

## Bible Commentaries

### Coffman Commentaries on the Bible ▾

#### Romans 8 ▾

##### Verse 1

This great chapter is, in a sense, the heart of Romans, being a shout of victory contrasting with the wail of despair which closed the seventh, the transition from the bleak and depressing condition of the unregenerated there, to the enthusiastic and joyful optimism of the eighth, being signaled by the adverb "now." "There is therefore **NOW** no condemnation, etc." Thus, in the very first clause of this chapter, one encounters the dramatic affirmation and proof that the condition just described in **Romans 7** was not describing Paul's or any other Christian's experience, but was a depiction of something prior to and diverse from the situation prevailing "now." Brunner commented on this fact thus:

With a sharp turn, Paul now breaks off reflections on man under the Law; again, a "now" stands here as the signal of the new train of thought.<sup>[1]</sup>

Actually, Paul here returned to a train of thought he had already followed in **Romans 5** and **Romans 6**; but he took it up here again, following the interruption of **Romans 7**, that theme being the blessing and privilege of the life "in Christ."

##### ENDNOTE:

[1] Emil Brunner, The Letter to the Romans (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 69.

##### **There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)**

Seven times already in this letter, Paul had stressed the significance of being "in Christ." Faith (**Romans 3:26**), redemption (**Romans 3:24**), peace (**Romans 5:1**), rejoicing in God (**Romans 5:11**), abundance of grace and of the gifts of righteousness (**Romans 5:17**), being alive unto God (**Romans 6:11**), and eternal life (**Romans 6:22**), were all mentioned by Paul as blessings available to man "in Christ" and nowhere else. The expression "in Christ" opens and closes this chapter, and no understanding of Paul's gospel is possible without emphasis upon this concept.

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? Smedes wrote:

Incorporation into Christ means, in practice, incorporation into the church. The church is the social organism which forms Christ's earthly body now ... Being in the church, incorporated into it by baptism, the Christian is in Christ himself.<sup>[2]</sup>

This view is disparaged by some as sacramentalist; but Paul himself stated exactly this conception in his declarations that people are baptized into "one body" (which is the church) (**1 Corinthians**

**12:13**), and that all Christians are likewise "baptized into Christ" (**Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26,27**). Of course, being "in Christ" means far more than mere enrollment in an earthly society that calls itself a church. Being truly "in Christ" means having been born again, having believed with all the heart, having received the remission of sins and the Holy Spirit of promise (**Ephesians 1:13**), walking in newness of life, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, etc.; in short, it means having become a partaker of the salvation Christ came to deliver. However, the participation in community is without any doubt included. No man is an island; and since it is true that, from the very beginning, God added to the church those that were being saved (**Acts 2:47**), it is axiomatic that one not in the church is not saved either. This view does not fit in with modern man's passion to be relieved of any obligation toward the church; but it is nevertheless the viewpoint of the word of God. The Scriptures affirm that Christ gave his blood for the church (**Acts 20:28**); and no philosophy of religion that downgrades the church and reduces it to a non-essential status can ever be reconciled with such a truth as this. If men may truly be saved without the church for which Jesus shed his blood, then the death of Christ upon Calvary is reduced to futility.

**No condemnation ...** refers to man's justification, defined negatively as a state wherein is no condemnation. The ground of justification is the perfect righteousness in Christ; and it includes the perfect faith and obedience of Christ, in whom the righteousness of God truly exists; and the availability of that righteousness of Christ for the salvation of sinners does not derive from some magical transfer of Christ's righteousness to them in consequence of the sinner's faith nor of anything else that the sinner might either believe or do; but it derives from the fact of the sinner's being transferred into Christ Jesus where the righteousness is. Briefly, salvation is not procured by the transfer of righteousness to the sinner, but by the transfer of the sinner into Christ.

The addition to this verse found in the **KJV** has been rejected by the scholars on what surely appears to be sound critical judgment, because it is not found in any of the oldest manuscripts that have been handed down through history. There is a plausible explanation of the error by Murray, who wrote:

It is most likely that it was inserted from the end of **Romans 8:4** in the course of transcription.<sup>[3]</sup>

[2] Lewis B. Smedes, *All Things Made New* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 86.

[3] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 1p. 275.

## Verse 2

**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death.**

**The law ...** as used here, has troubled the commentators, especially those who were concerned with removing the concept of law from Christianity and making it a system of "faith alone." Nevertheless, Paul here used exactly the same word that previously was applied to the Mosaic institution; and this affords dogmatic proof that there are indeed rules, regulations, commandments, and ordinances connected with faith "in Christ" that are in the fullest sense of that word, "the law of God." The new system of Christianity is here called "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"; and, although a law of liberty, deliverance, and freedom from bondage, the requirements of it may not be ignored, but must be observed. Nor is this an isolated reference to Christianity in which such terminology is discovered. Paul himself wrote of certain persons who were spoken of as "without law," that is, without Moses' law; but of the same persons, Paul said

they were "under law to Christ!" (**1 Corinthians 9:21**). Thus, freedom from Moses' law does not mean freedom from the higher law "in Christ." All people are under obligation to obey Christ. Paul called such obligations "the law of Christ" (**Galatians 6:2**); James called them "the perfect law of liberty" (**James 1:25**), "the royal law" (**James 2:8**), and "the law of liberty" (**James 2:12**). Thus, the very gospel itself is "a law" that mortals are required to observe and obey upon pain of eternal condemnation if they neglect, refuse, or fail to do so (**1 Peter 4:17**; **2 Thessalonians 1:8,9**). Any and all of the commandments of Jesus Christ are components of that "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," which Paul mentioned here. That the commandments of Jesus Christ are actually endowed with binding and legal status as the irrevocable law of God appears in the words of the Master himself, and in that very portion of the scriptures usually recognized as the very constitution of Christianity. Christ said,

Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:19**).

If then Christianity is, at least in part, a system of law, what about the question of legalism? Who is a legalist? A legalist is one who obeys the rules and regulations of Christianity, at least to some extent, and then falls into the error of supposing that he has thereby merited salvation, and as a result of such error develops an attitude of self-righteousness similar to that of the ancient Pharisees. Never in a million years could it be correct to define a legalist as one who shall "do and teach" the commandments of Christ, for Jesus said of such a person as that, that he "shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." The practical use of the term "legalist" today is as an epithet hurled at persons who reject the heresy of salvation by "faith only."

There are two laws in view in this verse, the law of Moses from which people have been liberated through Christ, and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," the latter being synonymous with what might be called the law of the gospel of Christ. There is a sharp contrast between these two laws, one being called the law of sin and death, the other being referred to as the law of the Spirit of life. Although both systems are quite properly referred to by the Holy Spirit himself as "law," the difference between them is the difference between noon and midnight. On the very first day that the law of Moses went into effect, three thousand souls disobeyed it and were put to death (**Exodus 32:28**); on the very first day the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus went into effect, three thousand souls heard the word of God, believed in Christ, repented of their sins and were baptized for the remission of sins, thus being saved (**Acts 2:37,47**). Three thousand died at the unveiling of the law of Moses; three thousand were saved at the unveiling of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Some writers make the "law of sin and death" here apply to the law Paul mentioned in **Romans 7:23**; but these words apply also, if not exclusively, to the law of Moses. Barrett's paraphrase of this verse is:

For the religion that is made possible in Christ Jesus, namely, that of the life-giving Spirit, liberates from the old religion which is abused by sin and leads to death.<sup>[4]</sup>

Moule likewise understood this as a reference to the law of Moses, thus:

To call that sacred Code, the Decalogue, "the law of sin and death" is not to say that it is sinful and deathful. It need only mean, and we think it does mean, that it is sin's occasion and death's warrant, by the unrelieved collision of its holiness with man's fallen will.<sup>[5]</sup>

**The Spirit of life ...** is the Holy Spirit, because of no other spirit could it be said that such is the Spirit of life. He is the blessed Spirit, a member of the godhead, who takes up residence in Christian hearts in consequence of their being sons of God (**Galatians 4:6**), and in fulfillment of the apostolic

promise of such an indwelling to all believers who will repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38f**), and is thus identifiable as the "Holy Spirit of promise" (**Ephesians 1:13**). Thus the residence of the Holy Spirit in Christian hearts is not for the purpose of making them sons of God, but in consequence of their already being so; despite this, the continued indwelling of the Spirit is of such vast consequence that true sonship cannot exist without it (**Romans 8:9**). Moreover, even the resurrection of the believer at last is dependent upon this same Spirit, as indicated in **Romans 8:11**.

[4] C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), p. 153.

[5] H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Pickering and Inglis, Ltd.), p. 211.

## Verse 3

**For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.**

The law of Moses could not make people perfect, due to the weakness of people themselves in being unable to live according to its tenets. There were also certain other limitations in that ancient divine law, there having been no provision for the impartation of God's Spirit to help people, and no absolute forgiveness, there having been a remembrance of sin made again every year, even after observance of the ceremonies which typically "removed" them. (See under **Romans 10:2** in my Commentary on Hebrews.) The law could not extend justification to people except upon the premise of perfect obedience, and the weakness of all flesh prevented such a thing from ever occurring.

**God sending his own Son ...** Jesus came into the world to achieve perfection as a man and upon man's behalf. He came to fulfill the whole will of God, to obey God's every word of commandment, and to "fulfill all righteousness." Christ's faith was perfect; his obedience was perfect; his love of the Father was perfect; he was totally perfect. In Christ, therefore, is the righteousness which alone can save people; and, as to the manner of this righteousness being made available for the salvation of sinners, see under **Romans 8:1**. As David Lipscomb wrote:

Jesus Christ came as the perfect embodiment of obedience to the law of God, and with the purpose of inspiring others with the same spirit and leading all who trust in him to the same obedience from the heart to the law of God.<sup>[6]</sup>

**In the likeness of sinful flesh ...** Here is a precise distinction. The apostle did not declare that Jesus came "in" the sinful flesh, but "in the likeness" of it, the significance of this lying in the fact that our Lord's flesh was not sinful, but only like the flesh of sinful people, their flesh being sinful, not from birth, but through the practice of sin.

Perhaps people may never know why it was so absolutely necessary that God should become a man in the person of Christ, down to the very last details of conception and birth, and with all the normal attributes and characteristics of people, even to the suffering of weariness, pain, and death; but the fact of that necessity is apparent, not merely in the act of incarnation itself, but in all of the typical and prophetic representations of it, as for example when Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, the healing serpent being "like" poisonous ones (**Numbers 21:8**)! But why did Paul use such an expression as "the likeness of sinful flesh," an expression found nowhere else in the word of God? True, Paul used such expressions as "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (**Romans 1:3**), "manifested in the flesh" (**1 Timothy 3:16**), and "made in the likeness of

men" (**Philippians 2:7**); but the use of such an expression here must have fulfilled some special purpose. Murray's exegesis provides a plausible explanation, thus:

He is using the term "likeness" not for the purpose of suggesting any unreality in respect of our Lord's human nature. That would contradict Paul's express language elsewhere in this epistle and in his other epistles. He is under the necessity of using this word here because he uses the term "sinful flesh"; and he could not have said that Christ was sent in "sinful flesh." That would have contradicted the sinlessness of Jesus for which the New Testament is jealous throughout. So the question is, Why did Paul use the term sinful flesh, when it is necessary to guard so jealously the sinlessness of our Lord's flesh? He is concerned to show that when the Father sent the Son into this world of sin, of misery, and of death, he sent him in the manner that brought him into closest relation to sinful humanity that it was possible for him to have without becoming sinful himself. He himself was holy and undefiled - the word "likeness" guards this truth. But he came in the same human nature; and that is the purpose of saying "sinful flesh." No other combination of terms could have fulfilled these purposes so perfectly.<sup>[7]</sup>

Let it be noted, however, that the flesh of humanity is sinful, not from birth or by nature, but from the practice of sin.

**And for sin ...** is Paul's way of stating the purpose of Christ's coming into the world. It was on account of sin, to deal with sin, to provide an atonement for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh, as stated a moment later.

**Condemn sin in the flesh ...** does not mean to condemn the people who sinned, the law of Moses having been far more than sufficient for such a purpose as that, but to condemn sin in the sense of taking away its dominion over people, stripping sin of its power to hold the entire race of man captive in sin. This expression reminds one of Paul's saying that Jesus "led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men" (**Ephesians 4:8**). Here the meaning is that Christ condemned the condemnation due to sin, and sin, almost personified, is said to be itself condemned. The law of God to the effect that sin deserved the penalty of death could not be thrust aside and merely ignored; the penalty had to be executed; and, in the weakness and sinfulness of humanity, there appeared to be no hope whatever that this penalty could be removed by the actual living of a pure and holy life. Thus, it was necessary that if the penalty should be enforced and at the same time humanity spared, it was mandatory that the Holy One should descend from above and pay it himself upon their behalf. That is what Jesus did! To provide such a great gift on behalf of man was the purpose of Christ's coming into this world. As Brunner commented:

God's Son had to assume the sinful flesh (the likeness of it) in order to be able to bear and take away its burden. Godhood and manhood had to be in an incomprehensible manner united in it so that God's law could really be fulfilled.<sup>[8]</sup>

[6] David Lipscomb, A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles (Nashville, Tennessee: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1969), p. 143.

[7] John Murray, op. cit., I, p. 280.

[8] Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 68.

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## Verse 4

## **That the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled is us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**

The great purpose of Christ's redemptive act was this, that people might keep all the law of God. The purpose of salvation in Christ, far from being that of mere imputation from without of a righteousness to mankind through such a device as the sinner's faith, was, on the other hand, concerned with the enabling of people to observe all of God's commandments in a true spirit of love and obedience, such becoming possible through the means here presented, that of walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

**That the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us ...** shows that God's purpose with reference to his commandments has been invariable from all eternity, and that God's purpose has not been diverted or diminished with regard to those who are called Christians. The manner of fulfilling God's commandments, however, has undergone a marvelous transformation in the new covenant. Whereas under the Old Testament regime, attention was directed to specific commandments of "thou shalt not" do this and "thou shalt" do that, under the New Testament system the believer in Christ lives a life of love and harmony with the Spirit of God. Paul earlier said that the law of Moses was spiritual (**Romans 7:14**), and, therefore, the law coincides absolutely in all of its commandments of moral uprightness with the Spirit of God. Thus, to walk in the Spirit is to fulfill the will of God.

**Who walk not after the flesh ...** This is an appropriate place to note Paul's use of the term "flesh." For three separate senses in which Paul employs this term, see under **Romans 7:6**. Paul did not teach that all flesh is by nature and from birth sinful. As Whiteside observed:

Human flesh is not sinful in and of itself; if so, the flesh of Jesus was sinful. ... Christ had in his nature all that the word "man" implies. "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also in like manner partook of the same" (**Hebrews 2:14**). "Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren" (**Hebrews 2:17**). If Christ's brethren were born sinful and he was not, then he was not like them in all things. But as Jesus was made in all things like unto his brethren and was without sin, it shows conclusively that sin is not a part of man's nature. When Adam and Eve were created, they had all that belongs to human nature. Sin came into their lives as the result of a foreign element. Sin is no more a part of man's nature than is dust in the eye.<sup>[9]</sup>

The use of the word "likeness" in the preceding verse (which see) has led some to suppose that Christ partook of a human nature that was only similar to that of people, the dissimilarity being in that all other people possessed a sinful nature, and Christ did not. Such cannot be true because the author of Hebrews described Christ as one "tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin" (**Hebrews 4:15**). Now if Christ's very nature had been different from that of other people, it could not have been true that he was tempted as people are tempted. He would have had, in such a view, a variation that would have made that statement in Hebrews impossible. Therefore, as already noted, the sole reason for Paul's employment of the term "likeness" in the preceding verse was for the purpose of avoiding an implication that Christ's flesh was sinful, and not for the purpose of suggesting that his flesh was different from that of all people.

**In the flesh ...** as used here has reference to living in such a manner that the fleshly lusts, appetites and desires are the goals of life. That person who makes the satisfaction of temporal, bodily, social and animal instincts the end and all of living is walking after flesh. Thus Tertullian was correct:

It is the works of the flesh, not the substance of the flesh, which St. Paul condemns. ... The apostle everywhere condemns the works of the flesh in such a way as to appear to condemn the flesh; but no one can suppose him to have any such view.<sup>[10]</sup>



[9] Robertson L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to Saints in Rome* (Denton, Texas: Miss Inys Whiteside, 1945), p. 170.

[10] Tertullian, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), Vol. III, 578-579.

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## Verse 5

**For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.**

The Greek from which this verse comes, according to Wuest, may be translated literally thus:

For those who are habitually dominated by the flesh put their mind on the things of the flesh.<sup>[11]</sup>

Wuest also noted that the word "mind" carries with it the thought of "deliberately setting the mind upon a certain thing." From this, it is clear that "walking after the flesh" means deliberately shutting out from the mind all other considerations except those related to animal, bodily, social and temporal needs and desires. In such a definition appears the true reason why the flesh is called "sinful." It is not because of inherent or natural contamination, but it is due to domination of the flesh by a mind at enmity with God. Again, from Tertullian,

Therefore the apostle says that "sin dwelleth in the flesh," because the soul by which sin is provoked has its temporary lodging in the flesh, which is doomed indeed to death, not however, on its own account, but on account of sin.<sup>[12]</sup>

Once the stubborn soul of man, the inner man himself, as distinguished from the flesh, has become reconciled to God through faith and obedience to the gospel of Christ, and has received the Holy Spirit of promise, such a person is then endowed with a whole new set of values. He is born again! Thus the man walks "in newness of life," as Paul had already stated in **Romans 6:4**. This transformation from the old state to the new one is here identified as "minding the things of the Spirit"; but Paul also identified the same condition as that of permitting the mind of Christ to be in the believer (**Philippians 2:5f**). A legitimate deduction from this is that to possess a measure of God's Spirit and to possess the mind of Jesus Christ are one and the same thing.

[11] Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 130.

[12] Tertullian, loc. cit.

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## Verse 6

**For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace.**

**Mind of the flesh ...** cannot be thought of as identifying the mind with the flesh, that is, the substance of the flesh. Tertullian cautioned that

The carnal mind must be referred to the soul (as distinguished from the flesh), although ascribed sometimes to the flesh (as here), on the ground that it is ministered

to by the flesh and through the flesh.<sup>[13]</sup>

The "mind" that Paul had in view here is the rebellious and perverse spirit of man's inner self; and the meaning is not primarily that physical death is caused by such mind (though, of course, it can cause that also), but that a state of death derives from and automatically accompanies such a mind, a condition called death "in trespasses and sins" (**Ephesians 2:1**). In a simplistic view, man's entire trouble lies in his inmost mind. Who is in charge there? If the inner throne is occupied by Satan, sin and death reign. If Christ is on the throne, life and peace reign.

#### ENDNOTE:

[13] Ibid., p. 579.

## Verse 7

**Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.**

As Barrett noted,

(The mind of the flesh) means a mind from which God is excluded.<sup>[14]</sup>

This verse should be understood in the light of certain basic facts. There is a seat of authority within every person; it is the essential "I" whose choices and decisions determine destiny. Not merely the body, but also the intelligence itself, are both subject to this essence of the person, which is the monitor of the complete life of the individual. This inner throne of personal authority was designed by the Creator for his own occupancy, and is so created that the "I" itself cannot occupy it; although it is possible for the "I" to dethrone God and turn the occupancy of the throne over to Satan. This is what Adam did in Eden. This means that every life is under the authority of God or that of Satan. Man was so created that it is impossible for man himself to be the captain of his soul, his very nature requiring that the ultimate authority of his life shall belong to either one of two masters, and only two, God or Satan. Thus, when Paul spoke of the "mind of the flesh" in this verse as being at enmity with God, he referred to the mind of one who has put the Lord off the inner throne of his life.

It is true that Satan deceives people into the vanity of believing that they might indeed get rid of God and "live their own lives"; but it is a delusion, for, in the very act of refusing God the adoration that is rightfully his, the person becomes automatically a de facto servant of the devil; and the inevitable result of such an exchange of masters is that the very highest human faculties (as well as all others), including the intelligence itself, are incapable of serving God as long as such a condition exists. This intelligence subordinated to Satan instead of God was called "the mind of the flesh" by Paul here, because such a mind no longer has any regard or concern for eternal things and is occupied completely with the earthly life of flesh.

How utterly wrong, therefore, and how totally incredible, is the delusion that any such thing as total hereditary depravity was taught by Paul in this verse. Murray has this:

In the whole passage we have the biblical basis for the doctrines of total depravity and total inability. ... "Enmity against God" is nothing other than total depravity, and "cannot please God" nothing less than total inability.<sup>[15]</sup>

But, of course, the expressions cited by Murray refer to man's mind, not as it was by the endowment of birth, but as it became through his rebellion against God. Paul's teaching here



corresponds exactly with that of Jesus regarding two masters (**Matthew 6:24**). If one decides to serve one, he cannot serve the other; but in the teaching both of Paul and of Jesus, the question of the soul's right to decide is never for an instant doubted. The impossibility of serving the other master cannot derive from any inborn condition, but it must always be viewed as the consequence of the soul's decision to serve one or the other, that option being the only one that God has given people.

The right of decision is never removed from man, no matter what his sins are; and therefore the "mind of the flesh" is morally accountable to God. Every gospel invitation, and even the great invitation of Jesus (**Matthew 11:29,30**) are grounded in the principle that even the wickedest of people have the right of decision if they elect to exercise it. The doctrines of depravity and inability cited above are inimical to the word of God, being not founded in the teachings of Christ or his apostles, but derived from the speculations of people. The question of judicial hardening is another matter, and will be discussed under **Romans 11:25**. Christ's teaching with regard to little children and his word that "unto such belongeth the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 19:14**) is a denial of human theories of total depravity, etc.

[14] C. K. Barrett, op. cit., p. 158.

[15] John Murray, op. cit., p. 287.

## Verse 8

**And they that are in the flesh cannot please God.**

The questions raised by this verse are discussed under **Romans 8:7**, above. "In the flesh" is here a reference to the condition that exists when the soul rejects its Creator, sacrifices all hopes of immortality and of the eternal world, and decides to make the present life of flesh its one and only concern.

## Verse 9

**But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.**

This verse categorically defines the person who is "in the flesh." He is the man, any man, who does not have the Spirit of Christ. The great human delusion is to the effect that there are really three kingdoms, Gods, Satan's, and **OURS**! But **OURS** apart from God is not ours at all, but Satan's. It's really that simple! Man, by the very nature of his creation, is free only to the extent of being able to choose between good and evil, between God and Satan. There are not ten thousand ways, but only two. Jesus called them the narrow way and the broad way (**Matthew 7:13,14**). But that glorious right of decision makes all the difference. It is the most priceless endowment of life on earth. Man was created in God's image; and, although sin has eroded and defaced the sacred likeness, enough divinity remains in every man, regardless of how wicked he is, to enable him to exercise the option of whom he wills to serve. Not even Satan can demur or countermand the soul's high order to re-enthroned the Christ within!

To every man there openeth **A** high Way and a low; And every man decideth The way his soul shall go.<sup>[16]</sup>

The ability to establish an acceptable pattern of behavior in the sight of God is therefore dependent, first of all, upon a person's decision. Once the right decision has been made by hearing and obeying the gospel invitation of Christ, God sends his Holy Spirit into the lives of his children, thereby enabling them to live "in the Spirit." Such a new manner of life frees them from "the mind of the flesh" and embarks them and sustains them upon the right pathway. The importance of God's Spirit in the hearts of Christians is of the very first magnitude, and a more particular attention to what the word of the Lord reveals concerning this truth is appropriate.

## THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

Not merely here (**Romans 8:9**), but throughout the New Testament, the fact of the indwelling Spirit of God is emphasized. The first promise of the gospel is that believers in Christ who repent and are baptized for the remission of sins shall "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38f**), and for this reason he is called "The Holy Spirit of Promise" (**Ephesians 1:13**). To the Corinthians, Paul spoke of "the Holy Spirit which is in you" and declared that "the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (**1 Corinthians 6:19**; **3:16**). To the Galatians, likewise, he said, "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (**Galatians 4:6**); and the Saviour himself said of the Holy Spirit to his disciples that "he dwelleth with you, and he shall be in you" (**John 14:17**).

The degree of impartation of this glorious gift is only a portion but marvelously sufficient. Paul called this partial infusion of the Holy Spirit "the earnest of our inheritance" (**Ephesians 1:13,14**). The token quantity of this gift is ample to supply the child of God with all the help that he needs, but it is not enough to make him independent, either of the community of believers or of the word of God. The limited nature of this impartation should ever be remembered. The Holy Spirit within Christians is not a full measure of prophetic, healing, and discerning power, such as that enjoyed by the apostles of Christ. No true Christian, by virtue of his possessing the Spirit, should ever consider himself free to discard the sacred scriptures and "feel" his way to glory; and yet one gets the impression that some feel that way about it.

When does one receive the indwelling Spirit? The Scriptures are very plain with reference to this: (1) It occurs "after that ye heard the word of truth" (**Ephesians 1:13**); (2) It comes after people have believed in Christ (**Ephesians 1:13**); (3) the indwelling begins after believers have become sons of God and as a consequence of their being so (**Galatians 4:6**); and (4) the blessed Spirit is promised as a gift contingent upon and following the believer's repentance and baptism (**Acts 2:38f**). In the light of these sacred teachings, how true are the words of Brunner with reference to how the life of the Spirit is achieved. He said, "It is nothing less than being in Christ."<sup>[17]</sup> It may be accepted as absolutely certain therefore, that the Holy Spirit never enters a believer for the purpose of making him a son of God, and he, in fact, never enters any person whomsoever except those who decide to serve God and obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The results of the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of God's children are also spelled out in **Galatians 5:22,23**, where such results are defined as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. Specifically it should be observed that certain things are not said to be the fruit of the Spirit. Such things as miracles, gifts of prophecy, and speaking in tongues are not included. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of contradicting the scriptures, nor of noise and confusion, nor of dreams and illusions, nor of strife and sectarianism, nor of pride and envy, nor of unfaithfulness and division.

There are many misconceptions regarding the Holy Spirit in Christians' lives, perhaps more than with regard to any other major doctrine of the Bible. Some of these are: (1) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a commandment of God; on the other hand, it is not a commandment at all but a promise; (2) that the Holy Spirit is promised to all believers; on the contrary, he is promised to all believers who repent and are baptized for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38f**); (3) that the Holy Spirit baptism was promised to all Christians; but this promise was to the apostles alone (**Luke 24:49**); (4) that the Holy Spirit is imparted to make people sinless; yet Peter sinned after he had received

even the baptism of the Holy Spirit; (5) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a subjective experience within men's hearts; to the contrary, it was a visible and outward manifestation of God's power, as exemplified by the two New Testament examples of it at Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius; (6) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is followed by speaking in tongues; and, while it is true that the apostles did speak in tongues on Pentecost, after the power of the Spirit came upon them, the kind of tongues manifested there was nothing like the incoherent, unintelligible jabberings of the so-called "tongues" affected today; (7) that the Holy Spirit must work directly upon an unbeliever before he can obey God; but this is wrong if any other type of work is expected beyond the preaching of God's word, there being absolutely no New Testament example of any conversion in which the convert did not first hear the word of God preached and then upon believing it, obey it.

[16] John Oxenham, *The Ways*.

[17] Emil Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

## Verse 10

**And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.**

**If Christ is in you ...** is exactly synonymous with several other Pauline expressions, such as: being "in Christ," the Spirit "dwelling in" Christians, and "having the mind of Christ" (**Philippians 2:5**), etc. These expressions may not be precisely differentiated, for they all refer to the saved condition.

**The body is dead because of sin ...** emphasizes the truth that the redemption in Christ does not remit the sentence of physical death upon all men. The body of the holiest Christian is dead (that is, under sentence of death), even as it is with all. Godet has this:

The primeval sentence still holds sway **THERE**; the body is deathful still; it is the body of the Fall; but the Spirit is life. He is in that body, your secret power and peace eternal. "Because of righteousness" (means) because of the merit of your Lord, in which you are accepted, and which has won for you this wonderful Spirit life.<sup>[18]</sup>

Some commentators insist that "spirit" in the second clause of this verse means the spirit of man, this being required as the antithesis of "body" in the first clause. Others, like Godet, interpret it as meaning the Holy Spirit. Godet wrote:

We refer the word (Spirit) here, as throughout the passage, to the Holy Spirit. No other interpretation seems either consistent with the whole context, or adequate to its grandeur.<sup>[19]</sup>

Another view is possible, and is broad enough to include both viewpoints. By understanding "spirit" to mean not merely the spirit of an unregenerated man, but the spirit of the Christian in the state of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the antithesis would be fulfilled and the appropriate emphasis upon the Holy Spirit would both be achieved by such an interpretation. This also harmonizes with the text. for it is not of any human spirit that Paul here wrote, but the spirit of Christians; and, furthermore, the life imparted is due absolutely to the Holy Spirit's residence within the Christian's spirit.

[18] F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 214.

[19] Ibid.

## Verse 11

**But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you.**

In the preceding verse, Paul mentioned the body's being sentenced to death, due to that portion of the primeval sentence being still operative, even upon Christians; but even the death of the body is at last to be nullified by the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Such a nullification will take place when the "dead in Christ" rise to meet the Lord in the air. The resurrection itself, in this verse, is made to depend upon the indwelling of the Spirit, for it is promised, "If the Spirit ... dwelleth in you."

The resurrection of Christ appears here as a pledge of a similar resurrection of Christians, a resurrection of their "mortal bodies," just as Christ's mortal body was raised and recognized by his disciples. Thus salvation is more than merely saving the soul, although that is likewise glorious; but this teaches that body and soul alike will participate in the ultimate glory of eternal life. The great connective between the resurrection of Christ and the ultimate resurrection of his disciples is the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit in Christian hearts, and thus appears the absolute necessity of the Spirit's residence in Christian hearts. This place, along with **Romans 8:9** compels the conclusion that if one does not have the Spirit of God in his soul, he is not a Christian, not in Christ, not saved, and is not in any sense Christ's.

## Verse 12

**So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh: for if ye live after the flesh, we must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

The first clause here is a figure of speech called meiosis, a vast understatement for the sake of emphasis. "Not debtors to the flesh"! Indeed no; they are debtors to the Spirit and are charged with the responsibility of even putting the flesh to death, in a figure. These verses form an exhortation regarding the two ways to live, the consequences of which Paul had already fully outlined. To live after the flesh is death; to live after the Spirit is eternal life.

**Ye must die ...** has reference to more than physical death, for Paul had already noted in **Romans 8:10** that Christians are not exempt from that; therefore, it is of eternal consequences that he spoke here. Lenski was impressed with the contrast between the words "live" and "die."

Men ever think that they are really living when they give way to the flesh, whereas in reality they are heading straight for eternal death.<sup>[20]</sup>

Significantly, there is no relaxation of moral requirements for those who are in Christ. Believing and obeying the gospel, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thereby rejoicing in the grace of God, do not for a moment cause sin to be any less sin for the Christian. Mortification of the deeds of the body is the daily task of the soul in Christ. Greathouse's comment is this:

It is important that we try to grasp just what Paul means here. He is most certainly not advocating ascetic mortification, which is based upon the idea that the body is a

weight upon the soul. Paul is not positing any Hellenistic body-soul dualism. As we have seen, the body [Greek: soma] is the soul expressed concretely. What the believer is obligated to do, if we may borrow Oswald Chambers' happy expression, is to sacrifice the natural for the sake of the spiritual. By the Spirit, we are to reckon that the members of our body are dead to sin and that we are alive unto God (**Romans 6:11-13**)<sup>[21]</sup>

[20] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 517.

[21] William M. Greathouse, *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1968), p. 174.

## Verse 15

**For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**

**The spirit of adoption ...** is doubtless another expression referring to the Holy Spirit, so-called here because of the appropriate contrast with the "spirit of bondage" which marked their lives in the service of Satan. Christians are sometimes called "bondslaves" to Christ; but here their status is compared to that of children adopted by a loving father. The point of the admonition forbids fear. If God's children will love him and be faithful to him, there is absolutely nothing that they need to fear. The first fruits of the indwelling Spirit are love, joy, and peace; and it is unbecoming of a child of God to manifest a spirit of bondage and fear. After all, he is God's **CHILD**! As a child of God, the Christian should live a life of joyful anticipation of those eternal benefits which are so emphatically promised in the word of God.

**Abba, Father ...** "Abba" is the Aramaic equivalent of "Father"; and thus the expression literally means "Father, Father." Sanday explained the repetition as

one of endearment and entreaty, taken from the natural impulse of children to repeat a beloved name in different forms.<sup>[22]</sup>

Barrett was impressed with the profound implications of this verse, as follows:

That it occurs twice (the expression "Abba, Father") in Paul's Greek writings is a striking fact, which may be due to the impression made by Jesus' direct and unconventional approach to the Father. It corresponds exactly to the opening of the Lord's Prayer in the Lucan form (**Luke 11:2**), and Paul's reference here may be to the use of this prayer in Christian worship. The very fact that you can address God as Abba proves that the Spirit is at work among you, and that you are Gods' children.<sup>[23]</sup>

Taking Barrett's discerning thought a little further, the **PROOF** that God's Spirit is actually working in people does not depend upon some outlandish manifestation but upon simple things like the willingness to address God as Father in prayer, the willingness to sing his praises in public assemblies, the willingness to attend public worship and to maintain public identification with God's children in the church. It is dearly in such ways as these, and in countless so-called ordinary ways, that the proof of the indwelling Spirit is manifested in Christians. Such prosaic things as daily prayer and regular worship tend to be despised; but in this verse the Spirit himself reveals that these things are actually the sine qua non of walking in the Spirit, and that they prove the Spirit's indwelling presence, only with this provision, that such conduct is truly the result of the Spirit's

influence and not merely the exercise of the person's own will through selfish and social considerations.

[22] W. Sanday, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 236.

[23] C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

## Verse 16

**The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him.**

**If so be that we suffer with him ...** Here again the great provisional is hurled into the consideration of the Christian's inheritance. "If" the child of God is faithful, even to the point of suffering with Christ, then, but not otherwise, shall he truly inherit eternal life. Again from Brunner:

We are still only adopted; we have not yet taken over the inheritance. We have been appointed heirs apparent of eternal life and its fulfillment, but we do not yet enjoy it. We have the full assurance of future glory, but we are not yet out of the life where there is suffering and fighting. Indeed, a definite suffering actually belongs to true discipleship. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow him, cannot be his disciple (**Matthew 16:24f**). He who does not want to suffer with Christ cannot share in his glory either. The way of the Christian is not a path on the heights but down below. The way on the heights is in heaven, not on earth.<sup>[24]</sup>

Notice the contrast between the use of "sons of God" (**Romans 8:14**) and "children of God" here. The latter terminology emphasizes the dependence of the redeemed upon their Saviour. They are not full grown, but are children; they cannot make it "on their own." Moreover, they are adopted, not heirs in their own right; and further, it is not as heirs **SOLE**, but as joint-heirs with Christ that they shall inherit, their ultimate inheritance being conditioned absolutely upon their identification with Christ, as being "in him" now and "found in him" at the last day.

"The witness of the Spirit brought into view in these verses has occasioned some extravagant language by commentators. Thus, John Wesley said:

(The witness of the Holy Spirit) is an inward impression on my soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.<sup>[25]</sup>

A further study of what the word of the Lord teaches on this subject is warranted.

## THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Nothing associated with the Christian faith has been the occasion of more uncertainty, confusion, and misinformation, than has the function of the Holy Spirit as a witness. None can deny that the Holy Spirit does indeed witness with believers, for this is the plain affirmation of the verse before us. It is not of the fact, but of the manner of the witness, that we are concerned here. John Wesley (as cited above) and countless others have understood the witnessing as an inner and subjective experience; and in that view of what this verse means, all kinds of subjective impressions, experiences, and even dreams have been received as valid bona fide witnessing of the Holy Spirit.



This writer still recalls an incident of many years ago, in which a man struck himself in the breast and said, "I would not give what I feel right here for all the Bibles on earth." He interpreted that "feeling" as the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit to him that he was a redeemed child of God, despite the fact that he was a known sinner in that community, who had never confessed the Lord, had never been baptized, and did not honor a church of any name with his membership! It is possible that such notions of the Spirit's witness still exist; and, in the interest of providing true and accurate information on this subject, the following is presented.

The New Testament gives certain examples of the Holy Spirit's witnessing, and those inspired examples demand our attention. The author of Hebrews wrote:

And the Holy Spirit beareth witness to us; for after he hath said, This is the covenant that I shall make with them ... then saith he, Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (**Hebrews 10:15-17**).

Here is an authentic case of the Holy Spirit's witnessing to the author of the book of Hebrews. Let it be noted that the Spirit did not witness "in" him but "to" him, and that the content of that witness had nothing whatever to do with any inward "feelings" of the author. The witness did not consist of anything that he either felt or thought but was composed of what the Holy Spirit **SAID**. He said, "This is the covenant, etc." (**Jeremiah 31:33f**); and the prophet Jeremiah was the mortal author of the passage here said to be the witness of the Holy Spirit. This, of course, had been written in the sacred scriptures many centuries before the author of Hebrews wrote his epistle; and that author learned what that witness was, either by reading it himself, or through hearing others read it. As Griffith Thomas noted,

This is the true witness of the Holy Spirit, not something dependent upon our own variable emotions, but that which is objective to us, and fixed, the word of God.<sup>[26]</sup>

Take another example. Paul wrote:

The Holy Spirit testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me (**Acts 20:23**).

Here again the witness of the Holy Spirit consisted of a message in words spoken. Paul did not (in that passage) name the speakers through whom the message was delivered in each of the cities where such witnessing occurred; but a graphic revelation of how it was done in one city was recorded for our benefit by the Holy Spirit, through the author of Acts of Apostles. This occurred at Caesarea, thus:

And as we tarried there some days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And coming to us and taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own feet and hands, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit. So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (**Acts 21:10,11**).

Here again, the Holy Spirit did not witness "in" Paul but "to" him, and not by any such things as subjective feelings, dreams, impressions, or premonitions. The Holy Spirit's witness came to him through words intelligibly spoken, dramatically illustrated, and plainly identified as being, not the words of Agabus, but the words of the Holy Spirit. That is the only kind of witness of the Holy Spirit that is worth the attention of the child of God.

These two New Testament examples of the Spirit's witnessing to people justify the conclusion that such witness is accomplished in two ways: (1) through the words of a living prophet, known to be true and authentic, and (2) through the words of the Bible, authored by the true and authentic prophets and inspired people of previous ages. In view of this, how does the Holy Spirit bear

witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, the same being the affirmation of the verses before us?

The Holy Spirit is the author of the commandments in the Bible, and of the promise of salvation connected with and related to those commandments, as for example when the Holy Spirit said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The witness of the Holy Spirit, in one particular, is that verse in the New Testament (**Mark 16:16**). Now, when the spirit of a man has accepted heaven's offer by believing and obeying such a command, then the spirit of such a person is also a witness that he has believed and obeyed God, and is therefore saved. Thus it comes about that the Holy Spirit bears witness, not "to" our spirit, merely, but "with our spirit" that we are children of God.

Regarding such marvelous truths to the effect that God loves us, Christ loves us, he gave himself for me, he has forgiven my sins, etc. - such are indeed witnessings borne unto the sons of people by the Holy Spirit, but certainly not in such a subjective fashion as that fancied by Wesley. No. Witnessings such as these do not depend upon the fallible and variable emotions and feelings of mortals but are grounded solidly in the word that liveth and abideth forever. One cannot resist the conclusion that Wesley received the things he mentioned, at least some of them, from the New Testament, and not from any independent testimony within himself. At least, that is **WHERE** this writer receives testimony from the Holy Spirit!

Thus, it is plain that the convert may properly say that the Holy Spirit bears witness to him in the New Testament, as indeed he does to all people, inviting people to accept salvation and revealing the conditions upon which they may have it; but the Spirit never bears witness "with" such a person until he accepts and obeys the gospel. Upon that event, the Spirit then bears witness "with" his spirit that he is a child of God. The Spirit witnesses as to the terms of salvation; the saved person's spirit witnesses to the fact that he has complied with the terms; and, in that instance, there are two witnesses to the man's salvation.

The witness of the Holy Spirit is available to all people who are able either to hear or read the word of the Lord. If one wishes to know what the witness of the Holy Spirit is with reference to such a question as who is, or is not, a child of God, let him read there what is written. There is the true witness of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's subject in these verses (**Romans 8:14-16**) was not how to become a Christian, but how to remain so. It is a misuse of this passage for one to declare that "Since I feel that I am led by God's Spirit, I know I am a Christian." Before the blessed Spirit will enter and dwell in any heart, its possessor must already be a Christian. No man who is not "in Jesus Christ" can possibly be host to God's Spirit. It is "because ye are sons" that God sent his Spirit into people's hearts (**Galatians 4:6**).

[24] Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 73.

[25] John Wesley, Sermons, Vol. I, pp. 115-116.

[26] Griffith Thomas, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 128.

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## Verse 18

**For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward.**

Despite the fact that Christians are beneficiaries of the blood of Christ, heirs of everlasting glory, and destined at last to live in that upper and better kingdom where all the problems of earth shall be solved in the light and bliss of heaven, there is a present and urgent sorrow that falls upon all of them by reason of the sufferings in the flesh. Paul had revealed a moment before that the child of God might expect no exemptions but must suffer throughout the days of mortality; and therefore, by way of encouragement, he emphasizes as a motive for patience in such sufferings, their triviality, as compared with the ultimate glory of the children of God, a glory which they shall not merely see, but a glory in which they shall actually participate. The time of such a glorification of the redeemed will be at the second coming of Christ and following the judgment of the final day. That far-off reality is here made a motive of patient endurance of sufferings and tribulations. Greathouse thus expressed it:

Sufferings then belong to this present age, between the advents of our Lord. Glory belongs to the age to come. As Moffatt puts it, sufferings are a mere nothing when set against the glory that shall be revealed in us."<sup>[27]</sup>

Charles Hodge connected this verse with the remainder of the chapter thus:

The main idea of **Romans 8:18**, obviously, is that the future glory transcends immeasurably the sufferings of this present state. All that follows tends to illustrate and enforce that idea.<sup>[28]</sup>

<sup>[27]</sup> William M. Greathouse, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>[28]</sup> Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 269.

## Verse 19

**For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the reveling of the sons of God.**

The common interpretation of this verse, from which this writer differs, is represented by the following:

The creation (means) the whole world of nature, animate and inanimate.<sup>[29]</sup>

Paul, after the manner of other sacred writers, describes the external world (the sub-human world, animate and inanimate) as sympathizing with the righteous, and participating in the glories of Messiah's reign.<sup>[30]</sup>

Hodge refers to such an interpretation as "the common one," and Murray said that:

This view is the one most widely maintained by the commentators.<sup>[31]</sup>

Very extensive and learned dissertations are available to "prove" this viewpoint, the best of them, perhaps, being that of Hodge whose logic is persuasive and difficult of refutation; but Hodge himself admitted that

In the early Christian church, this opinion was prevalent, and was the germ whence the extravagance of the Millenarians arose.<sup>[32]</sup>

Before proceeding to what is here considered the correct interpretation of this verse, it should be pointed out that if the above view is taken poetically, or figuratively, to

represent the "whole creation" now groaning beneath the consequences of the fall and anxiously awaiting the long expected day of redemption, then there would be no violence to the truth in such a view.

But the word "creation" in this verse is exactly the word in **Mark 16:15** and in **Colossians 1:23**, where, in both places, it means "human beings" only, and not animals and inanimate portions of the sub-creation; nor does there appear to be any good reason why the same restricted meaning should not be understood here. The following is from a footnote in the Greek Diaglott:

[@Ktisis] (as used in **Romans 8:19,20,21**, and 22), **CREATION**, has the same signification here as in **Mark 16:15**: "Proclaim the glad tidings to the whole creation," that is, "all mankind;" and also **Colossians 1:23**, where a similar phrase occurs. That the brute and inanimate creation is not here spoken of, but mankind, is evident from the hope of emancipation from the "slavery of corruption" held out in the 21st verse, and the contrast introduced in the 23rd verse, between the [@ktisis] and those possessing the "first fruit of the Spirit."<sup>[33]</sup>

Despite the preponderance of the commentators alleged to support the other view, there are, nevertheless, many of the most distinguished expositors who hold the view advocated here. Hodge himself mentioned, as holding this persuasion, Hammond, Locke, Semler, Ammon, and others, who held

that the word **CREATION**, as used here, means the race of mankind as distinguished from Christians.<sup>[34]</sup>

Note the following:

**CREATION** in the language of St. Paul and of the New Testament, signifies "mankind"; especially the Gentile world, as the far greater part of creation.<sup>[35]</sup>

One cannot fail to recognize that this concept of **CREATION** mostly denotes "humanity" for Paul, and that he nowhere else speaks of the world of nature.<sup>[36]</sup>

James Macknight summed up the position which seems to be correct, as follows:

According to some commentators, the words "we know that every creature groaneth" denote the whole creatures of God, animate and inanimate, which, as they were cursed for the sin of the first man, may by a beautiful rhetorical figure be represented as groaning together under that curse, and earnestly wishing to be delivered from it. ... Nevertheless **Romans 8:21**, where it is said that "the creature itself shall be liberated from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God"; and the antithesis, **Romans 8:23**, "not only they, but ourselves also," show that the apostle is speaking, not of the brute and animate creation, but of mankind, and of their earnest desire of immortality. For these reasons, and especially because of **Mark 16:15**, "Preach the gospel to every creature," which means to every human creature, I think the words (creature and creation) in this

verse and in the preceding three verses (this note was written on **Romans 8:22**), signify mankind in general, Jews as well as Gentiles. See also **Colossians 1:23** where the words signify "every human creature."<sup>[37]</sup>

If them, as assumed here, this verse is a reference to the unredeemed portion of humanity, which constitutes the overwhelming majority of all men, what is the meaning to be understood by the statement here that there is "an expectation" or longing and eager anticipation looking to the revelation of the sons of God? The most likely meaning is resident in that passionate desire of the human race for eternal life. Hodge downgraded such universal longings after immortality as insufficient to justify Paul's words here; but it cannot be denied that there are deep and irrepressible longings in the human heart for something better than the poor years of agony and frustration on earth. How eagerly do the men of science seek to hurl back the frontiers of death; how persistently do they strive to extend the human life-span; and how pitiful is the reaction of every man to the inevitable claims of the tomb! That all such agony of frustration is indeed an "expectation" looking to the revelation of the sons of God appears reasonable enough, the greatest tragedy being that, for earth's unredeemed billions, that expectation is but a subconscious thing, leading them to seek its fruition, not in the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom their most daring hopes might become reality, but in the futile and ineffectual devices which they themselves have contrived. Such is the darkness of the epic tragedy of mankind, lost in sin, without God, and without hope in the world, until they shall turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Macknight's fortunate paraphrase of this verse is thus:

What a blessing a resurrection to immortality is, may be understood by this, that the earnest desire of mankind hath ever been to obtain that glorious endless life in the body, by which the sons of God shall be made known.<sup>[38]</sup>

[29] W. Sanday, op. cit., p. 236.

[30] Charles Hodge, op. cit., p. 273.

[31] John Murray, op. cit., p. 302.

[32] Charles Hodge, op. cit., p. 272.

[33] The Emphatic Greek Diaglott, p. 531.

[34] Charles Hodge, op. cit., p. 270.

[35] John Locke, Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul (Boston, Mass., 1832), p. 331.

[36] Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 75.

[37] James Macknight, Apostolical Epistles (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1960), p. 98.

[38] Ibid.

## Verse 20

**For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope.**

There are three statements in this verse: (1) the creation was subjected to vanity; (2) this subjection was not voluntary, but imposed by God; and (3) the very subjection is a basis of hope, for otherwise there would have been no point at all in granting to rebellious humanity any further tolerance at all.

**Vanity ...** describes the wretchedness, sufferings, disappointments, frustrations, futilities and general tragedy of mortal life in a state of separation from God, due to man's sin. The New English Bible translates this phrase, "was made subject to frustration."

**Not of its own will ...** is understood by some commentators as meaning "not due to any act of its own"; but that interpretation confuses the reason of the subjection with the execution of the deserved punishment of man's rebellion. The reason for the subjection was certainly due to man's willful and rebellious act; but the execution of God's sentence upon man for that rebellion was no part of man's will. but contrary to it. It was the will of "him who subjected it," meaning God, humanity having had no choice whatever, except to submit to the subjection sentenced upon mankind by the Father. Thus the subjection was "not of its own will."

John Locke insisted that Adam's disobedience was not of his own will, since it occurred "not through his own choice, but by the guile of the devil."<sup>[39]</sup> However, Locke's interpretation fails to give proper weight to Adam's responsibility. Tempted or not, it was Adam's free will that consented to the deed that plunged all of his posterity into ruin.

**Him who subjected it in hope ...** is a reference to God, who alone had the authority and power to subject the creation to vanity, and also the option of totally destroying man because of sin, or subjecting him in hope of his redemption. The master plan of God called for the exercise of the latter option. Although many agree that God is spoken of here, Godet thought it was Adam who, through his rebellion, subjected the lower creation to the curse of God; and Hammond was quoted by him as applying the term "him"

to Satan, the prince of the world, as Jesus calls him, who either by his own fall, or that of man, dragged the creation into the miserable state here described.<sup>[40]</sup>

Neither of those views, however, takes into account the revelation here that the subjection was effected "in hope," a motive far from Satan, and likewise a stranger to Adam. That there is, of course, a grain of truth in such views, stems from the fact that both Adam and Satan had a part in it, Satan as the provocateur, and Adam as the rebellious instrument. It is, however, fully in keeping with the teachings of the Bible that God is said to do many things which, in a lesser sense, were done by others, as, for example, in the case of the crucifixion of Christ (see under **Romans 3:26**).

[39] John Locke, op. cit., p. 332.

[40] F. Godet, op. cit., p. 315.

## Verse 21



**That the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.**

The first clause here is the expression of God's hope for fallen man and should be read in close connection with the preceding verse. Here is the proof of what creation Paul meant in these verses, the same being the creation which is in "the bondage of corruption," terminology which excludes both the brute and inanimate creations and points dramatically at the sons of Adam. (See under **Romans 8:19**.) The corruption here ascribed to the "creation," as well as God's hope of its redemption, and of its becoming partakers of the liberty of the glory of the children of God are statements that simply cannot fit animal or inanimate life. No animal, for example, could be thought of as being in the bondage of corruption, nor as having any prospect of ever getting out of it. Again we have recourse to Macknight's paraphrase:

In the resolution that, on account of the obedience of the second man, even the heathens themselves shall be set free from the bondage of the grave, and those who believe be brought into full possession of the happiness which belongs to the children of God.<sup>[41]</sup>

#### ENDNOTE:

<sup>[41]</sup> James Macknight, op. cit., p. 98.

## Verse 22

**For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.**

**The whole creation ...** means all mankind, the word "creation" being the same as that used in all of these verses (see under **Romans 8:19**). Here the metaphor is that of the labor room in a hospital, only without modern anesthetics. Locke's paraphrase is,

For we know that all mankind, all of them, groan together, and unto this day are in pain, as a woman in labor, to be delivered out of the uneasiness of this mortal state.<sup>[42]</sup>

As Brunner noted, human beings are not asked if they wish to suffer, they must do so:

No one is asked! ... This expectation of the creature is different from the hope of Christians. (In their case) it is an apathetic, unconscious waiting, a waiting for something better, yet uncertain of its goal. But it is expounded by the apostle according to its true nature. What men actually mean without knowing it, is the goal in Christ which has been given to mankind: divine sonship, freedom, divine adoption, participation in the glory of God.<sup>[43]</sup>

No adequate description of the groaning of humanity is possible; but all men are aware of it. Millions of hospital beds are freighted with agony and despair. The struggles of humanity are like the frenzy of a savage beast caught in a vicious trap. Tears stain every face, and blood lies upon every threshold. The problem of daily survival presses upon the hearts of millions who are snared in poverty, grounded in the mud and filth of human sin, facing a life of ceaseless want and toil, and, augmenting their wretchedness, is the soul-fever of aching desires which agitate their minds, stifling the nobler impulses, and condemning the unfortunate to the pursuit of goals which, even if attained, turn to dust and ashes in their hands. And to climax all that tragedy of agitation and failure, the very bodies of all people, after attaining some little strength for a day, wither and descend into the rottenness of the grave. Like a wounded serpent that sinks its poisonous fangs into its own flesh people vent the agony of their madness through vicious indulgence of wars and

revolutions, only to face with each new generation the unremitting sentence to repeat the old follies, over and over again. The screams of the labor room are an apt metaphor indeed of the human condition, "subjected to vanity."

[42] John Locke, op. cit., p. 332.

[43] Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 75.

## Verse 23

**And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.**

**But ourselves also ...** Alas, not even Christians are exempt from the tragic consequences of Adam's transgression. Universal sighing is also our lot. As Brunner expressed it:

Of course, we have already become sons or children of God; but the effect of the redemption and the full realization of the sonship are still outstanding. We have only the "first-fruits" of the Spirit, the pledge of life in the glory of God, but the glory itself in its fullness is not yet here.<sup>[44]</sup>

**Our adoption ...** which was mentioned so favorably in **Romans 8:15** (which see), even that is by no means final but must be waited for. The adoption will be final and complete when man possesses his body, free of the sentence of death, thus being empowered truly to participate in the glory of God. The incompleteness of man's salvation shall ever pertain to the earthly phase of the Christian's existence. The adoption is not final, and even his possession of the Spirit of God is partial, in the extent of an "earnest" only, and bearing not the full fruit, but only the "firstfruits."

Despite the partial and incomplete nature of the salvation Christians enjoy during the present life, it is nevertheless the end and all of living. The word of the Creator himself is signed to the title deeds of our hope. The blood of Christ is sufficient to redeem; the love of God for his children will finally prevail; and the ancient promise of God will be fulfilled when "the ransomed of the Lord" shall indeed enter into his presence "with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (**Isaiah 35:10**).

### ENDNOTE:

[44] Ibid.

## Verse 24

**For in hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?**

Attention is directed to the English Revised Version (1885) margin where appears the alternate translation, "By hope were we saved." Translators and commentators are sensitive about salvation's being ascribed to anything else except faith; but the word of God honors no such inhibitions, affirming positively that people are saved "by grace" (**Ephesians 2:8**), "by the gospel" (**1 Corinthians 15:1,2**), "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (**Acts 4:10-12**), "by his (Christ's) life" (**Romans 5:10**), "by the washing of regeneration" (**Titus 3:5**), "by his (Christ's) blood

(**Revelation 1:5**), "by the foolishness of the preaching" (**1 Corinthians 1:21**), "by baptism" (**1 Peter 3:21**), "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (**1 Peter 1:3**), etc. Any simplistic system whatever that would impose such a word as "only" upon any of the factors involved in human redemption is antagonistic to the scriptures.

Hope belongs to the Christian's status, and is a prerequisite of his salvation, no less than faith and love, all three, in fact, being mentioned as a trinity of Christian requirements in **1 Corinthians 13:13**; and most significantly, faith does not climax that series; love does!

## Verse 25

**But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.**

This verse explains how we are saved by hope, because, without hope, there could not be the patience which is required to prevent the child of God from falling into discouragement. The Christian's salvation lies altogether within an area of what the world speaks of as "intangibles." It is a faithful trusting in "things not seen as yet" (see my Commentary on Hebrews, p. 250). Hope is far more than a mere wish that something might exist or be possessed; it is a valid claim, supported by faith, and grounded in confidence that the Lord is able to keep "that which I have committed to him" against that day (**1 Timothy 1:12**). This hope which saves is grounded in the Christian's living faith, but it must also be distinguished from faith. As Sanday noted,

Nor can it rightly be said that hope is an aspect of faith, because faith and hope are expressly distinguished, and placed as coordinates with each other in **1 Corinthians 13:13**, "And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."<sup>[45]</sup>

Going a little further with Sanday's reasoning, "these three" are arranged in the ascending order of greatness, and therefore hope outranks faith in the constitution of God's redemptive system. The **KJV**'s rendition of "We are saved by hope" is thus far better than the English Revised Version's "for in hope were we saved." One may not resist the fear that the latter translation was encouraged by the jealousy of people to guard one of their popular theories that people are saved by "faith alone."

### ENDNOTE:

[45] W. Sanday, op. cit., p. 237.

## Verse 26

**And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.**

There are two intercessors for the Christian: (1) Christ at the right hand of the Majesty on High (**Hebrews 7:25**), and (2) the Holy Spirit within the Christian himself. Thus, there are two sources of encouragement open to the Christian: (1) the blessed hope within himself, and (2) the help of the Holy Spirit. This entire arrangement supplies both human and divine encouragement to the child of God.

**We know not how to pray as we ought ...** does not mean that Christians have no knowledge of prayer; but, as Lard noted:

Our weakness and ignorance in this life are so great that in many respects, possibly as a rule, we know not what we should pray for as we ought. We want many things, and it may be pray for them, which, were they granted, would prove our greatest ills. fortune; while, we do not want, and never ask, for many things which would be our greatest blessings. Here then is ignorance of what we should pray for; and, as to how we should pray, I imagine we are equally at a loss. Confessedly then, we are weak and need aid.<sup>[46]</sup>

**With groanings that cannot be uttered ...** is a reference to the dimly perceived and partially understood longings of the redeemed soul which are impossible for the Christian to frame into articulated petitions to the Father, but which needs, though inadequately understood, are nevertheless understood by the Spirit of God who transfers such inexpressible yearnings of the soul to the Throne itself. This identification of the groanings mentioned here with the believer's inadequacy, rather than with any insufficiency of the Holy Spirit, follows the thought of Locke's paraphrase, thus:

Such therefore, are our groans, which the Spirit, in aid to our infirmity, makes use of. For we know not what prayers to make, as we ought, but the Spirit itself layeth for us our requests before God.<sup>[47]</sup>

Therefore, when the Christian's prayers have reached the boundary of language as a vehicle for the conveyance of thought, when such prayers become more of a heavenward sigh than a formal utterance, then the Christian may know that the inward Intercessor is fully able to convey the soul's true desire to the Throne.

[46] Moses E. Lard, Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans (Cincinnati, Ohio: Christian Board of Publication, 1914), p. 277.

[47] John Locke, op. cit., p. 333.

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## Verse 27

**And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is in the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.**

The identification of the Holy Spirit in this verse indicates personality, from the consideration of his having a "mind," and also unity with God from the consideration of his access to the Father and the absolute harmony of his actions with "the will of God." Particularly, it should be noted that the Spirit's intercession is not for all, but for the saints, the latter word emphasizing that the help of the Holy Spirit is available only for them that already have the Spirit within. God is represented here as searching people's hearts; and, as Godet noted, "God is often called in the Old Testament the searcher of hearts."<sup>[48]</sup> People may not inquire exactly into the "how" of such things, nor as to the precise manner in which such marvelous activities on behalf of the redeemed soul are actually accomplished. That it was from the beginning, in God's purpose, designed that the Holy Spirit would intercede for the saved, was pointed out thus by Locke:

"The Spirit" promised in the time of the gospel, is called "the Spirit of supplications" in **Zechariah 12:10**.<sup>[49]</sup>

[48] F. Godet, op. cit., p. 321.

[49] John Locke, op. cit., p. 334.

## Verse 28

**And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.**

**All things ...** includes all sufferings, sorrows, infirmities, and everything else of a discouraging and calamitous nature which might befall God's child on earth. "For good ..." cannot mean earthly prosperity, success, bodily health, or any other purely mortal benefit, but is rather a reference to the eternal felicity of the soul. Whatever might happen to the Christian in this life, absolutely nothing can happen to **HIM**, that is, his saved inner self. This is true because God is able to overrule every earthly circumstance in such a manner as to compel its contribution to the eternal redemption that awaits the children of God. As Brunner warned,

No universal optimism is meant - (such as) everything will turn out all right for everybody in any case. There stands here the significant limitation, "to them that love God."<sup>[50]</sup>

**Work together for good ...** speaks of a situation in which God is surely at work on the Christian's behalf, but it also speaks' of a situation in which the saved person's reaction to life's woes is a controlled response.

Some ships sail east, and some sail west, By the selfsame winds that blow. It's the set of the sails and not the gales That determines the way they go!

-Anonymous

The reaction of the child of God, or his response, to the ills of mortal life must be one of patience, submission, humility, prayer, love, hope, and faith. Even adversity of the severest kind must be made to yield its precious fruit in the heart of the Christian. It has been proved again and again by Christians that "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New."<sup>[51]</sup>

**Them that love God ...** identifies the persons who shall receive the blessing of having all things work together for good on their behalf, this identification being further pinpointed by the last clause, "them that are called according to his purpose." Who are the people who love God? Christ said:

If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. ... He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me (**John 14:15,21**).

Christ's apostles stressed the same truth:

This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments (**1 John 5:3**).

This is love, that we should walk after his commandments (**2 John 1:1:6**).SIZE>

**Them that are called according to his purpose ...** At this point, the great Biblical doctrines of calling, foreknowledge, and foreordination (or predestination) begin to emerge, doctrines which have evoked entire libraries of discussions, theories, and explanations, and which, in the fullness of their total meaning, may not be fully comprehensible to finite intelligence. These great teachings point toward God, upward and heavenward, and are like massive mountain peaks reaching up into the clouds, the summits of which extend far beyond the boundaries of human vision.

Despite this, the foothills reached by our understanding afford beautiful and breathtaking vistas of these "deep things of the Spirit of God."

Moses E. Lard said that

"Those who are called" is simply another mode of designating the saved. It and the expression "those that love God" are descriptive, not of different persons, but of the same. The two clauses also express important facts in their lives.<sup>[52]</sup>

Of deep interest is the "calling" mentioned here. Who are the called, and how does the calling occur? Paul gave the answer thus:

Whereunto (unto which salvation) he called you through the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**).

In one sense, the totality of human kind are called by the gospel, as indicated by Christ's express command that the divine call should be proclaimed to "the whole creation"; but the phrase "according to his purpose" delimits the persons here spoken of to them that fulfilled God's purpose through their affirmative response to the call.

**Called according to his purpose ...** means to be called "in one body (the church)" (**Colossians 3:15**), and that "through the church" there might be made known "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Ephesians 3:10,11**). This, properly understood, eliminates the widespread misunderstanding with regard to God's calling of the redeemed. Paul here did not speak of individuals as such, but of the whole body of the saved. That body, composed of the whole number of the redeemed, is indeed called and foreordained to eternal glory; but of an individual person, it must be said that he is called from before all time and predestinated to everlasting life, only if his affirmative response to the divine call has brought him into union with Christ, and if he so continues. See under following verses.

"Purpose ..." here is translated from a Greek term [*@prothesis*], meaning God's placing all future events before his mind so as distinctly to see them.<sup>[53]</sup>

Thus, the germ of foreknowledge is found in the very first word of Paul's revelation on this tremendous subject. God's purposing was "kept in silence through times eternal" (**Romans 16:25**), and was an event prior to the creation of the world, "which in other generations was not made known" (**Ephesians 3:5**), "which hath been hid for ages and generations" (**Colossians 1:26**), "which God who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (**Titus 1:2**). God's eternal purpose of gathering the saved of all ages into one body "in Christ" was a design "which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory" (**1 Corinthians 2:7**), which must be identified with "the mystery of God." A careful study of the passages here cited shows that in all of the "mystery" passages Paul was speaking of "the wisdom of God" and of his "eternal purpose" of uniting all people in Christ through the church which is his body.

A further word from Lard on this is:

We now have but little difficulty explaining the clause "called according to his purpose." In the [*@prothesis*] all things pertaining to man's redemption were set before God, and among them his predetermination that man should be called by the gospel, "to which salvation he called you by our gospel." Hence, to be called according to God's purpose, [*@prothesis*], is to



be called by the gospel. It is therefore not to be called by some secret impulse of the Holy Spirit; neither is it to be called "effectually," or "ineffectually," as the schoolmen phrase it. This call we are absolutely free to accept or reject; and, accordingly, as we do this or that, we shall be saved or lost.<sup>[54]</sup>

[50] Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 77.

[51] Sir Francis Bacon, in Bartlett's Quotations, p. 109.

[52] Moses E. Lard, op. cit., p. 280.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., p. 281.

## Verse 29

**For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

Godet's incisive comment on the meaning of the word "foreknew" is helpful.

There is not a passage in the New Testament where the word "know" does not above all contain the notion of "knowledge," for this is the first and fundamental meaning. The same is the case with the word "foreknow." ... In **Acts 2:23**, "foreknowledge" is expressly distinguished from "the fixed decree" and consequently can denote nothing but prescience; and, as to **Romans 11:2**, "His people whom God foreknew," the idea of knowledge is the leading one in the word "foreknew."<sup>[55]</sup>

Therefore, the only thing meant by the word "foreknew" in this verse is that God knew in advance all that would happen. There is no reason at all why this thought should trouble people, but it does. People invariably suppose that by God's foreknowledge of an event, he thereby became the cause of it, thus leaving no place for the freedom of the human will. That such a supposition is incorrect becomes clear in the analogy with human knowledge. A man knows an event that took place in the past; and yet his knowledge cannot be viewed as causing the event to happen. God's knowledge of the future is just like that, only covering a different period of time; and his eternal knowledge of what will happen cannot be viewed as the cause of those future events, nor as imposing any responsibility upon God for their occurrence. That Almighty God did actually know everything that would happen from all eternity is a fact totally beyond human comprehension, but the scriptural teaching of this fact is indisputable. In the background of Paul's thought here, there was evidently the epic problem of God's choice of Israel and apparent neglect of the Gentiles; because in **Romans 11:2**, he returned to this very word "foreknew" for the introduction of that subject there. The evident connection between what is said here and the Jew-Gentile problem discussed later was set forth in Locke's paraphrase, thus:

Bear, therefore, your sufferings with patience and constancy, for we certainly know that all things work together for good, to those that love God, who are called according to his purpose of calling Gentiles. In which purpose, Gentiles, whom he foreknew, as he did the Jews, with an

intention of his kindness, and of making them his people, he preordained to be comformable to the image of his Son.<sup>[56]</sup>

**Foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son ...** A glance at various translations and versions reveals the following words rendered for "foreordained": did predestinate, predestined, ordained, pre-ordained, appointed, etc. Where there is so much disagreement among the greatest scholars, no one should fear to choose another meaning, especially when the true meaning is obvious, can be shown to be absolutely Pauline, and clears up all the problems. Much of the fog, as thick as the meringue on a pie, which has confused and obscured the meaning of Paul here, disappears in a little closer attention to the word "destined," the same being the principal part of the word "predestined," which is by far the favorite word of the scholars for this rendition. The syllable "pre" is simple enough and refers only to the time (before the foundation of the world) when God "destined" certain things to occur. Therefore, we shall let the time element rest for the moment and focus upon what is meant by "destined." God destined people to be conformed to the image of his Son, the meaning being obviously this that the destiny of every man ever born on earth was that he should obey God and be conformed to the image of God's Son. "Destined" has special reference to the plan of God, his intention, the objective he had in view when man was created. Phillips translation of this place catches its meaning perfectly:

He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ.

That this is exactly what Paul meant is plain from what he wrote to the Ephesians:

He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 1:5**, RSV).

God's plan for every man ever born was that he should love God and be conformed to the perfect image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. To such a glorious end, God "destined him," every man. If God had destined only a few people to receive such an inheritance, such an act of discrimination would have been unjust; and it may therefore be set aside as preposterous that God showed any such partiality. Once more, the master theme of this great epistle, God's righteousness, is in focus in the words here, where Paul's meaning is that even the Gentiles also were included in God's loving plans.

But, if all people are thus "destined" by God to be Christians, why are not all saved? God gave every person the absolute freedom of his will, and any man can therefore accept or refuse the destiny to which God called him. A man can live against his destiny, as evidenced by the fact that so many do; but, despite human sin, the essential glory of man's true destiny is undeniable.

Something of the nature and quality of the destiny God intended for all people is illustrated by the various destinies of Other portions of God's creation. Thus a tiger was destined to live in the jungle, the fish in the water, the mole in the earth, the bird in the bush, and the bat in a cave. It is in such a broad frame of reference that man was destined to be a Christian, meaning that his true happiness, not merely hereafter but **NOW**, is best served by his conformity to the image of God's Son. It was for that purpose that God made him, and every one of the more than seven billion cells in his physical body bears the imprimatur of the Holy Spirit. No wonder the "wages of sin is death"! Man living against his destiny and contrary to it is like the restless tiger, pacing the concrete floor of his cell in the zoo, until he leaves his tracks in blood upon the unyielding stone of his prison. In such a tragic state, the beast reveals to man the pathos of living contrary to his destiny.

Such a view of the meaning of "destined" raises only one question, while answering many others, and that regards the reason why Paul restricted the meaning of "destined" in this place, apparently making it applicable only to those who actually became Christians. Godet's careful exegesis clears that up, thus:

(First, let it be remembered that Paul was here speaking of those who were **CALLED**). All alike are seriously called. Only it happens that some consent to yield to the call, and some refuse. This distinction is indicated by Jesus in the saying, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (**Matthew 20:16**). The chosen in this passage are those who accept the call ... those not accepting the call, remain called and nothing more, to their condemnation. In the epistles, the apostles addressing Christians, do not require to make this distinction, since the individuals they address are assumed to have answered the call from the very fact that they have voluntarily entered the church. The case is like that of a man who should say to his guests assembled in his house: "Use everything that is here, for you are my invited guests." It is obvious that by thus expressing himself, he would not be distinguishing invitation from acceptance, the latter being implied in the very fact of their presence.<sup>[57]</sup>

In exactly the same manner, Paul's reference to God's having "destined" (or foreordained) certain ones to be Christians may not be restricted to mean that such was not the destiny of all people, for it is. In Godet's illustration, above, the host's reference to those assembled as his "invited guests" cannot mean that no others except those present had been invited. Paul's use of "foreordained" here and "called" in the following verse may not be restricted to mean that no others were foreordained or called.

From the above considerations, and many others, it appears that the true meaning of Paul in this verse is that God predestined every man ever born to be a Christian, that such a destiny, or plan, was in God's original purpose before the world was, hence a pre-destiny, making Paul's word here (foreordained or predestined) to be exactly correct and appropriate. If only all people could realize that they are, and were from all eternity, destined to serve Christ, such appearing in scripture as the sole reason for their creation, what an incentive would be provided for them to turn to the Lord. To be sure, a man can live against his destiny (the freedom of the will took care of that); but, if he does, he will get hurt (and God will take care of that!). The highest happiness attainable by mankind is procurable only in harmony with the intended destiny of humanity, that of being conformed to the image of God's Son. There is no happiness comparable to that of the Christian life.

**Conformed to the image of his Son ...** is another expression that means "becoming a Christian," but there is a specific reference also to the Christian's being transformed into the image or likeness of Christ, in mind, character, obedience, and all other qualities and virtues of the soul; but it does not end there. Finally, the children of God will be raised from the dead in the true likeness of the risen Saviour. As John wrote:

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is (**1 John 3:2**).

[55] F. Godet, op. cit., p. 325.

[56] John Locke, op. cit., p. 334.

[57] F. Godet, op. cit., p. 323.

## Verse 30

**And whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified,: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.**

The last clause of this great statement of the apostle, through its use of the past tense with the ultimate glory of the child of God, is plainly prophetic, viewing the entire scheme of redemption, from the beginning plan in the purpose of God before the world was created, to the final glory, as a single great design, encompassing within one grand operation the whole of time and temporal things.

The predestined include all people, although many refuse their destiny: the called include all people, although many shall not heed it; the justified are they alone who through the obedience of faith are transferred into Christ, in whom alone justification is possible; and the glorified are those finally redeemed above.

In view of these considerations, the mysterious doctrines of predestination, calling, election, etc., dissolve into this: God's eternal purpose from times eternal, before the world was, determined that his Son, Jesus Christ, should lead an innumerable company of the redeemed out of earth's populations, that these should be made righteous through perfect identification with Christ, as being truly "in him," identifiable as his brethren, conformed to his likeness, and obedient to his will, this summing up of all thing in Christ being precisely the thing foreordained to happen. That body of Christ, the church, is destined to eternal glory, and to be presented before the throne of God's glory in exceeding joy in absolute perfection; and all hell shall not prevent it, such having been foreordained from all eternity. All that is said in the New Testament regarding predestination refers to this eventual triumph of the redeemed "in Christ," absolutely nothing whatever being able to forbid or prevent it; but all this has nothing at all to do with any individual person, as an individual, of whom nothing could be predestined, due to the freedom of his will. The predestined are those found "in Christ"; and the fairness and justice of this is inherent in the right of "whosoever will" to enter that company destined for eternal glory.

Before taking up the study of the next part of this chapter, one other word regarding predestination is in order. Sanday has this:

All we can say is that it (predestination) must not be interpreted in any sense that excludes free will. Free will is a postulate upon which all the superstructure of morals and religion must rest. The religious mind, looking back over the course by which it has been brought, sees in it the predominating hand of God; but, however large the divine element in salvation may be, it must in the end be apprehended by faith, which is an act of the free will.<sup>[58]</sup>

Lard commented upon these two great errors often committed in the exposition of these verses, thus:

These two great errors ... consist, first, in assuming that an act of foreknowledge necessarily implies an act of unalterable pre-fixture by decree of every act of human life; and, secondly, that the predicates of "called," "justified," and "glorified" refer to (individual) human beings. If the reader will free his mind of these two errors, he will have no serious trouble in discovering the meaning of, perhaps, the sublimest passage in the Letter; but, unless he does this, he will find it a hopeless enigma. The ordinary

modes of explaining this passage neither extract a ray of light from it, nor shed a ray of light upon it.<sup>[59]</sup>

[58] W. Sanday, op. cit., p. 238.

[59] Moses E. Lard, op. cit., p. 285.

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## Verse 31

**What then shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who is against us?**

Seeing, as just stated, that God's eternal purpose relative to the redeemed in Christ is absolutely certain of fulfillment, how solid and secure is the state of the person in Christ. "In Christ" is absolute safety, the only mortal concern of the Christian having to do, not with any doubt or uncertainty of final glory, but only with his being "in Christ" and remaining so. Given the integrity of that relationship, salvation for the child of God is a certainty. For the person "in Christ," it is an unqualified fact that God is "for" him, with all that implies. God appears in this verse, not as a detached or disinterested judge, but as a helper, protector, and benefactor. As Paul put it,

For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure  
(**Philippians 2:13**).

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## Verse 32

**He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?**

The confidence of the apostle in this verse is founded upon the principle of logic called "a fortiori", being a progression from the great to the lesser. The great gift is that of God's only Son; and surely the love that provided such an unspeakable gift could not fail to provide whatever else might be required to accomplish his purpose of redeeming people, the particular things apparently in view here being whatever earthly encouragement and provision might be necessary to the achievement of the Christian's ultimate salvation to the uttermost.

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## Verse 33

**Who shalt lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.**

Locke paraphrased these verses thus:

Who shall be the persecutor of those whom God hath chosen? Shall God who justifieth them? Who, as judge, shall condemn them? Christ that died for us, yea rather that is risen again for our justification, and is at the right hand of God making intercession for us?<sup>[60]</sup>

Justifying his paraphrase in a footnote, Locke added:

Reading this with an interrogation makes it needless to add any words to the text to make out the sense; and it is more conformable to the scheme of his argumentation here, as appears by **Romans 8:35**, where the interrogation cannot be avoided. It is, as it were, an appeal to them themselves to be the judges whether any of those things he mentions to them (reckoning up these which had the most power to hurt them) could give them just cause for apprehension: "Who shall accuse you? Shall God who justifies you? Who shall condemn you? Christ who died for you?"<sup>[61]</sup>

[60] John Locke, op. cit., p. 335.

[61] Ibid.

## Verse 35

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.**

In this and following verses, Paul mentioned the things conceived of as hostile, and hindering to the Christian's life; and most of the things here mentioned should be understood as lying within the ordinary daily experience of the Christians of that age.

**The love of Christ ...** refers not to our love for him, but to his love for us.

The scripture quoted by Paul here is **Psalms 44:22**; and his employment of the expression "even as it is written" was his way of saying, "This is just our lot, exactly as the scriptures teach." Like many other lists found in the Pauline writings, this one should be understood as representative rather than exhaustive.

## Verse 37

**For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

All of the calamities mentioned here were suffered by Paul himself, as a glance at **2 Corinthians 11** will show; and, despite the fact of all things working together for good for Christians, the hardships and sufferings they endure prove that no exemption from life's sorrows has been provided for them. On the contrary, it was doubtless a fact that the Christians of that age suffered far more than other groups of mankind; and, due to the natural discouragement arising from such extraordinary sufferings, there was a constant temptation for the Christians to fall into doubt and discouragement, or grow cold in their love to the Lord, or to acquire deep feelings of guilt arising from a view of their hardships as being caused by their sins. It has ever been the tendency of troubled individuals to become depressed and doubtful, as was the case with John the Baptist when thrown into prison (**Matthew 11:2**). Paul in this marvelous peroration emphasized the fact that all guilt had been removed through the death of Christ, that condemnation of God's children is impossible. God himself is "for them." What a shout of victory is this passage!



**Height ... depth ...** Locke understood these to mean "the height of prosperity" or the "depth of misery."

**Life ...** in this context was interpreted by Lard as meaning the hard life they were called upon to live in the flesh, life with its burdens, toils and persecutions.

**Angels ...** if understood as a reference to good angels are only a conceptual hindrance to the Christian, meaning that even if an angel were to try to hinder them, such would be impossible; but if the word should be understood of Satan's angels (**Matthew 25:41**), the meaning is the same. Not even Satan's angels may finally hinder the child of God.

Whiteside pointed out that the impossibility of apostasy is not what Paul was teaching here. He wrote:

All the things mentioned are things without. Nothing is here said of what corrupting influences may do to the heart. No powers of persecutions can compel one to stop loving God; if he quits, he does it of his own accord. Love cannot be destroyed by force of imperial command, but it may wax cold. Some even depart from their first love (**Revelation 2:4**). Paul recognized that people depart from the faith, but he was persuaded that no evils coming on us from without could destroy the love of God.<sup>[62]</sup>

Whiteside's point is well taken; but it is God's love for man, not the other way around, that Paul primarily had in view here.

**In Christ Jesus our Lord ...** is the final word of this flourishing burst of eloquence; and it brings the mind back to the major proposition underlying all that Paul wrote, which is this, that salvation is "in Christ" alone, and that the totality of the Christian's hope derives from the fact of his having been baptized into Christ (the only scriptural baptism being that of a true believer who is penitent), and from the presumption of his continuance therein (in Christ) "unto death." Paul wrote many things, but the expression "in Christ" or its equivalent is the theme of all that he wrote, being mentioned no less than 169 times; and any "system" that omits this is like a symphony from which both the tonic and dominant chords have been deleted. Paul never left it out! Here is the point where his mind always came to rest.

One is reluctant to go on from the magnificent teachings of this wonderful chapter, even for the purpose of further studying Paul's epic letter; and, by way of a final salute to the inspiring thoughts of this chapter, the following words of Moule are appended:

Some years ago, we remember reading this close of the eighth chapter, under moving circumstances. On a cloudless January night, late arrived in Rome, we stood in the Coliseum, a party of friends from England. Orion, the giant with the sword, glimmered like a specter of persecution over the huge precinct; for the full moon, high in the heavens, overpowered the stars. By its light, we read from a little Testament these words written so long ago to be read in that same city - written by the man whose dust now sleeps at Tre Fontane, where the executioner dismissed him to be with Christ; written to men and women, some of whom, in all human likelihood at least, suffered in that very amphitheater, raised only twenty-two years after Paul wrote Romans, and soon made the scene of countless martyrdoms. ... We read the words of the Epistle, and gave thanks to him who had there triumphed in his saints over life and death, over beasts and men and demons. Then we thought of ourselves, in our circumstances so totally different on the surface, yet carrying the same needs in their depths. Are we too to overcome, in "the things present" of our modern world, and in the face of "the things to come" yet upon our earth? Are we too to be "more than conquerors," winning blessing out of all things, and really living in our generation as the bondmen of Christ and the sons of God?<sup>[63]</sup>

[62] R. L. Whiteside, op. cit., p. 193.

[63] H. C. G. Moule, op. cit., pp. 242-243.

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