

Romans Summary
Week 14, Wednesday January 4, 2016
Romans 8:1-17

When Paul finishes the section describing Israel under the Law, apart from Christ and the Spirit, with the great cry “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death!” (Romans 7:24) he is not just spewing hyperbole. This is the very problem, not just Israel, but of all humanity — we stand under God’s judgment of death; condemnation. So, when Paul responds to his cry with “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25a) he is pointing at the answer, and carries on to explain in greater detail what he means.

Paul puts his conclusion right at the head of what he is saying because it is the most important thing — he’s emphasizing. He is now describing the picture of the Christian — those under Christ and the Spirit — rather than the Jew according to the flesh. The Christian does not, with their flesh, serve the Law of sin (7:25c) because the Law of the Spirit of life has set them free from the Law of Sin and Death (8:2). It is for this reason Paul can exclaim that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (8:1) How has the Law done this when Paul has already shown that the Law desired to give life but couldn’t?

Remembering that the problem was not with the Law but with the flesh (8:3), God dealt with the problem. God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh (actual humanity, but distinct as he was without the guilt of sin therefore the term likeness) and God passed judgment on the real agent responsible — sin itself — in the flesh of Jesus.

This is why Paul has said in chapter 5 and chapter 7 that a part of the role of the Law was to make the trespass of Adam abound, to make sin appear as sin, and to make sin totally sinful. God has brought sin to it’s fullest and to one place, Israel in general, and in the Messiah (Israel’s true representative) in particular so that God could deal with it once and for all. So, sin is condemned in the flesh (8:3).

The declaration that sin is sinful and deserves condemnation or death is the work of Torah — in other words, Torah fulfills its purpose to deliver a righteous verdict on sin. So the flesh is judged but those who walk according to the Spirit have life — are justified (8:4).

He explains further. The problem has been a mental one. There are two characteristics: those who think in fleshly ways are characterized by enmity with God and death, but those who think in Spirit ways are characterized by life and peace with God (8:5-7). Note also, the implication that those who are Spirit thinkers are able to be subjected to the Law of God (v. 7).

Paul affirms his readers, both ancient and modern, that they are in the Spirit, provided that they are indwelt by the Spirit (this is the new indwelling, rather than sin, which empowers and enables believers). However, if one does not have the Spirit of Christ (same Spirit as of God) then they do not belong to Christ. Really, though the expectation is that they/we have Christ (by his Spirit) in us, so even though our bodies will die, we are given life by the Spirit. What is this life?

Resurrection! It is the same Spirit through whom God raised Jesus from the dead who will also raise us — those in Christ and those in whom Christ is — from the dead. This is done through the agency of the Spirit. Note the trinitarian movement of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The implication or application of this amazing theology of atonement and Spirit is that we are under obligation to live according to the Spirit not the flesh. We need to anticipate the last day judgment that our mortal bodies will die and begin now putting the misdeeds of the body to death now.

Just as Israel is led out of Egypt and led through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and fire, so we are being led by the Spirit — not back to Egypt (slavery to sin and death) but to our inheritance (life and peace). This presence of God does not only lead us, but is the assurance of our identity as God's son. It is by this Spirit that we cry out, and join Jesus' term for God, Abba Father. By that cry God's Spirit witnesses to our spirits that we are in fact children of God.

What that means is that because we are children of God, we are his heirs as well. Because Jesus is the Heir, we are co-heirs with him. This has two dimensions: on the one hand because he rules the world, we rule with him. God is reconciling the world through us as well. On the other hand, we suffer with Jesus for the sake of the world. What's true of the Messiah is true of his people.

“Heirs of God” reflection and discussion questions:

1. Why does this legacy, that we are heirs and children of God, give us hope when all else fails?
2. Why is this message disturbing at the same time as it is comforting?
3. Why does Rutledge say that we have misunderstood the whole gospel if we think we can have the inheritance without pain?
4. Why is it important to know ourselves as a people guaranteed an inheritance?
5. Have you encountered a reckless person?