

# **Life in Spirit: A Reflective Analysis on Romans 8**

**Alunkal Jose, SDB**

## **1. Introduction**

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, who the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”<sup>1</sup> Letter of St. Paul to the Romans chapter eight is an assurance for the believers that though they are stretched between desires of the flesh and Spirit, none of them is left abandoned. Paul once again emphasizes the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit with believers. It explains to us, how relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer defends the forces of evil and remains faithful to Jesus who paid the ransom for his/her salvation by offering his own life as a sacrifice on the altar of the cross.<sup>2</sup> The scripture scholar Spenser states: “If Holy Scripture was a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans is a precious stone.”<sup>3</sup> It underlines the supreme importance of this passage to the believers who want to grow in holiness day by day.

Paul makes it clear that the indwelling Spirit of God empowers the believer from the clutches of sin and assists him/her to pursue the divine destiny of being with God forever. This chapter, chapter 8 of the letter to the Romans, can be divided into four sections. Verses 1-11 discuss the deliverance from the power of the flesh through the overwhelming power of the Spirit. Verses 12-17 present the full realization of our filiality by the power of the Holy Spirit. Verses

17-30 teach us that we withstand the evil of suffering relying on the grace of the Holy Spirit and verses 31-39 lead us to the fact that the final victory belongs to the believer through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Law of Sin and Death**

“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”<sup>5</sup> Humanity received the curse of death due to the denial of God’s love that is sin. Thereafter, he/she lost his/her original innocence and came under the yoke of sin and death. All of us inherited this inclination to Sin from Adam and as long as we remain under condemnation, we cannot keep the commandments.<sup>6</sup> Though the law itself is holy, good, and spiritual, due to human resistance and also due to the power of sin, it became ineffective and no longer has power over humanity and much less over the power of sin.<sup>7</sup> As a result, humanity lost its original orientation of living a life based on God’s law and started to live to please the desires of the flesh. Such a life led humanity to develop hostility towards God and an inability to please God. A life based on the norm of the flesh is earthly and transitory thus he/she can never attain the destiny for he/she is created by God.<sup>8</sup>

## **3. The Law of the Spirit**

Sin and death refer to the source and result of our condemnation, but we are liberated from these by Christ through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. The law did not have the power to condemn sin in human flesh. The human being was carnal and lost his/her capacity to obey the law. The law is not a force in itself rather it is a method of the operation of a force. Our inclination towards sin made the eternal law insufficient and impotent; as a result, human nature could not provide what the law demanded. Therefore, God had to do everything for the salvation of humankind.<sup>9</sup> As long as the Adamic humanity remained in the realm of the flesh, under the power of sin, there is only one verdict – the death sentence that is the eternal separation from God.<sup>10</sup>

To redeem humanity, what was impossible for the law that was weakened by the flesh was accomplished by God. He sent his only Son in the likeness of human being without sin. Jesus entered into

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the cosmic realm of sin and death that affected Adam's descendants. Jesus is incarnated in this cosmic world as a human and not as a sinner. Thus, God sent his son as an offering for our sins. So, God accomplished what the law could not do, that is, the condemnation of sin in human flesh. Thus, Paul states that the singular requirement of the law has been fulfilled in those who walk no longer according to the flesh but according to the Spirit because they are in Christ, the new Adam. Thus, the law that is the Spirit has overcome the law that is sin and death.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. The Holy Spirit - The Dawn of a New Hope**

The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross delivered us from the bondage of sin and gifted us with the unfailing assistance of the Holy Spirit. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to be with you forever."<sup>12</sup> The Holy Spirit assists the believer in a threefold manner. The Spirit delivers the believer from the condemnation of the flesh, from the power of the flesh, and the power of death. The natural inclination to sin makes a person powerless. However, when the Spirit takes possession of a person, he/she will be freed from the condemnation of sin, given life in the Spirit and assured of redemption of the body at the time of the resurrection.<sup>13</sup>

##### **4.1. The Indwelling Spirit**

Many believers think that they are called to fight against the power of evil. The spiritual fight is fought mostly relying on one's strengths and capabilities. This is not the way God wanted to deliver us from evil. His method of liberating a soul from the clutches of evil power is different. He becomes the power that empowers the believer to fight against evil through the presence of the indwelling Spirit. Therefore, it is not through our struggles rather it is through the mighty energy by way of granting the necessary graces for a soul, that the Holy Spirit helps to win the battle. The supply of this spiritual strength is not like the battery recharge, when the grace diminishes a further supply of the grace is assured. Instead, it is through a constant union with the Spirit who dwells in us. We would be able to lead

a holy life when we are growing into the realm of spiritual height wherein we are constantly in touch with the Spirit of God.<sup>14</sup>

Paul is not identifying Christ with the Spirit; he wants to tell us that Christ is present with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us.<sup>15</sup> It is through the saving work of Christ that we receive Holy Spirit. Christ died for all, therefore, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit is not the privilege of the chosen few rather a normal and necessary feature of every Christian. The Holy Spirit is not an occasional visitor. The Spirit takes residence with the believer and remains as a faithful and constant guide in his/her earthly sojourn.<sup>16</sup> The book of Ezekiel gives us the account of the Lord breathing life into the dry bones.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Paul emphasizes the fact that the same Spirit who became instrumental in the resurrection of Christ will raise the mortal bodies of the believers on the last day through the instrumentality of the indwelling Spirit in them.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.2 The Accompanying Spirit**

There is a constant struggle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit in every believer. Paul insists that those who are in Christ and led by the Spirit can put to death the desires of the flesh and live as children of God. The accompanying presence of the Spirit will help us to be in communion with God the Father by fulfilling His holy will in our day-to-day life.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is the Spirit who empowers us in this struggle to remain faithful to God. The Holy Spirit does not take away our human weakness. It is the Spirit who fills our life with the hope of salvation gained for us by Christ. The Spirit helps us to see through these difficult moments. Christians are not spiritual giants though we are called to be that. If we are left alone, we will be in trouble. The accompanying presence of the Spirit with us inspires us to rely on God's strength.

At those fragile moments, we may not be in a state to pray, or we may not know how to pray. Anyhow, the Spirit prays on our behalf. Thus, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.<sup>20</sup> We cannot find adequate words to express our prayer instead we do so in sounds. The Holy Spirit takes those sounds and transforms them into

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groaning. This groaning is the work of the Spirit. God who searches the heart finds this unutterable groaning which is the intercession of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God's will. Though a person may be discouraged about his/her weakness and unable to pray, the Spirit intercedes for that person with streams of empowering grace flow into the person.<sup>21</sup>

## **5. The Primacy of Christ Jesus**

The believer may be worried about his sins and think that in the end, it may prevail against him/her. Paul assures the believers that nothing would prevail against them because it is God who justifies them.<sup>22</sup> He sent his own Son in the flesh, to condemn sin in the flesh, the sin that alienated humanity from God, neighbour, his/her own self, and nature. Thus, knowingly, God handed over his Son to the clutches of death for the sake of humanity. His death on the cross restored humanity to God.<sup>23</sup> Since Christ suffered the penalty on behalf of us, the law cannot condemn us. We are no more under the law but under grace. We need not encounter the tribunal but the throne of grace, God alone is our judge, our justifier.<sup>24</sup>

Death cannot conquer Christ forever; on the third day, he rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God. It shows the eternal glory of the Son of God and his role as an intercessor on behalf of humanity. It also signifies the furnished work of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the totality of the victory in Christ<sup>26</sup> liberated us from guilt, weakness, defeat, want, and separation.<sup>27</sup> When we are filled with the fullness of Spirit nothing can separate us from the love of God. Even death would be a gain because one can be with Christ forever.<sup>28</sup> The love of God does not mean our love for God rather God's love for us that was revealed in Christ crucified, the everlasting icon and symbol of the unconditional love of God for each one of us.<sup>29</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

Christian life is a call to be with God forever. The foretaste of this communion we begin while we are on this sojourn, here and now. However, being in communion with God is not an easy task due to the fragile human nature caused by our sinful inclinations. Though

the eternal law was written in the human heart it could not condemn sin because the influence of sin was so severe it conquered even the law. As a result, the ultimate destiny for which we are created became impossible for us. The second person of the Holy Trinity incarnate amidst us to liberate us from the clutches of sin, places us not under the law, but close to the throne of grace. To attain this end, God the father had to hand over his Son to death by condemning human sin in his flesh. Thus, he underwent the punishment for the sins of entire humanity by dying on the cross. The divine expression of love showered the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit on us, till the end of time. As a result, we have the strength of the Spirit available to fight against the desires of the flesh and remain in communion with God despite our inclination towards sin.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jn14: 15-17 NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 1988), 299.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Devotional Commentary* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 200.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, 202.

<sup>5</sup> Gen 3: 19 NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Haldane, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Forward by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones (Michigan: Kregel Publication, 1996), 329.

<sup>7</sup> Arland. J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Cambridge: William B. Eermans Publishing Company, 2011) 298.

<sup>8</sup> Hultgren, 300-301.

<sup>9</sup> Thoams, 204.

<sup>10</sup> Frank. J. Matera, *Romans* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010) 190.

<sup>11</sup> Matera, 192.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, 211.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, 207.

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- <sup>14</sup> Morris, 309.  
<sup>15</sup> Morris, 309.  
<sup>16</sup> Morris, 308.  
<sup>17</sup> Hultgren, 306.  
<sup>18</sup> Matera, 196.  
<sup>19</sup> Hultgren, 311.  
<sup>20</sup> Morris, 326-327.  
<sup>21</sup> Morris, 329.  
<sup>22</sup> Morris, 337.  
<sup>23</sup> Hultgren, 338.  
<sup>24</sup> Thomas, 231.  
<sup>25</sup> Morris, 337-338.  
<sup>26</sup> Morris, 340.  
<sup>27</sup> Thomas, 233.  
<sup>28</sup> Morris, 340.  
<sup>29</sup> Morris, 342.

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