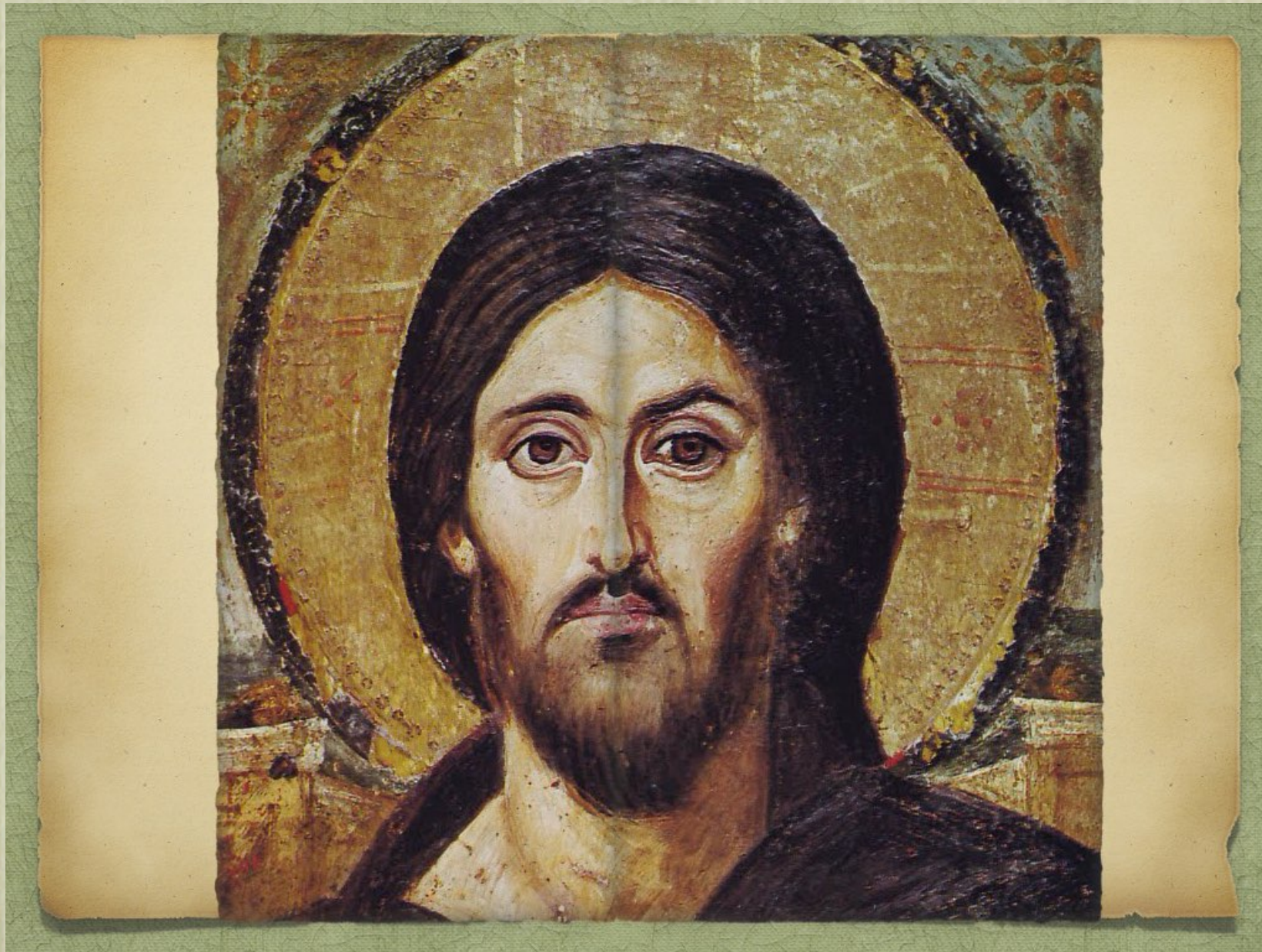


09. Romans 8:1-13



Romans 8:1-2

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in the Messiah Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Paul has been building up to this point from the beginning of the letter. He has been writing for everyone, Jew and Gentile. In a special way, however, he has been making the way as easy as possible for a Jewish reader to welcome the gospel as the way to be truly faithful to God and to Jewish tradition. A Jew who is 'in the Messiah Jesus' will lose none of his/her delight in God's revealed word. Now (see 3:21; 7:6), he/she will find that obedience is possible, as is communion with God's Spirit and the assurance of eternal life. Such a life fulfils all that Judaism ever promised. Indeed, it goes beyond all that it ever thought possible.

What then is the gospel? It is that ‘there is now no condemnation for those in the Messiah Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in the Messiah Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death’. It is no longer sin that exercises dominion. Rather, as Paul said earlier, it is ‘grace through justification leading to eternal life’ (5:21). Thanks to Jesus, we have been ‘discharged from the law’ (7:6). Now, we ‘belong to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God’ (7:4).

Previously, we found ourselves unable to obey the law. We knew that, before the divine tribunal, the law would stand and accuse us, and that we would face a judgment of condemnation (see 5:16,18): ‘Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them’ (Deuteronomy 27:26 – quoted by Paul in Galatians 3:10). Now, we are no longer ‘captive to the law of sin that dwells in us’ (7:23), suffering the effects of our slavery to it, swept along by the unruly desires of our unspiritual self and accused by the law. Now, thanks to Jesus’ life-giving Spirit (see 1Corinthians 15:45), we are living in the communion of love which he shares with the Father: ‘It is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20).

We can now ‘live by the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:25): the ‘Spirit of life’ (see 7:6), the Spirit of love that flows between the risen Jesus and God. When we welcome in faith this gift of God’s grace, we find ourselves with a new principle of life, and we are made able to bear fruit in love (Galatians 5:6), and to obey the law of God in which our inmost self has always delighted (7:22). We have been ‘set free’ (see 6:18,20,22), for ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Corinthians 3:17) – a freedom which the law was never able to achieve.

In these and the following verses, Paul takes us to the essence of the Christian experience of being ‘in the Messiah Jesus’, living by his Spirit. This relationship with Jesus has been at the heart of Paul’s message from the beginning of the letter. In the introduction he speaks of himself as a ‘slave of the Messiah Jesus’ (1:1), and of Jesus as ‘our Lord’ (1:4). The Christians in Rome are ‘called by Jesus’ (1:6), and Paul wishes them grace and peace ‘from the Lord Jesus’ (1:7). He concludes his introductory words by offering his thanks to God ‘through Jesus the Messiah’ (1:8).

Paul goes on to state that the final judgment will be ‘**through the Messiah Jesus**’ (2:16). He speaks of Jesus through whose faith and sacrificial self-offering God’s true self was revealed. We are offered a share in the righteousness of Jesus through sharing in his faith (3:21-26). Human sinfulness put Jesus to death, but divine fidelity raised him to life in order to make us righteous (4:25). The peace that Christians experience in relation to God is a gift that comes to us through Jesus who ‘**died for us while we still were sinners**’ (5:8). Living now in the glory of God, Jesus is the source of our hope, for ‘**we will be saved by his life**’ (5:10). We rejoice because of him (5:11).

The way Jesus gave himself in love on the cross drew people to want to be united to him. This desire found expression in wanting to be united to those who were Jesus' disciples. Welcome into the community was ritually enacted in the initiation of baptism. Wanting to be with him on the cross and to put to death that part of themselves that was being seduced by sin, those who were baptised accepted to go down with him into the grave, so as to rise with him to a new life here, and to eternal life hereafter (6:1-14). Now they 'belong to him' (7:4). God has saved them from the dominion of sin and death (7:25).

This belonging to Jesus is experienced through communion with his Spirit. Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit first in the address when speaking of Jesus' resurrection (1:4). Apart from that he has mentioned the Spirit only twice: as the one through the gift of whom God has poured love into our hearts (5:5), and as the source of our new life (7:6).

It is this experience of the Spirit upon which Paul now wishes to focus. When he speaks of the Spirit, he is thinking of the dynamic influence of God and of the risen Jesus in the lives of those who share the faith of Jesus. He is thinking of the many ways in which God's love is manifested in our lives. He is thinking of the powerful source of the new life that we have in Jesus. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Spirit of God is God as present and active: creating (Genesis 1:2), giving life (Genesis 2:7), renewing (Psalm 104:30), and guiding us through the words of his prophets. Paul is faithful to this tradition. Now, however, God's presence and action has been revealed in Jesus, and so Paul is thinking of the Spirit of God's love that binds the risen Jesus to God. This is the Spirit through whom God now creates, gives life, renews and guides us. It is through the gift of the 'Spirit of Jesus' that God fulfils the promise which he gave through Ezekiel: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you ... I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live' (Ezekiel 36:26 and 37:14).

Romans 8:3

God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

In the weakness of our humanity (the ‘flesh’, σάρξ), we were unable to throw off the yoke of sin. As Paul, speaking for all of us, wrote earlier: ‘I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members’ (7:22-23). The law could not liberate us from sin, but God could, and this was the mission which God gave to Jesus. This was the purpose of everything that Jesus was, and everything that Jesus said or did. Paul’s focus, as always, is on Jesus’ self-giving on the cross. It was in this culminating act of love that we received ‘the redemption that is in the Messiah Jesus’ (3:24). It is in contemplating Jesus on the cross that we see that God has ‘put him forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood’ (3:25).

God sent his own Son ‘**in the likeness of sinful flesh**’. His ‘flesh’ was the same as ours. He was one of us, a member of this sin-oriented and sin-affected human race. He was tested as we are in every way. He had to suffer the effects of sin in every aspect of his human situation, especially in the sinful way in which he was treated by others. He was even condemned by those who claimed to be carrying out God’s law, and he suffered the curse of rejection by his fellow Jews and death by hanging on a tree. As Paul wrote to the Galatians: ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”’ (Galatians 3:13).

His 'flesh' was the same as ours. However, in his case the 'likeness' was not exact, because though he shared the weakness of our human condition, unlike us, he did not sin. Though, 'for our sakes' God made him to be sin [in the sense just described], he 'knew no sin' (2 Corinthians 5:21). Though 'tested in every way as we are', he remained 'without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). He had to face the forces unleashed by sin, but because they were unable to deflect him from his faith in God and from his love, he remained, throughout the testing, in communion with God.

He conquered sin in the flesh. His victory showed that sin is not invincible. His gift of the Spirit enables those who welcome the Spirit in faith to be freed from sin (to be 'justified') and to live in communion with God.

In him we are enabled to resist the desires of the flesh, and to share in his victory over sin. We are enabled to remain in divine communion in this world, and so to be declared righteous at God's tribunal and to inherit the glory of God in which final salvation consists.

Romans 8:3-6

God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death. To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Through his loving obedience to God in the actual circumstances of his life, Jesus fulfilled ‘the just requirements of the law’. This is what Paul means by ‘the obedience of faith’ (1:5). Through his loving gift of himself to us, Jesus enables us also, in communion with him and through the power of his Spirit, to fulfil these just requirements, and to live a life of obedience to God. This is provided we do not let our decisions be determined by the flesh. Grace has always to be welcomed. Faith is not a once for all decision. Under the impulse of the Spirit it must be renewed daily so that we ‘walk according to the Spirit’.

There are two ways in which we can choose to live. One way is to live for the self – not the ‘inmost self’ that delights in the law and responds to the Spirit – but the self that is directed and dominated by our self-focused desires. The other way is to live by the Spirit. Paul developed these contrasting ways in his letter to the Galatians in which he pleaded with them to ‘live by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh’ (Galatians 5:16). He went on to list some of the ‘deeds of the flesh’, and by way of contrast some of the fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:19-23). He concluded: ‘Those who belong to the Messiah Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:24-25).

If we follow the desires that do not come from the Spirit, there is only one outcome: the death of separation from God: ‘**The end of those things is death**’ (Romans 6:21). If we follow the desires that well up from our ‘inmost self’ in response to the Spirit, we will experience life: ‘**the end is eternal life**’ (Romans 6:22).

‘To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life’ (Romans 2:7).

‘Just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace exercises dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus the Messiah our Lord’ (Romans 5:21).

Communion with God brings ‘peace’: ‘**Justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**’ (Romans 5:1).

Romans 8:7-9

For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law — indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of the Messiah does not belong to him.

Paul speaks again of the inability of a person whose mind is set on the desires of the flesh to submit to God's law or to please God. As Christians God is offering us 'the Spirit of the Messiah': the Spirit of love that is the communion between Jesus and God. We are in the Spirit, for we are caught up in the communion of love that is the life of the risen Jesus. We are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. In drinking in God's love 'we were all made to drink of one Spirit' (1Corinthians 12:13). 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' (Galatians 4:6).

Because the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, through the gift of the Spirit we ‘**belong to the Messiah**’ – an expression frequently used by Paul to describe what it means to be a Christian (see Galatians 3:29 and 5:24; 1Corinthians 3:23 and 15:23; 2Corinthians 10:7). Through the gift of the Spirit, we are drawn into the loving of the triune God in whom we live and who has made his home in the depths of our ‘**inmost self**’ (Romans 7:21).

Romans 8:10-13

But if the Messiah is in you, though the body (σώμα), is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised him from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh (σάρξ), to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body (σώμα), you will live.

Because the Spirit dwells in us, Paul can say that ‘the Messiah is in you’. This is at the heart of Paul’s own Christian experience: ‘It is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20).

‘Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus the Messiah is in you? (2Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus is breathing into our being the breath of God's love. 'The Spirit is [our] life because of righteousness'. God's giving us this Spirit is what we mean by 'justification' (5:18), and the ensuing communion in love is what we mean by 'righteousness' (5:21). Without this communion our mortal bodies, because of sin, would die; that is, we would be separated from God, the only source of life. Because of the indwelling Spirit, we live, and because it is this Spirit which 'raised Jesus from the dead' (see 1:4; 4:24; 6:4), and because the risen Jesus 'became a life-giving Spirit' (1 Corinthians 15:45), we are assured that not even physical 'death' will be able to separate us from him. We will 'reap eternal life from the Spirit' (Galatians 6:8). 'Through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died' (1 Thessalonians 4:14). 'God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power' (1 Corinthians 6:14). 'We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence' (2 Corinthians 4:14).

The person whose cry is heard in Romans 7 was caught 'in the flesh', unable to submit to God's law, 'unable to please God'. Now another life is possible if we accept it. Notice the recurring 'if' through verses nine to eleven. Tragically, it is possible for us to turn away from the extraordinary grace of communion which we have received. It is possible to turn again to the distracting and corrupting enticements of our sin-prone nature. If we do this, and choose against the Spirit, we are bound to die. There is no other possible outcome. When the Spirit of Jesus calls us to love, we must put to death ('mortify') any impulses arising from our unspiritual selves that resist the call. We must give ourselves in love. If we do this, we will live.