

The Law, the Flesh and the Spirit - Romans 8:1-13

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Abstract

The dominion of the Spirit in the new realm of salvation is an vital element for having part in the eschatological life. The dominion of sin and death with its results in a mindset determined by the flesh is broken by the power of the Spirit of life which gives the covenant blessings to those who have a mindset determined by the Spirit.

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The argument in the whole section moves from the rhetorical question in 6:1 toward the answer in 8:12-13.¹ The things realized by the Christ event, described in the 5:12-21, counterbalanced the effects of Adam's act and was much more than that. This last

1. Neil Elliot, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue With Judaism* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 237.

paragraph shows the last elements in that 'how much more' argument from 5:12-21. The dominion of sin and death with its results in a mindset determined by the flesh is broken by the power of the Spirit of life which gives the covenant blessings to those who have a mindset determined by the Spirit. In other words the dominion of the Spirit in the new realm of salvation is an vital element for having part in the eschatological life.

8:1 Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·
'Now, therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in the Christ Jesus.' Incorporation in Christ has the result of eliminating the condemnation. This condemnation has to be understood as a verdict of situation described in 7:7-25. Because of the determination of the Adamic 'Y', in the life of Jews under law had resulted the unwilling sin² from which has this result: condemnation. This liberation from condemnation is true also for his Gentile-Christian audience from 6:1-8:13.³ In this verse Paul recall one important aspect realised by God in his action of salvation: δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. This 'now'⁴ indicates the reality of the new epoch in which is true

2. N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 224.

3. Elliot, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue With Judaism.*, 249.

4. Also in 3:21, 5:6.

the affirmations which follow. The way in which is eliminated this condemnation will be explained in v.2.

8:2 ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἠλευθέρωσέν ἑ σε ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου, 'for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death'. This verse is the ground (γὰρ) of the 'dogmatic sentence'⁵ from 8:1. This liberation is realised through a 'law'. The background for understanding of this very debated⁶ affirmation is 3:21 where the action of God for establishing a righteous relation with man is realised χωρὶς νόμου. In 8:2 not the law helped⁷ or determined⁸ by the Spirit has a role in the transferring into the reality of the new epoch, but the power of the Spirit in and through Christ⁹. This power of the Spirit brings life to those who were liberated from the power of sin and death. In this way Paul gives an important dimension concerning the change in lordship at the transfer from the old epoch into the new. The role of the Spirit was affirmed in 1:4 and, as was said in 6:4,

5. E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM, 1980), 214.

6. See for this Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 504-508; J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans* (Waco: Word, 1988), 416-418.

7. Wright, *Climax*, 209.

8. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 119.

9. Romans 3:24.

the life in the new realm of salvation has as its pattern the resurrection of Christ in which the Spirit had a preeminent role.

8:3 τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου, ἐν ᾧ ἠσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός, ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, 'for what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering and condemned sin in the flesh'. In this verse we have a contrast between what the 'law was not able to do' and what 'God did'. The accent is not, in the first, on the liberated law by God,¹⁰ but on the action of God (an aspect of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) of sending his Son, sending defined in terms created by the role of the human flesh in the history of salvation. Showing the inability of the law, Paul wants to identify another ally of sin, namely, the flesh. In a sense this is a positive affirmation concerning the law which stands in positive perspective concerning the law that was argued in 7:7-25. The weakening of the law was explained in 7:7-11¹¹. The sin and the flesh realised this. The law was not able to accomplish what the God did accomplished¹². The law was not able to give life, even if this was its in-

10. contra Wright, *Climax.*, 209.

11. Stuhlmacher, *Romans.*, 119.

12. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 509.

tended purpose (7:10). This is so because it was not able to break the power of sin.

The reference of the sending of the Son is made with the view of realising what the law was not able to do. In this perspective are showed aspects of the incarnation and of the work of the Son. His coming into the world is described as a full participation in the human condition. This participation is defined with the help of expression ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας. This affirmation has to be understood in the line of Adamic Christology of chp. 5. He is the Son of God¹³ send into the world to assume the fallenness of men and through this participation he exposed¹⁴ to the power of sin. In the case of Jesus the power of sin 'did not had its usual final'¹⁵. With the help of ὁμοίωμα Paul showed the limit¹⁶ of the participation into the sinful flesh. His subjection under sin did not result into the guilt. In this way Paul shows the fact that the incarnation through its inherent nature had the necessary elements for realising its redemptive purpose affirmed here. Death of Christ is seen here in the light of the context of 7:13-20 where Paul present a

13. Dunn, *Romans.*, 421.

14. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 512.

15. Dunn, *Romans.*, 421.

16. Käsemann, *Romans.*, 217.

person who delights in God's law, yet fails to keep it.¹⁷ This is unwilling sin. The Old Testament remedy for this is the sin offering (περι ἁμαρτίας). Through this sin offering God realised the condemnation of sin. This action is a judicial one in which God executed the judgment on sin.¹⁸ On the cross was punished the real culprit which brings the condemnation over the humanity.¹⁹

8:4 ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα, 'in order that the just decree of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit'. In this verse is affirmed the purpose of the action of God from the v.3, namely, that the just decree of the law might be fulfilled in us. The phrase 'just decree of the law' has to be understood with the help of the following words: it is a thing which is done in us and for us.²⁰ In the context of chap.8 this thing is related with the image of the Spirit, a Spirit which brings *life*. This is the purpose of the law to give life (7:10; also Deut. 30:15). With the help of the Spirit, who is life (8:6), is fulfilled in us the 'decree of the law according to which

17. Wright, *Climax.*, 224.

18. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 513.

19. Wright, *Climax.*, 213.

20. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 515.

one who does these things shall live'.²¹ This thing is related to God's action through which someone is brought in a righteous relation with him (διὰ δικαιοσύνη, 8:10). Those who were rescued from the realm of the flesh live in the realm of the Spirit. Their life is a Spirit determined life.

8:5 οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, 'for those who are according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh and those who are according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit'.²² With this verse Paul begins an elaboration²³ of v.4. What is the reason for which in those who live according to the Spirit is fulfilled the just decree of the law? And for what reason in those who live according to the flesh is fulfilled the opposite, namely, death? The powers of those two epochs are important when we pursue the answer to these questions. In the realm of the flesh, flesh gives a particular direction of the will, and in the realm of the Spirit, the Spirit gives a particular

21. Wright, *Climax.*, 203.

22. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 502.

23. Dunn, *Romans.*, 425.

direction²⁴ of the will.²⁵ These powers determine a particular way of thinking: one characteristic²⁶ to the flesh and one to the Spirit.

8:6 τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη; ‘the mindset of the flesh brings death, but the mindset of the Spirit brings life and peace.’ This verse continues²⁷ the thought of the previous verse with the accent on the results of those two ways of thinking. In the old era of salvation we have this situation: men are under a complex set of powers, namely, a way of thinking characteristic of one (flesh) result in experiencing dominion of the other (death). In a sense the death is a result that shows the true character of one’s life²⁸. In the new realm of salvation is experienced the covenant blessings: life and peace. These are not psychological states, but realities of the inaugurated βασιλεία (14:17).²⁹

8:7 διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται; ‘this is because the mindset of flesh is enmity against God. It does

24. Käsemann, *Romans.*, 219.

25. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 519.

26. *Ibid.*, 519.

27. γὰρ continuative; *Ibid.*, 520; RSV, NIV.

28. Dunn, *Romans.*, 426.

29. Käsemann, *Romans.*, 219; Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 520.

not submit to the law of God, and it also cannot.' In this verse is explained why the mindset of flesh leads to death. σάρξ here has to be understood in the salvation history background, namely, as a power of old era that is in enmity against God who, when designated his Son as Son of God in power at resurrection, inaugurated new realm of salvation in which the life lived is κατὰ πνεῦμα (1:3-4). There is this enmity because the flesh's way of thinking cannot submit to the law of God. In the life of can be the desire to obey the law but there is not the power to realise it (7:14-25). Paul speaks about this impossibility not as a physical incapacity but as a condition created by the powers of the old realm of salvation.

8:8 οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύνανται., 'and those who are in the flesh are not able to please God'. This short affirmation is a summary³⁰ of what has been said about the existence in the old era as a life ἐν σαρκί. Those who live in the flesh and under dominion of flesh cannot please God.

8:9 Ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ἀλλὰ ἐν πνεύματι, εἴπερ πνεῦμα θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν. εἰ δέ τις πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ., 'but you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. If someone does not have the Spirit of Christ that person does not belongs to him' At this point Paul is addressing to his readers. They belong to the new

30. Dunn, *Romans.*, 427.

realm of the Spirit. This belonging to the new era where the Spirit is a dominant power is described as being 'in the Spirit'. This positional³¹ state of his readers shows the transfer from the old realm, seen as being 'in the flesh', that has taken place at the conversion-initiation. This new position is described both as being 'in the Spirit' and the Spirit as being 'in' them. In this way is shown dimensions of this position, namely, dominion of Spirit and the life in one realm in which the Spirit rules³². The Spirit who realise this transfer is the Spirit of God. His activity is described as 'dwelling'. In this way is marked the lordship of the Spirit in contrast with that of sin (7:17-20).³³ This Spirit is identified with the help of Christ.³⁴ Belonging to Christ is certified through this Spirit identified with the help of Christ. The Christian is defined with the evidence of the directing of the Spirit.

8:10 εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, τὸ μὲν σῶμα νεκρὸν διὰ ἁμαρτίαν, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωὴ διὰ δικαιοσύνην., 'but if Christ is in you, though³⁵ body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness'. Together with the Spirit of Christ,

31. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 522.

32. *Ibid.*, 523.

33. Dunn, *Romans.*, 429.

34. *Ibid.*, 429.

35. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 502.

in the believer lives and rule the Christ. This presence of Christ in the believers does not mean that the old powers does not have influence upon them. The reality of sin has the result of death³⁶ even in the life of the believers. This does not mean that the believers are under power of sin but this is a result of the tension 'already and not yet' of salvation. The physical body³⁷ of the believer is dwelt by Christ and as a consequence of being put in a right relationship with God, Spirit is life. This life is the life of the new realm of salvation. Because of the fact that the Spirit is given as the first fruit of the harvest this life announces the future resurrected life that will bring the transformation of the mortal body.³⁸

8:11 εἰ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἐγείραντος ἰησοῦν ἐκ νεκρῶν οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὁ ἐγείρας ἐκ νεκρῶν Χριστὸν ἰησοῦν ζωοποιήσῃ καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν διὰ τὸ ἐνοικοῦν αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα ἐν ὑμῖν., 'and 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 is dwelling in you'. The possession of the Spirit, identified now as 'the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead' is the starting point of the assurance of the future resurrection life. The perspec-

36. For the debate here see *Ibid.*, 524-525; *contra* Stuhlmacher, *Romans.*, 122.

37. For the debate here see Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 524.

38. *Ibid.*, 525.

tives about the Spirit in this chapter make possible to say those things about his role. The Spirit is the Spirit of life (8:2) and 'is life' (8:10) and also is the Spirit of God (8:9,11). In our verse the Father (6:4) who raised Christ from the dead also will give life (a reference to the resurrection) to our mortal bodies. The believer lives between these two resurrections that of Christ and that of his. From this perspectives the new realm of salvation is a realm between two events which give life. This life is a life which comes from the Father, namely, the the Father gives life using³⁹ the Spirit who is life. The Spirit is the element who makes that the life which we live in our mortal bodies to be an eternal life lived in the immortal resurrected bodies.

8:12-13 Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ὀφειλέται ἐσμέν, οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν, 13 εἰ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆτε μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν, εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε, ζήσεσθε., 'therefore, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you will die. But if through the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live!' We treat these two verse in relation with the 8:1-11 and as a conclusion of the argument begun at 6:1.⁴⁰ After that argument has

39. For textual problems see *Ibid.*, 531.

40. See i.e. Elliot, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue With Judaism.*, 251.

to be clear that the believer was liberated from the power of the flesh. The flesh does not have any right upon us. These verses are a warning about the real possibility to be under the influence of the flesh. This power of the old era was broken at the conversion-initiation when the power of sin was broken. This was realised by the Spirit. Against this old master has to be resisted. If not, the result is death. The liberation of the believers from the dominion of the flesh does not free him from the 'necessity of mortifying sin'.⁴¹ With the help of the Spirit they are able to put to death the deeds of the body. Here we have a common space of meaning between the σὰρξ and σῶμα. The dominion of sin into the body has death as its result (7:24). The manifestation of the Spirit as life in the believers is conditioned by the mortification of those results of the dominion of sin in the body, namely, sinful actions of the body.

41. Moo, *Romans 1-8.*, 528.

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