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Romans 8:13 and the Security of the Believer

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Anyone familiar with the New Testament and the Gospel of God's grace understands that those who believe in Christ are promised that they will live forever (John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24). There are other passages in the Word of God, however, which seem to indicate that those who believe in Christ may actually die if they do not pursue a righteous life before their God. Romans 8:13 is one of these passages and states simply, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."² Is this passage saying that the one who does not follow the Spirit is already dead? Or, is it possible for an unfaithful Christian to die in some spiritual sense? The purpose of this paper is to explore the three general views regarding the relationship between a walk in the Spirit and eternal life. Specifically, Romans 8:13 teaches neither that one can lose his eternal life, nor that his manner of living is an indicator of a lack of spiritual life.

Romans 8:13 can be understood in three basic ways: 1) the Arminian view; 2) the Puritan-Reform view; and 3) the Free Grace view. Each of these views has its advocates and reasons; however, to simply understand the distinctions, consider the following chart:

¹ See www.FreeGraceAlliance.com.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997).

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	Arminian View	Puritan-Reform View	Free Grace View
To the believer?	Yes	No	Yes
Is the believer eternally secure?	No	Yes	Yes
What's at issue?	Losing eternal salvation	Never having had eternal salvation	The spiritual / physical life of the one who has eternal salvation

In order to understand the nature of Romans 8:13, an understanding of Romans 8:1-12 is important; just as context is essential to understanding any passage. The larger context of Romans 8 is the sequence of chapters starting with chapter 4, which deals with the nature of faith in justification; chapter 5, which deals with the work of Christ on the cross in relationship to justification; chapter 6, the identification of the believer with Christ as a foundation for freedom from sin and power for righteousness; chapter 7, the struggle of the believer as it relates to a walk by the Spirit rather than law; and chapter 8, the full experience of freedom as the believer learns to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

Romans 8 is a discussion of the deliverance of the Spirit from the power of the flesh³ for the individual. The most strategic and telling markers for Romans 8:1-13 is the use of the personal pronouns found in these verses and translated as “those,” “us/me,” and “you.” In these verses, Paul uses the term “those” as a generic description for individuals broadly for which each passage or assertion applies. The terms “us/me” refers specifically to believers who are walking with God or applying truth in a similar fashion as Paul. The term “you” is directed to those believers in Christ who Paul is exhorting regarding their spiritual life or walk with God, including the single use of “we” to refer to Paul along with all other believers (8:12).

A simple outline concerning these pronouns is as follows:

³ The *New Bible Dictionary* offers the following definition of the flesh: “The flesh in this sense denotes the whole personality of man as organized in the wrong direction, as directed to earthly pursuits rather than the service of God.” D. R. W. Wood et al., eds. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

[8:1]	“ THOSE ”	(generic reference)
[8:2-4]	“ US / ME ”	(Pauline personal reference)
[8:5-8]	“ THOSE ”	(generic reference)
[8:9-13]	“ YOU ”	(specific reference to the Roman believers)

Notice specifically some examples of the use of the personal pronoun:

✧ *There is therefore now no condemnation to **those** who are in Christ Jesus . . . (8:1)*

Here Paul is giving a generic reference applied to all those who are in Christ Jesus. It is generic for all Christians and may indeed, if the Majority Text is correct, include a general reference to those who “do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” as a special category of Christians; those walking with the Lord and not experiencing the condemnation of the Romans 7 struggle.

✧ *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made **me** free . . . (8:2)*

✧ *That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in **us** who do not walk according to the flesh . . . (8:4)*

In these verses, Paul is referring to himself in particular, and those like him, who are led by the Spirit of life and do not follow the dictates of either the law of sin and death, or that of the flesh.

✧ *For **those** who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh . . . (8:5)*

✧ *So then, **those** who are in the flesh cannot please God. (8:8)*

Verses 5-9 are of generic reference and (specifically in verse 8) seem to point out that the object is generically all the lost or unsaved in the world.

✧ *But **you** are not in the flesh but in the Spirit . . . (8:9)*

✧ *And if Christ is in **you** . . . (8:10)*

✧ *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in **you**, . . . will also give life to **your** mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in **you**. (8:11)*

These verses look to offer direction and promise to those who know Christ and follow the Spirit’s leading.

In verse 12, Paul states, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors— not to the flesh . . .” and shows a generic statement which includes

himself; similar to the use of “me” or “us” in Romans 8:2 and 8:4, explaining that those who have believed in Christ have a special kind of freedom from the flesh because of the spiritual work of Christ, and their identification with Him (see Rom. 6). Finally, Paul’s exhortation in verse 13, states again, “For if you live according to the flesh . . . but if by the Spirit you put to death . . . you will live.” In this verse—the verse with which this paper is concerned—there is a clear and confirmed reference to the Roman believers; however, before considering Paul’s meaning in this verse, consider the first two interpretations historically held by some.

The Arminian View

Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” The Arminian view understands the reference to the personal pronoun “you” in this passage to mean the person who has believed in Christ for his eternal salvation. The logic is straight forward because, if this refers to a believer in the Arminian understanding, then the definition of death must mean eternal condemnation; a person who is saved can lose his salvation. The Arminian view translates this verse as, “For if you [as a believer] live according to the flesh you [as a believer] will die [lose your salvation and spend eternity apart from God].” It therefore stands to reason that the Arminian view takes the second part of the verse and understands it as a means of maintaining one’s salvation, or keeping oneself in the good graces of God. The Arminian view must translate the second part of verse 13 as, “. . . but if by the Spirit you [who have believed in Christ] put to death the deeds of the body, you will live [continue to stay in a saved state and get to spend eternity with God].”

The strength of the Arminian view is that it is an easy-to-understand explanation of Romans 8:13, and fits nicely into the Arminian premise that a believer is not actually eternally secure until finally in the presence of God. In this regard, Romans 8:13 operates as what has been traditionally called a “proof text,” which is a verse—added to a pre-understanding—which instantly confirms what the presenter suggests in terms of meaning and emphasis.

The Arminian interpretation, however, fails because it fails to take into account both the nature of the Gospel and eternal security as

described in Romans 8. The Gospel itself is found in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The Gospel simply states that faith in Christ guarantees eternal life to the believer. A guarantee of eternal life is exactly that—a guarantee. The promise of John 3:16 is not without abundant support throughout the book of John, where approximately 98 references to faith as the condition of salvation are made known to the reader. John 3:36 says, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The emphasis is on the black-and-white nature of the forgiveness we have through Christ; that those who have not believed on Christ have wrath abiding on them, while the individual who believes in the Son has (as his present possession) everlasting life. John 5:24 states it in these words, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” Here again, the Gospel is established as a basis on which someone is translated into a condition of possessing everlasting life, with the promise that judgment will never come upon him or her. It is almost without need to mention, that since one’s works are not a basis of taking hold of the gift of eternal life, one’s works, logically speaking, have no basis to serve as a means through which one can lose his eternal life.

The Arminian view fails to appreciate how Paul established eternal security in the immediate context of Romans 8. Consider, for example, the strategic chain of salvation in Romans 8:30, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified,⁴ these He also glorified.” In this verse, Paul is establishing the fact that there is a sequence in view. Without getting into a traditional and historic debate concerning predestination, it is easy enough to focus on the words “called,” “justified,” and “glorified.” Specifically, Paul is stating that

⁴ The *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* defines justification as “a forensic term, opposed to condemnation. As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands.” M.G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* [CD-ROM] (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

those God calls, He justifies, and those God justifies, He glorifies. The simple meaning is that those whom God calls will (at last) be glorified. This verse, perhaps like few others, serves as a basis for the traditional understanding of God's "irresistible grace" in the Calvinistic understanding of the term. If one who is called is therefore necessarily justified, and the one who is necessarily justified will necessarily be glorified; then it stands to reason that everyone who is called will, in the final analysis, be glorified (and that, in the presence of the Lord). In all historical theological orientations, believers are understood to be "the called," but in this case the call is not a generic call to all of mankind, but a specific call to those who will be justified (and finally glorified) before the Lord. In summary, since the called are those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is simply guaranteed by Paul that the believer will be justified and glorified; that is, he will be forever with the Lord.

The nature of security in Romans 8 is not only explained by this unbroken chain, but Paul adds these words, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:38-39)." This passage underscores the absolute guarantee of security for the believer in Jesus Christ. Paul is stating that nothing can separate the believer from the Lord. "Nothing" includes such things as angels, principalities, and created things. Needless to say, the believer himself is in this category of "created things," therefore demonstrating the possibility that the eternally saved can separate himself from the love of God is irrational and indefensible. Specifically as well, Paul, almost in anticipation of the point, explains that death also will not separate the believer from his Lord. This death easily harkens back to verse 13 where it is stated that the believer, if he lives according to the flesh, will die. But even there, Paul has said that this "death" will not finally separate him from Christ Jesus the Lord.

The Arminian view fails because the context asserts and confirms that the believer is forever connected to the Lord, and a destiny with Him in glory, once he has put his faith in Christ, the One who saves him. This truth, as established in the context, insists that Romans 8:13 cannot be used as a proof text, and certainly cannot carry the

idea that a believer who lives in a “fleshly” way will lose his eternal salvation.

The Puritan-Reformed View

The Puritan-Reformed view, with its emphasis on works as a means of assurance, comes perilously close to affirming salvation by faith on one hand, but taking it away with the other. Matthew Henry, the famous Puritan commentator, asserts concerning Romans 8:13,

Consider the consequences, what will be at the end of the way. Here are life and death, blessing and cursing, set before us. *If you live after the flesh, you shall die*; that is, die eternally. It is the pleasing, and serving, and gratifying, of the flesh, that are the ruin of souls; that is, the second death. Dying indeed is the soul’s dying: the death of the saints is but a sleep. But, on the other hand, *You shall live*, live and be happy to eternity; that is the true life: *If you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body*, subdue and keep under all fleshly lusts and affections, deny yourselves in the pleasing and humouring of the body, and this through the Spirit; we cannot do it without the Spirit working it in us, and the Spirit will not do it without our doing our endeavour. So that in a word we are put upon this dilemma, either to displease the body or destroy the soul.⁵ [my emphasis]

In these comments Matthew Henry understands Romans 8:13 to assert that those who live according to the flesh are not actually Christians at all. His argument is that a true believer will not live according to the flesh; therefore if one lives according to the flesh, then he will die (because he is not a true believer). In his own words, he explains this as, “It is the pleasing, and serving, and gratifying, of the flesh, that are the ruin of souls; that is, the second death.” Later in the same passage he says, “So that in a word we are put upon this dilemma, either to displease the body or destroy the soul.” Therefore, obviously in this Puritan-Reformed view, Romans 8:13 argues that living according to the flesh demonstrates a lack of salvation, or “death.” Moreover, Henry is saying that displeasing the body is preserving the soul; or simply, if one works at resisting the flesh, he will be eternally saved.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), Rom. 8:10.

The strength of the Puritan-Reform interpretation is that it, in a similar fashion to the Arminian view, seeks to provide a consistency in its logic as it proof texts its view. Again, the definition of the word “die” is simply accepted as “not having eternal life,” or “dying in hell, forever lost from the Lord.”

The Puritan-Reform view fails for three reasons: 1) it ignores the fact that the passage is directed to believers; 2) it confuses works with faith; and 3) it ignores the fact that life must precede death.

First, the Puritan-Reform view ignores that the passage is directed to believers. It should be enough counter-proof to see that the pronoun “you” specifically refers to those who are saved. For example, in the context, verse 9 states, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit . . .” Again in verse 12, the immediate context says, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you . . .” In other words, Paul is referring specifically to the brethren, those who are connected together through their common eternal salvation as God’s children. This brotherly relationship is also underscored in verses 16-17 where believers are referred to as “children of God” and “joint heirs with Christ.” The immediate context states that Romans 8:13 is addressed to Christians; therefore, when the Puritan-Reform view states that “For if you live according to the flesh” is a reference to believers who are not really believers, it undermines its own understanding and assertion regarding the interpretation of the passage. Therefore, if the reference is to a believer when Romans 8:13 states, “For if you live,” then it is impossible, given eternal security, that the word “die” can mean eternal damnation.

Second, the Puritan-Reform view confuses the relationship between works (or righteousness) and faith. The Christian is saved by grace through faith apart from works (Rom. 4:4-5, 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9). The Puritan-Reform view agrees and argues that we are saved by faith alone such that works have no consideration in one’s salvation from hell to heaven. However, at the same time according to Matthew Henry, if one lives according to the flesh, it guarantees the condemnation of the soul. Henry’s statement itself could be taken to say that a person loses (or perhaps fails to gain) his salvation because he walks after the flesh. In other words, the Puritan-Reform view creates such a relationship between faith and works, that the

reasonable option of a believer “walking according to the flesh” is excluded; therefore, the only rationale logically, is to decry, “A believer is not truly a believer.” This fine distinction creates struggles in many aspects of the Puritan-Reform understanding of faith and works. The Puritan-Reform view, also by implication if Henry is correct, actually suggests that one is saved by works in the second half of the verse, “. . . but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” This view then specifically means that if one operates in such a way as to keep the deeds of the body restrained, suppressed, or ignored, he will live (have eternal salvation). It further suggests that a walk in the Spirit is the means through which one is saved, and curiously puts the Puritan-Reform view back on equal footing with the Arminian view and their easier answer of “losing salvation,” rather than not having salvation at all.

Finally, the Puritan-Reform interpretation also ignores the simple fact that death, by definition, insists that life precedes it. “Die” carries the idea of perishing, and certainly may be applied to an eternal perishing in hell. “Death” itself carries with it the idea of separation; be it the spirit from the body as in James 2:26, or as in a separation from the power of sin by the law as in Romans 7:6, “But now we have been delivered from the law having died to what we were held by . . .” In either event, it is important to understand that death must be preceded by life, even in terms of eternal salvation, where death is preceded by the life that was once found in Adam. The nature of this conditional clause in verse 13, “For if you live,” describes that living according to the flesh creates death. If eternal death or an eternity in hell is in view, then the cause of this “death” is living after the flesh. The curious problem for the Puritan-Reform view is that the view itself believes the lost or unelect deserve hell apart from their actions, due to the fact that they are lost in Adam, belonging to the uncalled and unelect. The Puritan-Reform view, by its own admission, does not understand the nature of hell as something earned by sinning, but rather is due to the sinner who is born in that estranged and terminal estate (if non-elect) before God. In other words, the interpretation of Romans 8:13 in the Puritan-Reform view seems to deny one of its basic premises; the lost deserve hell because of their relationship to Adam, not because they “live according to the flesh.”

The Free Grace View

The Free Grace position is held by a host of individuals, including many classical and moderate Calvinists, along with some who identify themselves with a modified Arminian perspective. The distinction of the Free Grace view is that it understands Romans 8 to be an exhortation to the Christian to walk according to the Spirit and to live out a Spirit-led life (Rom. 8:14). In particular, the context governs the Free Grace position, both as it concerns the Gospel and as it concerns Romans 8. In the Free Grace view, the Gospel is held as a consistent “faith alone” proposition. Both Romans 4:5, “But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness;” and Romans 5:1, “Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” highlight the point. These passages demonstrate that it is by faith, and faith alone, that a person is justified and has an eternally secure standing before God. Spiritual life, however, is not given such a promise, since one’s faith can be questioned in relationship to the Christian walk. The Free Grace view understands the context of Romans 8:13 to refer to Christians (see Rom. 8:12). Romans 8:13 is referring to brethren who are not under obligation to follow after the flesh, but who hold that possibility as accountable children before their God.

The Free Grace position could be translated this way, “For if you [as a believer] live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you [as a believer] put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” In this understanding, the words “live” and “die” take on a strategic meaning which is not simply tied to eternal destiny as in the Arminian and Puritan-Reform views; but rather, these terms speak of a qualitative life related temporally (and perhaps regarding eternal rewards), to the Christian in his walk before God.

The first option among those who hold to the Free Grace position is that the word “die” in this context refers to physical death. Steve Elkins, in his new book *The Roman Road Revisited*, shares this view of the Free Grace position: “The notion that a believer cannot walk ‘according to the flesh,’ or cannot ‘practice’ sin, is as naïve as it is unbiblical. If—and when—believers walk *according to the flesh*, they’ll die. There is a real possibility of premature death for a believer following the flesh, and certainly the reality of the ‘death’ experience

that ‘killed’ Paul, in a manner of speaking (Romans 7:10-11ff.)”⁶ Elkins, and others, understand “death” to refer to physical death, and suggest that the believer who pursues a fleshly existence, or a life according to the flesh, will be taken home to be with the Lord. Another biblical example of this idea is found in 1 Corinthians 11:30 where Paul mentions how many of those who have dishonored the Lord’s Supper are sick, and some are indeed dead. The statement is made of believers as described and asserted by Paul at the beginning of the epistle in 1 Corinthians 1:2, where he refers to them as those who are “sanctified” and “called to be saints.”

A modified, but common expression of this Free Grace position is that the reference to death here, as well as life, carries with it the understanding of a walk before God similar to the wisdom literature of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In this literature, the description of a righteous walk with God is such that it leads to a lengthening of life. The book of Ecclesiastes asserts that individuals have a specific time to die in the overarching plan of God. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 states, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die.” Wisdom literature offers principles, which often are overcome by other principles, in the same way that gravity can be “overcome” by the Law of Lift to explain the reason airplanes fly. Therefore, even though Ecclesiastes says there is a time to die, later Solomon offers a further insight, “Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?” (Eccl. 7:17) In other words, a life of foolishness, even in the Old Testament, could lead an individual to a premature death. Spiritually speaking, in the New Testament, not only is the wisdom principle true, but rather it places a further warning to those who dishonor God by their life on this earth; these can be taken home to be in His presence early—elsewhere referred to as a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16).

The second Free Grace position is based on the contextual understanding of Romans 6. Romans 6 describes the facts of one’s identification in Christ, and specifically, statements such as verse 6, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the

⁶ Steve Elkins, *The Roman Road Revisited: New Vistas on the Road to Resurrection Living* (Dallas: Allie Grace Books, 2005), 111.

body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin,” underscore the fact that these truths are for believers and their lives before God. Paul indicates that because of this new identification and power from God to the believer, that the option is now in place to deny sin. Romans 6:12 states, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Obviously the believer, who is instructed not to let sin reign in his mortal body, still has the possibility of sin reigning in his mortal body. This truth is the foundation of Romans 8:11 which states that “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” In other words, Paul understands that the believer’s physical body as the primary instrument of the indwelling sin, is something that needs the empowering life of the indwelling Spirit in order to walk in righteousness. Romans 6:13 supports this as well by saying, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Here again Paul is describing the choice a believer has to remain in slavery to sin, or to step over into slavery to righteousness. The physical body is described as a somewhat “neutral” instrument that remains after eternal salvation, and which can be used by either indwelling sin or the Spirit of God.

Paul goes further in Romans 6 by asserting in verses 22 and 23, “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul’s point in Romans 6:22-23 is that Christians have been established positionally as slaves of God, and that when one pursues this life honoring the Lord, there is a fruit of holiness or sanctification; and, as a result, there is a qualitative benefit in our experience as the outworking of this everlasting life. In John 7:38, Christ describes this as “rivers of living water” that flow out of believers; pointing to the final destiny, as well in this qualitative, intimate, “eternal life” one can enjoy now with the Lord. Paul further states that “the wages [or payment] of sin is death” in verse 23. He is directing this to Christians in a context of their eternal salvation (Rom. 4 and 5) and their identification in Christ (Rom. 6). It is

Christians who can reap the “wages of sin” and therefore, as Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown states, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die—in the sense of Ro 6:21.”⁷

In this same vein, Paul returns to this theme of possibilities for the believer in Romans 8:13. The second Free Grace position understands this to be a reference for the believer without affecting his eternal security. It is an exhortation to walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh. The walk after the flesh results in a spiritual “death” or separation from the power of God; that is, the work of God’s Spirit through the believer. This failed walk, or “dying,” has eternal consequence in terms of rewards (see Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). On the other hand, Paul is encouraging the believer, as he has throughout Romans 8, to walk according to the Spirit; or rather, by the power of the Spirit (which the believer possesses) he is to put to death the deeds of the body, and so enjoy the power of the manifestation of the life of Christ (everlasting) itself. The following are examples of individuals who are consistent with this Free Grace position.

Some writers avoid the issue, but hint at the Free Grace view, like F.F. Bruce:

If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body. ‘Mortify’ is equivalent to ‘reckon . . . dead’ (vi. II); whereas in vi. II believers are exhorted to reckon themselves dead in relation to sin, here they are told to reckon their former sinful practices dead in relation to themselves (so also in Col. iii, 5 f.). We may compare Galatians v. 24, ‘they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (thereof)’, and our Lord’s more vivid language about plucking out the eye and cutting off the hand or foot that leads one into sin (Mt. v. 29 f.; Mk. ix. 43 ff.).⁸

Others are decisively Free Grace. In his multi-volume commentary on Romans, Donald Grey Barnhouse states,

I cannot stress too strongly that this portion of the epistle is in a stream of teaching that is addressed to those who have been born again, have

⁷ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Rom. 8:13 [CD-ROM] (Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker, vol. 6, Eerdmans ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1963; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 165.

been made alive in Christ, and have gone on with God to spiritual knowledge. There have been commentators who have taken the next portion of our text and twisted it far from its possible meaning. We now read, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” Those who have attempted to refer this passage to the second death nullify all that has gone before concerning the nature and certainty of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. The death that is mentioned here cannot, in any exegesis that recognizes the advancing nature of the revelation of truth in the epistle, be interpreted as referring to the second death.⁹

In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John Witmire writes,

Paul drew a conclusion and made an application from his previous discussion. **Therefore . . . we have an obligation.** Each believer’s responsibility is a positive one—to live each day in the control and power of the Holy Spirit. But first Paul expressed this truth negatively—**not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.** Each Christian is to refuse to follow the inclinations and desires of his sin nature. He is to deny the efforts of that nature to impose its lifestyle on him (cf. Titus 2:12). The reason is that a **sinful** manner of life results in death. This does not suggest that a believer who sins will face eternal death in hell; instead, it means he will not enjoy his spiritual life. He will seem like an unsaved person (1 Cor. 3:1-4) and will be unable to enjoy the indwelling presence of the Spirit. **You will die** is literally, “you are about to die,” or “you are at the point of dying.”

On the other hand, **if by the Spirit you put to death** (pres. tense, “are putting to death”) **the misdeeds of the body, you will live.** A few Greek manuscripts have “flesh” instead of “body.” But the body is the vehicle by which one’s sin-nature expresses itself (cf. Rom. 6:6, 13). Only by the Holy Spirit’s power can a believer put to death the sins of his former life (cf. Eph. 4:22-31; Col. 3:5-9). This is what Paul referred to when he said “count yourselves dead to sin” (Rom. 6:11).¹⁰

Robert C. McQuilkin offers the following thoughts in *The Message of Romans*,

If we live after the flesh, we must die. That is what unbelievers are doing. To the extent that Christians walk after the flesh, they are

⁹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God’s Heirs: Romans 8:1-39*, vol. 3, *Romans* (Philadelphia: Evangelical Foundation, 1963; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 52.

¹⁰ John A. Witmire, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), 470-471.

walking in the realm of death. Paul is not discussing here whether any Christians can walk after the flesh and be lost eternally. Every child of God will be kept by God's power. Paul is here presenting two opposite kinds of living. Instead of living after the flesh, what are we to do? We are to put to death the doings of the body (vs. 13).¹¹

Adam Clarke's commentary on Romans states,

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die] Though *mellete apoqnhskein* may mean, *ye shall afterwards die*, and this seems to indicate a *temporal* death, yet not exclusively of an eternal death; for *both*, and especially the latter, are necessarily implied.

But if ye through the Spirit] If ye seek that grace and spiritual help which the Gospel of Christ furnishes, resist, and, by resisting, *mortify the deeds of the flesh*, against which the law gave you no assistance, *ye shall live* a life of *faith, love, and holy obedience* here, and a life of *glory* hereafter.¹²

Concerning Romans 8:13, Robert Govett says,

Of whom does the verse speak? Of those who belong to Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, and who are raised from among the dead, because of the Spirit's indwelling: 9-11. This, then, sets aside the explanation of those who would make the passage refer to the wicked. See again: "Therefore, *brethren*, we are debtors." Here Paul calls the addressed his brethren, and associates himself with them as one of those to whom the words apply.¹³

The *Liberty Bible Commentary* asserts,

Consequently, we are not debtors to the flesh for we have not received new life by the flesh. When the Spirit of God comes to us at salvation we are under new management and therefore we are debtors to that management. All things are new in Christ for **there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus**. We must not give ourselves to lifestyles that are characterized by the flesh, for we no

¹¹ Robert C. McQuilkin, *The Message of Romans: An Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947), 94.

¹² Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, vol. 6, *Romans to the Revelations* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 96.

¹³ Robert Govett, *Govett on Romans* (originally published as *The Righteousness of God The Salvation of the Believer*; London, England, 1891; reprint, Miami Springs, Fla.: Conley & Schoettle Publishing, 1981), 301.

longer owe allegiance to it. If we continually serve the flesh our life is characterized by a state of death.¹⁴

In his recently published work, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver*, René A. Lopez writes,

Believers do not have to **live according to the flesh** (i.e., live like unbelievers; 8:1, 4-5), because, as vv 10-11 show, they have resurrection-power to overcome the deadly power of sin. Thus believers ought not to follow after their Adamic inclinations.

For (*gar*) is a conjunction that explains two possible outcomes believers will experience (similar to 6:9-10, 16; 8:2, 6) depending on their choice: **if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**¹⁵

Another advantage of the Free Grace position is that it holds on to eternal security as described in the context of Romans 8. The believer is forever saved and forever settled as one who will be finally glorified by the Lord (Rom. 8:30), and one who is unable to be separated from the God with whom he is joined through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:39).

The Free Grace position also has the advantage of taking into account the realities of an imperfect spiritual walk. Rather than putting doubts on the hapless believer because of human struggles, the Free Grace position exhorts and encourages (like Paul) the believer to realize he has been freed from sin's power and can walk in a new and powerful life before God through the Spirit who indwells him. When the believer's eternal security is founded on the sure hope of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and that nothing can separate him from this final destiny with God, he is in a position to then understand a second and strategic truth; that he must walk in the power of the Spirit. A Spirit-led life is not an automatic ability as demonstrated by Paul in Romans 6, 7, and 8. The exhortations to the Christian are to follow the Spirit, to walk according to the Spirit, to avail himself of the power of the Spirit in putting to death (putting away) the deeds of the body. These directions are vital for one to know God's will and

¹⁴ Jerry Falwell, Edward E. Hindson, and Woodrow Michael Kroll, eds. *Liberty Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 2240.

¹⁵ René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, Mo.: 21st Century Press, 2005), 169.

pursue His purposes. In this context and understanding the believer is eternally secure, and is given the hope that comes as he sees the power of God's Spirit enable him to walk away from sin and grow up in righteousness.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Free Grace position is that it restores an awareness of accountability and choice to the believer without striking fear alone into his heart. The Arminian view keeps the believer in a constant fear that he could soon lose his salvation through his failures. The Puritan-Reform view tempts the believer to doubt as he struggles to walk with God, because struggles are necessarily a sure sign of a questionable salvation. The Free Grace position allows the believer to be established in grace and confidence regarding his eternity while keeping his own accountability in check. Perhaps Romans 8:15 puts the Free Grace position in its best light, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" It is through this foundation, that Christians have nothing to fear because their eternity is sure; which allows them to be honest and straightforward in following the call to walk rightly each day before God, and that through the power of the Spirit within.

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