

Romans 8:1-17

Introduction

After introducing the idea of the age of Adam that introduced sin and death into the world and the age of Christ that brought grace and life, Paul began describing the Christ-followers' new life. In addressing the false notion that Paul's gospel encouraged sin, Paul described in Chapter six how in their being united with Christ they had died to Sin in order that Christ, instead of Sin, could be their new master and encouraged them to recognize Christ as their new master. Then in chapter seven Paul showed the contrasting life of death that was found while living, as the nationalistic Jewish teacher understood God's purposes in Torah and circumcision. He showed how Sin used law to bring death. In this chapter Paul speaks of the remedy for the ongoing struggle of Christ-followers living between times, living in the world of Adam yet having transferred into the age of Christ as they await the coming resurrection at the end time. That power is the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ.

Law of the Spirit of Life: 8:1-4

These verses are a summary of what has been said since 3:21 and serve as a transition into the main thoughts of chapter 8. The eschatological wrath of God is something that, out of God's patience, is being reserved until the return of Jesus. The power of Sin using law and preying upon the fleshly nature of humanity placed humanity in the destructive path of God's wrath until the bloody death and following resurrection of Jesus rescued humanity. But "now" (3:21; 6:22; 7:6) the power of the grace of God in Christ has overwhelmed the destructive power of sin. The death and resurrection of Jesus released humanity from the domination of Sin (for those who have a perspective governed by Christ) and it neutralized death as the verdict of final judgment. While humans die because Adam's sin released death into the world, the power of certain death to induce fear of punishment and uncertainty of relationship with God is gone. Condemnation in one's existence in this age and the age to come is removed. The indwelling Spirit, instead of indwelling Sin, brings a profound sense of life toward God and peace to face judgment. What God did through Christ transitioned humanity from the old epoch of Adam characterized by Sin and death and transferred humanity into the new epoch of Christ characterized by grace and life.

The two phrases, "law of the Spirit of life" and "law of sin and death" speak of contrasting ways of approaching Torah based on either the old age of Adam or the new age of Christ. See Fredenburg's translation on 3:27-28 and the comments in that document on these verses. This is not about throwing out Torah and replacing it with the NT. Paul, most likely, never thought of his or other's writings replacing Torah. Torah, in and of itself was never the problem. Paul always spoke positively about Torah as God originally intended it. Here in Romans Paul has said it was good, holy, and spiritual. Read Psalm 19 for a correct understanding of the intended purpose of Torah. The problem was, and continues to be, how people of the flesh read Torah, and how Sin uses it to kill. Sin, taking advantage of humanity's fleshly nature used Torah to bring death (the Torah of sin and death). This is Torah from the perspective of the epoch of Adam with the focus on "doing the Law" to overcome Sin and attempts at living up to

mistaken notions of God's expectations and purposes. Torah, when read through the lenses of God's faithfulness and responded to through the power of the Spirit brings life (the Torah of the Spirit of life). The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-33 is not the NT. This new covenant is God taking away the old way of understanding and responding to Torah as seen from the nationalistic Jewish teacher's perspective, and placing the intent of Torah within the hearts of the people. This is what Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the writing of Torah, "not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3). It is not freedom from Torah but freedom from a misdirected way of reading Torah so Torah can be understood through the Spirit of God.

Someone in today's church might object, "Are you saying we still need a tabernacle, animal sacrifices, Sabbath, etc. Absolutely, positively no! Jesus fulfilled all of that. We now have all that in a spiritual fulfilled reality rather than a worldly unfulfilled phantom reality. Jesus said he did not come to destroy Torah but to fulfill it. That Torah continued to be seen by NT as authoritative can be seen in that they quoted from the OT when they need an authoritative voice about anything in terms of morals and ethics, the character of God, etc. Torah is the scripture of 2 Timothy 3:16 that *is* "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." All of scripture (Torah and NT) is summed up in only two commands, to love God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind; and to love one's neighbor as one's self. The main point and intent of all scripture is the same.

The focus of these verses is the antithesis between flesh and spirit. "Flesh" is found 13 times in 8:1-13 and 13 more times in the rest of Romans. Flesh has two probable meanings in Romans. The NIV's "sinful man" and "sinful nature" are poor translations that stem from a Calvinistic and Evangelical understanding of human nature. The words "sinful nature" are not in the Greek text. The Greek text simply reads "flesh." The only place where "sin" and "flesh" occur together in this section is in 8:3b when speaking of Jesus. The NIV translators must have recognized the problem their "sinful nature" translation in the other instances would have in this statement because they translated 8:3b, "in the likeness of sinful man." There are two probable understandings of "flesh" in Romans. One, it is the weakness and corruptibility of humanity living in the fleshly form. Humanity's fleshly nature is powerless to overcome selfish passions. Two, is the connection to the nationalistic Jewish teacher and his understanding of circumcision of the flesh. Circumcision was not only one of those markers in which the nationalistic teacher boasted; it was also seen as a deterrent to sexual sins. Neither the law nor circumcision had, as the nationalistic Jewish teacher thought, the power to overcome Sin. Not only were the law and circumcision unable to control sin, one's own human weakness was unable to control sin.

God came to the rescue through His own Son. In God's wisdom, He dealt with Sin by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus lived in the same epoch of Adam with the same weaknesses and appetites of humanity. Since Sin exercises its power upon humanity in the flesh, this is the form in which Jesus had to live in order to break its power. God delivered up His Son in the form of flesh enticing Sin to do its destruction upon Jesus. Human wisdom would think such an event would cement Sin's power. In a sense, God deceived Sin making it think it would cement its power by killing

Jesus. Ironically, God would use that which Sin took advantage of (flesh) in order to condemn Sin and to break its power over humanity bringing the old epoch of Sin's domination to an end. It is only in death that Sin no longer holds any power over those in the flesh.

"So that" in verse four is an indication that the divine purpose is being fulfilled. What God did through Jesus made it possible for the just requirement of the law to be fully met in us. Notice, it is not fully met *by* us but *in* us. Another thing to note is that "requirement" is in the singular indicating Paul does not have individual items of the Torah in mind but the overall intent or purpose of Torah. The word translated "requirement" is a word Paul used of Gentiles (1:23; 2:26). If this is important, then Paul was making the point that the requirement of the law is fulfilled in the Gentile as well as the Jew. By having come to accept as truth God's faithful act in Jesus that reconciled the cosmos to Himself, Christ-followers have been enlightened to God's purposes in the world and are being empowered by the Spirit to live out the intended purpose of Torah. This is not the purpose of the law as understood by the nationalistic Jewish teacher but the purpose of the law as lived out in the life of Jesus.

Those who walk according to the flesh focused on physical/outward ritual and through nationalistic pride used the rituals as a means of separation from the rest of the world. Their focus was on the dos and don'ts of the law with a persistent underlying fear of not being able to pull it off. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear." It is a life that boasts in human performance and is lived in the old epoch of Adam.

But those who walk according to the Spirit are empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the intended expectations of Torah. The Spirit teaches them the spiritual reality that God, in Christ, condemned Sin, and that Sin, as a category, is no longer to be the focus of their attention. Their boasting is in God rather than their own performance. Their focus is on the faithfulness of God, the inclusive nature of God's purpose for the world, and they live lives that seek reconciliation with all people.

Whether one lives according to the Spirit or according to the flesh is a matter of one's mind or focus. This walking or setting of the mind is a willful and persistent pattern of choosing to see and interpret life through the lenses that characterized the age of Adam or choosing to see and interpret life through the lenses of God's Spirit. Taking the path of the flesh leads to death. Such a life does not partake of the blessings of the covenant partnership God has provided because such a life is hostile to God, does not understand or seek to live according to the true intent of God's law, and therefore, and cannot please God. It cannot because such a life continues to want to live a life characterized by the age of Adam. To realize the blessings of life and peace in covenant relationship with God requires a mind seeking to live a life empowered and led by God's Spirit.

Christ-followers live in a tension between the age of Adam and the age of Christ. In one real sense they have left the age of Adam but yet they live in a world where Adam's influence still has its power. Though they will die physically, unless Jesus returns prior to their death, they have life because the Spirit of God dwells within them. This has come about because of the covenant-keeping faithfulness of God. There will be a day when God's transformation and reconciliation of the cosmos will be complete. On that day the Spirit who raised Jesus' dead body will give life to their mortal bodies.

Until that day Christ-followers are called to set their minds on following the path taught by the Spirit of God.

Spirit of Adoption: 8:12-17

Christ-followers live in the realm of the flesh and can choose to pursue the fulfillment of their selfish fleshly passions (live according to the flesh) rather than living according to the Spirit. Such a choice does not allow the blessings of covenant relationship with God to be a reality; instead it leads to death. But having been united with Christ, they can instead choose to put to death the deeds of the body. The deeds of the body are actions characteristic of the age of Adam that are controlled by the desire to satisfy human appetites. Choosing to die to those deeds, releases Christ-followers from any obligation to serve their fleshly passions because Jesus can now be their master.

The power to overcome the passions of the flesh is to be led by the Spirit of God (v. 14). Being led by the Spirit should take the reader back to the Exodus and Wilderness travels of Israel. By the time of Paul, Jews had come to understand the pillar of cloud and fire as being the Spirit of God. It must not be missed that this is another of the promises made to Israel (Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29), and that this is true of the Gentile Christ-follower is another indication that they have received the privileges promised to Israel. The idea of being led by the Spirit is a difficult concept to grasp for people who live in the realm of the flesh. While there is always a mystery as to how God's Spirit works in the world it is not as weird as is sometimes thought. Being led by the Spirit is a choosing to let the Spirit of God be the dominant influence in one's life rather than one's fleshly passions. So, it begins with a desire to be led. The grammatical construction of this verse gives some insight. For one thing "led" is in the passive voice indicating it is a work of the Spirit on the person. Another is that the form of this word indicates a "compelling force, or surrendering to an overmastering compulsion (Dunn, pg. 450). It describes an active force that has a degree of emotional intensity. It would be inappropriate however to understand this as some unrestrained ecstasy.

This document does not have space to discuss this in much detail but there a number of avenues that help open one's heart to the leading of the Spirit that need to be explored. Not every avenue is as effective for some as it is for others. Certainly meditation on scripture and meditation in prayer are two of the avenues. The important aspect of these is the listening aspect of meditation rather than the usual dissecting of a text or constantly speaking in prayer. Being in relationship with others who have shown by their lives that the Spirit is leading them is another important aspect of being led by the Spirit. God has placed His people in community with one another, and one reason for that is to help each other learn how to live in the realm of the Spirit. There are certainly other things that can be done that need to be searched out through the multitude of spiritual formation materials that are available. A life led by the Spirit is a heart reaching out to God rather than a focus on duties to be done.

Those who are being led by God's Spirit have the status of being children of God (v. 14-17). This is a status that was true of Israel (Deut. 14:1-2; Joel 2:23) and was connected to Israel's promises (Hosea 10:1). Now, in the age of Christ, that familial relationship is not only true of the Jew but also of the Gentile. This relationship is not

determined by circumcision, the law, or the doing of law, but is determined by the presence and activity of the Spirit in the life of a believer. External proof that one is a child of God is demonstrated by a life that is being led by the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit are seen in their lives (Gal. 5:22ff).

When Paul talks about fear and slavery, he is no doubt talking about life in the old epoch when focus was on maintaining Jewish distinctiveness and on exactness in obeying the law. To go back to the old way of living as described in chapter 7 would be like Israel returning to Egypt. Such a life enslaved the people to ritual not allowing the intent of the law to be lived out. The event of the man with the withered hand in Matthew 12 as well as other texts in the gospels that describe the conflict over Sabbath are examples of how an incorrect focus on the law brought fear and slavery. Such a focus no doubt left people in fear of not living up to the standards that kept them in fellowship with other Israelites.

Instead of slavery and fear, Christ-followers have the status of adopted children. While not a practice within Judaism, adoption was a part of the Greco/Roman culture. The adopted children are Gentiles. Israel would never be spoken of as adopted children. Israel is the natural child. This same distinction will be made in Romans 11 where Israel is described as the natural branches, and Gentiles as the grafted branches (11:21, 24). Love and respect for a father who chooses out of love to make someone their child drives away fear. The motivation and power for a holy lifestyle is not the law but God's faithful love and the presence of His Spirit. But it must not be thought that being children gives any indication of freedom to do whatever one's fleshly desire wants. In the honor/shame world of Paul, a child's relationship to his/her father carried obligations. The child was expected to live in such a way that honored his/her father.

Paul believed the presence of the Spirit in a believer's life to be more than an acknowledgement of a spiritual truth. There is also an active experiential component to the presence of the Spirit. At times the Spirit inspires the believer with words that are expressed with emotional intensity ("When we cry"). See also Galatians 4:6. Such a cry comes from the spirit of the Christ-follower in conjunction with the activity of the Spirit in his/her life. This cry of "Abba! Father!" is most likely something that would happen in a worship setting. This interaction between the believer's spirit and the Spirit of God is a witness to one's status as child of God.

"Abba" is a term of intimate familial relationship, which was used by Jesus when speaking of the Father. As Jesus spoke of God as Father, so does the believer. This relates to what will be said in verse 17 of being heirs with Christ. In today's world this expression is often compared to the modern term "daddy." While this is intended to express a close relationship, our understanding of this term is probably not something Paul would have been comfortable with. We live in a relational society. Our use of the term daddy does not express the reverence that Abba expressed in Paul's day where honor was of utmost importance. "Daddy" conveys too much sentimentality and familiarity to be synonymous with the Jewish concept of Father. In Jewish culture, Abba took full responsibility for the training, instruction, care, and provision for the needs of his children. This cry of Abba is an acknowledgement that God is the provider of all these things.

Israel was God's son (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1) and was heir of the promises to Abraham. Now the divine promise is connected to the experience of the Spirit and the

sharing of the promise to Abraham is expanded from something distinct to Israel to an inheritance that extends beyond Israel to the Gentile. The basis for confidence in being an heir with Christ is found in sharing the Abba relationship through the Spirit. The concept of joint heir with Christ is significant to Christology. Jesus' kingly rule is something given by God (1 Cor. 15:24-28). In Luke 22:29 Jesus spoke of his disciples sharing in the kingdom that had been given to him by the Father.

In 6:4-5 Paul talked about the believer sharing or being united with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Here in verse 17a Paul talks about the believer sharing in the inheritance. But there is a condition to receiving the benefits of being an heir. In verse 17b Paul expanded the scope of sharing with Christ to sharing in His suffering. This suffering is a natural consequence that comes from rejecting Sin as one's master and from living a life of love that leads to being rejected by a world characterized by the age of Adam.

The present suffering of a Christ-follower will continue as long as one lives in this world of fleshly existence. Although the believer in this world is already an heir, the full inheritance is still in the future. Believers suffer in this world now, as they look for the resurrection when their inheritance will be fully realized and they will be glorified with Christ. This discussion of suffering is a transition in the remaining verses of chapter 8 that serves as an introduction to chapters 9-15.

Conclusion

Paul moves once again to normative Christian experience, this time indicating that those in Messiah actually fulfill the righteous expectations stipulated in the Mosaic Law simply by living in the blessings brought about in God's work in Messiah [cf. Ez 36:22-32]. By choosing to live within the reality of God's gracious covenant acceptance in Christ, Jesus-believers do not dwell on their "failure to perform" and thereby feel the guilt and self-condemnation that come from that way of thinking. Instead, they focus on the spiritual reality that God, in Christ, condemned sin and so sin as a category is not a proper focus of attention. The proper focus is on the power of God and the reality of God's Spirit dwelling in us, which produces joyful life. Under Law, sin dwells in "I"; in Christ, the Spirit dwells in us.

Being led by the Spirit enables Christ-followers to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to recognize their status of adopted children. The Spirit of God working in conjunction with the believer's spirit inspires them to proclaim their intimate relationship with God as they cry, Abba, Father. It logically follows that being a child of God includes being an heir of His kingdom.

This does not exempt those who follow Messiah from suffering. In fact suffering is the natural consequence of being united with Christ and being a child of God. In putting to death the domination of Sin and in living a life of love, suffering with Christ in this world is normative. But as believers suffer they look toward receiving their full inheritance in the future when Christ returns. It was through obedient suffering that God highly exalted Jesus (Phil 2:5-11) and it will be in suffering with Christ that the believer is glorified.