



RESOURCE KIT FOR THE STUDY OF SAINT PAUL: SESSION SEVEN

This 'kit' is provided as a follow-up to the interactive e-conference on Paul sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to mark the close of the Year of Paul on 30 June, 2009. It may be used by individuals or by groups of people who might meet regularly to use it as a basis for communal study, reflection and discussion.

The passages are taken from Paul's **Letters**, along with some extracts from the **Acts of the Apostles** that provide a context for what we read in the Letters. Details from the Letters and the Acts are not always in harmony, since they stem from different times. But together they fill out the picture.

The selection of passages has been made according to major **themes** that feature in the Letters of Paul. While this procedure may give a more rounded presentation of Paul's theology, it has the disadvantage of removing the passages from their immediate contexts in the wider texts. Those who have time and leisure might profit from reading the entire letters from which the selections are taken.

Those who would prefer to study **entire** letters are advised to begin with the shorter ones such as **Philippians**, **1 Thessalonians**, **Philemon**, and **Colossians**.

Though the early themes by way of introduction focus upon Paul's early life and mission, the later ones follow in no particular **order**. Individuals or groups should feel free to pick and choose among the themes as they see fit, rather than being bound to see the whole course through to the end.

The **Questions** posed at the conclusion to each selection are intended to stimulate the reflection and discussion that might promote deeper engagement with the texts. It is in no sense necessary to move through all the questions. Stay with those that you or your group find most interesting. The final questions in each case are more directed to seeking the meaning of the texts for our life in the Church today.

In some cases the texts are accompanied—before or after— by a **Note** explaining the role of the text in the wider context and providing information essential for understanding.

The **translation** used in the texts is that of the *New Revised Standard Version* (with spelling occasionally modified to conform to Australian usage).

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July 2009

7. FROM LAW TO SPIRIT

Chapter 7

We are well aware that the Law is spiritual: but I am a creature of flesh and blood sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate. While I am acting as I do not want to, I still acknowledge the Law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me. And really, I know of nothing good living in me -- in my natural self, that is -- for though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want -- that is what I do.

But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me.

So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God -- thanks be to him -- through Jesus Christ our Lord. So it is that I myself with my mind obey the law of God, but in my disordered nature I obey the law of sin.

(Rom 7:14-25)

Question:

- a) 'I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate.' Can you identify with Paul's struggle with sinfulness?

Chapter 8

Thus, condemnation will never come to those who are in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit which gives life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. What the Law could not do because of the weakness of human nature, God did, sending his own Son in the same human nature as any sinner to be a sacrifice for sin, and condemning sin in that human nature. This was so that the Law's requirements might be fully satisfied in us as we direct our lives not by our natural inclinations but by the Spirit.

Those who are living by their natural inclinations have their minds on the things human nature desires; those who live in the Spirit have their minds on spiritual things. And human nature has nothing to look forward to but death, while the Spirit looks forward to life and peace, because the outlook of disordered human nature is opposed to God, since it does not submit to God's Law, and indeed it cannot, and those who live by their natural inclinations can never be pleasing to God. You, however, live not by your natural inclinations, but by the Spirit, since the Spirit of God has made a home in you. Indeed, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But when Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin but the spirit is alive because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you. So then, my brothers, we have no obligation to human nature to be dominated by it. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the habits originating in the body, you will have life.

All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God; for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God.

And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory.

(Rom 8:1-17)

Question:

b) Paul's claims that we are 'coheirs with Christ' provided we are willing to share the suffering and his glory? What does this expression mean to you?

Chapter 5

Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery. I, Paul, give you my word that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all. I give my assurance once again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law; once you seek to be reckoned as upright through the Law, then you have separated yourself from Christ, you have fallen away from grace. We are led by the Spirit to wait in the confident hope of saving justice through faith, since in Christ Jesus it is not being circumcised or being uncircumcised that can effect anything -- only faith working through love. **(Gal 5:1-6)**

After all, brothers, you were called to be free; do not use your freedom as an opening for self-indulgence, but be servants to one another in love, since the whole of the Law is summarised in the one commandment: You must love your neighbour as yourself. If you go snapping at one another and tearing one another to pieces, take care: you will be eaten up by one another.

Instead, I tell you, be guided by the Spirit, and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence.

The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are in opposition to self-indulgence: they are opposites, one against the other; that is how you are prevented from doing the things that you want to. But when you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. When self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things. And about these, I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God. On the other hand the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control; no law can touch such things as these. All who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified self with all its passions and its desires.

(Gal 5: 13-25)

Question:

c) How do you think can live in this reality: 'Christ set us free, so that we should remain free'?