



Romans - Chapter Eight

IV Romans 5:1-8:39 - Hope as a result of righteousness by faith (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Paul, having given a full explanation of the doctrine of justification and the need for sanctification in Jesus, now moves to the consolation of the Lord's people, a subject that appears close to the heart of God: <<Comfort, comfort my people, says your God>> (Isaiah 40:1). This chapter is a great consolation to us all, especially those who have the great privileges given to us so freely through grace as to be called God's people now.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross and his subsequent resurrection dealt sin and death a mortal blow, thus freeing all believers from the burden of their sin and releasing them from the control of their sinful nature. Although believers remain in the mortal body and thus are subject to sin and death, they are no longer controlled by it, and Paul can claim there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul then moves on to the tension of sin and Spirit in the two 'I's. The one that follows the ways of their sinful nature will find themselves trapped in sin, decay and death. But those who give themselves over to the Spirit of God that dwells within them, who have chosen to accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour, have life; life in this time and everlasting life beyond.

Those who have received the Spirit by accepting Christ have now become sons of God, both men and women, giving them eternal access to the Father providing they continue to walk in the way of the Spirit, which leads to life. Not only do they have the reward of sonship but are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ over all creation in the kingdom of God, on the understanding they are prepared to share in Christ's suffering and death.

Creation is groaning under the weight of decay, misuse and devastation. Believers, too, are groaning as they remain in this time of unfulfilled salvation, at one with the risen Lord but not yet in receipt of the resurrection body that will truly release them from oppression and temptation. In the meantime, they are in the world as beacons for God to the world, and the firstfruits that will be part of the renewal of creation when it comes. In the meantime the Spirit will groan on their behalf as they struggle to ask God for what they truly need.

Paul concludes the chapter and the section on a high. God is for us so who can oppose us. There is nothing in this world or indeed in the whole cosmos, the whole of creation including those forces who oppose God that can separate us from God and the love of Christ Jesus our Lord.

I V.f Romans 8:1-17 - Life through the spirit

Having dealt with the consequences of sin and death in the believer, and then studied the role of the law within that deadly duo, Paul now turns to the other key influence, other than the death and resurrection of Christ; that is the Spirit.

The reason why Paul left this crucial unfolding becomes clear. For it is the Spirit above all else that provides the key to understanding the eschatological tension that believers find themselves: the Spirit, whose reception effected the sonship of God, is only the beginning, i.e. firstfruits, of a harvest of salvation which remains incomplete until the resurrection of the body and, by referring to the Spirit of God, the process of individual salvation can be set within a salvation history framework. Paul brings this to a conclusion by showing that the Spirit will fulfil, in believers, all that is promised by God for those who accept the Gospel message through Jesus and are prepared to share in his suffering, death and new life.

Having drawn together the dreaded triumvirate of sin, death and their surprise partner, the law, that has so dominated the Adamic-age, Paul will now go on to address the concerns this will have raised for his readership. Conscious of the questions this provocative conclusion was bound to raise in the minds of his thoughtful hearers, anxious as they probably would be for the light his exposition would throw on their faith and its outworking. Paul had moved immediately to clarify the effect of these same forces in their continuing relationship with the believer. A crucial issue was the role of the law, crucial in view of the heart searching, which Paul's assertion must have caused the Jewish members of the Roman churches and those Gentiles drawn to the new faith through Judaism. But first he focused primarily of the two 'villains of the piece'; sin and death. Initially, he stressed the decisive effects of Christ's death and resurrection on their power, but at the same time he did not forget to complement the indicative of grace with the imperative of obedience, lest his readership forget even for a moment that the eschatological tension of the life under the Cross cannot be escaped.

Paul then draws the law back in, indeed he sets it at the very heart of the argument, something that would be very puzzling and even worrying for his audience. The previously unflattering description of the role of the law is further expounded in quite shocking terms. In fact, they must have wondered if Paul was going to consign the law to the old, now defunct era along with sin and death. But what Paul went on to show was that the law, although it had shown up sin for what it was and had allowed it to grow to its full potential, it was therefore actually a two-edged sword. And this double aspect dove-tailed into the double internal tension in man, the two 'I's, thus sin would continue to serve and identify sin all the time man remained, in part at least, in the Adamic-era. Israel's continued reliance on the law showed just how successful sin had been in its use of the law.

To round off the picture of the individual caught between the two eras, embedded in the now but not yet aspect of salvation history and the kingdom, Paul now draws into focus again the other two remaining elements: the flesh and the Spirit. Just as he had focused on Jesus shift from one era to the next, he now evidently felt it appropriate to use the same terms in bringing his treatment of the individual believer's progress to salvation to its due climax through what remains of this age.

IV.f.i Romans 8:1-4 - God's action in Christ and Spirit

If anything could be said to be at the centre of Paul's thinking and understanding of the Gospel and God's salvation plan, it is probably here, wrapped up in these first verses. They contain one of Paul's clearest ever statements about what was accomplished on the Cross. They draw together both his critique of the Jewish law and the seeds of his view of how that law is strangely fulfilled in and through the Gospel.

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Romans 8:1

In all its glorious form, its use by JS Bach in his Cantatas, and being a favourite verse of many preachers, it should not be overlooked that this section is part of a wider argument and exposition, and should be viewed in its wider context. The tone and mood may have changed suddenly but the thrust is the same. The law of God, although highlighting sin, was intended to bring life and this is how God achieved just that; life in all its glorious abundance is unveiled on the Cross: <<The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full>> (John 10:10).

Here is Paul's triumph following his melancholy complaint and conflict in the foregoing chapter; sin remaining, disturbing, vexing, but thanks to Jesus no longer ruining. This is an unbelievable privilege imputed to all believers. It does not speak of 'no accusation' for we stand accused and convicted, but there is no condemnation, in fact God, through his Son, is well pleased: <<While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" >> (Matthew 17:5).

God has given resurrection life to all those, but only to those, who believe in Christ Jesus. In this section, indeed right through to v.11, Paul answers the issues raised in Chapter 7, but also introduces new issues, in particular the theme of life through the Spirit, which will take the rest of Chapter 8 to address and unpack.

Therefore indicates that Paul is stating an important summary and conclusion related to his preceding argument. The therefore is based first on the exclamation of victory that comes through Jesus Christ our Lord, fully expressed by Paul in: <<but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!>> (Romans 7:23-25), which in turn is linked back to Romans 7:6 <<But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code>>, where the idea of the 'new way or life of the Spirit' is first mentioned. But more broadly, Paul seems to be recalling his whole argument about salvation in Christ from Romans 3:21-5:21. However, therefore does not fit well with the end of Chapter 7 but does with the following verses and, in fact, Paul could have started with verse 2 and then inserted v.1 after v.6 or so. Then the arguments that follow would be explained and the therefore make clear sense, as the arguments and solutions now tumble out like circus acrobats.

The now in v.1 matches the but now in Romans 7:6, showing that the new era of redemptive history has now been inaugurated by Christ Jesus for those who are now in right standing before God, because they are united with Christ. But the summary relates further to the whole argument presented in Romans Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

No condemnation echoes the conclusion stated in Romans 5:1 <<Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ>>, and underscores the stunning implications of the Gospel first introduced in Romans 1:16-17 <<I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" >>. As Paul immediately goes on to explain, there is no condemnation for the Christian because God has condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son (v.3), to pay the penalty for sin through his death on the Cross. The following verses then show that indwelling sin is overcome through the power of the indwelling Spirit, with ten references to the Spirit in vv.4-11.

No condemnation only carries any real force and meaning for those who have understood the full seriousness of the problem of sin, and the reality of God's judgement. If those who don't

believe in the real effects of sin on a relationship with God, or indeed believe that God will just turn the other way and ignore sin, will simply shrug when reading v.1 and give it no second thought, that is if they have ever gotten this far in reading Romans!

Paul does not dwell on the devastating aspects of what he has proclaimed to believers in the previous chapters, especially the concerns they would have had over his treatment of the law, for Paul wants to focus on the believer's struggle with the two eras, living simultaneously in Adam and in Christ, and he wants them to be assured that it is Christ who is the dominant force, for he, as a man, conquered death and sin, and through him, the believer can move toward that same position.

However, this fact does not eliminate or even diminish the frustration of living in the present time, if anything, it heightens it further, but it does make it infinitely more bearable. Paul wanted to bring back into focus that these believers had made the decisive step of coming to Christ and all the assurances that provided them with.

Belonging to the two ages brings with it tensions and frustrations, but the decisive factor is that they are in Christ and the final outcome on the day of judgement will be acquittal.

² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2

Following on to the gloomy picture painted in Romans 7:13-25, Paul now asserts that from the perspective of salvation history, from the point of the new era introduced with Christ's death and resurrection, the 'I' trapped in bondage in the old era is not so depressing as the 'I' released in Christ is reassuring. The scales tilt in favour of the believer; the 'I' in bondage to sin ends in death and the 'I' in the Spirit lives on. The two descriptions of the law match the split in the two 'I's of the believer.

The evidence that believers are in Christ is that the power of sin has been broken in their lives by the work of the Holy Spirit. Some commentators claim that law in both instances means principle, but it seems much more likely that God's law is in Paul's mind throughout.

The new covenant of grace made with us in Christ is a treasury of merit and grace, and thus we receive pardon and a new nature. We are freed from the law of sin and death, that is, both from the guilt and power of sin; from the course of the law, and the dominion of the flesh.

Paul here is exuberant, describing his own conversion as an expression of true freedom: <<Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom>> (2 Corinthians 3:17), and the thought of his return to his old Pharisaic life under law as a return to slavery.

The Spirit is drawn into the argument again here, which Paul had clearly experienced as a source of power, whose transforming effects marked his own ministry in no uncertain terms: <<I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ>> (Romans 15:18-19), <<My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power>> (1 Corinthians 2:4-5), and: <<Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?>> (Galatians 3:5), in some distinction from the law. But how could he link the law and the Spirit, and describe it in the same liberating power? The contradiction with Romans 7:6 seems particularly blatant.

That Paul should choose to ascribe such liberation to the law in this exceptional case should not be discounted or ignored. Of course, it is the law in its eschatological expression, i.e. the law of the Spirit, and to be distinguished from the law in its baneful effect over those belonging to the old era, i.e. the law of sin and death, including unbelieving Israel. The point is, however, that Paul could characterise the transformation in himself and his understanding of God's promises in terms of his transformed understanding of the law. It was the law, understood in its proper function, which had liberated from the law as misunderstood by Israel and shackling the Gospel. Here, Paul's love/hate relationship with the law reaches its most positive expression. The paradox is this same law that was a trap and a snare, a life force for sin in the Adamic era, but such a power for life in the new era introduced by Christ.

Romans 8:3-4

The law, as worked out through sinful flesh, was a power force for sin and death. The same law of the Spirit, when expressed in the believer in Christ was and is a true life-giving force.

³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

Romans 8:3

Paul gives the reason that true believers walk in the Spirit and no longer in the flesh. The law could not do it, for the law was powerless; it could neither justify nor sanctify. It could not free us from the guilt nor from the power of sin, having neither the promises of pardon nor grace. It is not that the law was weak, for it was perfect, but that man could not keep the law due to his sinful nature. Since it was a covenant of works it could not provide for salvation in the flesh, and thus it left us as it found us; the law cannot take away sin: <<because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins>> (Hebrews 10:4).

The law, in this instance, the Mosaic Law, could not solve humanity's problem because sin employs the law for its own purposes, as Chapter 7 explained. God sent his Son as a sacrifice for sin, an idiomatic phrase designating a sin offering, and paid the full penalty for sin in his sacrifice, i.e. he condemned sin in sinful man.

Sending his own son. Moses brought the children of Israel out of bondage to the borders of Canaan but could take them no further. Joshua did what Moses could not and led them into the Promised Land. Likewise, the law leads us to the border of true faith but it is the leadership of Jesus as the Christ that allows us to cross over into the true Promised Land of free grace and eternal life in the presence of God the Father: <<The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all>> (Hebrews 10:1-10).

That God sent his son really tells us that God did not send someone else to fulfil this vital role in salvation history, but that he came himself in human likeness, in the likeness of sinful flesh.

He dealt a mortal blow to evil, condemned sin in the whole world and then sent his Spirit to guide believers towards personal righteousness through the salvation of grace. Here is how it fits together:

1. God came in person as the second part of his being, his Son, thus fulfilling the role of the Messiah.
2. He came in sinful flesh, the very heart of the problem, summing up the people of Israel, whose sin was exceedingly sinful through their misunderstood workings of the law.
3. The weight of the world's sin was focused on Israel.
4. The weight of Israel's sin, in turn, was transferred on to the Christ of God, Jesus, as he hung on Calvary's Cross.
5. The 'King of the Jews' died a criminal's death. At that precise moment God condemned sin in Christ's flesh: <<But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed>> (Isaiah 53:5).

It is important to note that God did not condemn Jesus, neither did man for all the courts found him innocent, but God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21), and: <<Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" >> (Galatians 3:13).

In the likeness of sinful man means that Jesus became fully human, even though he was and remains utterly sinless. Jesus came in the likeness of sinful man, not that he ever sinned but that he could feel the weight of its guilt and shame, and have a full understanding and demonstrate that he knew what we suffered before he freed us from it. In other words, he became sin for us. It is worth repeating that: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, sin was condemned in the flesh of Christ and thus condemned in the flesh of all mankind forever.

Of course, we should always remember that it is self-inflicted by our continued defiance of God. Jesus primarily came to be the ultimate sacrifice: <<Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself>> (Hebrews 9:26), that would take away the sin of the world: <<The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!>> (John 1:29), and remove the veil of separation to God the Father, freeing us to worship him in the only way he truly desires: <<God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth>> (John 4:24).

The law was impotent because man was impotent in his sinful nature. In addition, the Jews believing that the law was given to combat sin and seek atonement through sacrifices; but it was found to be unable to deal with sin, because of sinful man. Israel as a whole, as guardian of the law, had only succeeded in reinforcing the law's impotence. But God sent his Son as the atoning sin offering once for all.

The phrase in the likeness of sinful man serves two purposes:

1. Until now Jesus has been compared to Adam in terms of their comparative obedience, and the pre-existence of Jesus or his coming from heaven is never mentioned, so for the reader, there is no need for Jesus to have pre-existed any more than for Adam to have done so, but by being in the likeness of sinful flesh does highlight that Jesus is very different to Adam; he is God's Son.

2. Also, it shows that it was sin in the flesh, flesh in the likeness of human flesh that was defeated. For it was sin in human flesh that was the destructive power, not sin by itself.

Paul's logic is that sinful flesh cannot be cured or healed; it can only be destroyed. Forgiveness only dealt with individual acts of sin, not with sin itself. The human soul is encased within the flesh and is tainted by the flesh, therefore the flesh must die. Thus God sent his Son to take on all the sin of the world in his likeness of sinful flesh, to be crucified so that sin in his flesh would be destroyed, and then rise again to new life, in a resurrection body without any tainted flesh. Thus believers, who are prepared to die and suffer with Christ, although they remain in sinful flesh for now, can live in the hope of a resurrected life and, with the Spirit's guidance, can combat sin in their own sinful nature in the meantime.

Thus in this one act of selfless obedience, Christ fulfilled God's law. The law to be fulfilled is the law as it applies to all humanity, Gentile as well as Jew; the law as it speaks to the heart and calls forth the obedience of faith, fulfilled by conduct which expresses inner reliance on God and embodies dependence on his power.

Jesus, as the Christ, was a sin offering, something very familiar to all those who knew the OT laws, including most of the recipients of Paul's letter in Rome. Why? Well, a sin offering was the sacrifice used when someone has committed sin unwittingly, i.e. not knowing it to be wrong, or unwillingly, i.e. knowing it to be wrong but not intending to do it. That would be the miserable person Paul had unveiled to us: <<What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?>> (Romans 7:24). He is now saved by God's gracious provision of v.3.

⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:4

Righteous requirement of the law might be fully met. This could mean the requirement is fulfilled in the new life that Christians live on the basis of Christ's work, or it may refer to the full penalty of the law being met at the Cross.

Through Christ righteousness to the obedience to the requirements of the law is fulfilled in us, when by the Spirit the law of love is written on our hearts, and that love is the fulfilling of the law. Although the righteousness of the law is not fulfilled by us, for it is only by God's grace it is fulfilled in us. Such are the privileges of God given to all mankind who will turn to him through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those that choose not to follow Christ, will find the righteousness of the law fulfilled in them to their ruin.

IV.f.ii Romans 8:5-11 - The work of the Spirit

Consider the case where you decide to wire up a battery operated torch directly to the mains electricity supply. You would probably blow up the torch, making it entirely useless and perhaps get a fatal shock yourself. You had applied the right power supply to the wrong appliance. God's law had failed because it was applied to the wrong appliance. It was given to man in his sinful nature, in the flesh, see Romans 7:14-25. It needs to be applied to those who are spiritual. Spiritual describes those who invite the Holy Spirit to indwell them, then allows him to guide them and rule in their lives.

Just as a reminder that flesh or in the flesh, and similar descriptions, are not just physical descriptions, but refer to those who share in the corruptibility and mortality of the world, i.e. all of us at one time or other. It is not the world that is bad, God had created it as good: <<And God saw that it was good>> (Genesis 1:25d), it is because of the abuse, the neglect and the rejection of the creator that has so badly corrupted the world and all that is in it. The description of the Jews in the early days of settling in Canaan is reflected throughout the world,

especially today: <<In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit>> (Judges 21:25).

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Romans 8:5

Paul here draws out the antithesis between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. The choice of coming to Christ is a decision that has to work itself out day by day in the choices the believer makes in all aspects of his life. The very fact they are still in the flesh will draw them towards the world and make them a target for sin through their sinful nature. The struggle will continue this side of eternity or mortality.

Once again, we have the two 'I's of humanity: Adamic-humanity and Christ-humanity. Through Christ and in Christ-humanity, God's law does bring true life; the law has been fulfilled in its original intention, as Jesus confirmed: <<Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them>> (Matthew 5:17).

The tension remains, of course, that we are still in the now but not yet of the kingdom. Both types of humanity reign, often within the same person. If we are proud, jealous, covetous, gluttonous, or unloving, etc. we are in the flesh, i.e. part of Adamic-humanity. If we live through the Spirit we will have life, know peace and are free, whatever our personal situation may be: <<Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed>> (John 8:34-35).

Christian faith is the fulfilment of the law: <<Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved>> (Romans 10:5-9), those who obey the law of love are fulfilling the Torah, the law of God: <<Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law>> (Romans 13:8-10).

⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

Romans 8:6

Their minds set on what that nature desires (v.5) means to think continually about and constantly desire the things characteristic of fallen mankind, sinful human nature. That is, to think just the way the unbelieving world thinks, emphasising what it thinks important, pursuing what it pursues, in total disregard for and of God's will. There is only one outcome for the sinful nature, for the man of flesh and that is the mind of sinful man is death, sin only has death to offer.

The conflict now is to determine which things in our hearts and minds are of the flesh and which are of the spirit. Those things that seem to have our best interests at heart, that will

improve our status in the world, or provide us with more wealth and possessions, or even just provide us with more time to follow our own interests, are all things of the flesh. The issues that concern the welfare of our soul, the salvation of others and our eternal state, are issues of the Spirit. These are issues of the heart: <<for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. "Eat and drink," he says to you, but his heart is not with you>> (Proverbs 23:7). Even good intentions can be of the flesh, consider the thoughts of Peter: <<Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men">> (Matthew 16:23). A carnal soul is a dead soul, or at least as dead as a soul can be.

⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Romans 8:7

Those who are in the flesh behave as sons and daughters of sinful Adam and are hostile to God. They do not keep God's law, and indeed they are unable to keep it because they are slaves to sin: <<For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin>> (Romans 6:6), <<But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted>> (Romans 6:17), and: <<I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness>> (Romans 6:19-20).

⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Romans 8:8

Because unbelievers, i.e. those controlled by the sinful nature, are in bondage to sin, and unable to do what God commands, they fail to please God.

In a regenerate carnal state we can never do the things that please God: <<The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him>> (Proverbs 15:8).

These last two verses can't help but hold out a hint against the pride of Israel's privilege. They had focused on the law as their rightful inheritance and in doing so had forgotten their creatureliness in relation to their creator. Once they became alienated from God, by seeking men's praise for keeping the law, they had separated themselves from the only power that could defeat sin. Not the power of the law but the power of God. John summed up part of their problem: <<Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God>> (John 12:42-43).

⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Romans 8:9

To avoid over-generalising, Paul here switches to the second person plural, to speak to the members of the Roman congregations specifically. However, he does not wish to imply they have made the full transition from the flesh in their choice to follow Jesus. It is still a work in progress. What Paul implies is that they have neither left their sinful nature totally behind them, nor that they are in a constant state of inspiration and permanent ecstasy. What Paul

assumes is not that the process of salvation is complete but that it has begun; not that their total being has been completely transferred to another realm but that a decisive transfer of allegiance and lordship has already taken place; not that moral effort has been rendered unnecessary but that the inner compulsion of God's Spirit has become the most important factor at the level of primary motivation and enabling. Paul can make this assumption because belonging to Christ and having the Spirit are for him one and the same thing. Having the Spirit is what constitutes being a Christian, so naturally he assumes that members of the Roman churches have received the Spirit. It is the possession of the Spirit which makes the difference; Christ's lordship is realised, documented, and made effective by the presence of the Spirit in a life.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ: <<I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me>> (Galatians 2:20), and: <<To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory>> (Colossians 1:27).

By definition, Christians are not in the sinful nature, for all who believe in Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit: <<Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires>> (Galatians 5:24), and: <<When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins>> (Colossians 2:13). Peter demonstrates the difference: <<This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings>> (2 Peter 2:10), and: <<For their mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error>> (2 Peter 2:18).

Paul alternates between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ here, showing that Christ and God share the same status; they are one in essence and being.

All believers have both flesh and spirit but to say we are in the flesh or in the spirit are contrary states. We can only be in the spirit if we have the Spirit of Christ indwelling, which in itself is a great honour and privilege. Sadly, there are those who pretend to be of Jesus but are only ever in the flesh, like Simon Magus they have no part or lot in him: <<You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God>> (Acts 8:21). None are his but those who have his Spirit and therefore display his character by being meek, humble, obedient, peaceable, patient, charitable, etc. and yet determined to be faithful and true to the Father's will. Being of the Spirit is to be led by the Spirit and to follow faithfully.

Romans 8:10-16

The following verses describe two benefits. Firstly, life, true life, which comes by being in the Spirit: <<so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love>> (Ephesians 3:17). Even the most healthy person, if in the flesh, is dead because of sin, and cannot have life: <<Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" >> (John 3:36), but one who is dead in the body can have life through faith: <<And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore>> (Hebrews 11:12). The death of a believer frees him from the burden of the body and releases him to eternal life, and God will receive him: <<But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself>> (Psalm 49:15), because of the righteousness imputed by Jesus: <<And I — in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness>> (Psalm 17:15).

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Romans 8:10

The previous verse speaks of the Spirit's indwelling, but here Paul describes Christ's dwelling in Christians. This does not mean that there is no difference between Christ and the Spirit, which is the ancient heresy of modalism, but it does suggest that Christ and the Spirit are both fully God, and work cooperatively. Since the bodies of Christians are not yet redeemed, they still die, even though they are freed from the condemnation of sin. Yet the presence of the Spirit within believers testifies to the new life they enjoy because of the righteousness of Christ that is now theirs.

The believer escapes neither this body of death nor the death of this body, but God's acceptance, life and power are not subject to sin or death, and when sin plays death as its last card, God's Spirit will trump it.

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Romans 8:11

The Spirit of him who raised Jesus. The Spirit worked in the hearts of believers, to generate faith itself through the preaching of the Gospel, then to generate the kind of life described in vv.4-6, and then to work powerfully on the other side of death to give new bodily life: <<Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus>> (v.1), and we can have life now as well as then by faith in God's covenant promises.

Yet there is hope and life too for your mortal body through the Spirit of God, even though it is cast aside like a broken clay jar, it is still the work of the potter's hand: <<You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made>> (Job 14:15), <<How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands!>> (Lamentations 4:2), and: <<who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body>> (Philippians 3:21), and contains treasure: <<But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us>> (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our body is a temple: <<Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?>> (1 Corinthians 3:16), and: <<Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own>> (1 Corinthians 6:19), thus we should be good stewards of our bodies, not given to excesses of food, alcohol, chemicals or any other harmful or disfiguring procedures, whether internal or external: <<you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body>> (1 Corinthians 6:20), and: <<Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord>> (Leviticus 19:28).

Paul is not thinking here in terms of just the physical body, our earthly tent, but more in Hebraic terms, where the body is the dimension of a person whereby his environment, both material and social is experienced. Salvation will not be achieved simply in terms of escape from this body but in terms of Christ's redemption of the body. The Spirit is not restricted to working purely in the spiritual realm but can interact with the material and the social in order to steer the human mind away from fulfilling its unhelpful desires, or indeed from having such desires in the first place. Paul puts the whole thing together in these words: <<But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry

around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come>> (2 Corinthians 4:7-5:5).

With phrases like 'Christ in you' and the 'Spirit indwelling believers', Paul implies that the Spirit of God is now to be characterised and identified as the Spirit of Christ, as that power which determined Christ in his ministry and in so doing provided a pattern of life in the Spirit. The life giving Spirit is not independent of the risen Christ: <<So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit>> (1 Corinthians 15:45).

The Jewish tradition, inherited by Paul, was of a God who ruled above and over creation, and was also mysteriously within it: his wisdom, spirit, glory (especially in the Temple), word and law. You could add his Son to that list in terms of the anticipated Messiah as outlined in 2 Samuel Chapter 7, Psalm 2, and elsewhere.

Paul has drawn on these to describe God's salvation plan for Israel and the whole world. Paul has not yet used a developed formula for describing God in this new context but has all the elements that make up Trinitarian theology. This is not a theoretical debate but a passage that is alive in faith and hope.

IV.f.iii Romans 8:12-17 - Children of God, led by the Spirit

God called his people, his son, whom he called out of Egyptian slavery: <<Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me">> (Exodus 4:22-23a), and: <<When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me>> (Hosea 11:1-2). God personally led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, through the wilderness, toward the Promised Land in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Should not Christians be all the more in awe of God now that he indwells them by his Spirit and leads each one personally? It is his presence that allows us to cry out Abba Father as we are now his sons by adoption: <<But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father">> (Galatians 4:4-6).

Yet the way in the wilderness is hard and arid; many turn back to Egypt in their hearts rather than face the struggles and battles that are encountered on the journey, giving up the promised inheritance that is so desired but preferring instead to come under the bondage of sin; a return to slavery: <<What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves,

you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness>> (Romans 6:15-19).

¹² Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

Romans 8:12

We have an obligation; we are in debt. As we are still in our mortal bodies, being in Christ, having the Spirit of Christ does not prevent us from coming under the influence of our sinful nature again: a life dominated by the ambitions and desires that nurture self-centredness and pride. But as honourable people we should do all that is within our power to repay the debt.

A conclusion is drawn from the previous verses. Since Christians live in the Spirit, we are no longer captive to the desires of the flesh and should no longer live according to the sinful nature.

¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,

Romans 8:13

According to the sinful nature you will die. The death of a believer is but sleep but those that live in the flesh will know the second death, which is the death of the soul and is eternal: <<Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death>> (Revelation 20:14).

Those who give their lives over to the flesh will face eternal death, but those who slay the desires of the flesh, i.e. not just bodily cravings but all of the ordinary desires of fallen human nature, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will enjoy eternal life. God and believers each have a role in sanctification: it must be by the Spirit and his power, but you put to death shows that individuals must take an active role in battling sinful habits. This will take moral will. At times this will fail but we do not despair as salvation is not by works but given by free grace. However, an attitude not to apply moral will but to continue living in the corruption of the sinful nature would always raise the question of whether a person was initially saved at all.

¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Romans 8:14

Those who are led by the Spirit of God, i.e. those who yield to the Spirit, are those who are sons of God, i.e. they truly belong to his family. The only way to conquer the flesh is to yield to the Spirit, making decisions and choices according to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and acting with the spiritual power that the Spirit supplies. This will keep you from doing the things you want to do. Paul acknowledges that the Christian life is a struggle – a war between the flesh and the Spirit. Elsewhere Paul explains: <<But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law>> (Galatians 5:18), where led by the Spirit, the Greek verb agō, implies an active, personal involvement by the Holy Spirit in guiding Christians, and the present tense infers 'if you are being led, and indicates the Spirit's ongoing activity.

While our minds seem to be focusing on the usual conscious thoughts of daily life, sometimes, and for some of us it is only sometimes, we become aware of that small voice

within us telling us of God's love for us, calling us to holiness, hinting at us to do what is right. It also hints at tasks that we should give our attention and energy to. A key part of discipleship is to listen for and detect the true voice of God's Spirit in ourselves, not the voice of our own inner mind that tells to do the things we want to do, but the voice of the Spirit! And when God's Spirit and our spirit agree, we know that we are indeed a child of God, and heirs of the promise.

¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Romans 8:15

Paul switches immediately away from the antithesis between the sinful nature and the Spirit, to speak of the positive benefits and the responsibilities of sonship; being accepted into the wider family of Abraham and inheriting all the covenant promises made by God. Christians are no longer slaves to sin but are adopted as sons into God's family, as evidenced by the Spirit that cries out within them that God is their father.

You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again. Such a spirit would be one that would stimulate the sinful nature and then activate the lusts of the flesh. The Christian could once again find themselves working in opposition to God and becoming like those of who it is said: <<They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires>> (2 Timothy 3:6), or even: <<For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord>> (Jude 4).

What they have received is the Spirit of God, who will lead them away from such things if they will only follow him: <<But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit>> (Galatians 5:18-25).

Sonship. This is the crucial difference between old covenant and new covenant believers: life under the law was slavery; life in Christ is marked by the freedom that comes from being God's sons. Both men and women are here characterised as having the rights of sons, because with sonship comes the right of inheritance. The Greek word *huioi*, sons, is a legal term used in the adoption and inheritance laws of 1st Century Rome. As used by Paul here and elsewhere in his letters, e.g. <<You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus>> (Galatians 3:26), this term refers to the status of all Christians, both men and women, who, having been adopted into God's family, now enjoy all the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights of God's children.

A further privilege is the spirit of adoption (vv.14-16). We are adopted as the children of God. Spirit of bondage or slave again to fear here in v.15, but for us the veil is lifted: <<Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts>> (2 Corinthians 3:15), and can be convicted by the Spirit: <<When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?">> (Acts 2:37), as was Paul himself: <<"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do">> (Acts 9:6), and the jailer in Philippi: <<He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?">> (Acts 16:30). As God's children, and with Christ as mediator, we can

come to the Father in prayer and cry out 'Abba Father'; Abba being the Syriac word for father and pater the Greek. Why does Paul use both words? Jesus did! <<"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will">> (Mark 14:36). Some suggest it proved useful to the Gentiles (pater) and the Jews (Abba), but this is unconvincing, especially as in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek: <<There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus>> (Galatians 3:28). It is not unusual for our spirit to witness to peace in our lives, but when His Spirit witnesses to peace with our spirit then we will know true peace indeed.

¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Romans 8:16

The witness of the Spirit, i.e. his testimony, gives the Christian's spirit assurance that he or she is God's child.

Paul switches back to the first person testimony here. The continuity of thought from v.14 implies that for Paul conversion was as much as anything else a liberation of the emotions. It was certainly his own experience, as the almost unconscious switch from second to first person testifies, but he is able to assume the same to be true of his readers. The emotional quality of his faith and spirituality thus, once again, comes clearly to the fore. He would have had little personal sympathy with a purely rational faith or primarily ritualistic religion. The inner witness of the Spirit was something not just important for him but at the heart of what distinguished his faith as a Christian from what he had known as a Pharisaic Jew.

For Paul the Spirit is the power of God which integrates emotion, thought and conduct in a life-giving way. But it does so precisely as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit who brings us to share in the same intimate sonship, which Jesus enjoyed on earth, and does so as the beginning of that process that ends in the final integration of the body into the wholeness of complete salvation. To possess the Spirit is to have the Spirit of Christ, is to share his sonship, and to live as a son led by the Spirit.

¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:17

All who are God's children are also heirs of his promises, but a willingness to follow Christ in suffering is another sign of being God's children. An additional privilege is a title to future glory.

Hebrews 1:2 states: <<but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe>>, and this shows the position of Jesus, yet we are co-heirs with him, so we and he will inherit all things: <<He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son>> (Revelation 21:7), and will witness his glory in such status: <<Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world>> (John 17:24). We will sit with him on his throne: <<To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne>> (Revelation 3:21). Lord, what is man that you should so magnify him? This great reward, far beyond value and out of the reach of man in terms of human effort or ability, does come at a price: we are required to suffer with Christ (v.17), and: <<if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us>> (2 Timothy 2:12). We should always feel deeply honoured if we are considered worthy to suffer for him: <<The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name>> (Acts 5:41).

This seems to be something that many Christians fail to grasp and particularly seem to avoid mentioning to others they would have come to faith. Why does it surprise us that we should suffer for we are not of this world, for Jesus has taken us out of this world? We are still required to witness in and to the world, a world that hates us: <<If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you>> (John 15:19). There are many rewards for our suffering in Christ. Although it may seem we are losers in life, we shall not, indeed we cannot, be losers by and through Christ in the end. The Gospel is full of examples of such assurances.

Paul seems to describe this as if we are being weighed out on balance scales. On the one side we have the present sufferings which are time bound: <<For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all>> (2 Corinthians 4:17). This side is found to be light, for on the other side we have eternal glory revealed, something we come short of in our present state, but we do have the knowledge of the timeless glory to come: <<However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him">> (1 Corinthians 2:9), and: <<Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is>> (1 John 3:2).

As sons, the inheritance is assured with no benefits to the human firstborn, although there is ultimate glory for the firstfruits from the dead: <<But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep>> (1 Corinthians 15:20), and even then we are co-heirs with Christ. In Galatians 4:1-2 Paul states: <<What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father>>, which shows why we must wait patiently, just as with the Levites: <<The Lord said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites>> (Numbers 18:20), so too for us, the Lord is our inheritance: <<Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure>> (Psalm 16:5), and God will be with us all: <<And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God>> (Revelation 21:3).

Just as the Israelites were led to the Promised Land, God is now leading us to the land he promised originally to the head of the family of believers, our spiritual father Abraham, and that was the whole world. We are debtors of God, who loved us so much that he is giving this whole world to the Christ and giving us co-ownership of it all with him with full stewardship rights. That is the inheritance of all believers, to rule and reign with Christ in the new or renewed earth, free from corruption, sin and all evil.

But we are not just to sit and wait for the gift to be handed over to us. It is made clear that God is working through us in order to bring about the transformation needed in the world as it is today. This is not working for our salvation, as that came by free grace; it is purely an outworking of our salvation. It is also part of the debt we owe, for which we should at least endeavour to repay through our love and, as we participate in the process, there will inevitably be suffering and pain to be endured.

IV.g Romans 8:18-39 - Assurance of hope

Paul began this major section of the letter (Romans 5:1-8:39) by emphasising the final hope of believers, see Romans 5:1-11, which will be repeated at the end of the chapter for reference, and now he concludes with the same emphasis.

Here Paul indicates that the broadening out of God's saving purpose beyond Israel as such, has not only Gentile believers in view, but the whole of creation. The inheritance of the redeemed people of God is no longer simply the Promised Land of Palestine but the whole world. Thus the Adam motif re-emerges with still greater strength. What God has in view, always had in view from the first with Abraham, is the reversal of Adam's fall and its consequences. The analysis of the human condition is shown to climax in the restoration, not only of the sons of God to the glory God intended for man from the first, but also of the cosmos. Creation and salvation are in no sense in antithesis. Redemption is not so much an escape from creation, as simply the completion of God's original purpose in and for creation.

This brief section is often overlooked by readers but it is Paul's unveiling of God's glorious plan of salvation for us; not in us or through us, but simply for us. This indeed is representative of his love of mankind and yet it is couched in language that seems to see his creation being neglected and allowed to rot just so he could come in later and restore it. It is not that way at all. This passage is leading to one of the climaxes of Paul's entire letter and needs to be looked at closely and in detail.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[Romans 8:18](#)

The ultimate glory that Christians will receive is so stupendous that [our present sufferings are insignificant in comparison](#): <<For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all>> (2 Corinthians 4:17). They look forward both to the resurrection of the body: <<Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words>> (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and to the new heaven and new earth, described in Revelation 21:1-22:5. This was foreseen by the prophet: <<Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind>> (Isaiah 65:17), and: <<"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure>> (Isaiah 66:22); and has additional apostolic affirmation: <<But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness>> (2 Peter 3:13).

[Revealed in us](#). Creation has been waiting for this for a long time; waiting for God's people to be revealed. Then, at last, creation will see its true rulers, and will know that the time has come for it to be rescued from corruption. The world today can be seen through biblical history. God sent his people into Egypt, initially for their benefit so it seemed, as there was a famine in Canaan and God had sent Joseph on ahead to prepare sufficient food for everyone in Egypt. But as time went by the Israelites found themselves as slaves, God heard their cry, raised up Moses who went in and saved them. Then God brought them out of Egyptian bondage through his mighty power into the Promised Land. They were set up there as a beacon for the rest of mankind to see what God could do for his people. They were also set up to show the world what he would do when his people worshipped creation and not the creator.

The Kingdom of God is within us and will be forever. We cannot compare the two sides of the scales, the discrepancy in balance is beyond measure. Paul was convinced of this and he was a disciple who knew of suffering firsthand: <<Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches>> (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), and he had experienced the glory that awaited: <<And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell>> (2 Corinthians 12:3-4), and: <<He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward>> (Hebrews 11:26). There is nothing quite like personal testimony except, of course, the Gospel truth.

God would not promise us this if it were not so: <<In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you>> (John 14:2), and: <<Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope>> (Psalm 119:49), even though it may be hope deferred: <<Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life>> (Proverbs 13:12).

Romans 8:19-22

These verses reveal an expectation of that glory. These verses cause some controversy among commentators as there are no other scriptures on the subject to compare it with. The word used is translated as 'all creation' not just for mankind, who are the ones through whom sin and the curse came. The rest of creation was unwillingly and unwittingly contaminated by our transgression through Adam. There is nothing in scripture to tell us expressly what will happen to the current created beings when a new earth is presented; we are not even sure if this is a literal new earth or is symbolic for the reinstatement of this world to its original state that God thought was very good: <<God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day>> (Genesis 1:31). Perhaps the animals too will be freed from the crushing burden of our sin and the wolf will lay with the lamb: <<The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them>> (Isaiah 11:6), and: <<The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food . They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord>> (Isaiah 65:25). Of course, Isaiah's language is figurative in these passages and not literal, but sin is a burden to beasts weighed down with idols: <<Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary>> (Isaiah 46:1), inanimate objects protest man's sin: <<The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it>> (Habakkuk 2:11), as does the land: <<if my land cries out against me and all its furrows are wet with tears>> (Job 31:38), which shook in horror and anger, and the skies darkened when the Jews crucified the Son of God. But we are promised a literal renewal: <<But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness>> (2 Peter 3:13), and: <<Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea>> (Revelation 21:1).

¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Romans 8:19

Paul's vision of God's saving purpose drives him beyond any idea of a merely personal or human redemption. What is at stake here in all this is creation as a whole and the fulfilment of God's original intention of creating the cosmos.

Creation is personified in this verse and the following verses in order to emphasise the wonder of the future glory of God's sons i.e. believers who have the rights of inheritance of all that God has in store for them. The rights of inheritance normally went to all the male sons with the eldest receiving a 'double portion' as well as becoming the head of the family with all its rights and responsibilities. There are occasions when the rights of inheritance were lost by the firstborn son, e.g. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew: <<He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom. Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob>> (**Genesis 25:30-33**), and **Jacob's eldest son lost his birthright by sleeping his father's concubine**: <<The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright>> (**1 Chronicles 5:1**). **Now, Jesus gives equal rights of sonship to all God's children**: <<Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God>> (**John 1:12-13**).

To be revealed. What God has now done is chosen his people from the whole world and will now set them up as beacons, to give them stewardship over creation for all mankind to choose to come to salvation with them or suffer the consequences. For Israel that was exile; the next time it will be eternal separation from God.

Interestingly, Esau went on to be a leader of many tribes and the nation of Edom. God would later prophesy against that nation: <<See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you>> (**Obadiah 2-3a**). A prideful heart is a symptom of the sinful nature that plagues so many believers and stops many others from coming to Christ at all.

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Romans 8:20-21

When Adam sinned, the created world was also subjected to frustration. One thinks of the thorns and thistles that were to accompany work: <<To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" >> (**Genesis 3:17-19**), **the pain of childbirth for the woman**: <<To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" >> (**Genesis 3:16**), and **the repeated refrain that all is vanity in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 (ESV)**: <<The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity>>, **where**

the Septuagint uses the same Greek word used for futility in v.20 and vanity by Solomon, and which is translated as frustration in the NIV.

The original creation, Genesis Chapters 1-2, did not have these things, and on the last day it also will be transformed and freed from the effects of sin, and will instantly become far more beautiful, productive, and easy to live in than one can ever imagine.

Bondage to decay may bring to mind the spirit of Ecclesiastes; the repetitive futility of cycle after cycle of neglect, corruption and deterioration that has been seen in the world ever since mankind declared independence from God. But all is not lost. The created order is under the direction of God and not the puny minds of men. It will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God by God himself, restoring everything back to the way it was intended to be.

The end God has in view for his creation is eschatological liberation, liberation from the slavery of corruption. Paul deliberately picks up on the theme of liberation and slavery once again, thereby tying the thought here into the earlier expression of the same theme. They had already been liberated from the slavery of the law as used by sin, the restrictiveness of Israel's too narrow understanding of the law, the slavery of a concern for scrupulous obedience 'to the letter', which sin was able to turn to its own advantage so effectively. They were already rejoicing in that liberty. But there is also a slavery to corruption, the complete inability to escape from the physical deterioration and dissolution which characterises the created order, and on which sin capitalised. The believers are still part of that created order; like creation as a whole, they have not yet been liberated from that slavery. Paul's confidence, however, is that those in Christ will assuredly enter into that fuller liberty; the liberty of the splendour God always had in view for man when he created him; confidence too that creation will share that liberty. As man fallen into futility required a world given over to corruption and decay as his appropriate setting, so man liberated from both sin and the flesh will require an incorruptible setting for his resurrected embodiment: <<So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable>> (1 Corinthians 15:42-50).

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Romans 8:22

Again creation is personified, showing that it also longs for the day when the salvation that has already begun in God's children will be completed.

Paul is probably drawing on imagery of Jewish apocalyptic understanding, familiar throughout the Diaspora, the birth pangs of the Messiah, as God starts to bring the whole creation back together in fractured chorus. This had probably become part of the thinking in the early church too: <<Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains>> (Mark 13:8). The world was used to natural disasters and man-made ones as well, they were all too frequent. What a disinterested observer might regard merely as a geological phenomenon, or as

the unfortunate effect of changing weather systems, Paul sees as the slow, animal-like writhing of creation's discomfort at the present alienation from and distortion of what might have been, and will yet become. This is how the course of creation's history can be characterised right up to the present time. The implication of the metaphor of pains of childbirth, however, as of the eschatological 'now', is that the time for groaning will soon be past, the delivery of the new creation from the womb of the old is imminent, although Paul's thought cherishes as much the certain hope of that deliverance as of its nearness.

But Paul does not follow any of the avenues as to how this might happen but looks ahead instead to the point where we will finally be redeemed by God to full glorification. We are already groaning and sighing, with God's Spirit in us trying to shape us and guide us to the place we need to be. We, in our frustrations, impatience, or perhaps reluctance to act, seem to make little progress towards the final goal during our lifetime. But time is in God's hands and it will come at a time when he is ready, with or without us.

²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:23

God's people also groan and long for the completion of his saving work. The tension is seen here between the already now and not yet of Paul's theology. Christians already have the firstfruits of the Spirit, but they still await the day of their final adoption when their bodies are fully redeemed and they are raised from the dead.

Their adoption has already occurred in a legal sense (v.15), and they already enjoy many of its privileges, but here Paul uses adoption to refer to the yet greater privilege of receiving perfect resurrection bodies.

The suffering of believers is part of a cosmic drama into which all creation, inanimate as well as animate, is drawn. But lest the point be insufficiently clear, Paul spells it out. We ourselves are caught up in the same cosmic unease too deep for words. He claims an empathy between Christian suffering and the hidden forces working in nature, not the cycle of the seasons or nature's amazing fertility, which so motivated the religious fervour typical of the ancient world, but the deeper movements of history, including natural history, and not simply as an endless repetition of the same phenomena, but history moving to an end, a final climax. For the spokesman of a small movement still in its infancy, the vision is audacious. But, of course, for Paul it was not a new movement, rather the climax of a purpose begun in Adam, picked up again in Abraham and Israel, and now through Jesus Christ already broadened out to embrace the Gentiles. Paul does not thereby seek to glorify his own mission; his work is simply a small part in the cosmic plan from the beginning of time; but it was that vision which drove him on and which made his work so successful and of such lasting influence.

²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 8:24-25

For in this hope we were saved. When the end finally comes and judgement is upon us all, true believers will be found to be righteous in the sight of God. The great fire will refine them, not destroy them like it will those that are bound for the great lake of fire: <<Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's

name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire>> (Revelation 20:14-15).

It seems that those destroyed by the second death will however live on into eternal separation from God, in a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. However, it should be noted and cannot be overstated that those who proclaim such unbelievers will, after a period of time, be allowed the same privileges and brought back into the presence of God in eternity, are wrong and should never tell unbelievers this is the case, for scripture clearly indicates it is a final verdict and a dreadful one. In fact, final destruction would be a better option, if it were offered.

Believers' acceptance at this time will be a public proclamation by God as their full adoption as children of God, a right bestowed on them by Jesus: <<Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God>> (John 1:12). Like Christ, they will be raised from the dead to take their place with God, although, unlike Christ, it will not be a place by right, but by free grace. It is the adoption perfected and completed: <<In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering>> (Hebrews 2:10); when believers shall rest in hope: <<Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay>> (Psalm 16:9-10), the time they have patiently waited for: <<If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made>> (Job 14:14-15). And this is our patient hope in our present state and not our present possession, for we are saved by hope, one of the three principal graces: <<And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love>> (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith respects the promise, hope is what is promised; faith is the evidence, hope is the expectation, of things as yet unseen. The road may be rough and long but the reward is certain.

Paul, writing from Corinth, does not want the Romans to fall into the same trap that some in Corinth had. Those who have the Spirit and are guided by the Spirit are assured of salvation but it is a hope that lies just beyond the horizon for us at this present time. What Paul fears is that they become too indulgent in the gifts the Spirit gives them in the present age and that they might detach themselves from the physical world and focus all their time and energy on the future hope. Christians are called to be part of the physical world, to be where the trouble is, to engage with others who are suffering and, where necessary, to suffer themselves, in order to bring that hope of salvation to its full climax.

The church is central to God's plan in the present time. We are called to stand up for what is right, to spend our time in prayer to call for God's intercession where it is needed, or to equip us to deal with it if that is appropriate, thus to be a point of focus for God in the world, to be in the places where suffering is most acute, to willingly suffer and die if called to and by showing that we can stand firm against all attacks, whether from disinterested mankind that shares our planet or more directly from the forces that are actively opposing God. Bishop NT Wright states: 'That is part of our calling, our high but strange role within God's purposes for new creation'.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Romans 8:26

Here we have two further privileges. Firstly, the direct help of the Holy Spirit in our prayer. We do not know what we ought to pray for: <<For who knows what is good for a man in life,

during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?>> (Ecclesiastes 6:12). And too often we will pray for things of the flesh and for self, and not what is in line with God's will, which is what we should be praying for. Too often we do not understand what it is we are asking of God, even if we think we do: <<"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered>> (Matthew 20:22), and we do not understand what manner of spirit we are of: <<And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of">> (Luke 9:54-55 21st CKJV). Sometimes believers do not have the heart to pray: <<O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer>> (2 Samuel 7:27). It is interesting to note this passage is put in the first person and Paul, clearly a man who spent a lot of time in prayer if we accept his epistles to be true, and there is no reason to doubt them, sees a weakness in our ability to ask God for what he wants and what we need, rather than what we want.

Although Christians do not always know God's will in prayer, the Spirit himself intercedes for them in and through their unspeakable groans, confirmed in v.23. This does not refer to speaking in tongues, since what Paul says here applies to all Christians and, according to 1 Corinthians 12:30 <<Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?>>, only some Christians speak in tongues.

Groans that words cannot express. Paul would not see any reason to desist from prayer, to abandon so hopelessly inadequate an exercise. On the contrary, it is that very inarticulate groaning, which is itself an effective form of prayer, the point presumably being that what is fundamental in prayer is not the saying of words, but the expression of dependence on God for everything. That we cannot find the words to fully express ourselves seems quite ironic when mankind sacrificed his relationship with God for the fruit of knowledge!

In this tension between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of all when he returns, the believer remains as part of that tension. We have the Spirit but we are still in the flesh. The Spirit does not eliminate the weakness in them but is there to guide the believer through the minefield of sin, but it does take a conscious effort on the part of a believer to battle with sin and to prevail, with the Spirit's help, to overcome whatever sin may throw at them. This is a message Jesus gives to all seven churches in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, where each one is encouraged to persevere in faith and overcome.

²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Romans 8:27

He who searches our hearts is literally 'the Searcher of Hearts', a new title for God that might make us feel a little uneasy. Knowing that God can see our innermost being, have access to all our darkest thoughts, even those that may be subconscious, is really scary, but we have his Spirit dwelling in us, guiding us and if we let him take full control, we will gradually move to a place where this idea of God searching our hearts and minds will actually become a comfort and not a threat to us. If we are truly sons and daughters of God we will have nothing to fear; if not, we have everything to fear! What he is searching for though is not really our dark secrets that we might wish to remain hidden, for he knows them anyway. What he wants is to detect the Spirit groaning; in pain as it suffers from the pain of the world around us. This may be a strange idea for us. To have this Spirit groaning inarticulate sounds that we cannot ourselves voice. But the Searcher of Hearts is in constant communion with the Spirit dwelling in each of us, and he knows what is being said. While we perhaps are praying for things of little consequence in kingdom terms, the Spirit in us knows what is going on, cries out to the Father and guides us

towards the things we should be addressing, especially reaching the lost, for they have much more to lose than anyone else in all creation - their very eternal soul. This is what our glorified sovereignty looks like in the present age. The challenge to suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with him means, to be sure, being ready for all kinds of physical and mental suffering, persecution, etc. (vv.35-36).

God always answers the requests of the Spirit in the affirmative, since the Spirit always prays in accord with God's will. It is often said that without God, we cannot do anything and without us, God will not do anything, so we are required to ask God, i.e. pray. Jesus is in heaven to intercede for us with the Father, to make our prayer acceptable, but the Holy Spirit is in our hearts and intercedes for the saints to help us formulate our prayers in order to ensure we are asking in accordance with God's will; then we will see prayers answered.

Our prayers do not have to be spoken, for God knows our hearts as with Hannah: <<Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk>> (1 Samuel 1:13). Also, it is not the rhetoric and eloquence, but the faith and fervency of our prayers that the Spirit works as an intercessor within us. And, once again, he does so in accordance with God's will: <<"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done">> (Luke 22:42).

This verse should be of severe dread to a hypocrite, but a true believer, who is trying to make God's will his own heart's desire, has little to fear. In fact, it should be welcomed, as the Spirit will help to convict us of any wrong thoughts, even subconscious ones, and in turn that will help us to grow and mature as followers of Jesus. It also means that God knows what we need before we ask and often before we even know we need it, as Jesus has taught us: <<Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him>> (Matthew 6:8). Whatever we ask of the Father, according to his will, and in the name of his Son, he will give us: <<You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name>> (John 15:16).

Just as personal holiness is to be seen as taking responsibility in the present for that part of the created order most obviously under our own control, in anticipation of the day when we shall reign in life, i.e. over considerably larger spheres, so prayer, seen in the light of vv.26-27, can be understood as taking responsibility for the larger world itself, in advance of the new creation, and as sharing in the sufferings of the Christ as we do so. There may seem to be plenty of things in the world that we could be praying for, but we should simply remain still in the presence of God and allow the Spirit to groan inarticulately, for God will hear and recognise it for what it is, suffering according to the pattern of Christ.

IV.g.ii Romans 8:28-39 - More than conquerors

Paul gives a joyous conclusion to the argument that he has carefully unfolded throughout the preceding chapters. The opposition of unbelievers and Satan will never succeed, since God is for us (v.31).

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

God weaves everything together for the good of his children. The good in this context does not refer to earthly comfort but conformity to Christ (v.29), closer fellowship with God, bearing good fruit for the kingdom, and final glorification (v.30). In this way, we truly hand ourselves over to God's control and we can learn to trust God in the troubling circumstances and rest in the promises of God.

In 'Purpose Driven Life', Rick Warren comments on this verse: What it does not say is, 'God causes everything to work out the way I want it to', nor does it say, 'God causes everything to work out to have a happy ending on earth'. He also states that the promise is for God's children. It is not for everyone. All things work for bad for those living in opposition to God and insist on having their own way. This could include uncommitted 'church-goers'.

What Paul goes on to say is that we did not choose God but that he chooses us. This is a mystery that Paul does not, in any of his letters, go into. He simply leaves it that those who respond to the preaching of the Gospel by faith are accepted by God into the family of believers.

He performs all things for good and does so for us: <<I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfils his purpose for me>> (Psalm 57:2). He even permits us to stray, in order to test our hearts: <<But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart>> (2 Chronicles 32:31). And all things together for good as all wheels become as one wheel: <<I heard the wheels being called "the whirling wheels">> (Ezekiel 10:13).

According to his purpose. Paul is well aware that God is much more than the God of Israel. He is the creator God, who created everything and everyone. Therefore, it is clear to Paul that God had in mind the calling of the Gentiles long before Abraham was called. It may also have occurred to Paul that God had in mind the solution for the redemption of mankind even before Adam had sinned!

²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Romans 8:29

Verses 29-30 explain why those who believe in Christ can be assured that all things work together for good: God has always been doing good for them, starting before creation (the distant past), continuing in their conversion (the recent past), and then on to the day of Christ's return (the glorious future).

Foreknew reaches back to the OT, where the word 'know' emphasises God's special choice of, or covenantal affection for, his people, e.g. <<For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him>> (Genesis 18:19), <<"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations">> (Jeremiah 1:5), and: <<"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins">> (Amos 3:2).

In Romans 11:2 it states <<God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed to God against Israel>>, we will see foreknew functions as the contrast to rejected, showing that it emphasises God's choosing his people: <<who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood>> (1 Peter 1:2), and: <<He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake>> (1 Peter 1:20).

God also predestined, i.e. predetermined, that those whom he chose beforehand would become like Christ.

Words like foreknew and predestined seem to contradict the idea of humans having free will to choose God and then how to live their lives for God but with some element of their own input. I personally believe that God has given us free will to make choices, right or wrong,

and then live with the consequences. God, of course, has a plan for our lives but he can also accommodate the choices we make. To understand this we need to try to think of it from God's perspective, which for humans is impossible of course. Unlike humans, God is not bound by any of the dimensional constraints; especially time. We tend to think in terms of time as the past, present and future; then perhaps on into eternity - a long time. But try to imagine that eternity is not a long time but just an instant. As God is outside of time he sees everything in that instant. Therefore, he knows what choices we make long before we make them and therefore it can be said that he foreknew them.

³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8:30

The chain that begins with the word foreknew in v.29 cannot be broken. Those who are predestined by God are also called effectively to faith through the Gospel: <<He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ>> (2 Thessalonians 2:14). And all those who are called are also justified, i.e. declared to be right in God's sight. Because not all who are invited to believe are actually justified, the calling here cannot refer to merely a general invitation but must refer to an effective call that creates the faith necessary for justification: <<Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ>> (Romans 5:1).

All those who are justified will also be glorified, i.e. receive resurrection bodies, on the last day. Paul speaks of glorification as if it were already completed, since God will certainly finish the good work he started: <<being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus>> (Philippians 1:6).

This is one of many scriptures that seem to indicate that salvation is only for those that God predestines for everlasting life, to be moulded into the likeness of Christ, yet elsewhere his word indicates that salvation is available for anyone who calls on the name of the Lord: <<And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved>> (Joel 2:32a), and: <<That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame">> (Romans 10:9-11). Here, it seems to indicate that God's foreknowledge of individuals is the crucial factor in them having any hope of coming to faith. Examples of God's foreknowledge are: <<Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me'>> (Exodus 33:12), <<The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness>> (Jeremiah 31:3), <<For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish>> (Psalm 1:6), <<I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me>> (John 10:14), <<Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness">> (2 Timothy 2:19), etc. It has been suggested that since Christ is the Alpha and Omega, i.e. he knows the beginning from the end, then he knows those who will choose to come to him and that is the foreknowledge he has. However, we have to be careful that we do not limit God in this, as the above statement may suggest that God is in the past, in the present and in the future, but he is not bound by time in any way as he is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. It would seem to be one of the mysteries of God that has not been fully revealed to us and those of us who have come to faith should be forever thankful for that and do all we can to share the Gospel with others in order to give them the opportunity to make the choice for themselves. It does not seem in line with the Gospel that anyone who genuinely turns to Jesus in faith,

asks for forgiveness from the heart and then follows a life of service to him will then be rejected for not being pre-selected before the dawn of time. However, it is clear that coming to Christ, although it may seem to be by human choice, is only by God's election, as Jesus cares for those whom the Father gives him: <<This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me" >> (John 18:9), for many are called but few are chosen: <<Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it>> (Matthew 7:13-14), and: <<"For many are invited, but few are chosen" >> (Matthew 22:14). What we do know for certain is that Christ will be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, he will be the perfect template and all others will be like copies of him in character, including his absolute obedience to and love of the Father.

He predestined us from the beginning of time. Those predestined are also called: <<Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall>> (2 Peter 1:10). Those he called he justified, i.e. made righteous and guilt-free through the blood of Christ, although not guiltless! Those justified were glorified, i.e. given a resurrection body and accepted into the very presence of God in heaven as the final reward, not for our faithful service but as Christ's reward for his obedience.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:31-32

This is a magnificent discourse by Paul showing his full understanding of God's power and grace, and just what he has done, and is still prepared to do for those he now calls his own people. Through the Cross of Christ, the devil is bound, the world is defeated, and the principalities and opponents of God are powerless to oppose him, although they may still persecute the saints in this life with charges such as heresy, sedition and rebellion, even today in some countries. Through his almighty power, we are protected for all eternity, never to be lost again, no matter what may befall us during this brief time on earth as it is today.

He who did not spare his own Son in order to ensure our salvation will not fail, can never fail in any way. Just as Abraham did not withhold his only son, the very seed of promise, from God: <<"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" >> (Genesis 22:12). So too God did not withhold Jesus from dying so that we may have true and everlasting life, with him in glory. That is a triumph above all the triumphs ever recorded in the history of mankind.

Having mentioned Abraham and Isaac here it is worth considering this as an aside: <<Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" >> (Genesis 22:2), and then we read of this same location: <<Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David>> (2 Chronicles 3:1). Christ was crucified within a stone's throw of this same location. The Son of God about whom it is written: <<A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" >> (Luke 9:35). This is no coincidence but part of God's salvation plan.

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Romans 8:33

Satan, their enemies, or even their own consciences may bring charges against God's elect, i.e. those whom God has chosen, but those who have come to faith in Christ will never be found guilty, for God will declare them to be right before the entire world at the divine tribunal.

In his benevolence he supplies us all good things: <<The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing>> (Psalm 34:10). It is a free gift; not free of cost but free because it is beyond valuation so that no human payment could ever suffice the true cost of Christ being given up for us. Now he rightly and justifiably sits at the right hand of the Father, as our friend and as our judge: <<I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me>> (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Romans 8:34

Who is he that condemns? The question posed in v.33 is repeated. Christians may rejoice with the certainty that they will never be condemned, for:

1. Christ died for them and paid the full penalty for their sin;
2. he was raised, showing that his death was effective;
3. he now is seated triumphantly at God's right hand: <<The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet">> (Psalm 110:1); and
4. he intercedes for his people on the basis of his shed blood. Interceding signifies effective intervention.

Verses 33-34 echo Isaiah 50:4-9 <<The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up>>, with not just Jesus as the servant but any who are willing to share in his suffering. The suffering is taken up in Colossians 1:24 <<Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church>>, in the sufferings of God's people into God's purposes, not in order to add to the unique achievement of Christ, but in order to live it out in the world so that his love might extend yet further.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Romans 8:35

There are several scriptures that compliment the scene that Paul is portraying for us here, including: <<Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them>> (Hebrews 7:25), <<For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now

to appear for us in God's presence>> (Hebrews 9:24), <<My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One>> (1 John 2:1), and: <<But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God>> (Acts 7:55). This gives reassurance to believers that God is with us and interceding for us throughout the tough times that lie ahead for each generation until Christ returns for his church and to rule over the earth.

What these verses show us is that true believers have nothing to fear. Those who choose to live in fear are lacking in faith and trust, and need to look to God to deal with the issues that are affecting them. We can then ask him to help us deal with the issues that we can change and let those which we have no influence over pass us by. This is the basis of the serenity prayer.

After four chapters of careful, well formulated questions, statements and arguments, Paul suddenly bursts forth with this amazing summary statement of those four chapters with a resounding crescendo put together as a statement showing God is eternally with us, based on four rhetorical questions:

- Who can stand against? No one!
- Who will bring a charge against us? No one!
- Who will condemn us? No one!
- Who can separate us from God? No one!

This is all exciting stuff but it has its mockers who criticise it as fanciful, wishful thinking and who openly state: 'you are sure of God's love and your own salvation - how self-centred, how arrogant!'

All this is based on the hope that God is with us, and is made by an apostle who daily faced beatings, persecution, hardship and death; based on a hope that is grounded on us suffering with the Christ. But the hope goes much deeper than that, for it based on a promise made by God that anyone who believes in the Gospel, who accepts that Jesus Christ died for their personal sins, was raised to life and is now Lord of all Creation, is justified in the eyes of God. This justification is made in faith and will be reaffirmed on the great Day of the Lord, when all are raised to final judgement.

³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

Romans 8:36

As it is written. The quotation is from Psalm 44:22, which is a Psalm of complaint to God in the midst of suffering, and shows that the difficulties listed in v.35 do strike Christians hard. They are not exempted from suffering or even from being killed, nor indeed should they expect to have the right to be exempted from any of it: <<Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” But the Lord replied, “Have you any right to be angry?” >> (Jonah 4:3-4), or perhaps Paul himself: <<Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong>> (2 Corinthians 12:8-10), and Jeremiah, in his anguish and despair, turned to God and trusted in him: <<Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,

for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord>> (Lamentations 3:22-26)

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Sheep are harmless, docile, placid creatures in life yet we slaughter them, as we find sheep useful for clothing and for food once dead. So too those that oppose Christians find them useful when dead, so they can feed their own malice and hatred of God: <<Will evildoers never learn – those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the Lord?>> (Psalm 14:4).

As 2 Corinthians 1:5 shows: <<For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows>>, no matter what the afflictions the consolations abound all the more. That is the great triumph for true believers in Christ: <<"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world">> (John 16:33).

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

Christians are more than conquerors, because God turns everything, even suffering and death, into good by using them for ultimately good purposes according to his will; therefore, there is nothing in this world that we should fear: <<I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more>> (Luke 12:4), for we have Christ on our side and death in this life is not something to be feared by the Christian believer. In all our persecutions, we must not love him any the less either for we are more than conquerors through Christ: <<They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death>> (Revelation 12:11).

Him who loved us seems to indicate that Paul is looking back to the Cross. The use of the past tense does not in any way indicate that Christ is not ever present, but is intended to draw the attention of the reader to where it all began in terms of the implementation of the final phase of God's plan of salvation for of all creation.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced. Paul answers the question he raised in v.35 with absolute certainty that nothing can ever sever God's people from his love; in Christ Jesus.

Nor any powers here likely refers to angelic and demonic authorities. Paul's conclusion is that nothing either in this world or the next can separate a true believer from the love of Christ. On principalities and powers Paul gives us more information: <<far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come>> (Ephesians 1:21), <<For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him>> (Colossians 1:16), <<For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms>> (Ephesians 6:12), <<And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross>> (Colossians 2:15).

Neither height nor depth is probably used in astrological terms, which in Paul's day, and even for many today, were thought to be responsible for determining the fate of mankind. Paul is saying that whether it is something visible or invisible in the heavens, it is under God's power and control, and ultimately everything is controlled by God.

Such persecution cannot separate us from the love of Christ; in fact it strengthens the bond. Paul is a prime example of this. For all the times he was beaten, stoned, whipped and imprisoned, God did not love him less, but his grace and promises did abound all the more. And when the end came and his friends seemed to have abandoned him, God did not: <<At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth>> (2 Timothy 4:16-17), and this was not for the first time: <<The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome">> (Acts 23:11). We can rest in God's love: <<The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing>> (Zephaniah 3:17).

Jesus could have been the Messiah the Jews wanted and expected. He could have come with legions of angels and swept away all those who opposed God, and who opposed God's people. He had done so in the past with mighty power against the Egyptian and Assyrian armies, but that did not even have any impact on the Jews, who continually turned away from God to idols and to their own way of life. By suffering and dying on the Cross to take away our sin, and to be the propitiation, turning away God's wrath from us, Jesus became far more powerful than millions of mighty angels could ever be!

As we look back to the start of this section, at Romans 5:1-11, we see that we have come full circle in the love that God has for us, which rules over life and death and all the powers of the universe, whether they are for or against God. He reigns overall. Therefore, after eight chapters of his letter to the church congregations in Rome, Paul can strongly boast and conclude in v.39 that: <<neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord>>:

<<Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation>>.
(Romans 5:1-11).