

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 8:1-17
“New Life In The Holy Spirit”

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(Connection/Pentecost Sunday)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

ROMANS 8:1-17 "NEW LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT"

Spirit/of Christ/of God/ of Sonship (14x), Christ/Jesus (6x), Son (1x), Abba (1x)

RELIEF	A1. vv.1-2 THESIS 1: NO CONDEMNATION FOR BELIEVERS BUT FREEDOM (*Legal Image).		
1*	1	There is therefore <i>now</i> no condemnation //8:34, New Regime! 5:16-18, Legal Metaphor = No Judgment Against Disciples	
	2	for those who are in Christ Jesus. <i>In Realm Of Messiah Jesus, Assertion (v.1) How Can This Be? (v.2)</i>	
	2	For the law (rule) of the Spirit of LIFE in Christ Jesus //7:6b, law = Personal Union, New Rule, New Location	
	2	has set you (sg.) free from the law (rule) of sin and death. p.v., Testimony, Experiential Truth, 2 Cor 3:17	
BATTLE	B1. vv.3-9 WARRANTS 2, FOUR BASES: CHRIST & THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US. 3 Laws		
		Form = Thesis (v.1-2) + Basis (vv.3-11) // Thesis (v.12) + Basis (vv.13-17)	
		1) vv.3-4 Christology: Sending Of The Son, Incarnation & Atonement. Trinitarian Logic	
3	For 1	a For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: <i>Sinful/Fallen Nature, Torah Is Good</i>	
		b sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, <i>Lev. 5:6-8, From Outside, Jn. 3:16</i>	
		b' he condemned sin in the flesh, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 2:7-8, Defeats Sins Power, Cross Of Jesus	
4	a'	in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, p.v., Internal Divine Empowerment	
		who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Link, Ezek. 11:19-20, Source Of Dynamism	
		<i>Flesh = Life Dominated By Self, Idolatry, Rebellion; Spirit = Set Free</i>	
		2) vv.5-6 Two Mindsets/ Orientations, Two Ways: Death/Life. Mind Follows Heart	
5	For 2	a For those who live according to the flesh <i>Flesh Two Types Of People</i>	
		set their minds on the things of the flesh, <i>Flesh Not Two Parts Of A Person</i>	
		b but those who live according to the Spirit <i>Spirit God As Central Concern</i>	
		set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <i>Spirit New Motivation</i>	
6	a'	To set the mind on the flesh is death, <i>Flesh Works Of Flesh (sarx), Gal. 5</i>	
		b' but to set the mind on the Spirit is LIFE and peace. <i>Spirit 5:1, Fruits Of Spirit, Gal. 5</i>	
		<i>2 Orientations, 2 Ultimate Outcomes</i>	
		2') vv.7-9 Two Mindsets/ Orientations, Two Outcomes: Hostile/Belong.	
7	For 3	a For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; <i>Flesh 7:7-25, Persons Outside Christ</i>	
		b' it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot; <i>Atheists As Wounded Theists</i>	
8		and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <i>Heb. 11:6, Alienated Persons</i>	
9	a'	But you (pl.) are not in the flesh, you (pl.) are in the Spirit, <i>Spirit 3rd→2nd Per. New Realm</i>	
		b' if (since) in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you (pl.) <i>If (vv.9, 10, 11), A Real House (oikein)</i>	
		Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <i>Phil. 1:19</i>	
		<i>Spirit = Gift Of Risen Lord = Spirit Of Christ</i>	
VICTORY	1') vv.10-11 Christology: Raising Of The Son And Of Believers By The Spirit.		
10	But	a But if (since) Christ is in you (pl.), v.2 Alternative Form, Indwelling Christ (v.10) // Indwelling Spirit (v.11)	
		b although your bodies are dead/ because of sin, <i>Outer/Inner, Two Realities Simultaneously</i>	
		the Spirit is LIFE/ because of righteousness. <i>Rightly Related To God In Trust, Resurrection</i>	
11	a'	If (since) the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you (pl.), <i>Present/Future Benefits</i>	
		b' he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead <i>Life (4x), Rom. 1:3-4 = Spirit As Agent, a-b//b'-a'</i>	
		will give LIFE to your mortal bodies also/ through his Spirit which dwells in you (pl.) <i>m. Sota. 9:15</i>	
		<i>Metaphors: Legal: No Condemnation, (v.1), Financial: Now No Debt (v.12)</i>	
ALLEGIANCE	A2 v.12 THESIS 2: WE ARE NOT DEBTORS TO THE OLD NATURE (*Commercial Image).		
12*	So	So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13:14, Owe It Nothing! Direct Address	
		<i>Deeds Produce Destiny, We Owe, But Not To Our Old Master</i>	
DYNAMIC	B2 vv.13-17 WARRANTS 2, FOUR THE BASES FOR OUR NEW FREEDOM.		
		v.1 = Calvinist Stronghold, v.13 = Arminian Stronghold	
		1) v.13 Two Mind Sets And Their Corresponding Ends, A Promise //vv.5-6. Real Choice	
13	For 1	For if (since) you live according to the flesh/ you will die, <i>Gal. 5:16-17, Life Pointed In Wrong Direction</i>	
		but if (since) by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body/ you will live. <i>Gal. 5:24, Mortify Desires</i>	
		<i>Battle, New Power To Self-Correct</i>	
		2) v.14 Spirit And Sonship Go Together, Ongoing Guidance (Gal. 5:18). Likeness, Living Bond	
14	For 2	For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons (daughters) of God. <i>3rd Person, //v.3, Guidance/Adoption</i>	
		<i>Still Live In Fallen World And Its Comprehensive Pressures</i>	
		3) v.15 Spirit Of Sonship Received Replaces Slave Spirit. Evidence, Faith As Experiential	
15	For 3	For you did not receive the Spirit of Slavery to fall back into fear (anxiety), //7:14-25, Of The Powers	
		but you have received the Spirit of sonship (adoption). <i>Living Link, Belong Securely To The Family</i>	
		<i>On A First Name Basis With God</i>	
PRAYER	4) vv.16-17 Example: Prayer To Abba/Father Demonstrates The New Reality. Spirit (16x)		
16	When	When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 1 st Pl., Aramaic Abba, Gal. 4:6, Mk. 14:36, Deep Trust, Ex. Of Sonship: Prayer	
		it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <i>sym, Dialog, Inner Witness</i>	
17		and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, <i>syn, Inherit His Kingdom</i>	
FUTURE		provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. <i>syn, 5:2, Reality: Already/Not Yet</i>	

A Brief Treatment Of Romans 8:1-11, 12-17

Romans 8:1-11, 12-17 are the first two of five thought units that compose the next section (8:1-39). Each has the same structure: A) An Assertion (vv.1-2, 12, 18, 22-23, 28), and B) Reasons, most often using *for/Gk. gar* to indicate links in the chain of supports (vv.3-11, 13-17, 19-21, 24-27, 28-39). The first two theses indicate conclusion (*Therefore* v.1) and inference (*So then*, v.12), the last three are knowledge claims: *I consider* (v.18a), *We know* (v.22, v.28). The phrase *in Christ Jesus* (vv.1, 2 // v.39c) is an inclusion for the section. Verse 1 announces a new reality, “There is *now* no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.” The verdict we expected is set aside because of a change in status and location; we are now *in Christ Jesus*, in his realm of power. But on what basis? Verse 2, “For (*gar*) the rule of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” We’ve been removed from the tyranny of *sin and death*; we now live free *in Christ Jesus*. The passive *has set you free* (v.2) indicates the work is by divine agency. We have been forgiven and rescued out of death’s prison camp. So what now?

The four warrants in B1 (vv.3-11) give reasons and form a 4:2 concentric pattern. Three uses of *for* (vv.3, 5, 7) introduce the parts with a contrasting *But* (v.10) as a climax. At the center (2. vv.5-6 // 2' vv.7-9) are contrasts between two opposing mind sets: *flesh* and *Spirit*. The first ends in *death*, the second in *life and peace*. The one who lives independently of God is hostile to and cannot please God, but because *the Spirit* indwells believers, we belong to and seek to please God. Affinity is restored. The frames (1. vv.3-4 // 1' vv.10-11) are Christological, the first proclaiming incarnation and atonement, “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,” the second resurrection, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you....” *Spirit* is used ten times in the unit (vv.2, 4b, 5 [2x], 6, 9 [3x], 11 [2x]) with some variation (*Spirit of life*, *Spirit*, *Spirit of God*, *Spirit of Christ*). We live in a new reality.

The law of Moses set good limits but cannot change the human heart, weakened as we are through sin’s debilitations. In his coming, the Son identified fully with our humanity, sin excepted, and in his death as an innocent renders God’s condemnation of sin; it is marked for death. We live under a new administration. God’s will is now fulfilled inwardly with the aid of the indwelling Spirit (vv.3-4). To live in the old regime and lifestyle is *death*; to live under the new with full attention yields *life and peace* (vv.5-6). In the old way we live independently of God— in hatred of the same— and cannot submit to God’s law or please him. But the Spirit gives new desires (vv.7-9). We still have mortal bodies, but there is already a new personal power at work within us. The same Spirit that energized Jesus’ resurrection will generate ours as well (vv.10-11). The shift from 2nd person singular address (v.2) to 3rd person description (vv.3-8) and back to 2nd person plural (vv.9-11) lends variety. The guilty verdict is vacated, God’s Spirit is now within; we are family; we pray as we suffer; we shall be fully glorified! This is the path *with Christ*.

The second thesis (A2, v.12) makes an inference (*so then*), invokes direct address (*brethren*), and switches the metaphor from legal (*condemnation/law*) to financial (*debtors*). We owe nothing to the old structures of corporate control. Four warrants follow (B2. vv.13, 14, 15, 16-17). As above, the first three are introduced by *for* (vv.13, 14, 15), the fourth with an example of prayer (vv.16-17) as a climax. Again, a density of *Spirit/spirit* language is present, five with reference to the divine Spirit (vv.13, 14, v.15 [2x], 16), one to the human spirit (v.16). An alternation of 1st person plural (v.12), 2nd person plural (v.13), 3rd plural (v.14), 2nd plural (v.15), and 1st plural (v.16) lends variety. Verse 13 echoes vv.5-6 and restates the stakes of death and life. Verse 14 takes the indwelling Spirit (v.9) as the mark of God’s offspring. Verse 15 speaks of security in a new relationship free of fear. In the prayer cry *Abba/Father* (characteristic of Jesus), the Holy Spirit gives witness we are children and so co-heirs with a bright future (vv.16-17).

NEW LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Any who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

No such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit, but some don’t know it!

ROMANS 8 : 9 b

I grew up in a house of books. Atlases full of maps because Dr. Jim was once a nineteen year old navigator taking star sightings and plotting coordinates on charts of the Pacific in combat control on an Attack Cargo fresh from the Kaiser shipyards in Providence, Rhode Island.¹ There were history books, a favorite being biographies of Winston Churchill, along with histories of medicine, from Galen in 2nd century Rome to William Osler at late 19th century Johns Hopkins, with the memoirs of Civil War surgeons being particularly gruesome. Medicine was— for him— not only a scientific but a humane discipline that required more than expertise in anatomy and pathology. To know the culture, the habits and histories of people enabled you to properly situate their maladies, and sometimes a proverb or referral to A.A. or a pastor was the medicine needed. Encouragement was a tonic. And there were books of poetry, not read in silence but aloud to savor the sounds and subtleties.

Then there were the medical journals that came monthly by the dozen, a pile to either side of his easy chair and a stack beside his office chair. He’d scan and read, tear out articles to file and even— from time to time— call the lead author to ask about a clinical application. I’ve seen him write the patient’s name at the top of the article with his fountain pen and blow the ink dry because of the slickness of the paper on which it was printed. That always amazed me as a kid, how he did it. “Dr. Townsend, this is one of your students you haven’t met. I’m a country doc in South Carolina, and I’ve just finished your article on the new hypertension drug.” Then they’d talk as colleagues. I sheepishly admit to using the same technique when— on occasion— I call a famous scholar whose book I’ve just read. “Dr. O’Conner (in Jerusalem no less!), I’m one of your students you haven’t met. I have six of your books on my shelf and studied with your colleague Dr. Charles Talbert,” and then we

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Turandot_(AKA-47).

talk. I've had some fascinating conversations. And when I read their books again, I hear their living voice as we continue the dialog.

My home was— as I now understand— *a rich learning environment*. School was eight to three, but learning was all day long. Life was full of surprises, but the trick was to process it through a wide range of knowledge in order to make a good response. But I must admit that the books and journals I loved best as a ten year old had names like *The Annals of Tropical Medicine* or *The Medical Oddities of Africa*, and the grosser the better; because that's how it is with boys. We love the *icky!*

One of my early learnings from such sources concerned the guinea worm, a parasite of central Africa. It begins as a larvae and hitches a ride in a millimeter-long crustacean called *Cyclops*. When a human drinks from a stream, *Cyclops* enters the stomach where gastric juices make short work of it, but the larvae are not so easily dissolved. Instead, the little critters poke holes in the intestine and go for a swim. After three months, male and female larvae get together. A year later a full-grown guinea, the width of a paper clip wire and up to a yard long, begins to move through the body of its human host with tremendous pain. The worm finally pokes out of the body— likely through the foot. Once exposed, it can only be removed a few centimeters a day. Otherwise the worm dies, resulting in infection and possibly death. The painful process takes weeks or months. The news is that the World Health Organization is very close to eradication, with only 22 reported cases in 2015.²

It was after reading an article on the parasite in 1999— when there were still 3.5 million cases a year— that Pastor Kevin Bidwell drew a three part analogy with sin, which fits since both are *gross* and cause much pain:

‘First,’ he writes “sin is easy to get involved in. Drinking water from a stream seems simple and harmless, so often does sin. Second, sin is difficult to get rid of once it's taken hold. When it *pokes its head* out of our lives, we recognize it has to be dealt with. Forgiveness comes quickly, but getting free from its pull can be slow and agonizing. Finally, like the guinea worm, sin left unchecked can kill you.”³

Now if I was to add to the analogy I'd add that sin is a condition we're all born

² www.cdc.gov/parasites/guineaworm/index.

³ Preaching Today.com search under Romans 8:1-17.

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with, not something we contract; the disease is present before ever the symptoms start to show, which is why we all think of newborns as innocent when they are helpless. Some diseases you innocently contract or— less innocently— bring upon your self, but this one is first inherited and then distorting and finally fatal.

This awful thing called *sin* is mysterious in its origins but universal in its spread as an almost allergic reaction to God and an inner bent towards living independently of our Maker and to acts of treachery and meanness and evil, as if some alien power or parasite used us as a host organism, which it indeed does.⁴ Paul says in verses 7 through 8 that this state of being is characterized by hostility to God and by an inability to submit to God’s law because of a rebel spirit that wants to do everything but please God. And that is all of us in our native state.

Once- we are told in the prequel of Genesis— it was not so. We lived in the perfections of Eden with an open relationship with our Creator nurtured through long walks together in the cool of the evening to review the events of the day. But then doubts were planted in our childlike minds by a clever talking snake who told us God was holding out on us, and so we believed the oldest lie, distrusted our Maker and violated the one thing that was forbidden for our good, which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we bit the sweet fruit everything soured and nothing was any longer innocent or pure. Everything was now spoiled, and most especially us on every axis: with ourselves, with one another, with the natural world around us, and ultimately with the God whose boundaries we crossed to our harm.

We are now broken, the image of God shattered within us, living in naked shame and mutual blame and constant vulnerability and a dark cloud of fear between us and God. Now we can only dream of such bliss and wonder, “What happened to us and our world? How did our garden home end up as a foreign land under such a cruel government and us with such dark inner compulsions? And why does this God

⁴ The gloomy, honest picture of our common condition is preserved in our U.M. Doctrinal Standards, Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin, “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” (*BOD 2012*: 65). For another of our doctrinal standards, see John Wesley’s Standard Sermon No. 44, “Original Sin,” www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-44-Original-Sin.

we hear about and whose handiwork we observe seem so far away?”

Now because we’ve each given our assent as demonstrated by our actions, the just verdict against us all is judicial condemnation, a universal death sentence. And though we search and strive with all our might, the cure for what ails us is not among us. For all our nearly god-like capacities that yet remain in weakened form, none of them— not science, not smarts, not art or philosophy, not engineering, not self-help, and not any of the forms of human religion— can cure us because we are all thoroughly implicated, as is all of our work. If all are blind, only a sighted person can help us find our way. If all are deathly ill, only a healthy one can be the antidote and vaccine. If all are guilty, only a pure soul can offer fresh innocence. If all are wrong with God, only one who is righteous can bring the truth. All our stuff, impressive as it is, all comes out of the same, stinking human stew. If help is to come, it must be from outside. It must come *to us* because it will not come *from us*. We’re not all as bad as we might be, though some of us across history are truly moral monsters, but after a certain point it’s just statistics and how much power and opportunity you have. We’re all in this together, the entire human family, a lump of resistance and rebellion against a God both holy and true, just and loving, wise and persistent.

Only one who comes into the world without the systemic parasite of sin, and that’s Jesus of Nazareth, God’s only Son; only one sent to us at just the right time from outside our world and from inside the Triune life of God can help. And since Jesus is a full participant in our humanity without being a carrier of the same moral disease, he can help us in a way no one else is able. And what a remarkable, singular life he lived, like none other, a thing unseen until this moment. No sin, no rebellion, just vulnerable accessible humanity consistently surrendered in trust to God his Father and wide open to what the Holy Spirit wanted to do through him at any and every moment, his every word and deed the stuff of divine revelation in a polluted world: light in our darkness, life in a world of the dead, truth to banish the lie that we are forgotten and abandoned and all on our own.

The technical name for the comprehensive, debilitated, alienated state in which we now live is the little Greek word *sarx*, most often translated as the word *flesh* and sometimes— more theologically— as *fallen human nature*. For Paul *flesh* is not necessarily the same as *body*, nor is it just the visible component of the human person as opposed to the invisible *soul* or *spirit*. *Flesh* is not a part of who we are but the whole of the human person set over against God. It is life lived independently, life lived rebelliously, life lived ignorantly, life lived in the wrong direction and from the wrong center; it is life pointed away from its source and headed for death and

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destruction. *Sin* is the larvae of which *sarx* is the full blown *wormy* disease in all its horrific personal and social consequences. It consumes the whole person and bends a society towards violence and injustice. We and our world reflect each other.

So what's it like here on *Planet Sarx*, the land East of Eden among folk like us? Because life is a story, only a story will do, in this case from Rich Doebler:

“Some years ago,” he writes, “while our family was vacationing in northern Minnesota, we visited a small fair near the town of Babbitt. When I climbed into the Tilt-O-Wheel with my three kids, we hoped the operator would give us a decent ride— even if we were the only ones.

The first few minutes were fun. We laughed and enjoyed the funny feeling inside our stomachs. But after a while, it got to be not so much fun. I wanted to get off, but couldn't. Centrifugal force pressed me against the back of the car. Every time we spun past the operator, I looked at him, ‘Please! Read my eyes! I need to get off!’ But the ride kept going. I had no control. I was caught, going around in circles, held down by a merciless carnival ride operator.

Only after what seemed like three or four hours did he relent. I looked completely green by this time. I staggered off the platform and made it about 20 feet, where I bent over and lost my breakfast. Of course, my kids gathered around, cheering me on. They thought this was the best part of the ride.”

Doebler continues:

“If you're caught in the grip of a diabolical ride that started out fun but has turned into addiction (the very essence of what sin does); if you're going around in circles, powerless to get off, you know the helpless feeling of losing control of your life. You know what it means to need God's supernatural help to stop the ride so you can escape.”⁵

I don't know who said it, but it's true, “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”⁶ And why is that? Because it's goal as a personified spiritual power is to kill

⁵ PreachingToday.com search under Romans 8:1-17.

⁶ <https://sermonquotes.wordpress.com/2009/02/06/sin-will-take-you-farther>.

you and separate you from God. This is our common human condition.

Now perhaps you have a less severe analysis and diagnosis, something a bit more modern, one that typically begins with the hopeful phase, “If only we would...” but I have not found another with the same explanatory power as the biblical doctrine of original sin. There’s been a rebellion in the angelic realm with a cosmic division of loyalty into good and evil; there’s been a parallel betrayal and rebellion in the human realm in which all are implicated, and together the teaching of supernatural evil and human sin have great power to illumine our world at multiple levels.

But none of this is good news, though it may be something of a relief to finally get an adequate handle on the problem, why our troubles are so pervasive and entrenched and resistant to our best efforts. In such a world, despair is an honest option, and for some the despair of addictions, of substances to numb the soul and quell anxiety. Retreat into personal security and pleasure is live option for those with the resources or power to do so. Atheism is an option for some, though the rational evidence is against it and only about four percent hold it, though- oddly enough- some of them still pray!⁷ The creation of so many philosophies and religions is evidence of a continual search for what cannot be found unless it is revealed.

But there’s a minority report available for those who want to explore it. There’s enough evidence for the invisible God for the curious to explore and find, but not so much evidence as to be apparent to the disinterested. It’s the story of an invisible Creator who left thumb prints on the pages of creation and a quiet echo of the divine voice in human conscience and the deep longings of the heart. And who- when the time was right called a single man- one Abraham- to a walk of trust that would eventually grow into a tribe of Hebrews to be sent down and then rescued by Moses from Egypt and who- after their trials and failures over forty years- would enter the land of Promise to become God’s own tribe, the people of the covenant, the Jews, God’s stubborn minority report concerning the one true God and his expectations and plans for all the world.

And it was from them, again at the right time- when the infrastructure of the Roman world was in place with roads and shipping lanes and a postal service and legal order and a chance for the message to spread rapidly- that a man Jesus left his village and showed up in the public announcing a new reality, that in him the rule of the Father had shown up at ground level in the power of the Holy Spirit to offer what

⁷ www.baylor.edu/artsandsciences/index.php?id=59330.

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people most needed, which was a healed relationship with their God, and with him came many other benefits: physical healing for whole lives, spiritual freedom for tormented minds, occasional resuscitations of the dead to put sin's greatest power on notice it did not have the final word, a new community of followers around a new brand of Savior, full of grace and truth, God the Son on public display, his every move a fresh reflection of what divine love was doing through him as nowhere else.

It was a jolt to conventional Judaism, and many resisted this unlettered upstart and his claims to forgive as if he knew the mind of God about every person. And it was—some said—a threat to political stability since Rome was highly resistant to Jews stirring dreams of freedom and restoration. And everywhere Jesus went, hope and help came near. There was a freshness and authority to his teaching that came straight from the heart and mind of the one he called *Abba* in his native tongue.

Now because his teaching on God's rule was accompanied by the power of love to heal, he earned credibility and great crowds in a world of only primitive medicine. And when he spoke harshly to the religious frauds and hypocrites, all felt the sting of his truth. Could this be the Messiah? And perhaps most remarkably of all, Jesus was approachable, humble and gentle, with time for children and a touch for lepers and for all the questions of the fishermen and tax farmers who were his inner circle of apprentices. Never in a rush, but always at the right place at the right time. A robust and perfect life, thirty years hidden, three years traveling, a life of truth and love in one package, and when he looked at you and caught your eye, all was known. But why here? And why now? And why him? And why us? Because, Paul said, *it's the right time*.⁸ The stage is now set.

But then, one Passover weekend—AD 33 is our best guess—*they got him* after long observation, and by *they* I mean the Jewish Temple hierarchy and the Roman overlords of occupation. An insider tip, a garden arrest, trumped up charges, irregular jurisprudence, passed off to Pilate, traded in by Judas and then traded in for Barabbas at the cries of the crowd, whipped nearly to death and then judicially crucified naked by a Roman death team between two other stripped Jewish freedom fighters until—after six hours of exquisite torture—he gurgled a final shout from fluid filled lungs and collapsed in death, whereupon a secret admirer assured Pilate he was indeed dead and received permission to give the pitiful man from Galilee the minimal honors of a burial before sundown, lest the whole land be defiled.

⁸ Galatians 4:4a.

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Faithful woman saw the process from the cross to the tomb. The great dream ended as love died. Shocked at the horror, numbed with grief. Hope was gone, and the men went into hiding lest after taking the leader they should come for his followers. The city marked Passover, and Jesus' followers had little to celebrate. "What a train wreck! How could we have been so wrong? What are the synonyms for *fool?*"

It was early Sunday morning that the rumors started. Dawn visits by women bearing spices. Empty tomb. Collapsed linens. Absent body. Sightings of angels. The claim to a personal appearance by a once-demonized woman no one believed, Mary Magdalene. How could they believe her? This was death, and while some had been resuscitated back to this life, no one has been resurrected in the full sense because that's a mass event at the end of the age when the kingdom of God comes down to fix it all. How could it happen in the middle of time and to only one?

But then, a bit later the same day, there were other appearances of a gloriously re-embodied Jesus to Peter and the eleven. He'd appear and speak, then go, each event a new layer of evidence to singles and groups of his fully embodied resurrection from the dead and his vindication by the Father who had not—as assumed—abandoned him. God was there at the cross as the weight of the world's hatred and rebellion fell upon the Son. The tomb was emptied because the corpse had been transformed by an infusion of the life of God. The Father raised the Son in the power of the Spirit.

That Jesus was now more alive than ever was made clear over forty days of appearances. His movement would now continue in a new form. He would rule them from above with his Spirit indwelling them as a living link. God the Son had been *with them*; in a short while God the Spirit would be *in them*. They had the story of Jesus' life from three years together. The raw data of divine revelation was downloaded onto the hard disk of common memory. They'd met the risen Lord multiple times. Only one thing was lacking, the personal filling of the fire of the Spirit who would arrive at Pentecost. It was not enough to know his stuff, even to know him. The one who inwardly empowered Jesus must do the same for them.

In the light of Easter morning, what happened on Friday at Calvary was now to be seen not as a tragic accident of history but the very will of God, an act of the Triune communion to embrace in the Son the sinful human situation all the way down into the bowels of death and thus to declare a final judgment against the whole of the old regime of sin and death. Jesus is the final self-offering of God, not an innocent human being God pounded so as to get us off the hook. And in those initial

appearances of the risen Lord, a new world was born, a new reality unleashed.

For those who trust in Jesus, and by that I mean believe that *who he was* and *what he did* is the revelation of the God of the Jews, the true and living God, something happens, something experiential. Sins are forgiven, which is why Paul can make his bold declaration in verse 1 that “There is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We are set free from fear. As a second dimension of the same reality, God the Holy Spirit now comes to dwell within, as if a visitor moved permanently into your house with you because the house is you. And with God the Spirit on the inside in contrast to the law of God on the outside making demands none can fulfill because sin so weakens us all, we live in a new world in the middle of the old. We live in the same space but in a new reality with a new loyalty. To use Paul’s paradoxical imagery, we are now *in Christ Jesus*, and he is likewise *in us*. We are *in the Spirit*, and the Spirit is *in us*, the idea being that of a mutual indwelling of persons. We dwell in a new sphere of influence, one where the Holy Spirit is a farmer who cultivates in us the fruit of the Spirit to make us more like Jesus and who— as the gift giver— pushes the powers of Jesus through us for the benefit of others.

The old verdict of condemnation against me is now vacated by the highest authority. I am now free to live deeper and deeper into the new reality of life and peace. Nothing in the old regime has changed at all, but I have, and so with others we set up a principled resistance to the old way of life. I don’t owe it anything anymore; I’m not its debtor; it has no claim on me. Here I find myself with new desires to be channeled into new habits, and when the old ones return whining and begging for attention, I put them to death. I mortify them by saying No and calling on the Spirit for inward strength to fight and win. I refuse to let them dominate my thinking. I no longer rent them free space in my brain. And when they send reinforcements in waves of corrupt thinking, I sometimes literally shout, “No! Get out of here, in Jesus’ name.” And after several such resistance moves, peace returns until next time the battle rages, and the war never ends until you die.

Learning to redirect your thoughts is a core Christian discipline because that is where the battle is, between your ears as desires bubble up from the control center of the heart to your mind. It is in the battle that we learn that what Paul shared of his experience in verse 6 is true, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” It is a discipline with great benefits.

Now this brings us to Romans 8, and in the first seventeen verses Paul lays out what has happened *for us* and *in us* and what God now wishes to express *through us*

as his people. His description of the new reality is highly experiential and thoroughly experimental. This is not lecture but lab. We actually get to try it out. We're meant to have an interactive relationship with the Holy Spirit who never leaves us, and over time we learn to distinguish the Spirit's voice from other ideas and to follow his lead in new situations. Always present, the Spirit is also able to fill us from time to time for special missions and equip us with gifts on the spot as needed. There is, says Paul in verse 9, no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit. We don't get God in pieces. To know God at all is to know and be known by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, even if you don't know how to talk about it.

But many of us have what some call H.S.D.D. or *Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder*.⁹ Because we've not been taught about the Spirit or how to listen for his leading, we are ignorant of a powerful divine friend who dwells within waiting for our attention and the cultivation of a relationship.

There are two prayers I pray a lot. The first is as a reminder of who I am, and it comes from the Orthodox Churches of the East, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The second is a shorter prayer for aid, "Come, Holy Spirit." I then wait to see what happens or what comes to mind. It's a fresh experiment every time, walking by faith and in love. I keep God's commands because I want to please him, but my relationship is not rule based; it's an interactive relationship based on continuing subtle interactions like those that pass between a loving husband and wife. So when you meet another believer, you meet not one person but two: that person in all their particularities, and the Spirit who shines through them. And if you pay attention to both, it enriches the interaction immensely.

I had such an encounter recently. I was sitting at a bedside making a hospital visit with a discouraged, disconnected Christian; it was my third time to see them in as many days. Without warning they launched into a multi-episode narrative of their life in all its sorrows and pain. The atmosphere shifted, and I— in a flash— became acutely aware the Holy Spirit was at work as if someone flipped a channel in my awareness, and that is how it often seems— a shift of stations with a divine hand on the remote. So I leaned in and listened all the more closely on two levels— to her words and to the Spirit's presence— as a soul unfolded before me. I— without much thought— had built something of a bridge of trust by prayerfully doing my duty, and today she walked across it in my direction. There must have been light and love in

⁹ Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Overcoming Holy Spirit shyness in the life of the church," *Vision*, Spring 2012, 6-13.

the room for this to happen; here I was doing my job when it happened in front of me.

Now that’s not too dramatic a story, but no less real, and when our antennas are up and turning, it’s surprising how often this sort of thing happens. Our days and duties are meant to be filled with divine love and the winds of the Holy Spirit filling our sails and blowing us into some new port. It’s why Paul spoke so often of being *led* by the Spirit and *walking* in the Spirit as a lifestyle. He leads, and we follow at the pace of walking. God is within us and things are happening around us all the time; the question is, “Are we paying attention?” Are we tuned into the Spirit?

If I was to quickly walk through our Romans text with a list of insights, it would go something like this:

1. If you belong to Christ, the death sentence against you is cancelled and you are now free to live a new life in the new reality without fear.¹⁰
2. By coming in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a self-offering, which we celebrate as Christmas and Good Friday, Jesus announced that the alien powers of sin and evil and death are condemned and will be done away with. God’s good law is now to be fulfilled in us with the help of the Holy Spirit providing the *want to* and the *how to*. It’s a relationship, and if marriage takes time to live into, how much more profound is a divine person coming to live *inside us* and changing our desires from the center out?¹¹ So be patient. You were designed for just this.
3. We live in a dual reality and need to be as honest as Paul about the struggle. The old world of living independently of God is all around us, what Paul calls the rule of *sarx* or *flesh*, and if you let its scripts dominate, it will suck the life out of you. But if you retrain your thinking, with God’s help, to meditate on the new reality of which you already have a preview, life and peace will sustain you. To help you in this new way of living, the Spirit of God is within you as coach and cheerleader.¹² We’re not about independent but about dependent living.

¹⁰ vv.1-2.

¹¹ vv.3-4.

¹² vv.5-6, 7-9.

4. The one at work within me is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Talk about power! We have great respect for nuclear plants because of the nature of their power. But the One who dwells within us is the God who lit the fuse for the Big Bang, and the power of the Spirit has been scaled down to our limited capacity. When you see a single light in a dark house at a distance, you know it can be traced back to a power plant, and that’s how it is with us. Light has been turned on in our souls, and the generator of the light is the same one who provided the divine energies to raise Jesus from dead.¹³ And if he did it once, he can do it again, which is why I’m getting in line for a new, resurrection body fit for new life in the kingdom of God.

5. While the old life still has a pull on me because of habits, I don’t owe it anything. The Spirit of Christ takes me by the hand and leads me along. I’m a child by adoption, got the baptismal papers to prove it, and I have a helper assigned to me. I’m not an orphan but a family member with Jesus as my strong older brother. I believe, and I belong. It takes a while to learn the ways of the new family, but they have taken me into their heart.¹⁴ The most powerful thing I ever say to people is this: “You belong to us, and we belong to Jesus Christ. You are not alone.”

6. There is a new privilege, and that is to address God with the same sense of security Jesus did, perhaps even to use the same Aramaic address he did, “Abba.”¹⁵ And when I take that word on my lips and cry to God, something happens. The Holy Spirit says to my spirit, “Yes. God is your Father, and if a child, then you are also an heir with Jesus to the riches of the coming kingdom. Your future is brighter than you know.”

About a decade ago that I was teaching missionaries from three continents just outside Istanbul. As I walked down the hill out of the Grand Bazaar, I passed at the

¹³ vv.10-11.

¹⁴ vv.12-15.

¹⁵ For a review of scholarship on Jesus’ form of address, see Ben Witherington and Laura Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), Chapter 2, “The Promising Father,” 19-66; Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 206

gate a gold merchant and turned into his small shop. He was in his eighties, and I soon found he was from Iraq and a member of one of the oldest churches of the East, the Chaldean Orthodox Church, which was even then having its ancient buildings destroyed and its priests killed by Al Queda. My heart hurt as tears came to his eyes. I then asked, “What language do you worship in?”

He said, “We worship in the language of Jesus; our liturgy is in Aramaic.”

The channel flipped, and my heart melted. Here I was speaking to a fellow Jesus’ follower whose church had never stopped worshipping in Jesus’ mother tongue and where *Abba* was the first word of the Lord’s Prayer as it was for the first disciples and as preserved for us by Paul in Romans 8:16 where he gives the Aramaic *Abba* and then the Greek translation *Father*. The faith that had started in Jesus’ mother tongue had been translated into Greek and then Latin and then Anglo Saxon and then middle English before it came to me in modern English had never changed for him.

Here was one of the deep continuities of our ancient common faith. You see, the Holy Spirit had a great gift for me that day and used my desire to buy Lori a gift to my advantage. Sometimes with a smile I ask, “Sugar Babe, where did that ring come from?” and she answers, “When you were in Kazakhstan or Israel or Brazil or Ghana or Fiji or Istanbul.” I leave for two weeks and come home with a ring and sometimes ivory or pearls. She thinks it’s a very good deal!

The reason this great faith has grown stale and boring and irrelevant and dusty and de-energized for so many is that we have ignored and grieved the very one the risen Jesus gave to keep our relationship with him alive and full of local adventures. We’ve turned it into a list of rules for bland behavior and a grab bag of techniques for life improvement instead of enjoying it as a highly unpredictable personal relationship with the Living God who knows we can’t make it unless we follow Jesus and the Spirit sets up internal residence to keep us linked up and on track.

What if we were honest and asked the Holy Spirit to forgive us? What if we were sorry for ignoring all his prompts and his gifts and his calls to love and service? What if we asked God the Spirit to reclaim the lead in our lives and fill us afresh with all we need to represent Jesus to our confused world? Might that not be a holy adventure? I can’t make anything happen, and I’m not a salesman. The things I point to I cannot deliver. God is not a slot machine or a delivery boy. It’s not about technology or psychology or pumped up emotions. But it may have something to do with spiritual hunger and soul-level desperation. But maybe if I prayed for us, and you gave your internal agreement, an opening might be found and a fresh spring bubble up in our midst. We’ll only know if we go for it!
