted)

²¹ **So I find with regard to the law** that when I want to do the good, the bad is right there with me. ²² For **I delight in the law of God**, in my inner person, ²³ but in other parts of myself I experience law as something very different waging war against the law that my mind delights in and taking me as a **prisoner** under the **law as it is used by the sin** that dwells in those parts of myself. ²⁴ **Wretched man** that I am! **Who will deliver me** from the body caught in this death?

²⁵ Thanks be to God through **Jesus Messiah our Lord!**

So then, on my own, I in my right mind am a servant of God's law, but in my flesh-weakened mind I serve a law wielded by sin.

8:1 But now **nothing** can bring **condemnation** for those who are **in Messiah Jesus!** ² For now the law, under the power of **the Spirit who gives the life in Messiah Jesus**, has itself set you free from that same law as it was wielded by sin to bring death.

³ **For God has done what was impossible** for the law on its own to do, because it was weakened by the flesh. By **sending his own Son in flesh** so like our sin-enslaved flesh and to deal with sin, **God condemned sin itself** in that very flesh. ⁴ God's purpose was that his faithful righteousness promised by giving the law might come to fulfillment in us, who walk a path not determined by the flesh but **empowered by the Spirit**.

⁵ For those who live lives determined by the flesh think in a way that can't see beyond the things of the flesh, but those who **live according to the Spirit** think in a way opened to things that only the Spirit can do. ⁶ For it is **death** to limit the mind to its enslavement to the flesh, but **to open the mind to all that the Spirit does is to receive true life and peace**.

Romans 3:21-22

²¹ But now apart from the Law, God's faithful righteousness has been manifested, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - ²² God's righteousness seen through Jesus Messiah's faithfulness for all who believe.

Romans 5:1-2, 8

¹ Therefore, since we have been declared right from his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Messiah, ² through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. ... ⁸ but God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, the Messiah died for us.

Romans 8:9-10

⁹ 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 the Messiah does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if the Messiah is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of God's righteous faithfulness.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ Though the Messiah did not know sin, but God made him to be sin on our behalf, in order that in him we might embody God's righteous faithfulness to all his promises.

Isaiah 53:4-5

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

The Spirit of Life – Where Jesus' Life Meets Ours

Today is Pentecost (fifty days after Passover/Easter) the feast of Weeks. Acts 2 stamps it forever as the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the new beginning, the “power from on high” that Jesus promised. Jesus' new resurrection life, so startling to his disciples, now began to invade their own lives as the Spirit of God became part of them. Jesus was not calling people to be generally ‘more spiritual.’ He poured out God's own Spirit, new life, new power, that brought Jesus' work to fulfillment and changed everything.

The New Testament is filled with this. Luke tells the story in Acts. John describes Jesus anticipating the coming of the Paraclete/Advocate. Paul focuses on the Spirit in Rom 8. The Spirit is the presence of the one God, given to us, continuing God's work in Jesus.

Losing the War of a Divided Mind

In Rom 7, Paul deals with the deep problem of humans in relation to our sin and brokenness. It is not that we did some offense and God is angry with us. It is that we are divided against ourselves, self-destructive, at war within, enslaved by our own destructive desires. God's wrath is against that destruction of his creation by sin and it hits us by ‘letting us go’ to follow our ‘flesh’ and receive the consequences of our choices. It's humanity's story.

God's Law, seen in scripture, itself becomes divided. We can recognize its goodness and take delight in it, but our ‘flesh’ (limited, self-centered mind) weakens it and paradoxically uses it to stir rebellion in us. We find ourselves as our own enemy, the law that promised life now being used in/by us to produce death. Self-trapped, we can't break free. Wretched!

A New Power, Life in a New Space

But “Wretched” is not the end of the story. Paul sets beside it the Gospel: *Nothing can stand as a condemnation against those in Messiah Jesus!* The only hope was to change the basic structure of life that led to the wretchedness. That change has happened! Paul step by step lays out the events, starting with the most immediate, personal change, and then looking back and wider to view the vast, deep change that God has brought about.

The immediate reality is the work of God's Spirit in our life (8:2). This is not a change of feeling or an elevated experience, but the reality of God working in our life, as objective as the crucifixion of Jesus. That Spirit is God's continuing creation of life and it takes on the task of fulfilling the promise of Life that God always intended and expressed even in the Law.

But that life has a very specific “location” that we could not have imagined before. It is “in Messiah Jesus,” who is both God and us. We share in his life, his grace, all that he accomplished by his death and resurrection. A spacious place, to hold the whole world.

The reason this can happen (8:3) is that in Jesus God has done what we could not before imagine. In ‘his own Son’ – the Son who is the one God's own self – he came in flesh just like ours. But rather than be enslaved by sin, he dealt with sin. He experienced our life caught in limitation and vast desire. As sin massed around him and condemned him to the tortured death of crucifixion, he condemned not the people, but sin itself. Sin, pain, brokenness, rebellion – these are the intruders in God's creation. The people, even as sinners, are God's beloved creatures. We trust and live “in him” by “his Spirit.”

This also begins new experiences for us. We learn what God has done and begin to think in new ways. Our minds are opened to the vastly expanded world of beauty, power, and love that is the life of the Spirit. Our trust in that love of God leads us into real peace.