

Bible Study Romans 8

Chapter 7 ended with Paul's exasperation with the war within his soul. This ongoing war is between his righteous desire to do good and his fallen nature that constantly entices him to sin:

"I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Suddenly, his exasperation turns to thanksgiving and doxology:

"I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The first paragraph of chapter 8 explains the source of this optimism which overshadows his exasperation. It begins:

"8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."

There is a condition to this status of non-condemnation:

"...who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

Paul is saying that in order to be in a state of non-condemnation before God, we have to be in a state of walking. This is an important metaphor. When we walk, we are intentionally moving from point A to point B. That movement requires intention and effort on our part. Point A is our subjection to sin, which Paul experienced and bemoaned. Point B is being fully in union with God and no longer subject to sin. If we have the intention and are expending effort to move ourselves from point A to point B, then we are not under condemnation. If we stop that intentional and active movement from our passions towards the Kingdom of God, then we are in danger of coming back under condemnation.

Sharks swim in the ocean, but their muscular bodies are heavier than water. From the moment they are born, they must swim constantly. If they ever stop swimming, they will begin to sink. The longer they stop swimming, the deeper they will sink into ocean. If they stop swimming long enough, they will eventually be crushed by the pressure. It is so for spiritual life.

We do not take this walk alone. Paul says that we walk *"... according to the Spirit."* It is the third Person of the Holy Trinity that energizes and guides us the entire journey. Without the constant strengthening and guiding of the Holy Spirit, we would never be able to arrive at Point B, the Kingdom of God. This effort-requirement of "walking in the Spirit" to arrive at the Kingdom of God is the very definition of "deification" - how we are saved.

The Old Testament may have a prophecy of this principle. When the Israelites began their wanderings in the desert, the Bible states the following:



“So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people” (Exodus 13:20-22).

If the Israelites did not have the pillars of fire and smoke to lead them, they would have never arrived at the promised land. We who are called to “walk by the Spirit” must do the same.

The text also states that it was “the Lord” who led them. The supernatural smoke and fire were his visible manifestation. The manifestations of flame and smoke may indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of flames on the heads of the believers present (Acts 2:3). At the Transfiguration, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a “bright cloud” (Matthew 17:5), along with the voice of the Father, and the transfigured Son. The same Person of the Holy Trinity that led the Israelites in the wilderness leads us today.

The text restates the ongoing enmity between the fleshly passions and the deifying presence of the Holy Spirit, both present within us:

“² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For 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, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

The presence or absence of the Holy Spirit within us means everything:

“⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But 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.”

All Orthodox Christians have sacramentally received the Holy Spirit at our chrismations. This is our assurance of His presence within us. He is certainly present in many non-Orthodox Christians as well. As Christ told Nicodemus, *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).* A common saying among Orthodox is, “We know where the Spirit is. We do not know where He is not.”

Paul extends the thought that presence or absence of the Holy Spirit within us means everything. He is not only the source of our non-condemnation and the divine guide to our walk through life (verse 1), He is also One who unites us to the Father:

“¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For 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.’”

All true Christians are adopted children of God. This is a staggering concept. In the ancient pagan world, people had no such relationship with their gods and goddesses. They offered sacrifices to their gods and goddesses in fear, and hoping for favor. They did not love their deities, and they never believed their deities loved them. This letter the Romans informs the Christians that their God is utterly unlike the gods and goddesses they once worshiped. The God of the Christians loves them so much that He has adopted them into His family. Furthermore, this Father-adopted child relationship is intensely intimate. Strong’s concordance defines “Abba” (Αββᾱ) as “...the term of *tender endearment* by a beloved child – i.e. in an *affectionate, dependent* relationship with their father; “daddy,” “papa.”

This intimacy we have with the Father is enshrined in the Lord’s prayer. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom highlights this extraordinary closeness: *“And grant us, with boldness and without condemnation to dare to call You, the heavenly God, Father, and to say: “Our Father, who art in heaven...”*

“¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”

If the Holy Spirit is in us, then one of His many ministries to us is remind us of our familial connection to the “our Father” to Whom we pray. We need this reminder from time to time. It is a source of comfort, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is called the “Comforter.” However, the text tells us there are preconditions to this profound relationship. This passage begins with, *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God...”* (verse 14). If we are not “walking” (verse 1) or in that walk not, *“being led by the Spirit of*

God,” or if we do not wish to, ‘... suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (verse 17), then our familial status with God is in question.

The topic of suffering with Christ continues. Paul endured incredible suffering for Christ. He once listed some of them;

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Corinthians 11:24-26).

Yet, despite all that hardship in his life, as well as his coming martyr’s death he also wrote in this chapter of Romans: *“¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*

Suffering in this world and awaiting redemption in the next extends beyond Christianity. It includes nature as well.

“¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

When Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, nature also fell. This is often overlooked. Frustration came to the vegetable kingdom. God told fallen Adam *“Cursed is the ground for your sake”* and *“Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you... Death also came to the animal kingdom: “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”* This was the first animal sacrifice, with many to follow. It was from the disobedience of Adam and Eve that all the disorders of nature came into being – floods, earthquakes, diseases, etc.

However, when humanity is finally and fully restored in eternity, so will the disorders of nature.

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 66:17)

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1).

The animal kingdom will be renewed. Animals are now in a constant struggle to survive against predators. In the new earth their struggle will cease.



“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:6-10).

Now Paul introduces the theme of hope. Hope is one of the three chief Christian virtues: *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).*

“²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, one still hope for what he sees?

²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does with perseverance.”

These words echo the words in the book of Hebrews: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1).*

We have already seen several ways in which the Holy Spirit is vital to our spiritual walk: *“¹⁵ ...but you received the Spirit of adoption” and “His Spirit who dwells in you.”* The next few verses teach us another ministry of the Holy Spirit to us:

“²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

The Holy Spirit is also our prayer partner. Origen says, “Just as a sick man does not ask the doctor for things that will restore him to health, but rather things which his disease longs for, so likewise we, as long as we are languishing in the weakness of this life, will from

time to time ask God for things which are not good for us. This is why the Spirit has to help us.”

“²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

“When Paul speaks of ‘all things,’ he mentions even things that are painful. For if tribulation or poverty or imprisonment or famines or deaths or anything else that come upon us, God can change them into the opposite.” (John Chrysostom).

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Think of how cars are built. You have to have an assembly in place. You have to manufacture each part, often in far away places. All the parts have to be transported to the assembly line. The future car proceeds through the assembly line, and at each stop acquires new parts. After all the many different parts are systematically attached together in order, a complete car can be driven away. The above verses show the steps of our salvation from God’s perspective. It begins with foreknowledge of our free will, goes through several stages, but the end result is the host of the saints glorified in heaven.

The following passage is one of the great sources of comfort in all Scripture:

“³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

All humans experience some degree of sorrow and tragedy in our lives. During times these times, we can be tempted into thinking God has abandoned us. This passage assures us that calamities are not evidence that God has abandoned us. He is still with us, surrounding us in His love no matter how bad our circumstances.

“³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”