

Romans 8:1-10

8 So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh, ⁴so that the righteous decree of the law would be fully satisfied in us who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

⁵To be sure, those who are in harmony with the sinful flesh think about things the way the sinful flesh does, and those in harmony with the spirit think about things the way the spirit does. ⁶Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace. ⁷For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Live in Harmony

I.

"I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony." Those of you who are from my generation might immediately think of the Coke commercial from the 1970's.

The concept of harmony in the commercial was designed to be a play on words. There was, of course, the harmony of singing together in different parts. Harmony also means, as Merriam-Webster's dictionary puts it, "a pleasing...arrangement of parts," as in a painting. The commercial for Coke might have been the first to get people from all different backgrounds together. There were people from different races, and they were all in perfect harmony. Another part of the dictionary definition gives the example of living in harmony with neighbors. Every single person singing along with the perfect harmony song in the Coke commercial was holding a bottle of Coca-Cola.

Paul writes: "To be sure, those who are in harmony with the sinful flesh think about things the way the sinful flesh does" (Romans 8:5, EHV). Out of 18 different translations I looked at, the EHV is the only one to translate "harmony." If one were to translate more literally, the passage begins: "For those being according to the flesh..." Most common among other translations was: "those who live according to the flesh."

Neither "live" nor "harmony" are to be found in the Greek. "Harmony," though that word isn't specifically used, captures the mood of what Paul is saying. That becomes clear by other things Paul says as he continues. "Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death... ⁷For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8, EHV).

The harmony of the sinful flesh becomes intertwined in everything. The way the sinful flesh thinks results in death.

God created people with a conscience, which tells us what God wants and expects for moral behavior in the world. God also gave the written law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. God expects perfect obedience to his moral law.

The sinful flesh ignores the conscience, and God's added written instruction, too. Temporary things are much more appealing.

Perhaps that is most obvious in the young. They have very little life experience, so when a desire confronts them, the obvious choice is to go for it. There is no thought about the consequences in the next minute, let alone for the years ahead. The very young might ignore mom's instructions to wait until after dinner to have a cookie. As children enter puberty, sexual experimentation is an overpowering urge, to which they give little or no thought about any future impacts.

Jesus' parable of The Lost Son in today's Gospel (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32) showed a young man living in harmony with his sinful flesh. He wanted the immediate gratification of his inheritance. He took the money and lived with no thought about his future. Jesus puts it this way: "He wasted his wealth with reckless living" (Luke 15:13, EHV). Jesus doesn't go into detail about his reckless living, but it was obviously focused on his immediate wants, not on what was best for him.

"Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death" (Romans 8:6, EHV). The Lost Son just wanted to feel good—to feel alive. He wasn't thinking about the future. Jesus' point in the parable wasn't to focus on the poverty that came because the Lost Son squandered his wealth. Parables use an earthly story to tell a heavenly meaning. The wild living of the Lost Son was a spiritual poverty. He was focused only on things that had immediate impact.

Paul says it gets worse. "For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:7-8, EHV). The Bible describes sinners as dead, blind, and enemies of God. A dead person cannot do anything for him- or her-self. There is no question that one who is dead is powerless. A blind person needs assistance, at the very least. In familiar surroundings, someone who is blind can function, but something put out of place can be devastating. An enemy of God is someone who is hostile to God, as Paul says here. Hostile indicates opposition.

The sinful flesh "does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot." One who is hostile to God, as the sinful flesh is, does not *want* to be obedient to God's law. The Second Table of God's moral law is all about how we treat others. The sinful flesh puts *self* first, not others. Self becomes god for those living in harmony with the sinful flesh.

Harmony with the sinful flesh means living in such a way that sin controls your life. It becomes an obsession.

Harmony with the sinful flesh sounds quite pleasing to the one who cares only about the moment, but it is really discordant—in other words, conflicting. When God made Adam and Eve, he didn't make them with a sinful nature. That came with the fall into sin. Sin puts people *out* of harmony with God.

II.

"Those in harmony with the spirit think about things the way the spirit does. ⁶... the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6, EHV). Paul talks about the New Self. The New Self is in harmony with the spirit, in other words, with spiritual things. How do we get that way?

"For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh" (Romans 8:2-3, EHV). Human beings are woefully inept at keeping God's law. Remember, Paul said that by nature we are hostile to God. We cannot please God, and

in fact, we don't *want* to please God. We want to put "self" in first place.

Even though God's law was there, the sinful flesh ignored it, and God's demands and requirements were weakened in our minds. God knew it would be this way, but God wanted harmony with the people he created. Only one way would suffice to deal with sin and restore harmony: "God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin." Paul writes very specifically. Jesus, though he was fully human, was without sin. Still, when people *looked* at him, he looked just like everyone else—everyone who had sinful flesh.

The whole Lenten season is about what Paul says in the end of these two verses: "God condemned sin in his flesh." Jesus was hung out to die on the cross because God condemned all the sin of every single human being in Jesus' flesh. As Paul says elsewhere about Jesus: "God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21, EHV). On the cross, it was as though Jesus had committed *every* sin, though he had committed none.

Why did God do all of this? "So that the righteous decree of the law would be fully satisfied in us who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit" (Romans 8:4, EHV). We have been made right with God because of what Jesus selflessly did for us. He became sin so that we would not be sentenced to the spiritual and eternal death the sinful flesh deserves, but the life and peace the spirit thinks about.

III.

"Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you" (Romans 8:8-9, EHV). The mindset of the sinful flesh is hostile to God. Because the sinful flesh is God's enemy, it cannot please God and does not *want* to please God.

You, on the other hand, are a Christian. You have heard God's Word and the Holy Spirit has worked faith in your heart. God's Spirit lives in you. Elsewhere he says: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God" (1 Corinthians 6:19, EHV). God's Spirit living in you *wants* to hear and follow God's Word. Your New Self wants to live in the righteousness of Jesus that you have been given.

In Jesus' parable in the Gospel, the Lost Son found out in the end that true happiness did not come from all his wild living, but from being with his father. Jesus' spiritual truth in that parable is that true happiness comes from being with our Heavenly Father, and living in the way *he* knows is best for us, rather than satisfying the desires of the moment. The Theme of the Day reminded us that "No one is beyond the reach of God's grace. The heart of the gospel is God's undeserved love for all."

Paul concludes today's Second Reading: "If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10, EHV).

The Second Table of God's law takes on new meaning for those with Christ inside us. No longer are we driven by a love of self, but we are concerned for others. We are concerned about the physical needs of other people. We are concerned about how they feel and how what we say or do might hurt them. Most importantly, we are concerned about their spiritual needs. We are concerned that they might have the same harmony of the spirit we enjoy.

I guess you could say that all of us, as Christians, would like the world to sing in perfect harmony. But not about a Coke, not about artificial things that might make us feel good in the moment. Those of us who are in harmony with the spirit would like everyone to live in harmony with the spirit. Our deepest spiritual desire is that all might know the salvation that Jesus won for them. Live in harmony by sharing harmony in Jesus with others. Amen.