

CHAPTER X

ROMANS 8:1-39 – THE REIGN OF GRACE THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL

Superlatives abound when commentators reflect upon the esteem that has been accorded to this eighth chapter of Romans, and such acclaim is entirely justified. James Montgomery Boice titles his commentary on this passage, “The Greatest Chapter in the Bible.”¹ J. I. Packer declares: “Now, as Romans is the high peak of the Bible, so chapter 8 is the high peak of Romans.”² Keeping in mind Paul’s grand purpose in writing this epistle, which was his intent to heighten the addressees’ understanding of the gospel so that both sanctification and assurance might result, here the pinnacle of such a purpose is reached.

In appreciating the truth that a right understanding of Romans 8 is gained from first grasping the thrust of Romans 1-7, it has become common parlance to speak, agreeably or disagreeably, of the thought that the defeated, carnal or legal Christian ought to move from living in Romans 7 to the more victorious realm of living in Romans 8. It is certainly true that some glib convention ministry and perfectionist “higher life” writings have conveyed this idea.³

On the other hand, it is also true that others, in attempting to uphold the normalcy of Romans 7 for the mature believer, have seemed to become blinded to the obvious triumphant contrast that Romans 8 presents.⁴ In simple terms, the determining factor here is the question as to whether the believer of 7:24, in crying out “Wretched man that I am,” is responding to a general principle of inward carnality or a more specific inflammation of his body of flesh by means of the law.⁵ The former course perceives the contrasting standards of Romans 7 and 8 as oscillating normal experiences; the latter course perceives these standards as contrary experiences that present a preferable standard in Romans 8. This commentary is committed to the latter course as being the intent of the biblical text.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, the Reign of Grace, 5-8*, pp. 781-88.

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 232.

³ The Keswick Convention movement originating from England gained a reputation for this emphasis in its regular ministry format of expounding through Romans 5-8. One of its founders, Rev. W. E. Boardman, had a perfectionist/holiness bent, and B. B. Warfield quotes him as describing deliverance from the bondage of sin “having passed out of the seventh chapter of Romans into the eighth.” *Perfectionism*, p. 241.

⁴ Arthur Pink writes: “To talk of ‘getting out of Romans 7 into Romans 8’ is excuseless folly. . . . This moan, ‘O wretched man that I am,’ expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life.” He further declares that those who disagree with him at this point, or suggest a present deliverance is included in Romans 7:25a, are influenced by the spirit of Laodiceanism.” *The Christian in Romans 7*, p. 00.

⁵ It needs to be remembered that this aggravation of “the body of this death,” which is arousal of “the law of sin” according to 7:23, finds such stimulation to be in the instrumentality of the law as 7:7-11 has taught and 8:2-3, 7 confirms. In accepting that Galatians 5:17 presents a parallel with the expressed conflict of 7:24, it should be noted that Galatians 5:18 also suggests that this condition is stimulated by the law.

A. PRESENT LIBERTY THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOSPEL GRACE, VS. 1-17.

While the subject of the law continues to hold a place of prominence here in vs. 1-8, and thus could be included as part of the subject matter that precedes, as does Lloyd-Jones at least in the title of his commentary that covers 7:1-8:4, yet the new triumphant emphasis on “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” in v. 2 leads us to retain the accepted chapter break here.

Given that Romans 6-7 is parenthetical concerning some objections that Paul addresses with regard to the abuse of grace and the role of the law, while Romans 5 and 8 present a degree of continuity, does it follow that there is no connection between Romans 7 and 8? Lloyd-Jones is quite emphatic here when he writes: “You cannot deduce from what Paul has just been saying [in chapter 7] that ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.’ There is no natural connection here.”⁶ However, this appears to be an astonishing comment when the following is considered. First, the issue of the law has not concluded at this point even though its last mention in this chapter is 8:7; rather verse 1 here directs us to the potency of being “in Christ Jesus” in contrast with the impotency of the law in sanctification described in verse 3. Second, the cry concerning felt “condemnation” in 7:24 finds its answer in “no condemnation” in 8:1. Hence the thought here of “no condemnation” focuses on the fact that union with Christ delivers from the condemnation of the Law. Thus C. K. Barrett comments concerning 8:1: “It is the law that leads to condemnation, both because sin fastens its grip upon man through the law, and because judgment takes place on the basis of law. Christians, however, are dead to the law and therefore escape judgment.”⁷ It is in this regard that Augustus Toplady’s verse is so applicable here.

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offerings to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view

1. There is life in the Spirit of Christ, vs. 1-11.

It is significant that, while in 7:7-25 the mention of life in Christ is totally absent, in 8:1-13 the concept in general is dominant. Put another way, while the doctrine of regeneration is absent in 7:7-25, it is emphasized in 8:1-13 as being especially important in terms of the believer’s present sanctified life.

⁶ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 7:1-8:4, p. 259.

⁷ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 154. Murray similarly comments at this point: “In this context, . . . the apostle is not dealing with justification and the expiatory aspect of Christ’s work but with sanctification and with what God has done in Christ to deliver us from the power of sin. Hence what is thrust into the foreground in the terms of ‘no condemnation’ is not only freedom from guilt but also freedom from the enslaving power of sin. If . . . this view of ‘condemnation’ is adopted, then this verse, as inference, can be connected with what immediately precedes, either restrictedly (7:25) or more inclusively (6:1-7:25). *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 275.

a. Walking in the Spirit of Christ, vs. 1-4.

Focusing on the present, Paul transfers us from the realm of legal dominion and sanctification, the law's condemnation, carnal arousal, and weakness, to the realm of spiritual union with Christ, that is the relationship of being "in Christ" by means of the Spirit. This spiritual realm is a pilgrimage in which the believer is to progress toward heaven with a spiritual gait that distinguishes him from a carnal style of walking (Gal. 5:16; 25).

(1) There is no condemnation in Christ, v. 1.

The KJV includes a segment, identical to that found at the end of v. 4, which is strongly believed to be a scribal addition, and thus is excluded from the NASB and NIV.

It is difficult to avoid the impact here of, as Morris puts it, "a different atmosphere from that in chapter 7."⁸ The emphatic conclusion and the immediacy of "now" both add to the impact. Further, the reintroduction of Paul's favorite term for union with Christ, that is being, "in Christ," last mentioned in 6:11 as the conclusion of vs. 1-10, paves the way for the emphasis of 8:2, 10, 39. Charles Wesley has well conveyed this joyous status:

No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
 Alive in Him, my living Head,
 And clothed in righteousness divine,
 Bold I approach the eternal throne,
 And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

It is true that "no condemnation" is a negative declaration of "justification;" but it needs to be asked why Paul uses this expression since the preceding broad context appears to provide a ready answer, including 5:16, 18 where *κατάκρινα*, *katakrina*, is used, as well as 7:1-25 where the tenor of the struggle is bound up with legal condemnation. Man's fundamental problem is that he qualifies for condemnation, chiefly at the hand of God, even as Job rightly understood (Job 15:14-16). The law only aggravates this truth; it presses it home remorselessly; it increases the misery; it helps not one whit in providing a sanctifying remedy. But to those "in Christ," to those who are justified, who are clothed with a perfect and acceptable righteousness, condemnation is obliterated; God will not hear it in His court! His verdict is final, total, and binding for eternity (Ps. 34:22)! Surely this causes the prisoner in the dock to jump for joy and sing as Philip Bliss has taught us:

My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought!
 My sin, not in part but the whole,
 Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more;
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 300.

- (2) There is freedom from the law of sin and death, v. 2.

Clearly following on from v. 1, Paul describes the liberated status of “me” (NKJV, NIV) rather than “you” (NASB, ESV),⁹ which the context of 7:21-25 would support. Here is the reason why the condemnation of the law does not fall upon those in a saving union with Jesus Christ. It is true that much perfectionist/holiness ministry has stressed that here a higher level of sanctification is reached through the now dominant Holy Spirit. However, while a blessed change is evident here in comparison with 7:13-25, it is the result of the free grace of the Spirit communicated and liberating gospel that is now uncompromised and unrestricted by legal interference (Gal. 3:1-3; 5:25).

- (a) The instrument of liberation, the law of the Holy Spirit.

The “[new gospel] law of the Spirit” is intended to contrast with the “[old Mosaic] law of sin and death” described at the end of this verse, which comparison will be heightened in v. 3. Indeed “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is given expanded definition in v. 3b-4. This is the superceding “law of the gospel of Spirit communicated grace, embodied in Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 3:7-18). In other words, Paul is now focusing on the importance of regeneration as it relates to justification.¹⁰ These doctrines are distinct yet vitally related, both with regard to conversion and sanctification, the latter mentioned being considered at this juncture. This emphasis, while having been more implicitly broached in 5:5; 6:4, 11; 7:6, is now pressed home with explicit force through to v. 27.

Thus it is “the law of the gospel” that regulates the Christian’s sanctification, and especially as that gospel is an internal reality through the Holy Spirit, not merely some external testimony. Beyond the objectivity of the gospel in terms of historic reality, inscripturation, and true confession, there must be a soul, formerly of stone, made flesh that throbs with life and holy affections.¹¹ Thus the gospel here takes on fuller dimensions than those perceived when we first believed. Jesus Christ is the root and ground of the gospel, yet here there are explained the facts of life and union with this Savior. To savingly believe is to be made alive unto Christ and engrafted into Him. Such a relationship is the real ground of Christian fruitfulness (7:4; John 6:63; 15:4-5; Gal. 5:16-26) and not the administration of Moses. Thus, in a sermon on Romans 8:2, Thomas Manton declares:

⁹ To decide here on which pronoun is correct is difficult. The UBS Greek text, second edition, opts for “me” with a low “C” rating. Then in the third edition it changes to “you” with a lower “D” rating!

¹⁰ Many commentators differ as to whether the “law of the Spirit” here refers to the gospel or the Holy Spirit. However, it appears that for Paul these entities are not unrelated (Tit. 3:5-7). Refer to Morris, *Romans*, p. 301.

¹¹ “The thought [here] moves in the realm of internal operation and not in that of objective accomplishment. We must not assume, however, that the basis upon which it derives its power is far from the apostle’s thought.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 277.

[T]he new covenant is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. . . . [T]he new covenant giveth liberty (to all that are really under it) from the slavery of sin, and the condemning power of the law. . . . The gospel, which is both our rule and charter, is the law which in Christ's name is given to the world. . . . It is his [Christ's] law that is written upon our hearts by the Spirit.¹²

- (b) The emancipation, the past act of justification and regeneration.

“Has set me free,” is correct with its perfect tense connotation, according to Paul's intent, though “set me free” most accurately translates the aorist of ἐλευθερώω, eleutheroō. In other words, Paul refers to the decisive act of justification when the Holy Spirit was given at that same point of conversion and thus presently indwells, the past event, that obtained emancipation in terms of right standing and newness of life, which continues to have sanctifying effect (Gal. 5:1).

- (c) The instrument of captivity, the law of sin and death.

What is this enslavement by means of “the law of sin and death”? Surely 7:23-25, but especially v. 24, presents the obvious answer. In the context of sanctification, this “law” is the law of Moses¹³ which stimulates “sin and death” and the cry of agony, “Wretched man that I am!” Here is the Christian whose dalliance with Moses is productive, not of hoped for holy improvement, but a revelation of misery producing unholiness and condemnation.

- (3) There is fulfillment of the righteousness of the law, v. 3-4.

The contrasting “laws” of v. 2 are now described in more practical and dynamic terms. The inability of the law, according to its misuse and wrong expectations, is eclipsed by the ability of the Spirit of the gospel.

- (a) Christ is stronger than the law, v. 3.

Here God the Son is the obedient administrator of the Father's plan of redemption, while in vs. 2, 4, God the Holy Spirit is both the communicator of the Redeemer's work and the enabler of the redeemed.

- 1) The law's impotence through the flesh.

“For what the [Mosaic] law [of God] could not do” supports the contention that in chapter 7 there was a false assumption concerning the purpose of the law and its ability. Further, the obvious reference here to the Mosaic code supports the same identification of “the law of sin and death” in v. 2. This law is an excellent ethic without dynamic. Morris quotes T. W. Manson:

¹² Thomas Manton, *Works*, XI, pp. 397, 399, 408. Cf. Barrett, *Romans*, p. 155.

¹³ So Barrett, Haldane, Hodge, Lloyd-Jones, Moo, Stott.

“Moses’ law has right but not might; Sin’s law has might but not right; the law of the Spirit has both right and might.”¹⁴ But why does Paul not say, “For what the flesh could not do, weak as it was, in the face of the law . . .”, which statement is in fact true? Because the law has been misunderstood as an instrument of sanctification and it must be exposed in all of its sanctifying impotence. Thus the law is ἀδύνατος, adunatos, “without power.” In this regard it is vital to again appreciate that the context here concerns sanctification and not justification.

Luther’s initial comment on this verse is as follows: “Where now is free will? Where are those people who are trying to affirm that we of our own natural powers can produce the act of loving God above all things?”¹⁵ Of course Paul has already argued concerning man’s moral impotence through corruption (3:9-18) so that here it is couched in terms of “[sinful] flesh” being “weak” and “lacking strength [ability to acceptably obey the law],” that is apart from the renewing and enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Man’s ultimate problem is not simply the fact of sin but rather its congenital root that produces incapacitating paralysis. How pathetic then is man, as the paralytic, when he claims ability that he manifestly does not have.

2) God’s potency through His Son.

“God did,” is in fact saying “God the Father had power to do what neither the law nor sinful flesh could accomplish.” These two words sum up the Christian gospel which is principally about God, that is who He is and what He has done. Here the evangel is again encapsulated for the sake of grasping more fully its sanctifying effect.

a) His sending of His Son.

It is “His own Son,” the Son of His heart (John 1:1-2), the Son rich in heavenly glory (II Cor. 8:9), the Son in whom He delights (Prov. 8:30), His “only one (darling, KJV)” (Ps. 22:20), directed in the counsels of eternity (Ps. 2:7-8; Heb. 10:5-7) to leave His Father’s bosom (John 1:18; 17:5); this was divine forfeiture that is astonishing when the intent to save sinners is kept in mind.

b) His identification with sinful flesh.

This was condescension, beyond christophany in the Old Testament, when the Son of God took on humanity and was “made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5-8). Here this Son,

¹⁴ Morris, *Romans*, p. 301.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Works*, XXV, p. 344.

“not unsympathetic regarding our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15), was sent in the “likeness/resemblance” of literally, according to Stott, “[the] flesh of sin,” but not “in sinful flesh.”¹⁶

True humanity was revealed in Adam before the Fall, hence Christ being perfected in humanity (Heb. 5:8; Luke 2:51-52) did not necessitate a yielding to the temptations of Satan, as if sympathy for thieves could only come from thieves., or only a thief could judge a thief. Rather Jesus Christ was “of David according to the flesh” (1:3) or descended from “the fathers . . . according to the flesh” (9:5). In the same way he mingled with publicans and sinners without the slightest participation in their sinful lifestyles. Thus he closely identified with sinful and leprous human flesh in the colony of this world while in no way knowing the contagion.

c) His sacrifice for sin.

Jesus Christ not only confronted the diseased of this world, but also the disease itself in the sense of himself being offered as the only effective antidote. The language here may well convey the more specific idiomatic Hebrew thought of Christ being offered as a “sin offering” NIV.¹⁷ This truth naturally leads to the next thought of sin being vanquished.

d) His subduing of sin allied to the flesh

This is the point that Paul wishes us to dwell upon, namely that by means of his atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ “decisively judged/condemned/passed sentence upon [aorist of κατακρίνω katakrinō] sin in its unholy alliance with the flesh,” cf. 7:8, 11, 13. However, the ongoing context concerning “walking in accord with the Spirit,” v. 4, surely demands more than an objective and judicial meaning, for the fact of such a conquering judgment also requires a conquering ability. So Toplady describes the necessity of sin being not only sentenced, but subdued.

Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Thus Murray explains at length that “the forensic term ‘condemn’ can be used in this instance to express the judicial judgment executed upon the power of sin in the flesh of Christ,” so that sin is both “sentenced,” and its power “overthrown, vanquished,” (John 12:31; I Cor. 11:32; Col. 2:15; II Pet. 2:6).¹⁸

¹⁶ John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, p. 219.

¹⁷ Moo, *Romans*, p. 480; Morris, *Romans*, 303.

¹⁸ Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 279, with support from Alford.

(b) The Spirit is stronger than the flesh, v. 4.

The resultant, dynamic, effectual saving work of Christ is now explained. Thus, “Christ wrought judgement against the power of sin in the flesh so that the righteous requirement of the law of Moses might be fulfilled for us and in us, that is the Christian whose pilgrim life is now directed by the indwelling Holy Spirit rather than carnal overtures.”

1) The fulfillment of the law.

The expression “the righteous requirement of the law [of Moses],”¹⁹ refers to God’s demand for righteousness that ought to be expressed in the believer’s lifestyle, his manifest life of practical righteousness. Of course the vital matter here concerns how these demands are met and this life is inaugurated and maintained. Further, is the result that of the Christian now inwardly suffused with a specific commitment to the keeping of the Ten Commandments or the law written on the heart? In other words, what exactly is this expression or fulfillment of righteousness to be?

Moo first points to the singular form of “righteousness,” cf. 2:26, in contrast with the more common plural usage in the Septuagint, which strongly suggests a more essential principle, such as love being the fulfillment of the law, 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14. Then he emphasizes the passive aspect of “fulfilled,” namely what is fulfilled for us rather than by us.²⁰ Morris makes a similar point “Notice that Paul does not say, ‘we fulfill the law’s righteous requirement’, but that ‘the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us’, surely pointing to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.”²¹ Hence the believer’s personal performance is not so much the initial emphasis here as Christ’s performance. It is Christ who has done the fulfilling for us, even as v. 3 describes his “condemnation of sin in the flesh.” This being so, Christ has fulfilled all righteousness “for us” and “in us,” that is Christ has perfectly satisfied the law’s essential demands for those in saving union with him through the Spirit. So Moo translates, “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”²² Christ has settled all accounts with the law through our union with him, 7:1-4; now the superceding New Covenant “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” v. 2, has been established (John 13:34) and the believer now walks under this new administration of the Spirit.

¹⁹ Literally, “the righteousness of the law,” except that we have δικαίωμα, dikaiōma, here focusing on expressed righteousness, 1:32; 2:26; 5:16, 18, rather than δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosunē, meaning the standard of what is right, 3:5, 25-6.

²⁰ Moo, *Romans*, pp. 481-3.

²¹ Morris, *Romans*, p. 304.

²² Moo, *Romans*, pp. 470, 484-5.

2) The regeneration of the Spirit.

We might have thought concerning the preceding emphases of Romans that Paul assumes the act of regeneration to be implicit in the act of justification. The new birth is not dealt with so categorically as justification in the early chapters, yet at this point the doctrine of Christian vitality, at a personal and experiential level, takes on a primacy that sharply transfers us from the objective truth of being right with God to the subjective truth of being alive unto God. Of course both truths, while being distinct, yet are also indivisibly related. Thus, “if anyone [claiming to be justified by grace through faith] does not have the Spirit of Christ [the Spirit of God], he does not belong to Him [God],” v. 9.

Life is a pilgrimage, and the Christian walks a narrow way directed by the Holy Spirit in contrast with the broad way where pilgrims are directed by the flesh (Matt. 7:13-14). For Paul the flesh is the source of dynamic carnality, with its seductive lustings; this is because the body is captive to sin (7:5, 18, 25; 8:3; Gal. 5:17);²³ the Holy Spirit is the source of dynamic spirituality, with its energizing unto righteousness. Thus the Christian is “walking” (present tense) according to the Spirit.

Here the negative and positive aspects of holiness are plainly described, and this contrast between flesh and Spirit will be enlarged upon through to v. 17. The marks of such spiritual journeying will focus on the arena of the mind which embraces either life or death, peace or hostility, adoption or slavery.

b. Thinking in the Spirit of Christ, vs. 5-8.

Up to this point, “sin in the flesh” has been acknowledged as not only the driving force behind the walk of the natural man, but also the irritating force of the Christian dominated by the impotent law. Now we are taken to a deeper level where the power of the renewed/regenerate mind is acknowledged as having potency over “sin in the flesh.” As in Romans generally (7:23, 25; 12:2, 16), so here Paul upholds the vital role of the mind in the life of the Christian. Four references in four verses to the “mind” describe the activity of thinking, of rational interaction with knowledge, especially in the New Testament, with regard to revealed moral truth.²⁴ Such “thinking” is to be both a ground of sanctification

²³ Moo defines “flesh” here as, “not the flesh of our bodies, or the bodies themselves, but the ‘this-worldly’ orientation that all people share.” *Romans*, p. 478. But such disassociation from the actual body, which Paul has considered since 6:6, is too vague and extreme. In 6:6 he referred to “our body of sin” and in 8:3 it is “sin in the flesh.” Thus “flesh” as distinct from the “Spirit” is our sinfully polluted, influential humanity; in the unbeliever it has an agreeable alliance with the “old man in Adam,” while in the believer it has a disagreeable alliance with the “new man in Christ.” This latter relationship is especially evident in 7:18, 24 where a clear distinction is made between “me” and “my [sinful] flesh.”

²⁴ The root of φρονέω, phroneō / φρόνημα, phronēma, is φρήν, phrēn, meaning “diaphragm,” since this part of the body was regarded, in early times, to be “the seat of intellectual and spiritual activity,” Kittel, Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IX, p. 220.

as here, as well as unity amongst believers who are exhorted to “be of the same mind” (15:5; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; 4:2). This emphasis does not sit well with the modern Christian who is more inclined to be directed by sensuality and sentiment. But for Paul, gospel truth rightly apprehended in the mind, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, is foundational for a resultant spiritual walk. Hence, “practical Christian living” has its genesis in the mind (I Pet. 1:13-15), even as does carnal behavior (Eph. 4:17; Col. 1:21).

(1) Spiritual thinking repudiates the flesh, v. 5.

It is the carnal/natural mind of the unbeliever that prompts him to vigorously trade at “Vanity Fair” which is under the patronage of “Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, . . . [also their friends] Lord Old Man, the Lord Carnal Delight, the Lord Luxurious, the Lord Desire of Vain Glory, my old Lord Lechery, Sir Having Greedy.”²⁵ It is the spiritual/heavenly mind of the believer that prompts him, in traversing Vanity Fair, to respond to the innumerable solicitations, “‘Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity [Ps. 119:37]’ and look upwards, signifying that [his] trade and traffic [are] in heaven; . . . [declaring] ‘We buy the truth [Prov. 23:23].’”²⁶ Here is the root of Christian sanctification. Moo significantly points out that Paul is not warning Christians about two possibilities they face [since] . . . ‘being in the flesh’ (vs. 7-8) is not a possibility for the believer. . . . Paul is contrasting two groups of people: the converted and the unconverted.”²⁷ Thus the carnal Christian/spiritual Christian dichotomy of recent days is clearly repudiated here.

(2) Spiritual thinking results in life and peace, v. 6.

Mental contemplation has consequences so that knowledge digested, depending upon its quality, effects destiny, in much the same way that the food we eat effects our health and longevity. Hence a carnal or spiritual mentality produces inevitable results, even as specific sowing produces a predictable harvest (Gal. 6:7-8). Again, here are not options but consequences. The carnal person, with a mind-set, a bent toward carnality, surely is “death” (6:23), that is presently exists as dead to God in the mind (Eph. 2:1-3). He sees but is blind; he hears but is deaf; he lives but is dead; he is exposed to the truth but has no appetite or thirst for it; his body has a pulse, but his soul is cold as a stone.

But on the other hand, the regenerate mind that presently focuses on spiritual truth is alive unto God, 5:17-18; 6:4, 8, 11, 22-23; 8:2, not hostile, 8:7, is at peace with God, 5:1; 8:1; 15:17, not subject to His condemnation and wrath, 3:16-17. Here then is the fulness of true conversion. Lloyd-Jones significantly comments:

²⁵ John Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 127, 130.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁷ Moo, *Romans*, p. 486. Also Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17*, p. 11.

In many ways this [life from Christ and life in Christ] is the major theme of the New Testament; everything, including justification, leads up to it, and centers in it. The doctrine of regeneration is absolutely foundational. It is because so many do not realize this that they have a wrong view of evangelism, and become interested overmuch in decisions, and they believe that people can fall away after they have become Christians. It is all because of a failure to understand the idea of regeneration and of life, that we really are born again as the result of the operation of the Spirit, and are made ‘partakers of the divine nature [II Pet. 1:4].’²⁸

(3) Carnal thinking results in hostility toward God, vs. 7-8.

Why is the mind that is set on the flesh described as “death” (v. 6)? Because that mind is militantly opposed to God and thus proves its “deadness.” Thus men reveal their deadness with regard to God by their attitude toward God.

(a) Carnal thinking is averse to God, v. 7.

By “the mind set on the flesh” is meant the soul’s chief focus, its primary interest through mental activity, contemplation and consequent affection concerning this world’s varied menu. Thus such a person proves to be a militant opponent and enemy of God. Here is no neutrality, no slight acknowledgment or token appreciation of God (Col. 1:21; I John 2:15); the natural man is not even tinged with regard for the Divine. Rather he wars against God and His holy demands in particular (Ps. 2:1-3). Like Judas, he may well fraternize with the friends of God and mingle close to the courts of God, yet he would nevertheless crucify God for thirty pieces of silver!

Further proof of this defiance is the carnal mind’s lawlessness, its opposition to “the law of God” in contrast with the Christian’s “inner man” (7:22). In other words, the carnal mind, faced with the unavoidable demands of God’s moral universe, His essential righteousness which is intrinsic to the Decalogue, the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, the two great precepts (Matt. 22:37-39), and human conscience, chafes at the bit or bucks, so to speak, at God’s moral imperatives.

But why is this mental attitude against the righteousness of God so intractable, so invariable, so thoroughly pervasive in this world? It is because the carnal mind “is not able,” οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται, *oude gar dunatai*, it does not have the innate power and ability to reverse its bias so as to love that holy will of God which it formerly regarded with contempt. In other words, the natural man does not have the capacity for self-renovation in his soul, that is with regard to a reversal of moral affections, any more than a pig can reverse his love of the pig-pen or a dog can reverse his taste for his own vomit (II Pet. 2:22). Here is no free will, no seed of goodness in human nature, no universal prevenient grace, for thorough depravity produces total moral inability. Herein lies

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:5-17, p. 34.

the necessity of a gospel of sovereign, effectual saving power since a gospel merely on offer has not the slightest prospect of being fruitful. Jesus Christ does not merely call men out of the human pig-pen, but rather enters that realm of corrupt human debris for the purpose of actually, individually delivering them, their nature, intellect, will and affections, from their hopeless, leprous captivity.

(b) Carnal thinking displeases God, v. 8.

Logically, because the carnal man is incapable of obeying the righteous demands of God, it follows that he is also incapable, “is not able,” οὐ δύνανται, ou dunantai, of pleasing the righteous God. But further, consider that the essence of his carnality is, as Luther describes it, “[T]his crookedness, this depravity, this iniquity” whereby “man turns in upon himself” and thus “seeks his highest good.”²⁹ So that those “who are in the flesh,” view themselves as being at the center of the universe; they pamper themselves, their physical, sensual, intellectual and Adamic beings, and at best allow God a peripheral role. Thus if man shunts God to one side, it is impossible for that same God to have pleasure in the one who attempts to dethrone Him. This is especially true concerning religious and social liberalism, for any token acknowledgment of a revisionist and man-shaped god is overwhelmed by vaunted and humanitarian concerns which are but sophisticated carnality that stimulates no heavenly pleasure.

c. Living in the Spirit of Christ, vs. 9-11.

Contrariwise, the only people who please God are those who are “in the Spirit,” as these verses now explain. To them, God is the center of the whole universe, indeed they belong to God, are alive to God, and identify with His righteousness. This contrast marks out the radical distinction between a true believer and an unbeliever.

(1) The Spirit of God indwells, v. 9.

Now the doctrine of regeneration takes on a significance that ranks equally with the doctrine of justification that so dominated the earlier part of Romans. Likewise in the life and ministry of a Christian, both doctrines should be regarded as being of equal importance.³⁰ Here we come to

²⁹ Martin Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 351.

³⁰ In the early part of his ministry, Lloyd-Jones, like George Whitefield, gave greater emphasis to preaching on the need of regeneration while the doctrine of the atonement and justification by faith were more “assumptions.” However it was a Calvinistic Methodist minister who made the Welsh preacher aware of this lack. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The First Years 1899-1939*, pp. 190-2. In the case of Whitefield, apparently it was John Wesley who helped his fellow field preacher in a similar way. Today we have likewise witnessed the “born again” movement, although many preachers err in the opposite direction by emphasizing a sterile justification at the expense of regeneration. Biblically speaking, the true Christian must be both alive unto God and right with God. J. C. Ryle adds: “You need not only the atonement of Jesus Christ, but *the quickening, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, to make you a true Christian, and deliver you from hell.*” *Old Paths*, p. 275.

understand that regeneration is very much integral to the gospel (Tit. 3:5-7), and should be regarded as coterminous with justification and conversion. We expand in translation, “However, you are not now living according to the dominion of the flesh but rather that of the indwelling Spirit of God, that is if (and it is assumed to be the case) this same Holy Spirit is presently dwelling in you believers who congregate in Rome.”

(a) Positively, the Spirit inhabited Christian lives “in the Spirit.”

It is the indwelling “Spirit of God” that marks out a believer from an unbeliever, not a carnal from a spiritual believer, or a regular Christian from a Spirit baptized Christian. For Paul, it is conversion that brings both death to sin in justification and renewal of the heart in regeneration, through “the Spirit and the water and the blood” (I John 5:7-8). Thus John Stott writes, “To know Christ and to have the Spirit are one. Bishop Handley Moule was wise to write that ‘there is no separable Gospel of the Spirit’. Not for a moment are we to advance, as it were from the Lord Jesus Christ to a higher or deeper region, ruled by the Holy Ghost.”³¹ Here is the distinguishing dynamic of a true Christian since the residency of this Spirit is eclectic (II Pet. 1:3-4), and it is this life of God that makes him distinguishable in his contrast with the common carnality of this world.

(b) Negatively, the person vacant of the Spirit of God is not owned of God.

Here “the Spirit of Christ” must be synonymous with “the Spirit of God.”³² The inference is akin to that of John’s Gospel where the ministry of the Holy Spirit is, to “bring to your remembrance all that I [Christ] said to you. . . . [That] He will testify about Me. . . . He will glorify Me” (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14; cf. I John 3:24). Note the triune inference here in which Christ through the Spirit brings union with the Father. Categorically, to have the Spirit of God is to have the Spirit of Christ and thus a saving, living appreciation of this Son of God. To be void of this Spirit of Christ is to be void of any saving union with the God of Abraham.

(2) The Spirit of Christ indwells, v. 10.

Expanded translation: “If (and it is assumed to be true that) Christ through the Spirit indwells you, then on the one hand the body is dead on account of sin, but on the other hand the S(s?)pirit is life on account of righteousness.” As the preceding context indicates, literally “Christ in you” (cf. Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:11) does not equate Christ with the Spirit or declare that the second person of the Trinity indwells the believer. Rather Jesus

³¹ Stott, *Romans*, p. 225; also Moo, *Romans*, p. 490.

³² Note that Paul does not use the title “Holy Spirit” in this eighth chapter. Here he is concerned about the Spirit sourced in the Father and the Son rather than the sacred character of the third person of the Trinity.

Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, is represented by the person of the Holy Spirit (I John 3:24). J. C. Ryle comments:

I do not say that the expression, 'Christ in us' is unscriptural. But I do say that I see great danger of giving an extravagant and unscriptural importance to the idea contained in the expression; and I do fear that many use it now-a-days without exactly knowing what they mean, and unwittingly, perhaps, dishonor the mighty work of the Holy Ghost.³³

That the body, σῶμα, sōma, as distinct from flesh, σάρξ, sarx, is dead means that the physical vehicle of the redeemed soul is intrinsically defiled, judged, and decaying on account of sin, 6:6, 13. As such it is unresponsive to God and on a course of dissolution; it is a corpse with only the motion of death throws!³⁴ On the other hand, "the Spirit of Christ" is the life of God that has, through grace, invaded this condemned carcass because of the gospel of the righteousness of God, that which is both imputed and imparted.³⁵ Such a conquest means that the "death throws" are under the dominion of the Holy Spirit.

(3) The Spirit of resurrection indwells, v. 11.

Here is glorious, irresistible logic that builds upon the reality of the Spirit of God indwelling the Christian. Thus, by expansion, "But if (and it is assumed to be true that) the Spirit, that is of He who raised Jesus from the dead, is dwelling in you, then that same One who raised Christ from the dead will also make alive your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Thus the matter of the saving of the body is taken up in view of the prior description in v. 10 of its seeming consignment to inevitable and just decay. Consequently the Spirit that instrumentally saves the soul will also save the body rather than replace it. Hence this "mortality" will be clothed with "immortality" which transformation is simply the culmination of gospel victory (I Cor. 15:53-57; II Cor. 5:4). Yet also note here that while the Spirit is the agent of indwelling and enabling, even so the Father commands this gospel work while the Son is its holy executor.

Again Stott quotes Bishop Handley Moule: "Wonderful, is this deep characteristic of Scripture: its gospel for the body. In Christ, the body is seen to be something far different from a mere clog, or prison, or chrysalis, of the soul. It is its destined implement, may we not say its mighty wings in prospect, for the life of glory."³⁶ For Paul, the term "mortal bodies," τὰ θνητὰ σώματα, ta thnēta sōmata, that is our bodies subject to corruption through sin, surely has in mind much of his earlier emphasis introduced in

³³ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, pp. xiii-xiv.

³⁴ "The body is, as it were, the seat of death; there is a principle of decay and of death in the bodies of all of us, and the process of decay is increasing and growing. Ever since the Fall, the moment we enter into this world and begin to live we begin to die. Your first breath is one of the last you will ever take!" Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:5-17, p. 69.

³⁵ Both Lloyd-Jones and Morris understand this broader meaning; Haldane, Moo, Shedd, Stott, an objective righteousness; Hodge, a subjective righteousness.

³⁶ Stott, *Romans*, p. 227.

6:6 regarding “our body of sin” that has continued to be a major concern up to this point. Indeed this focus is ongoing, except that it now concerns the anticipation of triumph when we, who presently “groan within ourselves,” finally experience “the redemption of our body,” v. 23, which indeed shall be transformation “into conformity with the body of His [Christ’s] glory” (Phil. 3:21).

2. There is life in the Spirit of adoption, vs. 12-17.

Thus this indwelling Spirit is a “mighty Spirit” in terms of our present interim pilgrimage (Eph. 1:19; 3:7, 16, 20; Col. 10-11), and the expectations of holy Christian living are now presumed to be based upon this fact, especially as the doctrine of adoption incorporates such truth. In practical terms, Thomas Manton comments: “Now the Spirit would not put us upon the labors of the body, and take no care for the happiness of the body; these two always go together: ‘The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body’ (I Cor. 6:13). Christ expecteth service from the body, and gave up himself for the redemption of it, as well as the soul (I Cor. 6:20).”³⁷

a. The obligations of sonship, vs. 12-13.

Like the strong inference commencing v. 1, here there are emphatic and weighty consequences with regard to the Christian so potently indwelt by the Spirit of God. As the well equipped soldier is responsible, under obligation in terms of using those accouterments which are designed for his safety, so the child of God is indebted to the reign of the Spirit of God in his life with regard to an appreciation of His might, holy dominion and exclusive claims. The word ὀφειλέτης, *opheiletēs*, describes a person in debt; for Paul in 1:14 it is divine obligation according to his calling; in 15:27 it is the Gentiles’ material obligation to Jerusalem for their spiritual inheritance; in Gal. 5:3 it is the legalist’s obligation to keep the whole law. So here it is the weight of responsibility which the indwelling Holy Spirit brings, as a Master who although capable of being “grieved” (Eph. 4:30) and “quenched” (I Thess. 5:19), yet here upholds His rightful demands upon the children He has adopted.

(1) Not to the flesh, vs. 12-13a.

Implicit is the understanding that while the flesh was formerly the governing lord of the Christian when unconverted (7:5; 8:3; Eph. 2:3), now the indwelling lordship of the more potent Holy Spirit has supplanted this reign. Therefore a new allegiance is incumbent upon the child of God, in two realms. First, in the realm of Scripture knowledge, we are to yield to the truth lodged in the mind concerning the Spirit’s dominion. Second, in the realm of regenerate experience, we are to yield to the dynamic concerning the Spirit’s indwelling life and influence. Thus the Christian is not merely a person who has, through a commitment of will, spurned carnal overtures; rather he is under constraint of the life of God in his soul God, a new bias, a

³⁷ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, XII, p. 24.

new tilt of affections, to repudiate the lustings of the flesh by means of the new resources bestowed at conversion.

But does the warning here imply the possibility of defection? The “if” proposition can be translated: “For if, and this axiom is certainly true, you are living [present tense] according to the dictates of the flesh, then you are destined to a damnable death.” Lloyd-Jones responds that Paul uses, “a form of speech which we use when we say to a person, ‘If you put your finger into that fire you will be burned.’”³⁸ That is, here we have a warning which the true child of God will certainly heed. The present tense focus here, as well as that of the “deeds,” πράξεις, praxeis, of the flesh in v. 13b, is reminiscent of I John 3:8-9 where a similar concern describes those “practicing sin” as being “of the devil.” Yes a Christian can and will sin according to the promptings of the flesh (I John v1:8, 10), but not as a matter of habitual routine. Rather he will truly repent, seek cleansing and forgiveness (I John 1:9), and pursue a course of “mortification,” that is a “putting to death the deeds of the body.”

(2) But to the Spirit, v. 13b.

An opposite destiny awaits those who actively pursue mortification of the body through the Spirit, namely that of “life.” Surely this incorporates both a present perspective as vs. 14-17 describe, though primarily a future hope as vs. 18-25 anticipate.

“Mortification” or “putting to death” is ἀποθνῆσκειν, apothnēskēin, a present active infinitive describing a continuous process that the believer initiates, in contrast with the death resulting from carnality just mentioned. Moo explains Paul’s point here as, “you will not ‘die’ if you cause your sin to die.”³⁹ However it is vital to note here that such responsible activity is that of a regenerate child of God “by the Spirit,” that is the Spirit of God the Father “who raised Jesus from the dead.” This subject of mortification has been the object of much perverse teaching, especially by the Roman Catholic Church in terms of physical containment and even flagellation. On the other hand, Puritans in particular have contributed greatly to our understanding of Paul’s teaching here, perhaps preeminently in John Owen’s work, *Of The Mortification of Sin in Believers, Etc.* based on this verse.⁴⁰ In summary he declares:

- (a) There is no “sin killing” unless a person be a true believer. “There is no death of sin without the death of Christ. . . . All attempts, then, for mortification of any lust, without an interest in Christ, are vain.”⁴¹

³⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:5-17, p. 109.

³⁹ Moo, *Romans*, p. 495n.

⁴⁰ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, VI, pp. 5-86. In a similar vein, also refer to Owen’s *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, *ibid.*, pp. 153-322.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35.

- (b) There must be “universal sincerity” or a thorough concern regarding sin. “So, then, it is not only an intense opposition to this or that peculiar lust, but a universal humble frame and temper of heart, with watchfulness over every evil and for the performance of every duty, that is accepted.”⁴²
- (c) There must be faith in the succor of Christ. “Set faith at work for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.”⁴³
- (d) Particular directions to follow. 1. Be alert to symptoms of lust, 2. Be aware of the results of sin, hardening, loss of peace and strength, wounding, loss of usefulness, discipline. 3. Allow guilt its full dimensions. 4. Cultivate the longing for deliverance. 5. Consider the nature of the body (I Cor. 9:27). A man may have leanness of body and soul together. 6. Watch for situations that cause eruptions. 7. Quickly oppose the first actings of sin. 8. Let the soul contemplate the excellence and majesty of God. 9. Seek peace only from God, not self delusion.

Of course, such a disciplined Christian life is ever the fruit of justification, as the order here in Romans clearly indicates. However, the Christian saved by sovereign grace is to vigorously “consider [put to death]”⁴⁴ the members of his earthly body with regard to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed” (Col. 3:5). Or, he is to “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).⁴⁵ Notice the paradox that Paul describes as resulting from our investment in either the flesh or the Spirit. Living in the flesh brings death; inflicting death on the flesh brings life (S. of S. 2:15; Matt. 5:29-30). So Morris well describes these fundamental options that confront us in this modern era when he concludes: “There is a living that is death and there is a putting to death that is life.”⁴⁶

b. The marks of sonship, vs. 14-17.

As Paul has recently given sudden focus to an aspect of sanctifying truth that receives concentrated emphasis, namely that of the role of the “mind” in vs. 5-8, so here the doctrine of “adoption” is given the same abrupt prominence. The reason for this injection of teaching concerning the believer’s sonship with the Father through Christ appears to be further explanation about the Spirit’s effective operation in sanctification, but especially “mortification.” In other words, the dominant leading of the Spirit, v. 14, is that by which mortification

⁴² Ibid., p. 42.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁴ Here Paul uses “to put to death,” νεκρώω, nekroō, probably emphasizing the condition of death whereas ἀποθνήσκειν, apothnēskēin refers to the act that brings death about.

⁴⁵ Here Paul uses “crucify,” σταυρόω, stauroō, emphasizing the strictness and severity of the mortification.

⁴⁶ Morris, *Romans*, p. 312.

becomes a possibility, reality, and evidence of adoption; but further, this is in fact the “Spirit of adoption,” v. 15, by which an array of reassuring inheritance privileges have been obtained, vs. 16-17.

The concept of “adoption” is described by the terms of “sonship,” v. 14, “son placement,” v. 15, and “children,” vs. 16-17. In vs. 14-15 the root term concerns υἱός, huios, while in vs. 16-17 it is τέκνον teknon, the distinction perhaps being the “relation of nature” in the former and the “position of honor” in the latter.⁴⁷

(1) Living sonship from the Spirit of the Father, v. 14.

Since v. 13 was very much concerned with lifestyle, whether according to the flesh or Spirit, here Paul further declares and qualifies who are really the sons of God. Confession of this relationship is one thing, but manifestly “being led by the Spirit of God” is quite another. So, and the text is emphatic at this point, only those “who are being led [present tense, passive voice] by the Spirit of God” are authentic Christians. Thus, such teaching indicates that all men are not universally, in terms of salvation and thus distinct from Acts 17:28, “children of God,” according to “the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.” The fact that Jesus Christ charged certain Jews with being “children of the devil” (John 8:44) is sufficient proof of this point. Further, the “like father like son” principle applies here. As the natural child bears the physical likeness of his parentage, so the child of God inherits the spiritual likeness of his heavenly Father, and that of His Spirit in particular. Children of God are spiritual by inevitable derivation because “God is S[s?]pirit” (John 4:24). Now when such a child of God becomes aware of such a relationship, especially its internal witness, then great confidence results, as v. 15 indicates.

But more specifically, what is this “leading”? The word ἄγω, agō, in its basic form simply means “to lead,” as in Luke 4:1 where Christ was “led around by [under the influence of] the Spirit in the wilderness.” But here the context, as well as the passive force, suggests a more personal constraint. So Lloyd-Jones comments: “What [the Spirit] does is to persuade them. He leads us by persuasion; not by brute force, not against our will. He persuades the will, which is a very different thing. . . . What the Spirit does is to enlighten and persuade. . . . It is a matter of powerful persuasion.”⁴⁸

(2) Adoptive access through the Spirit to the Father, v. 15.

Paul continues to use antithesis, as in vs. 4-6, 9, 12-14 to stress the radical character of a regenerate child of God, who, previously under the dominion of the flesh, is now under obligation, that is inevitable constraint to live confidently according to the indwelling Spirit of God, v. 11. Here “flesh” seems paralleled with “spirit of slavery” and “Spirit” with “spirit of adoption,” though now heightened passion is injected based upon a privileged filial relationship.

⁴⁷ Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 311.

⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:5-17, p. 167.

(a) The spirit of slavery leads to fear.

The term “spirit of slavery” refers to a former “inward principle” or “guiding mind set” which, according to the preceding context, especially 7:14, 23, would be a legal dominion that has captivated the unwary Christian (Gal. 2:4; 4:1-7; 5:1-2; Col. 2:16-23; I Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 12:18-24).⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones best captures the thrust here when he writes of those believers who are subject to this bondage:

I am thinking of people who are quite clear about their relationship to the law the —Ten Commandments, or the moral law —as a way of salvation. They have seen clearly that Christ has delivered them from that; . . . they are quite clear about their justification. However, they now begin to look positively at the Christian life, and in a very subtle way — quite unconsciously to themselves —they turn it into a new kind of law, with the result that they get into a spirit of bondage and of serfdom. . . . In other words, holiness becomes a great task to them, and they begin to plan and organize their lives and introduce certain disciplines in order to enable them to carry it out. . . . We can easily impose upon ourselves a new law.⁵⁰

Sometimes a child lives in a “spirit of slavery” before its parents; it lives in the household, in submissive, trembling fear, addressing the father as “Sir,” in military style, but not as one who confidently cries “Abba! Father!” and runs toward his gracious embrace. So here Paul is concerned that the slavish Christian is robbed of the joy of his secure standing through sovereign grace, his ready welcome, his privileged inheritance; he lacks confidence; he has doubts concerning his acceptance and approval before God. Now he distinguishes true sonship as being based, not upon conformity to principle, but vital constraint of the Spirit of adoption.

(b) The Spirit of adoption leads to access.

As is Paul’s frequent method (6:11; Col. 3:3-5), so here he reminds the Christian of his real status; it is as if he were to say: “Child of God! Wake up to your high calling! Being an authentic Christian, you have received the Spirit of adoption who mediates sonship. Therefore be bold, even as you sense the constraint! Confidently address Him as, ‘Abba! Father!’” The key term here is πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας, pneuma huiiothesias. We opt for the Holy “Spirit” here based upon Galatians 4:6, who communicates and seals the new adoptive relationship, which is literally, “son placement.” Bruce explains:

The term ‘adoption’ may smack something what of artificiality in our ears; but in the first century AD an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary

⁴⁹ Surely this slavery is not a reference to the unconverted state as Hodge and Murray maintain, which, as we have earlier considered, is not the concern of Romans 7.

⁵⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes And Cure*, pp. 165-6.

course of nature, and might well enjoy the father's affection more fully and reproduce the father's character more worthily.⁵¹

So the Christian “is crying out,” present tense of κρᾶζω, *krazō*, being onomatopoeic, sounding like its meaning, as the call of a raven (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 9:27; John 7:28, 37; 12:44). The actual cry is “Abba! The Father.”⁵² “Abba” is also onomatopoeic, an Aramaic term expressing a child's parental affection, though forbidden to be used by household slaves. Its use in Mark 14:36 by Christ indicates fervent, intimate relationship rather than distress. Thus the believer responds with intimate, confident, albeit respectful, fondness for God who he knows with a depth of experience. But is this a normative description here? Lloyd-Jones does not believe so. We respectfully disagree since, while not denying a gradual heightening of assurance following conversion, the context here does not support a higher level of assurance, akin to Lloyd-Jones' understanding of a post-conversion baptism of the Spirit.⁵³ Such a view must describe the “sons of God” in v. 14 as a distinct group of believers, whereas the context of vs. 9-13 distinguishes between the spiritual believer and the carnal unbeliever.⁵⁴ Furthermore, a natural child is not always crying out “Abba, father,” though it does so periodically. So the Christian has not only intervening valleys of diminished confidence but also periodic seasons of heightened assurance, of course initially at conversion. “t those times he delights to sing Charles Wesley's verse:

⁵¹ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, p. 166.

⁵² Israel was to regard Jehovah as “Father” (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16), in contrast with Mohammedanism.

⁵³ At this point in Lloyd-Jones' commentary, he deals at length with the view that Romans 8:14-17, in parallel with Romans 5:5 and Ephesians 1:13-14, describes the assured, Spirit baptized Christian. However not all believers have this depth of experience or Spirit baptism. He writes, “that the ‘Spirit of adoption’ is not essential to salvation, for a person can be a Christian and yet know little or nothing about this Spirit of adoption. As I say this I am well aware that the majority of the Protestant Reformers would not have agreed with my statement, for they tended to teach B Luther and Calvin in particular, but others also B that assurance of salvation was necessary to salvation. They failed to draw a distinction between salvation itself and the assurance of salvation. So they tended to teach that a man was not saved unless he knew he was saved, that is to say, unless he had assurance.” *Romans*, 8:5-17, p. 246. On Romans 5:5 he writes: “You cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit, but you can be a Christian without having the love of God shed abroad in your heart.” *Romans* 5, p. 84. He musters numerous testimonies in support, including Thomas Brooks, Philip Doddridge, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, Howell Harris, D. L. Moody, John Owen, Edward Payson, J. Philpot, Charles Simeon, C. H. Spurgeon, John Wesley, and George Whitefield.

⁵⁴ More contemporary commentators who would not agree with Lloyd-Jones at this point include Boice, Haldane, Hendriksen, Hodge, Moo, Morris, Murray, Shedd. Stott comments, “I have no wish whatever to call in question the authenticity of the experiences described [by Lloyd-Jones]. Nor do I doubt that many Christian people continue to be granted similar profound encounters with God today. Nor is there any problem in affirming that the ministry of the Spirit of adoption (v. 15) and the inner witness of the Spirit (v. 16) are designed to bring us assurance. My anxiety is whether the biblical texts have been rightly interpreted. I have the uneasy feeling that it is the experiences which have determined the exposition. For the natural reading of Romans 8:14-17 is surely that *all* believers are ‘led by the Spirit’ (v. 14), have ‘received a Spirit of adoption’ (v. 15), and cry ‘*Abba*, Father’ as the Spirit bears witness to them that they are God's children (v. 16) and therefore also his heirs (v. 17). There is no indication in these four verses that a special, distinctive or overwhelming experience is in mind, which needs to be sought by all although it is given only to some.” *Romans*, p. 236.

My God is reconciled,
 His pardoning voice I hear;
 He owns me for His child,
 I can no longer fear;
 With confidence I now draw nigh,
 And Father, Abba, Father! Cry.

(3) Internal witness by the Spirit from the Father, v. 16.

Here is the quintessential verse concerning the highest category of Christian assurance. A believer may be assured from reading the Bible that he is an adopted child of God, yet if that Bible is taken from him, what then? But if that same believer be in prison, none can take from him that witness of the Holy Spirit engraved upon his soul that speaks in biblical terms of adoptive blessings. John Wesley warns us: “How many vain men, not understanding what they spake, neither whereof they affirmed, have wrested this scripture to the great loss, if not the destruction, of their souls! How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for this witness of the Spirit of God, and thence idly presumed they were the children of God, while they were doing the works of the devil! . . . [I]t is the more necessary to explain and defend this truth, because there is a danger on the right hand and on the left. If we deny it, there is a danger lest our religion degenerate into mere formality; lest having ‘a form of godliness,’ we neglect, if not ‘deny, the power of it.’ If we allow it, but do not understand what we allow, we are liable to run into all the wildness of enthusiasm.”⁵⁵

The context concerns “being led by the Spirit of God” in v. 14 and the exuberant cry of “Abba! Father!” in v. 15. The initiative rests with the Holy Spirit, for it is “He himself” who “testifies with out spirit that we are the children of God.” The word *συμμαρτυρέω*, *summartureō*, cf. 9:1, means “to witness with.” Whereas in the context of justification 5:5 declares “the love of [from] God has been poured out within out hearts through the Holy Spirit,” here the witness of the Spirit is portrayed as a constant presence. Moo comments that Paul explains, “how it is that ‘receiving the Spirit of adoption’ enables us to cry out ‘Abba, Father!’ The Holy Spirit is not only instrumental in making us God’s children; he also makes us aware that we are God’s children.”⁵⁶ Here is the impetus that constrains the exclamatory, familial cry of being owned of God, as Charles Wesley expresses:

My God I am thine; what a comfort divine,
 What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!
 In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am,
 And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His name.

Hence Paul defines a fundamental, normative attitude of the Christian which marks out true conversion. Lloyd-Jones teaching at this point, though unintentional, suggests a lesser standard that is rectified by a baptism of the

⁵⁵ John Wesley, *Fifty-Three Sermons*, pp. 123, 136-7. Refer also to B. B. Warfield’s dealing with this problem in *Faith And Life*, pp. 187-9.

⁵⁶ Moo, *Romans*, p. 503.

Spirit. Rather, we agree here with Calvin who comments: “Therefore, this sentence standeth sure, that none can be called the son of God who doth not acknowledge himself to be such [an] one (I John 5:19).”⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that initial conversion has assurance in full bloom; but it is to affirm that there must be some budding of confidence that declares, “one thing I do know [is] that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

(4) Glorious inheritance with Christ from the Father, v. 17.

The witness of the Spirit does not stop at reassuring the Christian of his adoption; there is so much more that is to be appreciated as a consequence of being a child of God, and this involves future inheritance and glorification preceded by inevitable suffering, all of which is associated with Christ.

(a) The child of God has an inheritance with Christ.

Probably drawing on the Old Testament concept of “inheritance” that commenced with Abraham, 4:4, and focused on “the land” under future Messianic reign (Ps. 25:13; 37:9; Is. 60:21), the child of God now has a more glorious prospect. Having received the Holy Spirit only as “a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession” (Eph. 1:14), as an heir the Christian is to confidently anticipate the fulness, or “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). Thus the believer, as an “heir of God” (cf. Gal. 4:7), is the future recipient of all of the “riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; 2:7). But further, the language here suggests that we, together with Christ, inherit God himself. Haldane comments: “God is the portion of His people; . . . God is all-sufficient; and this is an all-sufficient inheritance; It is God Himself, then, who is the inheritance of His children. . . . ‘Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee!’ (Ps. 73:24).”⁵⁸

(b) The child of God has present suffering with Christ.

With the assurance and hope that adoption stimulates, the believer is able to traverse the inevitable sufferings that he experiences, for Christ and like Christ. As Christ anticipated his inheritance of the Father and endured earthly trial for this cause (John 17:1, 4-5), so his disciples tread the same path. They persevere because of an inheritance perspective (Heb. 12:1-2).

(c) The child of God has the hope of glory with Christ.

Travail culminates in triumph so that co-glorification, like unto Christ’s glorious body (Phil 3:21), becomes the moment of inheritance. Peter describes “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (I Pet.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 214.

⁵⁸ Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 373. Also refer to Murray in support, *Romans*, I, pp. 298-9.

1:11)” which the child of God is to likewise anticipate. So Paul in v. 18 declares, “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” This is the appointed pathway for the church of Jesus Christ.

Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war,
 She waits the consummation of peace for evermore;
 Till with the vision glorious Her longing eyes are blest,
 And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

B. FUTURE GLORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOSPEL GRACE, VS. 18-25.

There is an obvious connection with v. 19b that is at the same time transitional concerning the whole of vs. 1-19a. The present reign of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the present dominion of the godly mind over sin, the present life of God in the soul, the present adoptive relationship with the Father, the present internal witness of the Spirit, these are all experienced in an environment of present suffering and persecution. Nevertheless the best is yet to come when we shall “be glorified with Him [Christ].” So Paul launches forth from this point with the assurance that, for the Christian, future prospects are incomparably glorious.

For the child of God, like Job, his future blessings will far transcend present trials (Job 42:10-17). In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan portrays the authentic pilgrim as frequently anticipating the transcendent glory of the Celestial City. When the prospect of persecution tempts Christian to retreat, it is his assessment and vision of his final destination that encourages him to press forward. So here Paul presents a vision of “the freedom of the glory of the children of God, . . . the redemption of our body,” vs. 21, 23, that is intended to cause spiritual salvation.

2. There is hope of incomparable glory, v. 18.

The “consideration” or “reckoning,” λογίζομαι, logizomai, here, cf. 2:3; 3:28; 6:11; 14:14; II Cor. 10:11; 11:5; Phil. 4:8, is the focused activity of the Spirit animated mind of vs. 5-8. First, as with any normal Christian, it is sensitive to “the sufferings of this present [now] time.” While our self-inflicted troubles are excluded, and persecution may be a subsidiary concern, yet the primary cause of anxiety here is the inherent corruption of the human condition, as 7:18, 23-24; 8:20-23 indicate. These struggles include sickness, the aging process, poverty, bereavement, etc. Now the believer with poor or short-sighted focus will be a spiritual hypochondriac, much like Little Faith in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, who was more complaining than forward looking pilgrims. But the child of God whose clear vision is set heavenward will be transported to a more blessed plain of existence that finds the impact of earthly trials to be greatly diminished.

For Paul, it is “the glory that is to be revealed in [εἰς not πρὸς] us,” that is glory imparted to thee believer and not merely beheld by him. This “glory” or δόξα, doxa, especially its Hebrew equivalent, כְּבוֹד, kabod, includes the idea of weight of honor that a king would display. So in II Corinthians 4:16-17, “we do not loose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For [our] momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.” So here Paul describes this “glory” as “incomparable” insofar

as earthly glory is concerned. But more specifically, what is this “glory” yet to be received? Surely it is the fact that, “we shall be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (I John 3:3).

Two days before Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones passed away, having refused further life-sustaining medication, he wrote a note to his wife and family members: “Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory.”⁵⁹ David Brainerd responded similarly on his deathbed: “I am almost in eternity. I long to be there. My work is done: I have done with all my friends: all the world is nothing to me. I long to be in heaven, praising and glorifying God with the holy angels. “All my desire is to glorify God.”⁶⁰ This is what Paul writes of here, and it is intended to make us be more reassured in our faith as we look beyond ourselves to the anticipated privileges and delights of the Celestial City.

3. There is hope of creation redemption, vs. 19-22.

The following extension of thought now encompasses “the creation,” or “whole creation,” v. 22, which term seems to contrast with “we ourselves” in v. 23, so that the “subhuman creation” is envisaged.⁶¹ In other words, a polluted universe will be the object of God’s saving power. The effects of the Fall will be fully reversed so that the original creation will be redeemed as a whole so as to vindicate God.⁶²

a. The creation yearns for redemption, v. 19.

An expanded translation reads: “For the intense, absorbing, neck-stretching expectation [ἀποκαταδοκία, apokaradokia] of the subhuman creation is eagerly awaiting the apocalyptic revelation of the sons of God.” This “unveiling of the sons of God” looks to that future time of fulfilled glory when those presently saved are then consummately saved. Such redemptive perfection (I Thess. 5:23), when “this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality” (I Cor. 15:54), when “there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; . . . [when] there will no longer be any curse” (Rev. 21:4; 22:3), is fervently awaited by a creation under human dominion (Gen. 1:27-28).

Since v. 18 has spoken of “the glory that is to be revealed in us,” so here that future glory is assumed when “the revealing of the sons of God” is described, as does I John 3:2: “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because

⁵⁹ Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight Of Faith, 1939-1981*, II, p. 747.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II, p. 384.

⁶¹ Moo, *Romans*, pp. 513-5, also Cranfield, Hendriksen, Lloyd-Jones, Stott. Haldane adds that, “the prophets introduce the earth as groaning, and the animals as crying to God, in sympathy with the condition of man (Joel 1:10-20; Jer. 12:4; Isa. 13:13; 24:4-7; 33:9; 34:9; On the other hand, the Prophet Isaiah (49:13;) predicates] . . . a better state of things. [So also] in Psalm 98:4-8,” *Romans*, pp. 378-9.

⁶² Such redemption of the material universe or “the whole creation” is basic to a premillennial eschatology. Erich Sauer comments: “God does not abandon His plan for His creation, and even as in the beginning there was an earthly condition before sin broke in, so will there be finally a renewed and transfigured earthly creation, a perfected condition of the earth after sin has been overcome; and the last will surpass the first.” *From Eternity To Eternity*, p. 19. Refer also to Carl Hock’s defense of “new heavens and a new earth” (II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) as renovation rather than re-creation, *All Things New*, pp. 197-200, also George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, II, pp. 479-93.

we will see Him just as He is.” The strong inference here is that the creation is longing for that time when it can applaud, “clap its hands” (Ps. 98:7-9; Isa. 55:12-13), at that time when the sons of God “will be revealed with Him [Christ] in glory” (Col. 3:4).⁶³ Thus Lloyd-Jones makes application:

We have already considered Paradise lost. But Paradise is to be regained. This is a part of the great salvation, and the whole creation is involved. . . . But this is literally what is going to be true of all of us who are the children of God. Can we ever again allow anything to get us down in this world? Will you ever grumble and complain again? Will it worry you very much what man may do to you? You are being prepared for this indescribable glory which is awaiting the children of God. It is to be manifested and revealed. Lift up your heads, life up your hearts, by faith keep your eye on the coming glory. ‘Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth’ [Col. 3:2]. All here is passing and temporary; but we belong to the kingdom which cannot be moved, the kingdom which God has prepared for His people, His children, ‘before the foundation of the world’ [Eph.1:4].⁶⁴

b. The creation has need of redemption, vs. 20-21.

For Paul, the material creation is not a carnal diversion that should yield to a more lofty spiritual mode of comprehension. His understanding of the Old Testament hope must incorporate the anticipation of a renovated world, a true, righteous theocratic utopia that triumphs, through the agency of Christ, over a past fallen era.

(1) Due to bondage to assigned failure, v. 20.

Why is the material, sub-human creation in this state of pining for full human redemption? Because it also has suffered degeneration since “it was subjected to futility,” that is God consigned it to “vanity” or “purposelessness,” ματαιότης, mataiotēs, as frequently used in the Septuagint version of Ecclesiastes, to dissolution and decay and death, when He declared, “Cursed is the ground because of you [“dam”]; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:17). Haldane adds: “For as the leprosy not only defiled the man who was infected with it, but also the house he inhabited, in the same way, sin, which is the spiritual leprosy of man, has not only defiled our bodies and our souls, but, by the just judgment of God, has infected all creation.”⁶⁵ Therefore the creation in its agony (Is. 24:4-7; 34:4) longs for similar redemption; it does not have thoughts of evolutionary improvement, of progress from randomness to ordered complexity.

(2) Due to bondage to inevitable freedom, v. 21.

Yet this appointment to corruption by God purposed not only degradation but also deliverance, so that the “hope” KJV at the end of v. 20 anticipates

⁶³ Shedd comments: “Material nature is metaphorically in sympathy with redeemed man, and shall be restored with him. . . . Such personification of material nature is common in Scripture. Cf. Deut. 32:1; Job 12:7-9; Ps. 19:1-6; 96:11-12; 148:3-10; Isa. 1:2; 14:8; 56:12.” *Romans*, p. 252.

⁶⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:17-39, pp. 76, 81.

⁶⁵ Haldane, *Romans*, p. 380.

the emancipation described in v. 21, that is the “regeneration,” *παλιγγενεσία*, *palingenesia*, or earthly rebirth of Matthew 19:28. Thus the creation, the material universe including the flora and fauna, will know emancipation from its former “slavery to corruption,” a world of entropy and dissolution that is “red in tooth and claw.” Just as the children of God will experience glorious renovation, so the world at large will undergo similar conversion. Charnock comments:

As the world, for the sin of man, lost its first dignity, and was cursed after the fall, and the beauty bestowed upon it by creation defaced, so it shall recover that ancient glory, when he shall be fully restored by the resurrection to that dignity he lost by his first sin. As man shall be freed from his corruptibility, to receive that glory which is prepared for him, so shall the creatures be freed from that imperfection or corruptibility, those stains and spots upon the face of them, to receive a new glory suited to their nature, and answerable to the design of God, when the glorious liberty of the saints shall be accomplished. . . . The earth hath both thorns and thistles and venomous beasts, the air hath had its tempests and infectious qualities, the water hath caused its floods and deluges. . . . It is convenient that some time should be allotted for the creature’s attaining its true end, and that it may partake of the peace of man, as it hath done of the fruits of his sin; otherwise it would seem that sin had prevailed more than grace, and would have had more power to deface, than grace to restore things into their due order.⁶⁶

c. The creation groans for redemption, v. 22.

“For we know” suggests a specific Christian appreciation and sympathy concerning the present state of the universe, “the whole creation” exclusive of believers, due not merely to dissolution, but innate disturbance. The “groaning” here, represented by the compound, *συστενάζω*, *sustenazō*, literally “to groan together,”⁶⁷ suggests intertwining fellowship in distress, whether by means of flood, earthquake, fire, and hurricane, or famine, pestilence, plague, and chaos, or rust, corrosion, decay, and resultant dust, or war, rape, pillage, and all manner of evil. Yet this anguish is not to be comprehended in terms of futility as the world is prone to do; rather the child of God has an opposite perspective, that of “birth pangs” that will usher in glorious deliverance (Isa. 24:1-23; Matt. 24:6-8, 29-31), which principle v. 18 introduced.

4. There is hope of human redemption, vs. 23-25.

Reverting to the thought of v. 18, Paul now associates “birth pangs” with the believer who, like the expectant mother, hopefully anticipates or “waits eagerly” for consummated adoption, that is “the redemption of our body.” More specifically, “the whole creation” is the womb that shall, after much writhing, eventually usher forth “the revealing of the sons of God,” v. 19. Conception has taken place; troublesome gestation is in progress; but “the glory that is to be revealed to us,” v. 18, is yet future.

⁶⁶ Stephen Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 377-8. Peters also quotes Tyndale, Henry, Toplady, Wesley, Gill, Delitzsch who express similar opinions. *Theocratic Kingdom*, II, pp. 484-5.

⁶⁷ For Cranfield it is an intensity and accord in groaning, *Romans*, I, pp. 416-7.

- a. We groan for completed redemption, v. 23.

The tension which the Christian experiences between the indwelling Spirit and his mortal flesh, 7:21-8:8, his present earthly endurance and future glorious hope, receives yet further clarification.

- (1) The believer has present first fruits..

The believer presently has “the first fruits of the Spirit,” an initial bestowal of the Holy Spirit that both anticipates and promises the full harvest. Note the use of ἀπαρκή, aparchē, here also in 11:16; 16:5; I Cor. 15:20. In the same way God has provided a “down-payment” or “pledge” of the Spirit to begin with, an ἀρραβών, arrabōn, (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

- (2) The believer has present groaning.

Like creation in general, though contrary to expectation, the Christian groans due to his participation in God’s curse upon a fallen race. He too experiences inevitable, inescapable bodily dissolution (Eccles. 12:1-8) Thus at conversion, the believer does not receive all of his inheritance, that is perfection and glory in every regard, though he constantly longs for its reception. Hence, the groaning here has a twofold aspect. First there is the groaning that results from the conflict that the human condition presents (II Cor. 5:2, 4), and was distinctively described in 7:14-25.⁶⁸ So Stott comments:

[I]t is not only our fragile body (sōma) which makes us groan; it is also our fallen nature (sarx), which hinders use from behaving as we should, and would altogether prevent us from it, were it not for the indwelling Spirit (7:17, 20). We long, therefore, for our sarx to be destroyed and for our sōma to be transformed. Our groans express both present pain and future longing.⁶⁹

Second there is the groaning that anticipates, that longs for “the redemption of God’s own possession” (Eph. 1:14).

- (3) The believer has future adoption.

The encompassing term here is the yearned for “adoption as sons,” the accomplishment that fulfills original appointment, which climactic event includes fully realized union with God, total glorification, the plenitude of the Spirit, and reigning participation in new heavens and a new earth. Then

⁶⁸ We reject as too categorical Lloyd-Jones’ statement that, “the groaning of Romans 8:23 has nothing to do with the ‘wretched man’ of Romans 7:24. . . . So there is nothing in common between the groaning of Romans 8:23 and that of the wretched, miserable man of Romans 7:24. It is an entirely different matter. This groaning is the result of certainty, that ‘wretchedness’ was the result of uncertainty which cries out ‘Who shall deliver me?’” *Romans*, 8:17-39, p. 92. It is true that the man of Romans 7 is aggravated by his dalliance with the law, yet his accentuated problems are of the same character as that groaning which Paul presently describes.

⁶⁹ Stott, *Romans*, p. 242. In basic agreement are Calvin, Haldane, Moo, Moule, Shedd. Surely the forward looking groan in hope is stimulated by the present groan in travail over conflict with the flesh.

shall the Son of Man say, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). The specific future focus is “the redemption of our body,” that transformation from mortality to immortality, from the perishable to the imperishable (I Cor. 15:51-53), which has repeatedly been Paul’s concern since 6:6. The Christian does not simply receive a new body that displaces the old. Rather “redemption” indicates that God will reclaim that which was formerly abandoned; He will have holy triumph over that which was defiled (Phil. 3:21). And thus such a prospect becomes the ground of “waiting eagerly” for the best that is yet to come, of indomitable hope.

b. We hope for completed redemption, v. 24.

So “we are saved by hope” KJV, or better, “in hope we have been saved [aorist]” NASB. Thus “hope” is not an instrument of salvation, but rather the sphere in which salvation first came to us. Thus “hope” is a fundamental characteristic of being a Christian from the point of conversion onward. Moo comments: “Always our salvation, while definitively secured for us at conversion, has had an element of incompleteness, in which the forward look is necessary.”⁷⁰ Hence the present does not incorporate that consummation of our salvation just described as adoption/redemption, otherwise it would be realization rather than hope. Rather we hope for that which is revealed and promised as future, and yet is not presently observable.

c. We await completed redemption, v. 25.

However, in hoping for that which is not presently observable and realized, our understanding of the substance of this hope causes us to persevere with eager expectation. The child of God is like the engaged bride, looking hopefully at her engagement ring. She perseveres with eager expectation; she endures the days of preparation; she is “saved in hope,” that is she lives the days of her engagement in the sphere of hope, longingly awaiting that which she only perceives through the eye of faith, namely the wedding celebration, the day of consummated union. So the child of God “eagerly awaits” his consummated union with Christ, while at the same time contemplating the pledge/token of his engagement (Eph. 1:14). Such contemplation involves “being led by the Spirit, . . . walking by the Spirit, . . . sowing to the Spirit” (8:14; Gal. 5:16; 6:8).

C. INTERIM SECURITY THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOSPEL GRACE, VS. 26-39.

Whereas in vs. 1-17 we considered the believer’s *present* liberty that the dominion of the Holy Spirit has established, and in vs. 18-25 that same token Spirit encouraged us by means of the promised *future* glory that shall have dominion over this groaning human and sub-human creation, now we revert back to that *present* intimate dominion of the Holy Spirit which is productive of triumphant assurance, vs. 26-39.

⁷⁰ Moo, *Romans*, p. 522.

1. Through the help of the Spirit's intercession, vs. 26-27.

In the midst of a world evidencing violent death throws, the child of God not only exercises hope but also a prayerful disposition in that hope. Such an attitude is one of expressed longing while personal conflict continues. Thus the Christian prays “in the Spirit,” Jude 20, yet so often his cry to heaven seems feeble, and thus, as Morris comments, we “become discouraged in our praying, for we are conscious that we do it so badly. But here, too, we are not left to our own devices. The Spirit intercedes for us.”⁷¹

a. The Spirit intercedes with intensity, v. 26.

The expression, “In the same way,” ὡσαύτως, hōsautōs, connects us to the parallel encouragement that “hope” engenders in v. 25, and the aspect of forward looking “groaning,” v. 23, that accompanies such anticipation.⁷² Thus, as we have “groaning expectation concerning our consummate adoption,” so in the same manner we are further assisted by the “groaning of the Holy Spirit” in the realm of our poverty in prayer.

(1) Our weakness for which the Spirit of God intercedes

The believer's “weakness” or “lack of strength,” ἀσθένεια, astheneia, is that “we do not know how to pray as we should,” a specific manifestation of his overall frailty (cf. II Cor. 12:5, 9-10). But this is not a lack with regard to desire as much as prudent knowledge. Dana and Mantey more accurately translate: “we know not what we should pray for as we should.”⁷³ Warfield rightly comments on Paul here: “It is not lack of purpose—it is a lack of wisdom, that he intimates. We may have every desire to serve God and every willingness to serve Him at our immediate expense, but do we know what we need at each moment?”⁷⁴ We often pray glibly, generally, remotely, even searchingly, concerning the will of God, yet without certainty. Consider Paul's prayer in II Corinthians 12:7-8.

(2) The Spirit of God's intercession for our weakness.

Even as Jesus Christ promised, “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18), so the Holy Spirit as “the Helper” (John 14:26) will similarly be the one who “helps our weakness” in prayer, and specifically in that “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. This “help,” συναντιλαμβάνω, sunantilambanō, literally means “to assist alongside by bearing in the place of” (cf. Matt. 11:28-29). Murray adds:

⁷¹ Morris, *Romans*, p. 326

⁷² Lloyd-Jones associates v. 26 here with vs. 16-17, that is “the Spirit also helps our weakness” in a manner similar to that in which “the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.” Thus vs. 18-25 present a digression. *Romans*, 8:17-39, p. 121. However, Paul's use of this connecting adverb in seven other instances is always with reference to the immediate preceding context.

⁷³ Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 146.

⁷⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Faith & Life*, p. 198.

The children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven (cf. vs. 34; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1). The Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts (cf. John 14:16-17). . . . The glory of Christ's intercession should not be allowed to place the Spirit's intercession in eclipse.⁷⁵

Hence, the Holy Spirit helps the believer in his quest to pray according to the will of God. Thus the Holy Spirit "intercedes for us," or "petitions on our behalf" since His pleading is better able to direct our praying according to the will of God. Warfield adds that,

it is not an intercession through us as mere conduits, unengaged in the intercession ourselves; it is an intercession made by the Spirit as our helper and not as our substitute."⁷⁶ Further, the Spirit's support is "with groanings too deep for words," literally "nonverbal, incomprehensible, profound stirrings and longings," even as the whole creation and the believer presently groans, vs. 22-23.⁷⁷

Thus the Christian, in his weakness in prayer, yet will have promptings, "gracious inclinations" according to John Owen,⁷⁸ originating from the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit that will give him both constraint and direction. It is as James Montgomery has written:

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

So when the impulse to pray comes with regard to a specific situation or person, he should not hesitate but rather immediately respond to this divine stimulation. Consider Peter in mortal danger in Acts 12. Yet the church is praying for him in prison, vs. 1-5, and upon his supernatural deliverance, he finds the saints praying for him as he arrives at their gathering, vs. 11-12.

b. The Spirit intercedes with knowledge, v. 27.

Now we consider the divine perspective of God the Father with regard to what we have just understood in terms of human deficiency in prayer. An expanded translation reads: "and God the Father, who searches the hearts of all men

⁷⁵ Murray, *Romans*, I, pp. 311-2.

⁷⁶ Warfield, *Faith & Life*, p. 199.

⁷⁷ Lloyd-Jones, as with Morris and Murray, identifies this groaning with that of the believer, such as when in v. 15 and Galatians 4:6 he cries out, "Abba! Father!" *Romans*, 8:17-39, p. 136. However, this understanding is grammatically improbable, Cranfield, *Romans*, I, p. 423; Hendriksen, *Romans*, pp. 275-7. Glossalalia or speaking in tongues is excluded here since it was verbally understood in Acts 2:8, or otherwise called for verbal interpretation (I Cor. 14:13, 26-28).

⁷⁸ John Owen, *Works*, IV, p. 259-60; also refer to pp. 271-6.

universally, certainly knows with appreciation the mind and petitions of God the Holy Spirit, because that same Spirit intercedes in prayer, according to God the Father's good will, on behalf of the saints in particular."

The expression, "and He who searches the hearts," recalls the universal truth of I Kings 8:39; I Chronicles 28:9; Proverbs; 15:11; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Acts 1:24; Hebrews 4:13. It is not a pretty picture, that is the heart interests of the human race in general. However, He, God the Father, also knows the purposes of God the Holy Spirit, and in particular His groaning concern and intercession for those who He savingly indwells. Therefore the Father is aware of the Spirit's holy intentions concerning His holy will, even as they are channeled through the soul of a weak yet redeemed sinner. This aspect of divine omniscience is of special delight to the Father, and consequently suggests that such Spirit directed praying will certainly be heeded, even if so much vain prayer in the world is spurned.

2. Through the assurance of certain glory, vs. 28-30.

Here we confront a well known verse that is commonly understood in isolation, rather than retrospectively and prospectively, and in so doing a wonderful panorama of gospel truth is neglected. The overall point is that God, in delighting in the Spirit's intercessory pleading concerning His holy will for the groaning Christian, has an expansive and glorious agenda for that same believer which will never be thwarted, weakness notwithstanding. Further, this course is safely guarded for the Christian, and such security is guaranteed by the Spirit's sovereign participation. So Luther comments:

On this text depends the entire passage which follows to the end of the chapter. For He wills that to the elect who are loved by God and who love God the Spirit works all things for good, even things which in themselves are evil. He approaches, yes, from this point on begins to discuss the matter of predestination and election, which is not as deep a subject as is commonly thought, but rather is a wonderfully sweet thing for those who have the Spirit, but a bitter thing and harsh above all things for the prudence of the flesh.⁷⁹

a. A good end for the called, v. 28.

An expanded literal translation reads: "And we know that, to those who are loving the only true God, all things are working together toward a good, consummate and glorious end, that is to those who are the called ones according to His electing purpose." We could also say, "To those who are the called according to the predestined purpose of God and thus love Him, to such ones only all the particulars of life are presently working together so as to ultimately coalesce when God's good and holy objective is obtained, that is glory."

"We know" declares an expectation concerning firm Christian assurance at this point, doubtless because it is the indwelling and shepherding Holy Spirit who witnesses concerning such a secure relationship. But what is the "good" here? Surely it is the climactic "glorification" of vs. 29-30, or "the blessings of the coming age,"⁸⁰ to which terminus the Holy Spirit safely and certainly transports. Thus Joseph could declare to his trembling brethren, "As for you, you meant evil

⁷⁹ Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 371.

⁸⁰ Moo, *Romans*, p. 529n.

against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” The particulars of Joseph’s life were often troublesome, yet an overriding providence ordered that they coalesce at a point of ultimate salvation.

What then are the “all things” that are eventually eclipsed by “the good”? Not simply the adversities of life in general that unendingly confront the Christian. But rather the conflicts that Paul has recently detailed, namely the opposition of the “flesh” described in ch. 7, as well as the “groaning” and “weakness” more recently described in ch. 8. Warfield comments:

He [God] will so govern all things that we shall reap only good from all that befalls us. All, though for the present it seems grievous; all, though it be our sin itself, as Augustine properly saw and as the context demands (for is not the misery of the seventh chapter the misery of indwelling sin, and is not the joy of the closing verses of the eighth chapter the joy of salvation from sin?)—all, there is no exception allowed: in all things God cooperates so with us that it can conduce only to our good . . . our eternal good obviously.⁸¹

Who then participates in this divinely planned journey? Only those who are “the called (1:7) according to His purpose,” that is His πρόθεσις, prothesis, or “setting/placing before (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; II Tim. 1:9).” They are those effectually called, according to sovereign appointment, who consequently “love [the] God.” Again, it is the Holy Spirit who conducts safe passage so that He has no defections (John 17:12; Phil. 1:6; II Thess. 2:13-14). He is the administrator of the Father’s sovereign will. Warfield further adds:

The fundamental thought here is the universal government of God. All that comes to you is under His controlling hand. The secondary thought is the favor of God to those that love Him. If He governs all, then nothing but good can befall those to whom He would do good. The consolation lies in the shelter which we may thus find beneath His almighty arms. . . . [Nevertheless] [i]t is concerning sinners that he [Paul] is writing .⁸²

Certainly Joseph’s brethren, participants in an earthly salvation, qualified in this respect.

Thus we recall the present situation of Christians to whom Paul writes. They suffer without and experience conflict and weakness within. But reassurance is stimulated by the thought that the sovereign indwelling Spirit will preserve them unto a good and glorious end. Through the indomitable perseverance of the Spirit, they shall consequently persevere. Hence the authentic Christian can join with Paul in agreeing, “Yes, this blessed truth we do assuredly believe and know!”

b. Predestined conformity to the image of Christ, v. 29.

The striking certainty of Paul’s preceding assertion, and his expectation that Christians generally should appreciate such truth, prompts explanation that has been called the “Golden Chain” comprised of five aorist verbs or links, namely *foreknowledge*, *predestination*, *calling*, *justification*, and *glorification*. The

⁸¹ Warfield, *Faith & Life*, pp. 204-5, 210. Also Haldane, *Romans*, pp. 401-2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 210.

sequence here may be likened to an architect who first conceives of an attractive building project in his mind (*foreknowledge*); then he produces specific plans based upon this thinking (*predestination*), after which construction materials are selected (calling); then the foundation is laid (*justification*) that inevitably leads to completion of the edifice (*glorification*). The sovereign connectedness here expounds in greater detail upon God's good purpose for the called who love Him.

- (1) *Foreknowledge*, προγινώσκω, proginoskō, can mean simply to know in advance (Acts 26:5; II Pet. 3:17), yet other references (Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:2; I Pet. 1:2, 20) suggest that here Paul describes God's "forelove" (Deut. 7:7-8; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2). As Murray contends in rejecting prescience or the mere foresight of saving faith, "It should be observed that the text says 'whom he foreknew'; *whom* is the object of the verb and there is no qualifying addition. . . . It means 'whom he set regard upon' or 'whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight' and is virtually equivalent to 'whom he foreloved'."⁸³
- (2) *Predestination*, προορίζω, proorizō, logically, if not chronologically, describes "setting a boundary around beforehand," akin to foreordination, whereby God marks out in eternity past those who he set His love upon (Acts 4:28; Eph. 1:4-5, 11; I Cor. 2:7). Paul's doctrine here is rooted in, as Warfield states, "a personal God . . . according to whose will . . . all that comes to pass must be ordered [by Him]." But further, "he [Paul] too was a predestinarian because of his general doctrine of salvation, in every step of which the initiative must be taken by God's unmerited grace,"⁸⁴ as Ephesians 1:5-6 indicates. Further, the Apostle reveals a motive of love and not some dispassionate decree concerning why He chooses who He chooses (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:4; Col. 3:12; I Thess. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13, 16).⁸⁵

But the distinct point here is the design of God's predestinating love which is that those particularly chosen unto salvation might "become conformed to the image of His Son." In other words, "He [God the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him [God the Father]." (Eph. 1:4). Thus election is not unto presumption, but inner as well as outer conformity, σύμμορφος, summorphos, to the εἰκὼν, eikōn, or likeness of the glorified Christ. While present spiritual metamorphosis is not excluded here (12:1-2), yet the thrust of encouragement is that future hope of vs. 18-19 (cf. Phil. 3:21; I Cor. 15:49). So at that climactic occasion, Christ shall be acknowledged as "the firstborn [high ranking, honored heir, most blessed] among many brethren" (cf. I Cor. 15:20), that is the "head of the body, the church" (Col. 2:18), the Bridegroom who receives His purchased bride (Rev. 19:7-9).

⁸³ Murray, *Romans*, I, p. 316.

⁸⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, p. 308. Refer also to the whole article on "predestination," pp. 270-333.

⁸⁵ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 1, pp. 70-71.

c. Predestined glorification, v. 30.

The resumption of the argument reminds us that we are considering “*these* whom He [God] predestined,” that is the “called” and “we” or saints of v. 28, indeed the “sons of God,” vs. 14-15.

- (1) *Calling* bridges predestination and justification; it is directed by the plan of God toward those whom He foreloved so that by it the elect might be gathered for their salvation and incorporation into the body of the redeemed; here God moves out of the arena of His decree so as to address this polluted world and focus His word of sovereign grace upon the elect presently dwelling in the far country. Therefore “calling” involves that particular prevenient grace of God whereby the chosen are drawn with cords of love to the embrace, through faith, of Christ crucified. Again, this is “effectual calling” that is ultimately irresistible since the thought of forfeiture is not consistent with the obvious certainty that is essential to Paul’s argument here (cf. I Cor. 1:1, 2, 9, 24, 26; II Tim. 1:9). This calling is addressed to the predestined, not the world at large. It is as Packer defines, “God summoning men by his word, and laying hold of them by his power, to play a part in and enjoy the benefits of his gracious redemptive purpose.”⁸⁶
- (2) *Justification*, notwithstanding the earlier emphasis on faith alone as the linkage to salvation, is the work of God, as the other four links and v. 33 amply support. It is He who brought the Christians at Rome to this point of righteous standing with their Maker. The backward linkage suggests that such decisive reconciliation is associated with the wooing and regenerating Spirit (II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:1-2); the forward linkage suggests that such abiding reconciliation will result in inevitable glorification. Hence, the Christian is to reflect, not merely on the fact of his justification, as significant as it is, but rather the continuum of God’s dealing with him from eternity past to eternity future since this panoramic perspective will be far more reassuring.
- (3) *Glorification* refers to “the glory that is to be revealed to us,” v. 18, “the revealing of the sons of God,” v. 18, and “the redemption of our body,” v. 23. Like the other links, it is also an aorist that describes this future event proleptically, that is so certain as to be considered accomplished in the present. Most significant is Paul’s linking of justification with glorification without any mention of intervening sanctification. Actually it would be better to suggest that for Paul sanctification is implicit here. As Lloyd-Jones explains: “[T]here is no need to mention it [sanctification] as a separate step. Indeed, as Paul points out, the very facts that we have the new nature and the new outlook, that we are dead to sin and risen with Christ, that we are ‘in Christ’ and ‘alive unto righteousness’—all this guarantees sanctification.”⁸⁷ However, this manner of expression here does reinforce the Apostle’s repeated emphasis concerning the security that the Christian presently has.

⁸⁶ J. I. Packer, “Calling,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, p. 108.

⁸⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:17-39, pp. 260-1.

The point is that the believer who is genuinely justified will certainly be glorified. “[I]f you are called, you are justified, and if you re justified, you are glorified. Your glorification is as certain as the fact that you are now a Christian. No matter what may happen to you, or what the world, the flesh, the devil and all hell may do to you, nothing can ever make any difference to your position.”⁸⁸

3. Through the assurance of ultimate conquest, vs. 31-39.

Now Paul makes a mighty thrust by way of application based upon the preceding truth. Here is doctrinal extrapolation of the highest order; it is a rapturous finale that is intended to elicit intense and fervent agreement, a quenchless and joyous certitude. Notice the Godward thrust of Paul’s argument here, that is the fact that the sum total of his reasoning concerns the saving and securing character of God as the believer’s ultimate hope.

a. God the Father is for us against all opposition, vs. 31-32.

In a world that scrambles to find God, that believes God is to be discovered by human reasoning and investigation, we find the Bible declares the opposite, namely that God is only known by His self-revelation. This saving initiative is judicially represented here. After all, in any trial it is the character of the judge that will determine the destiny of the accused. Hence Barrett comments: “The question is not whether we are on God’s side, but whether he is on ours.”⁸⁹

(1) The Father defends us against all things, v. 31.

Like 3:5; 4:1, “What then shall we say to these things?” invites sacred argument concerning the force of truth embodied in both the preceding golden chain and overall gospel revelation that vs. 32-34 appear to encompass.⁹⁰ The “if” clause assumes the proposition to be true so that we could translate, “Since God is for us, who is against us?”

Literally we read: “If the God [*of Abraham*] is on our behalf [*one who defends our case,*”], then who is [*able to sustain any accusation*] against us?” Cranfield explains, like Calvin, that “God is on our side,” and such a statement is “a concise summary of the gospel.”⁹¹ What evidence then is there that supports this more effectual advocacy of God? Included in the gospel would be substitution, representation, adoption, and grace endowment; but surely the thrust here is the eternal and unstoppable design of God for us that originates in eternity past and will certainly be accomplished in eternity future. “God for us” is guaranteed by the golden chain, void of any weak link, that God has forged.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 259.

⁸⁹ Barrett, *Romans*, p. 172.

⁹⁰ Stott sees “five convictions” in v. 28, “five affirmations” in vs. 29-30, and here the first of “five questions” in vs. 31-35. *Romans*, pp. 246-60.

⁹¹ Cranfield, *Romans*, I, p. 435. He refers to the parallel use of ὑπέρ, *huper*, here in Mark 9:40.

However, it is soberingly implicit that God is not for everyone, but rather against a great multitude. The Old Testament supports this truth, both with regard to backslidden Israel (Num. 25:3), and especially paganism as represented by Babylon (Jer. 51:24-5), Nineveh (Nah. 3:5), Egypt (Ezek. 29:9-10), Tyre and Sidon, Edom (Ezek. 26:3; 28:22), etc.

“Who” then is against participants in the golden chain of God’s sovereign mercy? Those children of “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10) who indict God’s elect, the seed of the world, the flesh, and the devil, who inflict every imaginable form of evil, vs. 33-36 But in spite of this onslaught, nothing that man engineers can break the chain that God has forged, for nothing is “able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” v. 39. So Charles Wesley has written:

Surrounded by a host of foes,
 Stormed by a host of foes within,
 Nor swift to flee, nor strong to oppose,
 Single, against hell, earth, and sin,
 Single, yet undismayed, I am:
 I dare believe in Jesu’s name.
 What though a thousand hosts engage,
 A thousand worlds, my soul to shake?
 I have a shield shall quell their rage,
 And drive the alien armies back;
 Portrayed it bears a bleeding Lamb:
 I dare believe in Jesu’s name.

Thus we conclude that if God is for us in the manner that is here described, in spite of the whole world being against He and us, consequently we are most enthusiastically for God in worship, praise, and faith obedience.

(2) The Father gives us all things with Christ, v. 32.

Further evidence of “God being for us” is now forthcoming through the use of sanctified logic (cf. 5:9-10), that is arguing from a greater premise to a lesser conclusion. The major premise may be expanded in translation: “God the Father, prefigured by Abraham’s offering of Isaac (Gen. 22:16), did not spare His own Son, Jesus Christ, as pagan gods might, but on behalf of us all He determined to deliver Him up as an atoning sacrifice.” The emphasis here is upon what God has done by sovereign determination, certain accomplishment, without any thought of contingency. God did it! Period! He offered His Son; the world did not originate this sacrifice even though it accountably participated in it (Isa. 53:4, 6, 10; Acts 2:23; 4:27-8). Further, the divine intent was to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21), that is “us all” here, and not potentially or hopefully but actually. Further, and the context bears this out, such an offering was not provided in a vacuum, but rather as integral to that accomplished via the inseverable chain of vs. 29-30.

Thus the minor conclusion is posed in the form of an unanswerable question. How then is it possible for “God the Father *not* freely to give us all

[the] things, in conjunction with Christ?” But what are “the all things”? Strictly they are not the “all things” of v. 28 which oppose our Christian progress, but the broad spectrum of the gracious benefits incorporated in the golden chain.⁹² Thus if we have become united with Christ, then we have become partakers of “the all things” that are included from foreknowledge through to glory (cf. I Cor. 3:21-23). Therefore the Christian under trial is secure in the knowledge that present spiritual union with Christ, vs. 14-18 guarantees ultimate deliverance and glorification.

So Lloyd-Jones concludes in commenting on this verse:

If He [God] has ‘foreknown’ you He has ‘predestinated’ you, and if He has ‘predestinated’ you He has ‘called’ you, and ‘justified’ you: and if He has ‘justified’ you He has already ‘glorified’ you. His love sees the end from the beginning, and He has given you absolute proof of it on the Cross in order that you might enjoy the assurance and the happiness of salvation even while you are in this world of sin and woe and evil and shame. Do you constantly work out this mighty logic?⁹³

b. God the Father justifies us against any accusation, vs. 33-34.

While there is one saving purpose with regard to “those who are the called according to His [God’s] purpose,” yet a distinct saving relationship becomes evident between the Father who delivers the verdict concerning justification of His elect, v. 33, and the Son who obediently obtains the righteous ground of that justification, v. 34. More broadly, and in drawing upon Isaiah 50:8-9, this scene may be likened to the relationship between a righteous judge, the accused for whom the judge has merciful interest, and the counsels for the prosecution and defense, in a courtroom setting.⁹⁴

(1) God the Father declares justification, v. 33.

It is the wielding of His gavel that determines the outcome of the prisoner in the dock, not the accusations of Satan or his agents. However, his every ruling must be just. The “elect of God” here are the “foreloved” and “predestined,” the “chosen” ones, ἐκλεκτός, eklektos, (cf. 16:13; Col. 3:12; II Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1), from which is derived the English “eclectic.” Hence, “Who can *successfully* obtain a guilty verdict against God’s elect? Obviously none since, “God is the one who is justifying [present tense] these accused,” cf. I John 1:9. Thus Lenski comments that here, “lies the entire doctrine of justification as presented in 3:21 etc. The elect are constantly justified. God does not ignore the sins they still commit, he pardons them for the sake of Christ whom the elect embrace through faith: ‘he daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers’

⁹² John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, p. 102. Gary Long, *Definite Atonement*, pp. 10, 111; Murray; *Romans*, I, p. 326; *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 9.

⁹³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:17-39, p. 399.

⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones expounds upon this whole legal scenario in a most illuminating and practical way. *Romans*, 8:17-39, pp. 404-412.

(Luther).”⁹⁵ The inference then is that to accuse God’s elect is to in fact impugn His righteous jurisdiction, which behavior He will not tolerate in His courtroom!

However, what specifically is this declaration of justification? It is both the negative verdict of acquittal (guilt justly removed) and the positive verdict of approval (righteousness justly imputed). The following verse elaborates on the Judge’s full righteous provision in this regard.

(2) God the Son implements justification, v. 34.

In v. 31 the troubled believer faces those “against” him; in v. 33 he faces a related accusatory “charge,” while here he comes under “condemnation.” This adversarial onslaught is both subjective involving his “own heart” (I John 3:20), and objective concerning the trials of v. 35 as well as personal, even justifiable criticism from without, both presently and at the day of judgment. However, as was noted with regard to Warfield’s comment concerning “all things” in v. 28, it is the subjective, inner wrestlings with personal sin, weakness, and self-accusation that most easily shake Christian assurance and are in mind here.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the assailed child of God has “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our [his] sins” (I John 2:1-2). Thus Paul describes this defense attorney as he who, through acceptable atonement (substitutionary payment), enables God to be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:26). Christ’s advocacy involves four elements. The first two (both aorist tense) describe what Christ has done, namely “died” and “risen” from the dead. The second two (both present tense) describe what Christ is presently doing, that is “sitting” and “interceding” for those he has redeemed. Indeed it is the fourth element that is most crucial to Paul’s argument, in harmony with Hebrews 7:25; I John 2:1. The point is that those Christians who are presently assailed with “conflicts without, fears within” (II Cor. 7:5) yet have ongoing legal representation before God in His heaven, even such an attorney who has never lost a case and is the most intimate of friends with the presiding Judge, that is His beloved Son!

Thus the answer to subjective woundings and piercings that result from accusatory arrows, is to be found in the objective saving work of Christ, not my own inner reasonings which are so frail, fallible, and clouded by misunderstanding. It is the outer concrete advocacy of Christ that gives me solid ground to stand upon. So Jonathan Edwards declares:

The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate; but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel. When I enjoy this sweetness, it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own estate. It seems, at such times, a loss that I

⁹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *Romans*, 573. He also draws attention to the present tense of δικαιώω, dikaiōō in 3:24, 26.

⁹⁶ So Moo, Godet. Thomas Manton especially lists unbelief, dullness, deadness, lust, sorrow, discouragement, poverty, sickness, and conscience in general, *Works*, 12, pp. 321-2., 349.

cannot bear, to take off my eye from the glorious pleasant object I behold without me, to turn my eye in upon myself, and my own good estate.⁹⁷

So Johann Rothe, the German Moravian, directs us to this same ground of assurance.

Now I have found the ground wherein
 Sure my soul's anchor may remain—
 The wounds of Jesus, for my sin
 Before the world's foundation slain;
 Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
 When heaven and earth are fled away.
 With faith I plunge me in this sea,
 Here is my hope, my joy, my rest;
 Hither, when hell assails, I flee,
 I look into my Savior's breast:
 Away, sad doubt and anxious fear!
 Mercy is all that's written there
 Though waves and storms go o'er my head,
 Though strength, and health, and friends be gone,
 Though joys be withered all and dead,
 Though every comfort be withdrawn,
 On this my steadfast soul relies—
 Father, Thy mercy never dies!
 Fixed on this ground will I remain,
 Though my heart fail and flesh decay;
 This anchor shall my soul sustain,
 When earth's foundations melt away:
 Mercy's full power I then shall prove,
 Loved with an everlasting love.

c. God the Son loves the called unto triumph, vs. 35-37.

From the moment of his conversion, the Christian commences an earthly journey fraught with opposition of every kind, and this was the life pattern of the Apostle Paul, even as he followed in the steps of his Master. Hence the great challenge for any Christian pilgrim is overcoming these difficulties (Matt. 10:22; Acts 9:14-15; I Pet. 2:21; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). So Romans has addressed this same problem insofar as the ongoing life of the believer is concerned. It is appropriately introduced in 5:1-5 as “tribulation” which follows as a consequence of justification. Then in chapters 6-7 the internal aspect of this struggle is confronted, that of the “law in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind” (7:23), followed in chapter 8 by a Spirit of adoption that causes hope to rise above present “sufferings” and “groanings” (8:15, 18, 23-25). In vs. 31-34 the conflict is described in legal terms. Now a more broad portrayal of a

⁹⁷ Quoted by Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, p. 214. William Bridge the Puritan similarly writes: “When a man draws his comfort only from something that he finds within himself; from grace that he finds within, and not from grace without; from Christ within, and not from Christ without, then his comfort will not hold.” *A Lifting up for the Downcast*, pp. 35-6.

whole catalogue of potent adversaries is described as being vanquished by the omnipotent and redeeming love of God.

(1) We are inseparable from the love of Christ, vs. 35-36.

Again recall the oppression which the Christians in Rome endured. For as Shedd points out: “The Roman regarded the Christian as a cheap and common victim.”⁹⁸ While they might have gained a reputation of love for one another within a despised lower class, yet in their worldly poverty and torment the mocking comment would have been hurled at them: “But where is the love of Christ for you now?” even as Christ was ridiculed, “He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him” (Matt. 27:43).

(a) In spite of death variously, v. 35.

An expanded translation reads: “Who will separate *us* from the love of Christ which he has actively directed toward *us* (subjective genitive)?” Here Paul draws upon his own experience of opposition that attempts to alienate him from his Redeemer (I Cor. 4:11-13; 15:30-31; II Cor. 11:26-27; 12:10). We might add here not only the threat of sickness and false religions, but also the contemporary foes of secularism, modernity, liberalism and socialism. The implicit negative answer is reserved for the finale of vs. 37, 39.

(b) In spite of death daily, v. 36.

For Paul persecution is a daily matter (I Cor. 15:31), an expected hazard that nevertheless may surprise less mature believers. Hence he quotes Psalm 44:22 in support of v. 35. “For Your sake,” would suggest that for the sake of Christ, “we are being put to death all day long,” while in Psalm 44:22 the reference is to “God.” The apostolic expectation is that Christians will distinguish themselves in their contrast with the world, not their capitulation to the world. Further, the Christian response is not one of that militancy which the world employs; such judgment must be left to the Shepherd of the sheep and his example (I Pet. 2:21-23; Rev. 6:15-17).

(2) We are conquerors by the love of Christ, v. 37.

An expanded translation reads: “But by way of stark contrast, in all of these various trials that oppose our faith, we are continuously and gloriously excelling in victory by means of he, that is Christ, who loved us.” The victory here is ὑπερνικάω, *hupernikaō*, a compound that strengthens the idea of victory to supravictory or supreme victory or ultimate victory. The means of this victory is through Christ who “loved us” aorist, cf. 5:6-8; this is not love in general, but rather that atoning love which was manifest at a point of time, in death, resurrection, session, and intercession, v. 34. Hence, this

⁹⁸ William Shedd, *Romans*, p. 269.

victory includes the conquest of death by Christ for his seed (Eph. 4:7-10; Col. 2:13-15), and thus no opposition can take away the prospect of consummate life and dominion with Christ. And for “the called according to His purpose,” such a destiny is secure and certain. But further, as Cranfield points out, such triumph “is not through any courage, endurance or determination of our own, but through Christ, and not even by our hold on Him but by His hold on us”⁹⁹ (I John 4:19).

d. God the Father loves the called in His Son, vs. 38-39.

“For I am convinced” or “I have become persuaded” is not only a logical conclusion with regard to Paul’s argument thus far, but also an expression of his desire for the Christians at Rome to have a similar measure of assurance. For such faith can conquer an empire rather than be subject to it. Paul’s martyrdom was not a victory for the power of Caesar, but rather a confession of its failure to subdue the truth, even as was the case with the crucifixion of Christ. Further, it is arguable that one man Paul, as a servant of God, accomplished infinitely more in this world than ever any one Roman did!

(1) His infinite love overcomes all opposition, v. 38-39a.

Concerning opposition to biblical Christianity, Paul concludes by moving from the more personal of v. 35 to the universal, from the material to the spiritual, from the immanent to the transcendent. Concerning the religious climate of the first century, Barrett comments: “Paul turns to what his readers probably regarded as their chief and most dangerous enemies, the astrological powers by which (as many in the Hellenistic world believed) the destiny of mankind was controlled.”¹⁰⁰

- (a) Death and life. The frustrations of temporal human existence and destiny are conquered by Christ and not vice versa. Death frustrates life and life is shrouded in death. Death is so pervasive, humiliating and inevitable while life is so fleeting. But this tyranny cannot subdue Christ; the reverse is the reality, even as Christ presently “is at the right hand of God,” v. 35.
- (b) Angels (good/bad?) and principalities or rulers (earthly/spiritual?) The context would lead us to conclude that these are opposing spiritual forces. But “angels” usually refers to “good angels,” in which case Paul may be using hyperbole (cf. Gal. 1:8).
- (c) Present and future things or things to come. Christ has conquered the temporal world with the provision of eternal life. But the emphasis here on “things to come” certainly punctures the idea that human autonomy alone can “disqualify the called,” “break the golden chain,” and here be

⁹⁹ Cranfield, *Romans*, I, p. 441.

¹⁰⁰ Barrett, *Romans*, p. 174.

the unspoken future exception to Paul's train of thought. Rather Christ is the absolute guarantee of a secure future.

- (d) Powers. These may be higher ranking spirit beings with regard to the "miracles" and "wonders" which they are able to activate (cf. I Cor. 15:24; II Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:21). Whatever, no inexplicable manifestation, no wonders from the magicians of Egypt, can keep us from the riches of grace that are in Christ Jesus.
- (e) Height and depth. To be even more encompassing, in an exalted manner of speaking, Paul includes the spectrum of from heaven to earth to hell itself, which perspective so deflates the size of our present anxieties. So we sing:

From Him who loves me now so well
 What power my soul can sever?
 Shall life, or death, or earth, or hell?
 No I am His forever.

- (f) Any created thing. Thus no power outside of God the Creator can thwart His sovereign and gracious intention for His elect. This final hedge around Paul's premise of absolute security in Christ allows for no exceptions, otherwise a believer may yet slip through God's fingers!
- (2) His infinite love is mediated by Jesus Christ, v. 39b.

Thus the conclusion is that, "nothing, except or plus nothing, is able to alienate the authentic Christian from the love of God toward us, namely that same love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Again the subjective genitive focuses on the sovereign love which God exercises toward those who He has called. The administration of this love is mediated through the Lord Jesus Christ, yet the love of the Father and the Son are essentially identical.

But for the oppressed Christian in Rome, there can be little comfort if the whole of this triumphant declaration yet rests on the vital pivot of our own choosing to continue in the faith. The whole argument here falls apart if the will of man is the ultimate determinant in his destiny; it then in fact becomes the supreme issue which yet, some would say, is an assumption. Rather, the Christian in Rome would have read this climactic assertion with renewed confidence for, as Jonah acknowledged in a most threatening situation that he was enabled to rise above, "Salvation is from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).

Thus Lloyd-Jones concludes: "God never starts a process and then gives it up uncompleted. What God starts He finishes. . . . To say that a man whom God starts saving could subsequently be lost would mean that God has been defeated by the devil. That is impossible. God's character and honor demand that a man who has been justified should finally be glorified, and His power guarantees it."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 8:17-39, p. 456.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I cannot, desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!