

w e e k 9 n i n e



Discover

Last week, we turned our attention to Romans chapters five through eight. This shift sparked our exploration of the third section of Paul's letter to a church struck by conflict and tension primarily between the Jewish and Gentile believers. It is important that we remember that this letter is crafted to address the circumstances of a particular people in a particular place in time. Our shared humanity binds us, as modern readers of Paul's letter, to the experience of the church in Rome as we too wrestle together as a diverse community. I invite you this week to reread the names listed in Romans chapter sixteen and remember the diversity that exists among this community between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor.

This week, our emphasis is on the life ruled by the Spirit. How do we define or characterize the realm that is governed by the Spirit instead of held captive by the rule of sin? Our texts are Romans eight verses fourteen through thirty and Romans six verses twelve through twenty-three.

I invite you to read Romans 6:12-23 and Romans 8:14-30 as we draw our minds to reflect on the governance of the Spirit.



Discover

In Romans chapters five through eight, Paul cuts through all division among the Jesus followers in Rome by reminding his audience of their shared condition as human beings impacted by the consequences of individual and communal sin. Sin's governance over societal systems grows when sin is perpetuated in each of us as individuals. Through God's generous gift of grace through Jesus Christ, we are invited to disentangle ourselves from the realm of sin and place citizenship in the realm of the spirit. The question that arises is what is it like to embrace a life governed by the spirit? If we can recognize the presence of the spirit, we will more clearly distinguish the influence and control of sin within and without. Our texts this week provide a glimpse into the abundant and vast realm of the spirit. The following characteristics are not exhaustive but highlight particular aspects of the governance of the Spirit. What other characteristics are revealed to you through our texts?

When our citizenship is in the realm of the Spirit...

We become instruments of righteousness.

There is a strange dichotomy in the realm of the spirit that submission ensures freedom. Bondage to righteousness is the catalyst that empowers our disentanglement from the choking hold of sin. In the realm of the Spirit, we offer ourselves in willing submission to the will of God and become instruments of God's goodness in the world. We no longer feed the insatiable cravings of sin for violence and wickedness but give ourselves to the work of righteousness and holiness. We partner with God in this work because without God's initiative and gift it would be impossible for us by force of will to loosen sin's grasp over our lives. As citizens of the realm of the Spirit, sin no longer "reigns in our mortal bodies" and our actions and behavior extend God's righteousness into the world around us.

We reap holiness and eternal life.

The fruit of sin is death. The presence of death is our clearest indicator that sin still holds sway in this world. So pervasive is its presence, that it is difficult to imagine a world without death. Sin's governance perpetuates death. Sickness destroys our bodies. War ravages whole nations. Violence takes up residence in our homes. Murder thrives at every level of our society. But the fruit of the Spirit is life and life eternal. The Spirit's governance perpetuates life and invites us to catch a foretaste of life eternal. As citizens of the realm of the Spirit, we must consider if our actions contribute to life or death? This is a complex question because the influence of Sin or the presence of the Spirit are not always clearly defined in our individual and communal experience. We must ask God to help us discern where our actions contribute to life or to death?



We are children of God.

Romans eight expands on our role in the realm of the Spirit. Though slaves to righteousness, our bondage serves to free us from the captivity of sin and establishes our intimate tie to God. “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” Entrance into the realm of the Spirit makes us sons and daughters, children of God who submit to the will of our good parent without fear. As citizens of the realm of the Spirit, each of us holds the status of beloved children.

We share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Our experience in the realm of the Spirit is not without suffering. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Jesus experienced in his own body the impact of living in a world still governed by the oppressive forces of sin and we continue to live in a world that is not yet compelled by the Spirit. Our citizenship in the realm of the Spirit may make us, like Jesus, a target of the powerful forces governed by sin.

We experience a restored relationship with creation.

“Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.” Creation craves the influence and impact of the citizens of the realm of the Spirit. Creation craves a release from its bondage to decay. How do our lives impact the experience of creation?

We receive help in our weakness.

The Spirit intercedes on our behalf to God. Despite our weakened state as those who were once and still remain bound to sin to some degree, the Spirit imprints the will of God on our hearts. The Spirit transforms our unknowing into a vast awareness of God’s will and intention. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” The Spirit allows us to grasp hold of God’s good purpose for ourselves and our neighbors. As citizens of the realm of the Spirit, our weakness is overcome by the Spirit’s presence.

We conform to the image of Christ.

As Paul notes in Romans twelve, we are not called to conform to the pattern of the world but to conform to the image of Christ. Jesus Christ is the premiere citizen of the realm of the Spirit and his example defines the behaviors, attitudes and postures that we are all invited to adopt as fellow citizens.



Pray

Monday

Romans 7:1-6

Living God,

I look at my life and myself before I knew you and I see the futility of it. I was living however I wanted without regards to you and felt the guilt of my shame from my choices. It felt so hopeless and meaningless without you. I am overwhelmed with gratitude and joy that Jesus conquered evil and death and that through his death my old self died and as he was raised from death he gave me a new kind of life in your kingdom of love. Thank you that I have been freed from my captivity to evil, destruction, decay and death and because I now belong to Christ, I can bear his fruit of love, joy and peace. What a privilege it is to live for you.

Tuesday

Romans 7:7-12

Holy God,

All around me I see people living in lawlessness, seemingly without knowing or caring about the hurt and pain they cause themselves and everyone around them. Because they have no moral compass, they go from bad to worse. Often I just wish that they would follow the law and basic rules of human dignity so that everything would be better. And yet, I know that is not possible because the only times I have been able to follow the rules is when my heart is already aligned with the rules. Whenever my heart is opposed to the rules I eventually fail to keep the rules. So until people's hearts change there will be lawlessness all around me. Thank you for your rules for living that you have given me so that I can clearly see where I am behaving contrary to your desires. Transform my heart so that my actions are a natural overflow of your love and character.

Wednesday

Romans 7:13-25

Redeeming Father,

You are all too aware of the conflict that goes on within me. On the one hand, I know your love, care and compassion for me and others and because of that I want to live in such a way that brings goodness, love and forgiveness into the world. And I long for the world to be such a beautiful place. And yet, so often as I go about my day I find myself being rude, hateful, lying and cheating. I know these things are wrong and destructive but I can't seem to stop from behaving that way. My habits, behaviors and thoughts have become so ingrained that these actions pop out before I can even do anything about them. No amount of willpower seems to make a difference. Help me to give up trying to do this on my own and yield to you to change my heart, mind and body.



Pray

Thursday

God,

It is so frustrating to be struggling with the same problems and temptations year after year. I know that this is not the way that you want me to live and it crushes my soul that I can't make it go away. What am I doing wrong that I am such a failure at this? I feel that you aren't helping me to overcome this destructive behavior. It seems that you would want to help me through this but I don't feel that happening. What do I do now? Do I give up, because that is what I feel like doing? Obviously, what I have been doing has not worked. So, God, Father, creator, teacher and friend, I humbly ask you to show me the next step you want me to take and please give me the strength to take it and follow you.

Friday

Redeemer,

I am humbled to think that the creator of the universe loves and cares for me. Not because of any great thing that I have done, but simply because you do. Thank you for the ways you have taken the brokenness of my life and begun healing my heart, like an artist takes the broken pieces of tile and glass and makes a beautiful mosaic. Thank you for the transformation you are doing, so that I can show kindness where I used to be mean, be truthful where I lied and honest where I used to cheat. This new life you are giving me is so much better than what I was doing on my own. I want to continue to be more like you and yield my will to the kingdom of your love.



Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 In our Discover section, we discussed multiple characteristics of citizenship in the realm of the Spirit. Which characteristic strikes you most as you read our text from Romans. What other characteristics would you use to describe the realm of the Spirit.
- 2 Disentanglement from the governance of sin is an ongoing process because we remain subject to the influence and impact of sin in our world. This process is only possible through our partnership with God. In what ways have you experienced God's initiative helping you overcome the captivity of sin?
- 3 How can we be instruments of righteousness in our world? Consider this questions from a communal and individual perspective. How can the church be an instrument of righteousness in the world. How can I be an instrument of righteousness?
- 4 Consider Romans 6:17 "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance." I love the use of the word "allegiance" in the NIV's translation of this verse. What are the implications of the Gospel claiming our allegiance?
- 5 How can we more fully embrace our citizenship in the realm of the Spirit?

