

Notes on Romans 8:1-25

Romans 1-8 @ CNL

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8:1-11 — Life through the Son & the Spirit

Paul is parsing the transition from “sin’s reign in death” to “grace’s reign through righteousness to eternal life in Christ” (5:20-21); and most immediately Paul is picking back up the line of thought he had initiated at 7:5-6: what it means for us who have been *freed* from the condemnation of the law is that we are now enabled to serve in the newness of the Spirit.

8:1

now. See also 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:19,22; 7:6. The endtimes negative verdict against sin (“condemnation”) will not come in against “those in Christ Jesus” because of what God has done for them “in Christ Jesus” in the “now.” Verse 2 explains **why**. Verse 3 explains **how**. And verse 4 explains the “**so what?**”

8:2 — Why there’s no condemnation ...

Remember, Paul has been writing this section to “those who know the law,” meaning, I think, both Jews for whom the biblical narrative has shaped their self-understanding all their lives (“out of faith,” 3:30) and Gentiles who have recently stepped into that story (“through faith,” 3:30).

For the law of the Spirit of life ... from the law of sin and of death. The law’s (the Torah’s) true intent had been to offer life and to point to the age of the Spirit — (2:15,29; 3:21b; 7:10,14 — see Deut 10:16; 30:6,15). The law’s (the Torah’s) negative function of locking us all “under sin” was temporary (Rom 3:20; 4:15; 5:13,20; 6:14,20; 7:5, 7-25). Christ’s coming has effected a switch in the law’s administration — its curse function has ended, because the blessing it promised (the Messianic sin-offering and the regime of the Spirit) has now arrived. (In a sense, by the way, the letter to the Galatians is an extended argument based on this premise.)

in Christ Jesus has set you free. Those who by faith are united to Christ in his death and resurrection and have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit — they have been brought out of the Egypt of sin and death, and they have been promised citizenship in the kingdom of life (to borrow phrasing from NTW).

8:3 — How there’s no condemnation ...

God himself did what the law could never do — break sin’s power.

his own Son. See 8:32, and compare with Gal 4:4 (there simply, “his Son”). *His own Son* is Paul’s version of John’s “only begotten Son” (John 3:16). It’s Paul’s way of pointing to Jesus Christ’s pre-existence and divinity — see also Rom 9:5.

The sending of the Son condemns sin at sin’s strongest point, “the flesh” (3x). The sending of the Son breaks sin’s power in three respects:

- *in the likeness of sinful flesh* — the incarnation itself ... Jesus’s life of obedience to his Father’s will (Rom 5:19; Php 2:5-11) ... the one true, faithful son of Abraham who lived perfectly the terms of the covenant (perhaps the “faith of Jesus” verses, 3:22,25-26 — see also Gal 2:20; Php 3:9).
- *in the likeness of sinful flesh* — the whole redemptive design that begins with the separation of a seed of promise (Seth’s line over Cain’s, Abraham from out of Ur of the Chaldees, Jacob over Esau, Israel from out of the nations) was to concentrate sin into One who could stand in for all the rest of humankind and take the full measure of punishment. Note the “where” of 5:20 — “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” — that “where” was ultimately Calvary, where Isa 53’s Suffering Servant hung, “pierced for our transgressions ... to justify the many” (with Rom 4:25, compare Isa 53:4-6, 11-12).
- *and for sin*. Of course, Jesus comes to deal with sin in a general sense — Paul has already spoken of Jesus being offered up as a “propitiating sacrifice” (3:25), satisfying God’s wrath against sin. But here, Paul uses a most interesting phrase to talk about Jesus’s sacrifice, “for sin” (*peri hamartia*). In Lev 5:7-8; 6:25 (MT/LXX 6:18) this phrase refers to the “guilt offering” as opposed to the “whole burnt offering” (the propitiatory sacrifice) or the “scapegoat” (the expiatory sacrifice). The “guilt offering” is for unintentional, against-my-own-will sins — precisely the kind of sins that have provoked the inner anxiety of Rom 7:14-25. In other words, Christ’s sacrifice is so exhaustive that it takes care of the subtlest as well as the most obvious of our sins — the ones we can easily walk away from and the ones that will afflict us all the days of our lives. No matter how trifling, no matter how ginormous, they’ve been handled. How cool is that? (Sorry for the theological jargon!)

8:4 — The “so what?”

With our sin problem taken care of, the Spirit of God indwells us and enables a “walk” that fulfills the “just requirement of the law.” In a word, now it’s possible to “seek glory, honor and immortality” (2:7) without fear of condemnation due to failure. Now the commandments don’t bring death, but they do what their deepest intention was: shine the light on the path of *life* (7:10).

We’re given the power to live “according to the Spirit” and not “according to the flesh”

From Riley



to Ty Cobb

8:5-11 — simply a commentary on that dynamic.

The residence of the Holy Spirit in us is “Christ dwelling within us” (v. 10), for as Paul had written the Corinthians, “The Last Adam became Life-giving Spirit” (1Co 15:45. Luke had unpacked this in terms of Jesus ascending to the Father, receiving the Holy Spirit, and pouring the Holy Spirit out on the church — that’s what Pentecost was all about (Acts 1:8; 2:33).

Jesus had promised in the Upper Room: just as the Spirit had been “with them” (empowering Jesus’s ministry), now that Jesus was going to the Father, the Spirit would be “in them” (John 14:17) — the result would be a co-indwelling of Christ and his followers just like the co-indwelling of the Father and the Son: “I in my Father and you in me and I in you” (John 14:20).

To put it in terms of the exodus story: the Shekinah-Glory no longer dwells alongside the camp, but in the very hearts of those who are in the camp.

8:12-17 — **From debtors to sons — the Spirit bears witness to a sonship-established**

We owe Egypt nothing — there there was only slavery (revisiting themes of Rom 6). There’s no going back.

Instead, Paul puts before us a different path (though he opens with the idea of “obligation,” he only states the negative, merely implying the positive).

8:13

We're called, as NTW nicely says, "to see the death-bound inclinations of the present body for what they are, and to anticipate the verdict of the grave by putting them to death here and now." See Col 3:5-11 — we're "to say 'no' to the practices that carry the smell of death with them."

8:14-16

As Israel was called to follow the pillar of cloud and fire, we are called to follow the Spirit (compare Exod 13:21-22, etc.).

The "sonship" that Israel pictured is now ours (Exod 4:22, "Tell Pharaoh, ... 'Israel is my son, my firstborn'"; Isa 1:2; Hos 1:10; 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son") — witnessed to not *just* corporately, externally, transiently, but personally, internally, and permanently.

Jesus's "Abba, Father" in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36) implied the deepest and most personal of relationships. The Holy Spirit has given us a share in that same deep and personal sense of sonship.

8:17

If we have come to share Christ's sonship (as our prayer with him, "Abba, Father," implies), it means we also share in his incredibly glorious inheritance. But we need to understand that just as his path was cruciform, so is ours: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

8:18-25 — the Spirit prompts an urgent longing for our sonship-completed.

Remember 5:3-5? Suffering itself is a cause for celebration because it produces endurance, proven character, and a hope-that-will-not-shame-us — for "the love of God" has been poured out in our hearts. Paul is now about to close the loop: hope and patience (8:25) will see us all the way to glory — when we have finally been conformed to the image of God's son (8:29) we will come into the fulness of our adoption (the redemption/resurrection of our bodies, and the whole of creation (the venue of our sufferings) will itself be liberated from its "slavery to corruption," and there will be a new heavens and a new earth, where we will reign in everlasting life.

Now, Paul gives us perspective on why it is that it hurts so much between here and there — it's precisely because in the Endtime Spirit's indwelling, we've been given a foretaste of final glory (8:23). Through it all, the Father's and the Son's love will sustain us (8:35,39).