

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Treatise on Freedom from Death (8:1-27)

In the previous treatise (7:1-25) we were introduced to an autobiographical discourse on Paul's existence as a man "in Adam," under the Law. His movement of thought, which began in 7:9, built to a crescendo at v 24 with the question, "who shall deliver me out of the body of this death (his existence in Adam)?"

His answer is found in the opening lines of chapter 8, which introduces us to the next treatise: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are "in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life (or living spirit) in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."

Paul was no longer Saul of Tarsus the man "in Adam" condemned by the Law. Rather, he was Paul the apostle, a man "in Christ," who, through the death, burial, and resurrection, which had occurred in his conversion to Christ had been set free (delivered/saved) from the law of sin and death. How did his conversion to Christ set him free from "sin and death"? This is the question addressed in this treatise of 8:1-27.

(1) Those Who Are "in Christ" Are Free from the Law of Sin and Death (8:1-11)

There is a contrast running through this text; a contrast between the flesh and the spirit. The Greek word for "flesh" (*sarx*) is translated as "human nature" and "carnality" in some translations. This is a theme we have seen Paul use again and again throughout this letter, the human flesh

(with its passions and self-willed desires) as contrasted with the human spirit (which has experienced new creation in Christ).

It is not a contrast between the flesh and the Holy Spirit, which appears in some versions. The Greek text does not have upper and lower case letters, the oldest MSS are written in all caps (uncials), *scripto continua* (with no breaks between the words and no punctuation). The capitalization we see in our English text is a result of the editorial work of the English translators. If they decide that the word *pneuma* is a reference to the Holy Spirit, they capitalize the “S” to indicate that. If they interpret *pneuma* as a reference to the human spirit, they translate it with a small “s.”

Throughout the NT one finds this editorial practice; and in some instances, the decisions of the translators is subject to serious challenge. Such is the case here in Romans 8. The challenge is not difficult to establish. The contrast between the flesh of man in Adam and the recreated spirit of man in Christ is found from chapter 2:28 following.

The Holy Spirit is clearly in the text of the 8th chapter, and the human spirit is spoken of as being empowered by the Spirit of God, but when this is the point the apostle is making, it is clear that this is what he is saying. However, not all references to *pneuma* in the Greek text are the Holy Spirit, as will be indicated in the modification of the text below.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the S/spirit (better, “spirit”)²For the law of the S/spirit (better, “spirit”) of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the S/spirit (better, “spirit”).⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the S/spirit (better, “spirit”) the things of the S/spirit (better, “spirit”).⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.⁷Because the carnal mind (literally, “thinking of or pertaining to the flesh”) is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.⁸So then, those who are in the

flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (better, "spirit), if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the S/spirit (better, "spirit" – i.e., the newly recreated spirit) is life because of righteousness. ¹¹But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (NKJV).

There is now no condemnation (for transgression of the *Torah*) to those who are "in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Prior to their conversion to Christ they were all condemned in Adam, now they are not. Why? Because they are now new creations "in Christ" and are freed from the law of sin and death.

Here in this treatise, Paul continues the theme of "conflict" introduced in chapter 7:14ff; i.e., the ongoing conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Those converted to Christ had died to their existence "in Adam" and had experienced spiritual renewal (new creation) "in Christ" - now their existence as spiritual beings was in tension with their existence as beings of flesh.

The selfish desires of our flesh are at odds with the unselfish desires of the newly created spirit. This same teaching is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians (See: Gal 5:16-26 for this same Pauline theme).

Paul introduces two new expressions into the discussion: "in the flesh" and "in the spirit" (cf. vv 8, 9). Paul is being typically Hebrew here. It is very common in the theological writings of the Hebrews to say the same thing in different ways, called parallelism; i.e., "this" expression is parallel to "that" expression. This is what Paul is doing here. To be "in Adam" is to be "in the flesh" and to be "in Christ" is to be "in the spirit."

"In the spirit" (in Christ) our new existence is superior to our old existence. The Christian man (man "in Christ), with the power of grace at work in his life, is set over against the existence of the man "in Adam", with the power of sin at work in his life. The battle is not over for us in our resurrection from the waters of baptism because our earthly existence is yet tied to our existence "in Adam" (we are yet locked into this existence by our flesh).

**(2) Those Who Have Experienced New Creation
Have Become Sons of God (8:12-17)**

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors (opheiletes – one under obligation or in bondage to) - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the S/spirit (better, “spirit”) you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (the firstfruit of the new creation – 1 Cor 15:42-57), if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Our existence is now characterized by "the spirit" rather than "the flesh." The controlling force of our life now is not the malevolent power of sin; rather, it is the benevolent power of grace - and the power of grace is greater than the power of sin. Grace is the reigning power of the spirit [the human spirit] (and the spiritual/otherworldly realm of existence), sin is the reigning power of the flesh (the physical or thisworldly realm of existence). As Christians we are freed delivered/ saved) from the powers of the present evil age (sin, the Law, and death) because we, through our death, burial and resurrection, have been translated out of the dominion of darkness into the reign/kingdom of the Son of his love (Col 1:13). Our lives are now characterized by an ongoing conflict between the flesh and the spirit, but the spirit can always reign supreme because the power of our existence (i.e., grace/*charis*) is superior to the power of existence in the flesh (i.e., sin/*hamartia*), (Rom 8; Gal 5:13-26; Col 2:20; 3:1-17).

Here we must address the role of the Spirit of God in this process. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God," reasons Paul, "these are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). In 8:9 Paul stated: "But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that **the Spirit of God** dwells in you. But if any man has not **the Spirit of Christ**, he is none of his." What is implied by the interchange of expressions "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ"?

It would appear that to Paul, the Spirit of God he knew was the Spirit of Christ. In 1 Cor 15:45-48, Paul describes Christ as "a life-giving spirit,"

then, in contrasting him with the first Adam who was a man of dust, identifies him as "a man of heaven" who, from the nature of the discussion in these verses, is a Spiritual Being.

Then in 2 Cor 3:17-18, Paul states: "Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where **the Spirit of the Lord** is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from **the Lord, who is the Spirit.**"

In Jewish theology **the Spirit of God** was the way the Jews spoke of manifestations of God's presence and power in the world. In the creation of the world it was the *Ruach Elohim* (Spirit of God) that moved to effect creation (Gen 1:1-2). To Paul, God manifested his presence and power in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and he continued to manifest his presence and power in the life of the early church through his Spirit.

The way that Paul had come to believe in the risen Jesus would clearly leave him believing that Christ in his resurrected existence was a Spiritual Being (cf. Acts 9:3-7; 22:5-11; 26:12-19; 1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:15-16). To Paul, Jesus was a Risen Lord who dwelt in the midst of his redeemed community through this mysterious presence called *Ha Ruach Elohim* – the Spirit of God. Paul could attribute God's presence and power at work in the midst of that community to either the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ, and be speaking in both expressions of the same "presence and power" - it was the presence and power of God.

Conclusion

Through our union with him in his death, burial, and resurrection we become one with him and his presence and power become realities in our lives. God has, through the ages, manifested his presence and power in our world, both in the extraordinary and in the ordinary. To the one who is "in Christ" God's presence and power may be seen: **through inward transformation** (Rom 8:12-16; Eph 3:16-21), **through mental and moral elevation** (Rom 8:5-8, 12-14; 12:2; Eph 4:23; Col 3:1-2), and **through outward observation** (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16-26). All of this change becomes a reality in our lives because of who and what we have become through our conversion to Christ, and our spirits learn from his Spirit that we have become sons and daughters of God (cf., 2 Cor 6:16-18).