

Resymbolizing

Romans 8:1-17 New International Version (NIV)

Life Through the Spirit

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^(a) free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^(b) God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.^(c) And so he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^(d) because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^(e) his Spirit who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The 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.^(f) And by him we

cry, “*Abba*,^(a) Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now 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.

Part One:

In this remarkable passage, God shows that the root of spiritual change is not personal experience but the act of re-symbolizing. In that action, one can choose to take a situation, look at it, and symbolize it according to one’s own sinful nature, or according to a revealed point of view, the spiritual.

In Exodus 14 and Numbers 14, the people failed to resymbolize what they were experiencing: the chariots, the Red Sea, the desperate situation. Psalm 78 shows that their hearts weren’t faithful. A failure to resymbolize a situation is faithlessness.

Abraham, when asked to take Isaac to the mountain, made a conscious decision to resymbolize his son. Romans 4, beginning in verse 17, tells us that Abraham decided to resymbolize his son’s life in view of what God had told him about that son’s future. If he had operated on his experience with killing and burning up flesh on an altar, he would have concluded that Isaac would stay dead. Instead, he acted against even his hope, in order to believe and act.

Part Two:

Important: Sacrifice is the proof that someone has resymbolized. If Abraham hadn’t gone through with offering his son, there would be no proof that he had resymbolized Isaac. Isaac was at least symbolically made alive. Abraham was faced with the same kinds of “natural” representations of what is alive and what is dead, but the revelation from God challenged those understandings and caused him to re-symbolize those things. He could only prove he had done so, by actually being willing to carry through with the sacrifice. Then he could receive the quickening that resulted – a figurative resurrection.

In Numbers 13 and 14, the Israelites refused to go fight in Canaan. They didn’t want to sacrifice their own bodies. They hadn’t resymbolized. This is in contrast to what we read in James 5, where Christians are called on to sacrifice their own likes and preferences to show obedience to the Word of God.

The basis for sacrifice is resymbolization. It’s not just a proof of something, it is a threshold. Once you go through that door, you receive a quickening. In James 4, for instance, businessmen had to sacrifice their own predictions and plans, to rely on the will of God, and assume that in the future their businesses would be quickened.

Part Three:

One might think of the process of resymbolizing as having three phases:

One, the natural representations up to and including revelation

Two, the generalizations that would lead up to and include sacrifice

Three, the quickened state

Thus, generalizations would be indices or connecting agents for resymbolization.

And, the further you move from natural representations to revelation, the more the quickening.

When Abraham made his sacrifice, even though it was a symbolic killing of his son, it served as a proof of the fact that he had resymbolized his son. Again, without some sacrifice, there is no proof that this resymbolization has taken place. There are many examples of this in the Old Testament. For instance, you would take your best animal to the temple to be sacrificed, because you had resymbolized its worth from monetary to spiritual gain. Similarly, David, when offered at no cost a threshing floor on which to build a temple, refused because he didn't want to have for nothing a place that would be of great value.

In the temptation of Jesus, He had to re-symbolize: the pain and suffering He had undergone and would undergo; the relative worth of the souls of men and women; and the meaning or symbol of what others would see in a shameful death.

Part Four: What prepares any of us for conflict and trouble? We have to resymbolize what we undergo in terms of eternal meaning. Peter, in 1 Peter 1:6-9, asked people to resymbolize and show its proof by sacrifice which would certainly be recompensed:

⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

James asked us to do that, too:

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^(a) whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the

wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. James 1:2-7

Later James tells rich people they should re-symbolize their good circumstances as well as bad (verses 9-11.)

Part Five:

What prepares us for the battles of life? Resymbolizing brought about a strategic turn of events in many pragmatic examples in the Bible.

- 1) Those who wouldn't sacrifice in the desert wanderings died there.
- 2) Jehosaphat was willing to face oncoming armies with music and praising God, and was victorious.
- 3) Elijah at Dothan was able to help his servant resymbolize the circumstance and see the angels surrounding them.
- 4) Both Elijah and Gideon weren't successful at first, at resymbolizing; but were able to succeed when they did.
- 5) The widow of Zaraphath resymbolized her meager oil and meal and her dire situation—and eat until the famine was over.
- 6) The Shunammite woman was even able to rerepresent her dead son!
- 7) The Ninevites resymbolized their wealth and power and conceded all power to God.

Part Six:

Am I operating on myself, or on the Spirit? This is the point of the passage under consideration in Romans 8. There's a different regime that should be operating in our lives; one of giving up, of sacrifice, of self-denial; that leads to the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Sacrifice proves you have resymbolized. But it's not just a proof, it's a dividing line, a threshold; and it is always followed by some kind of quickening.

Paul, the writer of Romans, said his life was a literal sacrifice. He would have seen increasing quickening as he continued to offer up his life.

Resymbolizing has indexing (or connecting) power. It links power to our situation, the need to persevere. It pulls you out of the sinful representations of life and into the regime of the Spirit.

We are obligated to live by the Spirit. Without the shift and resymbolizing, you will die, says Romans. Misdeeds are caused by natural representations. But when you are led by the Spirit, that same Spirit communicates by witnessing, testifying, authenticating.

The life of a Christian shows the world this union. Further, the gifts of the Spirit in the first century were witness to a union that took place between the unseen world of God and the seen world where people operate.

The truest and greatest issue is, Can I cling to that Spirit?

Part Seven

How does one resymbolize a difficult situation, or a decision?

- 1) Try to find the proper symbols in Scripture.
- 2) Make sacrifice the threshold.
- 3) Working up resymbolization from within yourself is not enough.
- 4) All resymbolization, says Romans, means relying on the Spirit and not the resources of self or the world.
- 5) In summary, the presence of sacrifice shows that you have moved away from the sinful nature and into the spiritual regime.