

3. Romans 8.1-14 p2

Assurance for Sinner-saints and a Sanctifying Obligation

May 12, 2013

Introduction

Conscious of the depths of our sinfulness in the fall and the presence of evil with us when we want to do right (Rom 7.14-25), we need the assuring word that Paul gives in 8.1-11 (by four supporting pillars) and from which he draws out an obligation in 8.12-14. Today, we want to concentrate on the sanctifying obligation that is necessary for the attainment of eternal life. Notably, Paul states this weighty requirement in an assuring way.

I. Assurance for sinner-saints: by four pillars you who are in the Spirit have no condemnation

II. Your sanctifying obligation: not to the flesh but to the Spirit

8.12-14: ¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

1. Confirmation that we are *not* debtors to the flesh, 13a,

The pillars of assurance show that death is impossible for you. So, living according to the flesh, *under its debt* is impossible. You are not a debtor to the flesh.

2. Confirmation that we *are* debtors to the Spirit

a. 13b: **if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** Eternal life is guaranteed to you only if you are walking in the Spirit now defined as **by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.** If you do so by the Spirit, then your obligation is to the Spirit.

b. 14: **For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**

This verse shows how the obligation that we have to fight with sin does not take away our assurance (of no condemnation as sinner-saints). So, our analysis of 13b is incomplete until we include 14.

III. Your sanctifying obligation confirmed in the bond of 8.13b-14

A. The conditional argument

It is helpful to view 13b-14 as a conditional argument that as a whole confirms your debt to the Spirit. The argument pattern is: if A then B, A is true, so B is true.

Premise 1: **if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live**

Premise 2: **all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God**

Implied conclusion: **you will live**

You do fulfill this condition (**by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body**) because you are sons, people led by the Spirit. To see this, we need to see how being *led* by the Spirit connects with putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit.

B. The leading of the Spirit (cf. Warfield, Leading of the Spirit, BTS)

Being led is a word that indicates efficacious enabling (not simply enabling but effective enabling). The connotation of leading is distinct from guidance which points the way into truth (Jn. 16:13). It is distinct from being carried as a prophet (2 Pet. 1:21). Nor is it to be confused with being drawn or dragged to Christ in the initial monergistic (one-work) act of God. That work is required to bring sinners out of dark bondage and into the light and freedom of the gospel for "they cannot come to Christ by virtue of any powers native to themselves, but require the action upon them of a power from without, coming to them, drawing their inert, passive weight to Christ, if they are to be brought to Him at all" (BTS, 554). The word Paul uses is contrary to all these ideas being the same word used for the leading of animals (Matt. 21:2; Acts 8:32), leading the sick and blind (Lk. 10:34; 18:40), leading prisoners (Jn. 18:28; Acts 6:12; 9:2):

It is to be observed, however, on the other hand, that although Paul uses a term here which emphasizes the controlling influence of the Spirit of God over the activities of God's children, he does not represent the action of the Spirit as a substitute for their activities. If one is not led, in the sense of our text, when he is merely guided, it is equally true that one is not led when he is carried. The animal that is led by the attendant, the blind man that is led to Christ, the prisoner that is led to jail—each is indeed under the control of his leader, who alone determines the goal and the pathway; but each also proceeds on that pathway and to that goal by virtue of his own powers of locomotion (Warfield, 552).

Remarkably, "the Spirit determines both the end and the way toward it, His will controlling their action, yet it is by their effort that they advance to the determined end" (553). Leading does not induce passivity because the believer's "own efforts enter into the progress made under the controlling direction of the Spirit; he supplies, in fact, the force exerted in attaining the progress, while yet the controlling Spirit supplies the entire directing impulse" (553).

Warfield states the paradox that this entails with great care. The leading of the Spirit is the power of God unto salvation and therefore "it must needs abide with the sinner, work constantly upon him, enter into all his acts, condition all his doings, and lead him thus steadily onward toward the one great goal" (547). *That goal is the new life of holiness* that is determined by the power extraneous to ourselves for "One is not led when he goes his own way. It is only when an influence distinct from ourselves determines our movements that we can properly be said to be led" (548). It is a "controlling power that the strength of the led one is insufficient to withstand" (550) and thus "they go, not where they would, but where He would; they do not what they might wish, but what He determines. This is what it is to be led by the Spirit of God," but it does not mean that the work of the Spirit is "a substitute for their activities" (552). Indeed, "strenuous endeavor" (558) is required. Paul's language does not promise God's children:

...relief from the weariness of the journey, alleviation of the roughness of the road, freedom from difficulty or danger in its course, or emancipation from the labor of travel. That they have been placed in the right path, that they will be kept continuously in it, that they will attain the goal—of this he assures them; for this it is to be led of the Spirit of God, a power not ourselves controlling our actions, prevalently directing our movement to an end of His choice. But he does not encourage us to relax our own endeavors; for he who is led, even though it be by the Spirit of God, advances by virtue of his own powers and his own efforts.

C. Larger argument

"Led" is a strong word and means that the Spirit makes it certain that we put sin to death. All that He leads like this are sons and daughters of God and joint-heirs with Christ of all things including eternal resurrection life: **not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies** (Rom 8.23). Because the Spirit so leads you to the resurrection glory as His children, and therefore efficaciously enables you to put sin to death in your members, then you are indebted to the Spirit to put sin to death in your members, to walk submissively and obediently with Him on the way to the glory of heaven, and thus to do what is required for entry into glory.

This imperative of warfare with sin is deeply rooted in the indicative of the Spirit's efficacious working. That He is present in you as firstfruits means that He is leading you certainly and surely to conformity to His Son, which is the ultimate goal of sanctification. The process that He effectively maintains is the sanctifying process of being made in the image of Christ (Rom 8.28-30), of being made holy, and of fulfilling your very purpose for existing as fallen image bearers of God by creation in need of restoration. In the end, the obligation (daunting, real, down to earth, tough, and challenging) comes housed within even more assuring word than the pillars of justification, namely, with the assuring promise of the Spirit's leading.