

*“Welcome One Another  
Just as Christ Has Welcomed You”*

A Study of Romans for the  
Diocese of West Texas, Fall 2009

Study and Reflection Session 6:  
“The Torah of the Spirit of Life”  
(Romans 8:1-17)

*The Passage: New Revised Standard Version Translation*

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For 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, 4 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. 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 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, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 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 Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will

give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. 12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – 13 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, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit bearing 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, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### *A Translation for Study, With Commentary*

*Luke Timothy Johnson introduces his commentary on this section of Romans by saying, “Now Paul develops the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian experience by contrasting its power and its direction to the way of life lived ‘according to the flesh.’ ... [T]he gift of the Spirit is both the source of new life and the guide to behavior” (125, 127). For Paul, the Spirit is the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of the gathered community (see 2 Cor 3:18).*

**Romans 8:1 There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the Torah of the Spirit, of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the Torah of Sin and of Death.**

*8:1 brings us back to the new things that God is doing NOW, through the death and resurrection of Christ. Because of what God has done “now” in Christ Jesus (look back at 3:21-26), all people have been given the gift of being set free to be in right relationship with God and their neighbor. The word “Torah” in Hebrew meant much more than “law” (our usual translation). Sometimes it has more the meaning of teaching or instruction from God. In this passage, “Torah” functions as a principle for living a*

*moral life, a life that is profoundly good, both for the person living it and for all those around him or her. To live by the Torah of the Spirit, the Torah of life in Christ Jesus, is to be empowered by God for living well. Living by the Spirit's power, there is no condemnation for Jew or Gentile. The opposite of living by the Spirit is the choice to orient one's life toward destruction, the principles of Sin and Death.*

**3 For God has done what the Torah, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with Sin, he condemned Sin in the flesh, 4 so that the just requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

*Because the Spirit is indwelling, the choice to live by the Spirit means to orient our lives according to godly principles that we have deeply internalized, rather than to live by an exterior rule. Living this way requires that we learn the ways of Christ all the way down to our bones, so that we can live them as our own. Paul repeats here his understanding that God has chosen to receive the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for the well-being of all people. Consequently, the Jewish believers cannot continue to criticize Gentile believers for not keeping the whole Jewish Torah. The "Torah of the Spirit" is open to all, not as a rule, but as a power for fullness of life for all who "walk...according to the Spirit." "Walking" (halakhah in Hebrew) was a Jewish term for one's moral pattern. Remember that the heart of walking according to the flesh is the sin of idolatry (see Rom 1:18-32), the sin of putting something less than God in the place of God in our lives. Grieb says, "The 'Spirit' and the 'Flesh' (like Christ and Adam) are two opposing spheres of action or families of solidarity, so that to be a member of one or the other is to have one's thoughts and actions shaped by that allegiance" (77). Paul has been developing the contrast in this way: Orientation to the Flesh includes Sin, Death, Adam, and disobedience; orientation to the Spirit includes Life, Christ, obedience. The word "obedience" means, literally, a 'deep listening' (in both Greek and English). What practices do you engage for listening deeply to God?*

**5 For those who live according to flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For having the mind of the flesh is death, but having the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason, the mind of the flesh is hostile to God, as it does not subject itself to the Torah of God, nor can it. 8 And those who are in [the] flesh are not able to please God. 9 But you are not in [the] flesh but in Spirit, since God's Spirit dwells among you. And anyone who does not have Christ's Spirit does not belong to him.**

*According to Paul, whatever we set our mind on establishes the course of our lives. In his view, God's Spirit has decided to "dwell among" us, to make a home in our own frail Christian communities, to empower us for living as people who "belong to" Christ at every moment, with our families, at work, and in our leisure time. He wants to make the contrast clear, so that we will not be tempted simply to do what is expedient or to follow the crowd, as people who live oriented toward material things only (the "flesh"). The glory of Christian life is the Spirit, poured out among us to empower us for living fully. The Spirit is given into the whole community, but each person must choose whether or not to live by the Spirit (see the end of 8:9).*

**10 And if Christ is among you, though the body is dead because of Sin, the Spirit is Life because of justification. 11 If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells among you, the One who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through the indwelling of his Spirit among you.**

*The resurrection is not an event for Christ only. We know resurrection when we move from a life oriented to the material world (flesh, Sin, death) to a life oriented to the Spirit (Life, justification). God, by whose power Jesus was raised, will bring us new life also. Our full resurrection has not happened yet, but we have been given new life through the Spirit. Even in a world*

*marked by Sin and Death, we can experience what it means to live fully, in right relationship with God and with all creation.*

**12 So then, brothers [and sisters!], we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to flesh. 13 For if you live according to flesh, you are destined to die; but if, by Spirit, you put to death the practices of the body, you will live.**

*We are under an obligation to God, for God has “bought” us out of our old “half-life” and into a new way of truly living. We fulfill our obligation in living “by the Spirit” in all of our daily choices. This is a sweet obligation!*

**14 As many as are led by God’s Spirit are sons of God.**

*We have set this line apart, so that you may take it deeply into your reflection. We often speak of Christ as God’s ‘only’ son, but here we see Paul’s understanding of the fullness of what God in Christ has done for us. In the ancient world, it was the son who inherited not only the family’s property, but, perhaps even more importantly, the son inherited the responsibility of the family business. Like sons of God, we are to carry on the work of God in every place where we live and work and love. The Spirit empowers us for this life of faithfulness, and leads us into all faithfulness.*

**15 For you did not receive a Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of sonship, in which we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit itself witnesses together with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then also heirs, heirs of God, and co-inheritors with Christ, if indeed we suffer together with him, so that we may also be glorified together with him.**

*Here, Paul imagines us as actors in the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Like the Israelites, we have been freed from slavery (to Sin) and freed toward a life in God’s good pattern (in the Spirit), as “sons” of God. Those who live by the Spirit will be so truly “sons” of God that they will call God by the most*

*intimate name that Jesus used, "Daddy" (Abba). Those who live as sons of God will be inheritors of the glory that God intends for us. But, because the whole world is not living as God's kingdom, we may experience suffering, not in spite of our faithfulness, but on account of it.*

### *Questions for Reflection*

1. Can you tell a story about a time in the last week when you had to make a decision between living "according to the flesh" or "according to the Spirit"? What were the outcomes?
2. The phrase, "Torah" of the Spirit implies that there is a steady guidance by the Spirit to help us live as God intends. What does this guidance feel like in your life?
3. What is the relationship between "deep listening" (obedience) to God and the Spirit's empowerment to live as one who is in right relationship with God and neighbor? Do you have any particular disciplines that enable you to "listen deeply"?
4. Can you describe someone in your community who truly lives as a "son of God"?
5. Have you, or your church community, ever had the experience of suffering on account of your faith? Who or what helped you to persevere?