

Barth's English Paraphrase of Romans 5-8: As I Imagine It from *Church Dogmatics*

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(editorial note: this exegetical paraphrase is based on Barth's reading of Romans 5-8 in *Church Dogmatics*, and as represented in part in the accompanying paper, "Two Laws and the Gospel." If we start with every human in Jesus Christ, perhaps we will gain more impetus to dismantle racism and to better address the social challenges that seek to divide us from one another. I invite you to sit down with a cup of coffee and let the Word, to the extent that the Word is revealed here, soak into your bones.)

Chapter 5 (starting with the last verse of Chapter 4): Jesus Christ was delivered over to death for our wrongs and was raised to life, re-making us right with God. We have been perfectly restored through God's faithfulness, not ours. This is grace, God keeping faith from both sides—God's and humanity's—in our Lord Jesus Christ, who shares his faith with us. Being secured inside of this glorious Triune relationship gives us hope and joy. Even now our indelible character is found in Christ's glory against all other factors that try to rewrite the script. For this reason we can keep rejoicing, even while persevering through suffering. And with our joy comes hope, our steady anchor in the midst of adversity. Hope does not disappoint us because God has poured his love into our hearts, buoying us in the person of the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

You see at just the right time, when we were weak and needy, the Savior rescued us. He did it by dying. People don't often sacrifice their lives to save others, although it's more likely one might do it for a good person. But God demonstrates his unconditional love in this: Christ died for us, embracing us at our full-on worst.

Christ's blood has double meaning—his death and his life. First, by him destroying our sin at the cross, we need not live in fear of judgment day, and secondly, we can get on with genuine and purposeful living in Christ! Think about it: we think and act as enemies of God, but in the death of his Son, he sheds our alter ego like grave clothes, showing us that we have been his friends all along, and that sin doesn't fit who we truly are. We are saved now, and we will be saved. We are IN God. With room to breathe we can truly live. Even as we acknowledge our rebelliousness, through Jesus Christ we rejoice in the eternal fact that God never turns his back on us. He continually restores our face to face relationship with him. He provides us the lifestyle of a fresh start!

When Adam sinned everyone else got caught up in it too. In fact we are Adam; by our own choices we are all walking the road of sin and self-destruction—death. The consequences

for our disobedience are intrinsic, even if we don't know we're breaking a "law"—in other words we don't need a legal definition of sin before we feel the consequences of turning from our God. Sin is relational more than legal. The Ten Commandments do help to define the boundaries, but they are not a prerequisite for sin to exist! No, sin started with Adam, long before Moses came down from Mt Sinai. Adam then, we could say, broke the law of God before there was "a law."

Adam represents all of us in sin and its deathly consequences, and the gift of the Second Adam (Jesus Christ) applies to all of us as well—in fact it overflows to us, washing us through and through. Both the deadly result of sin and the gift of grace are universal, but can you see how different is the second one? The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed ALL sin and brought justification—we are all made right in Christ! For if through one person death reigned, how much more may we experience the life-changing reign of extravagant grace in Christ's person.

So again, here's the symmetry: just as the result of one person's sin brings condemnation and death to all persons, one act of righteousness brings justification and life to all persons. Said another way, in the disobedience of Adam we are sinners, in the obedience of Christ we are righteous. And here's the asymmetry: the law may help to show us how deep our sin is, but to whatever degree sin does its destructive work, Christ's work exceeds it. Christ's cross has plumbed the depths of sin and death, revealing to us our share in his surpassing, immeasurable life. Indeed, where sin increases, grace increases all the more! The incomprehensible depths of sin are no match for His incomprehensible grace.

Chapter 6: I can hear some people saying, if grace is that good, and I'm already forgiven, does that give me license to sin? Not at all! Why would you want to keep living a life that breeds self-destruction? Don't you remember that when we were baptized in Christ we were acknowledging that we died in his death? Now that our death is behind us in him, why would we reach backwards? The sacrament of baptism testifies that we were buried with Christ in order that we might now live lives smacking of resurrection, sharing Christ's glory in the Heavenly Father's love, walking forward in newness of life.

Let's be clear, our baptism celebrates the truth of Christ's solidarity with humanity—and therefore that the death and resurrection of Christ are ours. Informed with this cut and dried sequence, we can be assured that sin and death are categorically "old" and righteousness and life are "new," even though in this world the two are overlapped.

Our old self was crucified with Christ; we know it doesn't have a future. Meanwhile we are free in our new selves. Sin doesn't define us and never did. Again if we died with Christ, we believe we will also always live with him. One definitive death was all that was needed; he put

himself under death's mastery one time, and that was enough. The death he died, he died to sin once for all, the life he lives, he *lives to God*. In the same way count yourselves dead to sin and *living to God* in Christ Jesus.

Until your own worldly death, you will still struggle in your bondage to sin, but remember the cross defines your sinful self as merely your old, false, self. Don't buy into the stale economy of sin, offering your body to be a tool of wickedness. Instead of dragging the old into the present, live in congruence to the present and future truth of the new. In other words, keep bringing yourself to God because you have already been brought to God, from death to life! You *are* living to God. *Be* who you are in Christ, continually offering your body not to the staleness of sin but to the deliciousness of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under any written law but the greater authority of God's law, grace.

You may persist: but can sin do any harm if we are not under the written law's obligations and if we're already forgiven? Yes, great harm! You can't toy with sin and expect to be free from it. You're thinking small and missing the big picture. To the extent that you sin, you show you are still mastered by sin. To the extent that you obey, you show yourself to be mastered by righteousness, your true selves. I'm thankful that you are listening to me and have begun to obey from the heart of your true identity in Christ. Don't judge by sight, by feelings, or by experiences. Remember the bottom line established by Christ's death: you have been set free from sin. You are under the mastery of righteousness, where God's authority and human freedom are one.

As with the simultaneity of "newness" and "oldness" in this world, I realize that it seems counterintuitive to say you are free from sin at the same time that you are struggling in your bondage to sin. These opposing dynamics are happening at the same time. And it just goes to show how strong the evil forces are! If you offer your bodies to sin it will sweep you downriver into more wickedness. But trust me, Christ's power is stronger. Keep offering your bodies to the way of righteousness—the things of Christ that usher you into spiritual health and vitality. You know from experience how sin seeks to control you, keeping you in bondage as if your righteousness is a myth, swarming you with shame. Did you derive any benefit from the things you did under sin's control?

In the "anti-Christ dimension" of your life, the old-self lifestyle results only in unwanted consequences and death. But I am glad you are seeking to live the "in-Christ dimension," growing in life-giving awareness of your new, true self. You are experiencing the free flow of God's control, deriving the benefit of fruitfulness and enjoying the expansiveness of holiness and eternal life. For sin pays its wages—death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 7: You know what is written in our law. The law has authority over someone only as long as they are alive. For example, a woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is no longer bound to him. She is then free to marry another man without being considered an adulteress. In similar fashion, when Christ was crucified, the law as you know it died with him and we died to the law. I know this is hard to hear, but the written law needs to die so that it can find its pure form in God's spiritual law that underlies it. In the person of Christ the true and pure law emerges.

I am using an illustration from our written law, as sacred as it may be, to show how you are not wedded to it! Instead, we all belong to Christ, the one who emerged risen from the dead, so that we might bear fruit to God. To the extent our code of law is not perfectly congruent with Christ's life for us, God's real law, it fuels the wrong thing in us. Feeding off of the old self, it produces the fruit of death. But by dying to death's game, we are released from the restrictions of that law which falsely bound us. We now serve in the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the written code of law.

So am I saying our law is bad, and that we should throw the whole thing out? No! Positively, it is useful; I would not know what sin is—coveting, for instance—if I didn't know the written law. But negatively, sin seized the law and used it against me, causing me to want even more the things I couldn't have. It's true that sin is not as obvious apart from the letter of the law, but just as true is that the written code in and of itself actually brought death instead of life. There is a lot of irony in the fact that the commandment that was supposed to be life-giving turned out to be death-dealing. But sin seized the opportunity to deceive me, taking the commandment and effectively killing me with it. This all goes to show the futility of obeying the written code without understanding its basis in the real, spiritual law. Our written law is not all bad by any means, in fact it's good to the extent that it is perfectly congruent to God's real law, the law of Christ. Make no mistake, in this sense the law is always holy, righteous and good.

So am I saying that what is inherently good killed me? No! But again sin latched on to the law, using it to incite sin, thereby showing just how bad sin is in its ability to distort the law.

We know that the law in its pure form is spiritual, but I am unspiritual and under the mastery of sin. I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do I do not do, and what I don't want to do, I do. If I do what I do not want to do, then at least that shows that my inner being is sound, in compliance with the law. We could even say it's not my true self who sins, but my sinful self. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful self. For even though I have the desire to do what is good, I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not what I want to do. But the evil that I do not want to do, this I keep on doing! Again, any deviance from God's will (the higher and deeper law) shows it is my false self at work, not my true self.

It seems obvious that a double-dynamic is at work: two deep, opposing dynamics in which our one law, and each one of us, is implicated. When I want to do good, I'm conflicted with evil at every turn. In my most fundamental self, I delight in my ongoing participation in Christ's life, God's true covenant law for humanity. But the other dynamic of sin and death is also incessantly active in me; it makes war against my right mind, working me over, pulling me into bondage and disobedience.

What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this miserable contradiction of Spirit and flesh? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So again, in my true self I am totally controlled by the liberating dynamic of Christ's life. Conversely, in my false self I am totally controlled by the smothering dynamic of sin and death. In the Spirit, I cannot sin. In the flesh, I cannot *not* sin.

Chapter 8: In Christ we are not condemned; in our false selves we *are* condemned. Thankfully Christ Jesus has demonstrated that the liberating dynamic of the Law of the Spirit of life surpasses the law of sin and death. The written law was powerless to defeat sin, compromised as it was *by* sin. What the written law could not do, then, God did! He sent his own Son to assume our sinful false selves to kill them off in his own sacrifice. So he condemned sin in our condemned selves. He restored us in righteousness in keeping with the deeper Law of the Spirit and therefore in keeping with the pure form of our law—Torah.

In light of this, it makes no sense for us to persist in living in the falsity of our sinful selves. Don't be content with being doubly-minded, tangled up by a false, sinful mindset, when we've been given real single-minded purpose in the Spirit—living in our true mindset that she provides. Don't rationalize; these mindsets are mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed. Our wrong minds compel us straight to death, our right minds irresistibly lead us to life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. There is no way to please God under the control of the false self.

But again, this is not an endless tug of war. Utmost authority resides not in the influence of the false self but in the power of the Spirit who lives in you. Being in Christ is not a static category. You can't have Christ without being claimed by the dynamic life of the Spirit. The two go together. In fact, if you didn't have the Spirit of Christ you wouldn't belong to Christ (and I wouldn't even be writing you). Because the Spirit lives in you, Christ lives in you. You have a mortal body that will someday die, but your spiritual body is already alive. In fact, because the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, your resurrection life is not just a future thing. No, that same Spirit who raised Christ is the one who animates even your mortal bodies at this moment. In other words, the reason your mortal body has not collapsed already is because the Spirit in you not only fills your spiritual body but holds up your mortal body too!

Friends, the marvelous claim of grace upon us means we are vibrantly *living to God* in Christ's ongoing life—grace has a right direction. Therefore keep turning your back on your false self. For if you live under the influence of the sinful self, there's nothing to be gained but death. However, to the extent that you live into the reality of the Spirit, counting yourselves dead to sin and living to God, it will be plain that the Spirit is leading you. You will show yourselves to be counter-cultural and courageous children of God.

With such a secure identity in the Spirit, there is no reason to fall back into fear. In the Spirit we're given Jesus' language, "Abba Father," and the same Spirit continually confirms to us and validates in us that we are God's beloved children. Now as children of God we are all heirs of the Father, joint-heirs in the Son. It is a high calling: to share not only in Christ's glory but in his suffering that goes along with it.

Speaking of suffering, I consider our present sufferings to be nothing compared to the glory that awaits us in final revelation. All creation longs with eager anticipation for the veil to be fully lifted—the children of God fully revealed. We don't understand how God in his sovereign power allowed his creation to be subjected to frustration, but we look forward in hope to the day creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay. On that glorious occasion the children of God will be in the vanguard. They will finally be enjoying in unadulterated fashion their unique freedom as participants in the Son, sharing in Christ's undeviating faithfulness to the Father.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pangs of childbirth right up to the present time. We are enjoying the first fruits of the Spirit, but that doesn't mean we aren't also groaning—we can't wait until the full manifestation of our adoption is plain to see. We believe our salvation is secure, but the meantime we yearn for what we can't yet see, salvation fully revealed! For now this full picture eludes us, but in hope we wait patiently. We are weak, but this is where we draw encouragement from the Spirit. We don't even know how to pray, but the Spirit in us intercedes—praying our prayers for us! Meeting us in our brokenness, she groans our prayers in a deeper way than our words could possibly express. The Father knows the mind of the Spirit; they both know our hearts, and they are of one mind as to how to best pray for us in accordance with God's will.

We know that God is not the agent of evil, and we don't need to call bad things good to know that God brings good out of bad things. God our Father knew us before we were born, we were created in the Son, to be like him as adopted children. He not only knew us, he predestined us—calling us, justifying us and glorifying us in solidarity with his Son's death, resurrection and ascension.

What shall we say to all of this?! Could it be more plain that God is for us? Who could be against us? If the Father didn't spare his Son, but gave him up for us all, there is obviously nothing he will withhold, even his glory! Who will bring any charge against those God has chosen? It is God who has set us right, freeing us from condemnation; is there someone who can reverse that?! No way. Added to such an impossibility is the fact that Jesus Christ himself, the one who died for us and was raised to life, is, like the Spirit, also praying for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or famine or nakedness or danger or even death? (In these challenges we can relate to David's prophetic words: "As your people we are constantly facing death, our adversaries consider us as mere sheep to be slaughtered.") No! Our grievous losses, even death, can only do so much, because we've already won. We live as those who have already died, and die as those who are already alive! All this we know through the act of God, whose death in Christ demonstrates that he loves us even more than he loves himself.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth or anything else in the whole universe will be able to separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.