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**Sovereignty, Suffering and Salvation:
God’s Redemptive work in Romans 8**

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Introduction

Romans 8 sums all of redemptive history in 39 verses and gives those who are in Christ the best conceivable assurance of salvation. It begins with *no condemnation*, and ends with *no separation*.² Those who are in Christ, according to Paul, can never be condemned (8:1), neither can anything separate them from the love of God in Christ (8:39). These bookends—*no condemnation and no separation*—are

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² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 45, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 299.

grounded in God's love³ alone, which is seen in his massive sovereign work spanning from before creation, to the cross, and into eternity. Over against the life of failure under the law as portrayed in 7:7-25, the life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit grounded in the love of God in Christ is a life of victory. It is of utmost importance to observe that this chapter that presents such a victory in the life of a Christian is without any imperatives. Paul does not give any specific commands in this chapter, which suggests that when one is fully setting his mind on the Spirit (verse 6), obedience is a fruit and does not have to be commanded. Those who are indwelt and led by the Spirit naturally overflow in obedience to God. "Paul is talking about life in the Spirit, life in which the Spirit guides so constantly that there is no need for a string of commandments."⁴

The lack of any imperatives⁵ also points to the fact that the triune God is the sole Actor in redemption. God is presented in Romans 8 as the Initiator, the Sustainer, and the Perfecter of our salvation. Redemptive history, as presented in Romans 8, has God (The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) as the main Actor and those who are in Christ as beneficiaries. Salvation indeed is "from Him and through Him and to Him" (Rom 11:36). Paul's argument develops as follows: he opens with the declaration that there is no condemnation for all who are in Christ and then goes on to show the victorious life of the believers as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1–17). He proceeds to talk about the future glory and redemption of those who are in Christ in light of the present sufferings and groaning of this age (Rom 8:18–30). Then Paul celebrates the unflinching love of God in Christ Jesus, which is the foundation of redemptive history (Rom 8:31–39).

³ Elsa Tamez, "Now No Condemnation: A Meditation on Romans 8," *The Ecumenical Review* 41 no 3JI (1989), 450.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

⁵ The lack of any grammatical imperative suggests that Paul's concern is primarily on what God accomplishes in salvation—This does not suggest that holiness for the believers is not important—The conceptual imperative in 8:12 does show the place of a pursuit of holiness but does not weaken my argument above because this conceptual imperative is not something that believers do on their own, but we kill the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit's leadership (8:12–14). Holy living is indispensable for the believer, but this holy living is a fruit of the Spirit's work within the believer. "Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary; but that activity is never apart from, nor finally distinct from, the activity of God's Spirit" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996], 496).

A. No Condemnation Because God Has Condemned The Condemnable

Paul begins the chapter with a life-giving, joy-granting, heart-lifting, and Christ-exalting announcement regarding those who are in Christ Jesus. He states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Having shown in 7:7–25 how life under the law is a life of complete failure, Paul now declares that there is freedom and no condemnation to be found in Christ. Life under the law is a life of failure, condemnation, and death (7:10–12), but not so in Christ!⁶ For those who are in Christ there is no condemnation. The inferential conjunction *αλρα* (therefore) likely refers back to Paul’s argument not just from Romans 7:25 but most likely to Paul’s argument from chapter 4 about God’s saving grace in Christ because chapter 8 picks up various themes from 4–7 to restate that Christ has secured salvation for who are in him.⁷ If this is correct, then it can be argued that because justification is by faith alone and in Christ alone (Rom 4:1–5:21), and because in Christ believers have died to sin (Rom 6:1–23), and because believers have been freed from the law and married to Christ (Rom 7:1–6), there is therefore – now

⁶ It is my understanding that Romans 7 is about an unbeliever for the following reasons: First, the description of the “I” in Romans 7 cannot fit with the description in other parts of Scripture for the life of a believer. I therefore suggest that the “I” in Romans 7 is Paul as a Jew before his conversion. Second, Romans 7:5–6 seems to be a summary of 7:7–8:39, which contrasts the life of the one not in Christ (7:7–7:25) with the life of one who is in Christ (8:1–39). Romans 7:5, “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” would correspond to 7:7–25, and 7:6, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve no under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” would correspond to 8:1–39. Third, the complete absence of the Holy Spirit in chapter 7 suggests that it is the life of an unbeliever. “I” occurs about 28 times in Romans 7 but in Romans 8 the dominant person at work is the Holy Spirit. Since every true believer in Jesus has the Holy Spirit, it is hard to see chapter 7 as referring to a believer. Fourth, the kind of failure described in Romans 7 does not fit the new creation in Christ. Nowhere in the Holy Writ do we learn of believers described with such language as “sold under sin” (7:14), “sin that dwells [*οιοκε/ω*] within me” (7:17). Believers are always said to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and *not* by sin (Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Tim 1:14; Jas 4:5). The word *οιοκε/ω* (“dwell”) occurs nine times in the NT with four different subjects: 1. Sin [Rom 7:17–18, 20], 2. An unbelieving marriage partner choosing to dwell with a believing spouse [1 Cor 7:12–13], 3. God as dwelling in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16), and 4. the Holy Spirit indwelling believers in Christ [Rom 8:9, 11] (See Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. 3d, BDAG, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Out of those four subjects, the Holy Spirit is the only one in the Bible that is said to *οιοκε/ω* (“dwell”) in believers. Based on the above arguments, it is preferable to take Romans 7:7–25 as referring to the life of an unbelieving Jew. See also Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 441–451.

⁷ For another support of this argument, see Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 300.

that these things are true of the believers – no condemnation⁸ for those in Christ Jesus. The adjective οὐδεὶς/v which normally denotes that “which is actually non-existent or of no account”⁹ removes every possibility that there could be even a small amount of condemnation for the believers in Christ. The death of Christ for sin satisfied God’s wrath such that all who are in him are absolutely freed from God’s adjudication of comeuppance on them since it was laid on Christ. The “now” (nu=n) should be taken as temporal, marking a contrast between the present age of the Messiah and the Holy Spirit (7:6) from the former age of the law (7:5). The phrase “to those in Christ Jesus” (τοῖς ἐν χριστῷ = οἱ ἰησοῦ) limits Paul’s declaration to believers in Jesus. Only in Christ Jesus is the condemnation of God removed from sinners.

To show that redemption is *totally* God’s work, Paul makes the basis of the declaration in 8:1 God’s work instead of human effort. “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Because of the freedom brought about by the law of the Spirit, those who are in Christ are freed from condemnation. This verse raises a few questions: “who/what is the Spirit of life,” “what is the law of sin and death,” and “what is the law of the Spirit of life”?

The *Spirit of life* most likely refers to the Holy Spirit, and “Spirit” (πνεύματος) would be a genitive of source. In this case it would mean that the Spirit Paul refers to is the one from whom life comes. The *law of sin and death* most likely refer to the Torah, since chapter 7 speaks of the Torah as bringing sin and death on those under its rule (7:7–9; 14). If this is correct, then it can be observed that the Holy Spirit now stands where the law stood and he gives life where the law gave death. The *law of the Spirit of life* is Paul’s play on words with the “*law of sin and death*” in order to show how disparate these two ideas are—one leads to a life and freedom but the other leads to death

⁸ The Greek word *kata/krima* refers to adjudication of punishment (BDAG, s.v. “*kata/krima*,” 518.). This word only occurs two other times in the NT (Rom 5:16, 18), and Morris rightly observes that with its corresponding verb “*katakri/nw*” it refers to both condemnation and its execution (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 45, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapid, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988], 300. See also “*kri/nw*” F. Büchsel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964], 951–52).

⁹ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, 1920), 620.

and condemnation. This second use of “law” does not refer to the Mosaic Law, but *law* as a power or authority that brings liberation.¹⁰ It could not possibly be referring to the Torah because then the sentence would mean that the Torah sets us free from the Torah. The law cannot liberate from the law; the power of the Spirit liberates from the law.¹¹ Verses 3–4 explicate on how this power of the Spirit (“the law of the Spirit”) liberates from the law of sin and death.

The law of the Spirit liberates from the law of sin and death because “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do” (8:2a). It is ultimately *God’s work* that has brought about liberation from the law of sin and death. Those whom the law killed cannot liberate themselves, only God can. It must be observed that the law in itself is not bad (7:12), but the flesh weakened¹² it so that it could not give the life it promised. The second part of the verse explains what God did to bring about the liberation. “God sent¹³ his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh¹⁴ and for sin he condemned sin

¹⁰ See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 473–477 for an extended discussion of Paul’s play with the word νόμος (“law”) in Romans 8:2.

¹¹ This is contrary to Stott, who suggests that “the law of the Spirit” refers to the gospel (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 218).

¹² The verb ἀσθενέω denotes the experience of some personal incapacity or limitation (“ἀσθενέω,” BDAG). In which case, the flesh incapacitated the law.

¹³ πέμπω suggests the preexistence of Christ. If he was sent, it means that he existed with the Father before the Father sent him to do what he did. This is contrary to Stott who argues that “The word ‘sending’ does not necessarily imply the Son’s pre-existence, since God is also said to have ‘sent’ his prophets in the Old Testament and his apostles in the New, who of course were not pre-existent” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 219). The Greek word “πέμπω” almost always refers to sending someone/thing that has already been in existence. This existence does not necessarily have to be from eternity past, but the thing or person sent must be existing at least before the time of the sending (Cf. Matt 2:8; 11:2; 14:10; 22:7; Mark 5:12; Luke 4:26; 7:6, 10, 19; 15:15; 16:24, 27; 20:11–13; John 1:22, 33; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 37; 6:38–39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44–45, 49; 13:16, 20; 14:24, 26; 15:21, 26; 16:5, 7; 20:21; Acts 10:5, 32–33; 11:29; 15:22, 25; 19:31; 20:17; 23:30; 25:25, 27; Rom 8:3; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:3; 2 Cor 9:3; Eph 6:22; Phil 2:19, 23, 25, 28; 4:16; Col 4:8; 1 Thess 3:2, 5; 2 Thess 2:11; Titus 3:12; 1 Pet 2:14; Rev 1:11; 11:10; 14:15, 18; 22:16). If the thing or person sent is always in existent prior to the time of the sending, it follows that the Son existed before the time the Father sent him into the world. This existence must be from eternity past since the Son is also eternal.

¹⁴ ὁ ἐν ὁμοίω/ματι σαρκὸς ἀμαρτιᾶς should be taken to mean Jesus’ incarnation was into the likeness of sinful flesh, as in, he actually took on a human body. It doesn’t mean that he was a sinner; it does mean that he existed in the likeness of sinful humanity. He was like us in every way except that he never sinned. Stott observes that “the Son came neither ‘in the likeness of flesh’, only seeming to be human, as the Docetists taught, for his humanity was real; nor ‘in sinful flesh’, assuming a fallen nature, for his humanity was sinless, but ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’, because his humanity was both real and sinless simultaneously” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 219).

in the flesh” (8:3). The phrase “His own Son” stresses the unique place of Jesus in the Father’s heart and calls to mind the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 where the uniqueness of Isaac is stressed with similar language (Gen 22:2). So God condemned the condemnable (sin) in the flesh of his Son so that there may be no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

B. God Frees Us From The Law And Fulfills The Law In Us

God is pictured by Paul as both the one who frees us from the law and as the one who fulfills the righteous demands of the law in us. Paul states that God sent his Son “for sin,” and that the Son condemned sin in the flesh. The phrase “for sin” (*peri\ a9marti/av*) is used constantly in the LXX to refer to a sin offering,¹⁵ translated from the Hebrew תִּשְׂבֵּחַ, which also means sin offering.¹⁶ It is worth noting that in Isaiah 53, the same phrase is used to refer to the servant of God who was going to come to give his life for the sins of many, “But the LORD was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief; if he would render himself as a *sin offering*” (Isaiah 53:10). Thus, the Son of God took the place of the sin offering of the Old Testament and by that God, through his Spirit, brings liberation to all who are in Christ. The judgment of sin fell upon the Son of God. Stott rightly states, “God judged our sins in the sinless humanity of his Son, who bore them in our place.”¹⁷ God *condemned* sin in the flesh of his Son so that we may not be *condemned* (8:1, 3). Sin was condemned in God’s Son, and this condemnation of sin brings freedom from the law (8:2–3).

The act of God in his Son was carried out “so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:4a). The “righteous requirement of the law” (*dikai/wma tou= no/mou*) refers to God’s just demands. The phrase occurs once in the LXX (Num 31:21) and describes the law which God gave to Moses “This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded Moses”

¹⁵ Lev 5:6–7, 11; 7:37; 9:2; Num 6:11, 16; 7:16, 22, 28, 34, 40, 46, 52, 58, 64, 70, 76, 82, 87; 8:8, 12; 15:24, 27; 28:15, 22, 30; 29:5, 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38; 2 Kgs 12:17; 2 Chr 29:21, 23–24; Ezra 6:17; 8:35; Neh 10:34; 2 Macc 12:43; Ps 39:7; Job 1:5; Isa 53:10; Bar 1:10; Ezek 42:13; 43:19, 21.

¹⁶ Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. BDB. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906. v.s. “תִּשְׂבֵּחַ.”

¹⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 220.

(*to*=*to* *to*\ *dikai/wma* *tou*= *no/mou*, *o4* *sune/tacen* *ku/riov* *tw*=| *Mwush*|=). The passive *plhrwqh*| (fulfilled) highlights God as the one who has fulfilled his own righteous demands in believers. This does not suggest perfectionism for the believer. Rather, the passive verb “fulfilled” points to something that *is done* for believers, not something *we do*. Moreover, as Moo rightly observes, the always-imperfect obedience of the law by Christians does not satisfy what is stipulated by the logic of the text.¹⁸ If the righteous requirement refers to the demands of the Law of Moses, and if these are fulfilled in the lives of believers, then how can it be said that believers are freed from them? It must be noted that freedom from the law does not mean antinomianism. Paul argued previously that the law is not bad; it was only weakened by the flesh (Rom 7:12; 7–10). The law is good and holy (Rom 7:13), but the flesh incapacitated the law such that it could not bring life (8:3). The flesh makes the law ineffectual, but God by his Spirit fulfills the law in us.¹⁹ The law cannot enable those under it to fulfill its demands, but the Spirit satisfies the demands of the law in them. Edwards rightly notes, “Those who live in the Spirit are for the first time enabled to acknowledge the true intent of the law, and they are empowered to begin fulfilling it . . . The Spirit is the supernatural reinforcement of God’s grace who empowers Christians to fulfill the intent and requirements of the law.”²⁰ In Paul’s thought, all the law is summed up in this word: “‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:9c–10).²¹ Thus, the righteousness requirement that is being fulfilled in the believers is the Spirit-enabled capacity to love.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 483. Moo further argues that the fulfillment of the righteousness requirement of the law in us most likely refers to forgiveness of our sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness upon us. He states, “When the obedience of Christ is accepted for us, the law is satisfied, so that we are counted just.”

¹⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 221.

²⁰ James R. Edwards, *Romans*, Vol. 6, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 203.

²¹ Something worth noting here is that Paul does not, like Jesus, talk about all the law as fulfilled in love for God and neighbor (Matt 22:34–40). He only talks about love for neighbor. This, however, does not show any difference in Paul’s view from Jesus’. In Scriptures, love for God is usually said to be displayed in love for neighbor (1 John 4:20–21). So when Paul speaks of the love for neighbor, the love of God is assumed because one cannot love neighbor biblically while hating God. (See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 335).

The passive verb “fulfilled” (πληρωθή =) highlights God by his Spirit as the one who fulfills his own demands (stipulated in the law) in those who believe in his Son. Those in whom the demands of the law are being fulfilled are “those who walk not according the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4b). At least four observations are necessary at this point: First, from 8:4 we can conclude that holiness, or the fulfillment of the demands of the law in believers, is one of the main purposes of the incarnation and the atonement.²² Second, sanctification is ultimately the work of God by his Spirit. Third, holiness in the new covenant does not mean antinomianism, but rather fulfilling the demands of the law as enabled by the Spirit. Freedom from the law is a freedom to observe it. Stott rightly argues “The law-obedience of the people of God is so important to God that he sent his Son to die for us and his Spirit to live in us, in order to secure it. Holiness,” he observes, “is the fruit of trinitarian grace, of the Father sending his Son into the world and his Spirit into our hearts.”²³ Fourth, sanctification is portrayed in 8:4 as ultimately the work of God, not believers. However, this does not mean that believers are passive, their responsibility is to walk (“περιπατοῦ=sin”), but their walk is only as directed or in accordance with the leadership of the Spirit.

In 8:5–8 Paul explains the ends to which the flesh and the Spirit lead. The conjunction “for” (γα/ῖ) marks a logical progression.²⁴ The mind that is set on the Spirit results in life and peace but the mind set on the flesh results in death (8:5–6). Stott makes four significant observations on these verses. First, “our mindset expresses our basic nature as Christians or non-Christians.” Second, “our mindset has eternal consequences.” Third, “our mindset concerns our fundamental attitude to God.” Fourth, “unregenerate . . . *cannot please God* . . . because they *cannot* submit to his law, whereas, it is implied, those who are in the Spirit set themselves to please him in everything, even to do so ‘more and more.’”²⁵ From these text-based observations, it is clear that what we do with our minds has great effect on our present

²² Stott makes the same observation but words it differently. He says “holiness is the ultimate purpose of the incarnation and the atonement” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 221).

²³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 222.

²⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 487.

²⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 223–224.

life and on the one to come. Paul applies his theology to his readers directly in 8:9–11. Paul switches from third person (they) to second person (you). Having noted that “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (8:8), he now says to his readers “but²⁶ you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit” (8:9a). This means that his audience *can* please God because only those who are in God’s Spirit can please God.

In 8:9b Paul clarifies what he means by “you are in the Spirit,” stating “if truly [εἰληπερ] the Spirit of God dwells in you.” The conjunction εἰληπερ is unique to Paul and occurs 6 times (Rom 3:30; 8:9, 17; 1 Cor 8:5; 15:15; 2 Thess 1:6) with the notion of an emphatic condition.²⁷ To be in the Spirit then is true *only if* the Spirit of God dwells in the individual. This is the authentic characteristic of belonging to Christ. Thus “anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”²⁸ This indwelling of the Spirit of Christ brings life because of righteousness, and guarantees that God through his Spirit who indwells believers will also raise them from dead. The believers’ union with Christ is seen here in that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from dead is the same Spirit who will raise believers. The resurrection of Jesus is the pledge and the pattern of our own future resurrection.²⁹ In 8:1–11, Paul shows the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as working in perfect harmony for the salvation of those who are in Christ. God sent his Son to be a sin offering so that those who are in his Son are indwelled with the Spirit of resurrection and will be raised with new bodies—this resurrection bodies will be the unflawed vehicle of our their redeemed

²⁶ Runge argues that the conjunction δε/ represents the writer’s choice to explicitly signal that what follows is a new, distinct development in the story or argument, based on the writer’s conception of it (Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Bilingual ed. [Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2010], 31). Thus, Paul is making a clear and distinct development from those who cannot please God to those who can because they are in the Spirit.

²⁷ “εἰληπερ” v.s., Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

²⁸ It must be observed that the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are not two different Spirits; they both have reference to the same Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father as well as the Spirit of the Son. The fact that the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ have as co-reference the same Spirit is further elucidated in 8:10, 11: “But if Christ is in you” (8:10a) “if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you” (8:11a). All these have reference to the Holy Spirit. Paul is not suggesting that there are three different persons indwelling believers: the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and Christ. These all point to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

²⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 223–226.

personalities.³⁰ The Trinitarian Godhead works for the good of those who are in Christ.

In 8:12 Paul draws an inference based on the awesome privileges laid out for the believers in 8:1–11. These privileges come with responsibilities; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the assurance that believers will be raised places an obligation on them. “So then, brothers, we are debtors” (8:12a). The Greek word, οὐφείλε/θῆν conventionally means “one who is under obligation in a moral or social sense.”³¹ This means that believers are under moral obligation—they must live a certain way. In 8:12b, Paul states that Christians are not under moral obligation “to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (θη=| sarki\ kata\ tou= sa/rka zh=n).³² To be under obligation to the flesh means to live according to the dictates of the flesh. Believers, Paul states, are not under such an obligation to the flesh, “for if you live according to the flesh you will die” (8:13). Eternal death is *inevitable* (me/llete) if one lives according to the dictates of the flesh.³³ On the contrary, if Spirit-indwelted believers (8:1–11) “by the Spirit put to death the practices of the body,” they are promised life (zh/sesqe) (8:13b).³⁴ The life promised to believers (zh/sesqe) will come through death, or the killing of the deeds of the body. We must kill so that we may not be killed. No killing, no living! The active verb qanatou=te shows that believers are not passive in the act of killing the deeds of the body, they must take the initiative to kill sin or they will yield to the flesh

³⁰ Ibid, 227.

³¹ BDAG, s.v. “οὐφείλε/θῆν,” 742.

³² The infinitive zh=n with the article tou= is an *epexegetical infinitive* explaining what it means to be under obligation to the flesh.

³³ While it is true that believers are once-for-all freed from the law of sin and death and stand uncondemned before God, it is necessary that they lead holy lives. This warning must not be trivialized. Eternal life is at stake if believers live according to the dictates of the flesh. Freedom from the law does not make the mortification of sin unnecessary but makes it indispensable and possible. Paul insists that what God has done for believers in Christ is the sole basis for inheriting eternal life and at the same time insists that holy living is indispensable as a prerequisite for inheriting eternal life. “Neither the ‘indicative’—what God has done for us in Christ—nor the ‘imperative’—what we are commanded to do—can be eliminated. Nor can they be severed from one another; they are inextricably connected” (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 495).

³⁴ The deeds of the flesh in 8:13 refer to living according to the dictates of the flesh in 8:12. By deeds of the flesh, Paul does not mean that every practice done in the body is sin. The flesh in 8:12–13 does not refer to our human bodies but to the sinful nature.

and be killed. We either choose to be killing or be killed.³⁵ Death is the only way to eternal life.³⁶ Dunn rightly argues that this life is not masochistic self-mistreatment,

To put to death the deeds of the body presumably involves both the recognition that the body must die—there is no redemption for belongingness to this age except through death—but also the recognition that moral effort here and now can diminish the effective power of death, by diminishing that area over which sin holds sway in the believer’s life—that is, by rooting out and making an end of different expressions of that dependence on physical and social fulfillment which distance from God. It is a determined spiritual discipline Paul sees as essential and calls for, not a masochistic self-abuse.³⁷

Life through death lies at the heart of the gospel: Jesus brought life through death; he taught his disciples that to live one must die (Mark 8:34–38). It is by dying with Christ that believers have life (Rom 6:5–11), and now believers are told that in order to live they must put to death. Stott states “What the world calls life (a desirable self-indulgence) leads to alienation from God which in reality is death, whereas the putting to death of all perceived evil within us, which the world sees as an undesirable self-abnegation, is in reality the way to authentic life.”³⁸

In 8:14–17 Paul switches from antithesis between the Spirit and the flesh to the correlatives between Spirit and adoption or son-ship.

³⁵ This sentence is a re-wording of John Owen’s famous maxim “be killing sin or sin will be killing you,” from John Owen, Kelly M. Kapic, Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin & Temptation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 50.

³⁶ This is contrary to Stott, who argues that the life Paul is referring to in 8:13 is *not* eternal life. Stott argues, “Having called eternal life a free and undeserved gift (6:23), he is not now making it a reward for self-denial. Nor by ‘life’ does he seem to be referring to the life of the world to come. He seems to be alluding to the life of God’s children, who are led by his Spirit and assured of his fatherly love, to which he comes in the next verses (14ff.)” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 229). While Stott’s view is a possibility, it seems very unlikely in this context for the following reasons: First, the life Paul talks about in 14ff is about eternal life because being a son of God directly relates to having eternal life. Second, in 8:17, Paul says we will be glorified with Christ if we suffer with him. Suffering with Christ, although it has reference to the anguish of this present evil age, involves putting to death the deeds of the body. If this is right, then the life that we receive as a result of killing the deeds of the body is equal to being glorified with Christ. Third, the use of the future tense (zh/σεςqe) also suggests that it has reference to the eternal life that is yet to come (Cf. BDAG, s.v. “za/w,” 425). Fourth, present obedience is usually spoken of in scripture to have effect on our future salvation, not as though believers merit future salvation because of their present good works, but because good works prove and bear witness to faith. Such good works are the fruit of faith and are necessary for future salvation, although that salvation will be by grace alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

³⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*. Vol. 38 Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 458.

³⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 227.

This move, indicated by the conjunction $\gamma\alpha\lambda\rho$ (for), is grounding or undergirding the admonitory appeal he stated in 8:12–13. Christians are debtors to the Spirit and are to put to death the deeds of the body “because all who are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (8:14). The phrase “son(s) of God” ($\upsilon\iota\theta\omicron/\nu\ \rho\epsilon\omicron/\nu$) occurs in 1:4 with Jesus as the co-referent, which suggests that our son-ship is because we are in *the* Son of God. However, Paul does not speak about our being in Christ in 8:14 but of those who are led by the Spirit. Those who are led by the Spirit are evidently those who are in Christ (9–11). Paul states that one of the reasons why believers are debtors to the Spirit is because they received the Spirit of adoption or son-ship (8:15). In 14–17, Paul outlines at least two different activities of the Holy Spirit. First, the Holy Spirit leads those who are in Christ ($\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\omicron\iota\ \gamma\alpha\lambda\rho\ \rho\nu\epsilon\upsilon/\mu\alpha\tau\iota\ \rho\epsilon\omicron\upsilon=\ \alpha\lambda\gamma\omicron\tau\alpha\iota$). Those who are led by the Spirit are Sons of God. In Galatians 5:18 Paul writes that those who are led by the Spirit are not under law. If by being “led by the Spirit” Paul means not being under the power of the law, then it follows that the kind of obligation that Paul called for in Romans 8:12–13 is very different from the kind of law observance that was under the old covenant. Those who are led by the Spirit are not under law; they are Sons of God because God sent forth his Son at the right time so that he might redeem those who were under the law, and so that these redeemed people might receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:4–5). To be led by the Spirit consists in the Spirit’s enablement to put to death the deeds of the body. Cranfield states “the daily, hourly putting to death of the scheming’s and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit.”³⁹

Second, the Spirit replaces fear with freedom in regards to the believer’s relationship with God such that those who are in Christ can

³⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Introduction and Commentary on Romans 1–VII*, Vol. 1. International Critical Commentary (T&T Clark, 2000), 395. Käsemann interprets the phrase “led by the Spirit” as charismatic enthusiasts who are carried away by the Spirit (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, [Wm. B. Eedmans Publishing Company], 226). Dunn takes the verb $\alpha\lambda\gamma\omega$ to mean to be constrained by a compelling force, of surrendering to an overmastering compulsion (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 450). While these suggestions seem attractive, it seems unlikely because the verb $\alpha\lambda\gamma\omega$ does not necessarily show compulsion or charismatic enthusiasm. Moreover, in context, it seems most likely that the leadership of the Spirit has reference to morals or the putting to death the deeds of the body. See also BDAG, s.v. “ $\alpha\lambda\gamma\omega$,” 16; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 231.

now cry to God “Abba Father” (e01a/bete pneu=ma ui9oqesi/av e0n w[| kra/vomen: abba o9 parh/r). The verb “cry” (e01a/bete) probably denotes some charismatic expression of intimacy before God in public or private worship and prayer. In such liturgical acclamations the Spirit bears witness with the spirit of believers that they are children of God (8:16).⁴⁰ Paul goes on to state that because we have been adopted as children of God, we will be co-heirs with Christ. “Since⁴¹ [we are] children,” he argues, “then [we are] heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (8:17a). Because we believers share in Christ’s son-ship, we also share in his inheritance. However, the sharing in Christ’s inheritance is conditioned on our sharing in his suffering as well. We are heirs with Christ “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (8:17b). Verse 17 lays a significant stress on our union with Christ: we are heirs *with* Christ, if we suffer *with* him, then we will be glorified *with* him.⁴² Stott rightly argues “the essence of discipleship is union with Christ, and this means identification with him in both his sufferings and his glory.”⁴³ Suffering for the believer is the path to glory.

C. Future Glory guaranteed through Present Suffering

Paul, having portrayed suffering as the path to future glory, gives three reasons to encourage believers to endure the present suffering. First, he argues that the future glory⁴⁴ that suffering prepares us for

⁴⁰ The OT demanded that there be at least two witnesses to establish a testimony (Deut 19:15); the Spirit with our spirit join in testifying that we are children of God, and thus the testimony is established. However, this does not mean that our spirit and the Spirit of God are equal. The OT requirement did not state that the testimony had to come from two equals. In the case of the Spirit of God and our spirit, it seems that the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are loved by God (5:8) and then our spirit responds in confirmation. Thus, it is not an association of equals. It must also be observed that the testimony of the Spirit is not to particular “more spiritual” Christians, but to *all* who are in Christ. Paul does not seem to suggest such a distinction in the text.

⁴¹ This is a first-class conditional statement, which is best rendered here with the conjunction “since.” See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 690-94.

⁴² The verbs (*sugklhrono/moi*, *sumpa/sxomen*, *sundocasqw=men*) with the sun- prefixes emphasize that union so clearly. Believers who *share* in Christ’s inheritance must *identify with* him in his suffering in order to be glorified *with* him.

⁴³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 235.

⁴⁴ Ware rightly argues that this future hope is what undergirds the Christian faith (James P. Ware, “Paul’s Hope and Ours: Recovering Paul’s Hope of the Renewed Creation,” *Concordia Journal* 35 no 2 (2009), 129–130.

outshines and outweighs our present suffering (8:18–25). Second, we can endure through suffering because even when we do not know what to pray about, the Spirit of God intercedes for us (8:26–27). Third, God designs all things, including our suffering, for our good (8:28–30). Paul is so moved by such an awesome display of God’s love in the preceding chapters of Romans all the way up to chapter 8 that he culminates in celebration of the greatness God’s love towards us in Christ (8:31–39).⁴⁵

The focus in 18–27 is on the future glory of the believers. This focus, as noted above, is prompted by Paul’s allusion to the believer’s sharing in the sufferings of Christ (8:17). As a motivation for believers to share in the suffering of Christ, Paul says the future glory is beyond comparison to the present suffering. “For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (8:18). The suffering in 8:18 refers to the suffering with Christ in 8:17. The believers in Christ share in Christ’s suffering⁴⁶ gladly because there is a greater glory yet to be revealed to them in the age to come. Stott rightly notes, “The sufferings and the glory characterize the two ages or aeons.”⁴⁷ For the believer, suffering characterizes this present age and glory the age to come. The phrase *th\`n me/llousan do/can a0pokalufqh=nai ei0v h9ma=v* can be translated two ways, “the glory that is about to be revealed *in* us” or “the glory that is to be revealed *to* us.” The first would suggest that the glory would take place *in* us. The second would mean that there is an objective glory that will be unveiled *to* us. The first is most likely because it shows that believers will partake in

⁴⁵ See also Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 183.

⁴⁶ It must be clarified here that the suffering of Christ and that of the believers are not exactly the same. The suffering of Christ brought about the salvation of those now indwelt by the Spirit. Believers do not share in his suffering as though their own (believers) suffering is the ground of their salvation. Rather, Christ’s suffering is the ground of the believers’ suffering. Believers can suffer because through his suffering, Christ secured for them a future glory. Sharing in Christ’s suffering also suggests that Christ’s suffering is seen as a pattern for the believers. Christ’s suffering, I conclude, is both the ground and the pattern for the believer’s suffering.

⁴⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 237.

that future disclosure. Moreover, 8:19 says believers will be revealed which would further supports the first translation.⁴⁸

The immensity of that imminent glory is underscored by the fact that all of creation groans with eager longings for it. The present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed “for the creation waits with eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God” (ἡ κτίσις ἀποκαραδοκία τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται) (8:19). The use of the noun ἀποκαραδοκία highlights the greatness of that glory as it describes creation as *the eagerly expecting creation*.⁴⁹ The genitive τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ is an objective genitive showing the sons of God as those who will be revealed.⁵⁰ Thus, the *non-human-eagerly-waiting-creation* waits for the unveiling of the sons of God. The reason why the non-human creation waits so eagerly is “because the creation was subjected to futility,⁵¹ not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (8:20–21). The subjection of the creation to futility was most likely a result of the Fall of Man. Thus, when believers are one day glorified, creation itself will share in that glorification. The fact that creation suffers futility as a result of the Fall of Man and will experience freedom and glory when man is freed and glorified highlights man’s dominion over the rest of creation (Gen 1:26). “As sin brought the

⁴⁸ Stotts suggests that these two renderings are all possible. Both translations are possible, he argues, because “this end-time disclosure will be made ‘to us’ because we will see it, and *in us* because we will share in it and be changed by it.” John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 237.

⁴⁹ BDAG, s.v. “ἀποκαραδοκία,” 112.

⁵⁰ Creation (κτίσις) here refers to the sum total of everything that was created excepting humans. Some might argue that it refers to all creation including humans; while this view is possible, it is not very clear in this passage. It seems natural to take it as referring to all of the created world *except* for humans (who are the new creations in Christ who will be revealed). If “creation” was referring to all of creation *including* humans, then it would mean that all of creation is waiting for the revelation of part of itself, which makes no sense. It seems that it is better to take “creation” to mean that all of creation – excepting humans – waits eagerly for the revelation of the new creation, believers in Jesus. The distinction between creation and the sons of God in 8:20–21 further suggests that believers are not part of the creation that is eagerly waiting. Even when Paul is talking about our groaning he still makes a distinction. “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only creation, but we ourselves...” (8:22). The phrase “not only creation, but we ourselves” clearly sets creation apart from believers, indicating that the “creation” referred to in this passage has reference to every created thing except for those in Christ.

⁵¹ The concept of “futility” (ματοίωσις) echoes the language of the book of Ecclesiastes.

curse of death to the physical universe, the day is coming when a new heaven and earth will be in place (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). They will take their place with the children of God in the perfect freedom of a sinless universe.”⁵² Mounce rightly notes, “The physical universe was frustrated by Adam’s sin, yet there is hope.”⁵³

While there is this great hope for the freedom of creation, it presently experiences groaning in the pain of childbirth (8:23). Birth pains are very hopeful since they are usually pathways to a new life, and in a similar way creation’s groaning is a pathway to new life. Paul further states that not only creation groans but we believers in Jesus “who have the firstfruit of the Spirit⁵⁴ groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23).⁵⁵ The giving of the Spirit is the confirmation that at the present time we are the sons of God. The Spirit is the “down payment” (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14) of the inheritance that will be ours as co-heirs with Christ. The glorious future that awaits us involves the hope that our mortal bodies will someday be liberated from the bondage of decay and we will be clothed with immortality (8:23).⁵⁶ Because of this great hope, we can wait for it while patiently enduring suffering, which is a pathway to that hope (8:11, 25).

Just as the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God (8:16), so He helps us in intercession when we do not know what to pray for as we ought (8:26–27). Paul states “likewise⁵⁷ the Spirit helps

⁵² Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, 185.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 185.

⁵⁴ The phrase $\alpha\omicron\pi\alpha\rho\chi\eta\ \tau\omicron\upsilon= \ \pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon/\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\nu$ should be taken as a genitive of apposition which means the Holy Spirit is the firstfruit.

⁵⁵ Firstfruit ($\alpha\omicron\pi\alpha\rho\chi\eta$) in the Old Testament consisted of the initial portion of the harvest that was set as a sacrifice to God (Exod 23:19; Lev 23:9–14), which was regarded both as a first installment and as a pledge of the final delivery of the whole. Paul’s use of the word in reference to the Spirit means that the Spirit is the pledge that guarantees our future salvation (cf. 2 Cor 5:5). Cleon L. Rogers, et al., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub.House, 1998), 331.

⁵⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, 185-86.

⁵⁷ The adverb $\omega\varsigma\alpha\upsilon/\tau\omega\upsilon$ marks similarity that approximates identity and should be rendered “in the same way” “Similarly,” “likewise” BDAG s.v. “ $\omega\varsigma\alpha\upsilon/\tau\omega\upsilon$,” 1106. It likens the work of the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit (8:26–27) to the Spirit’s witness to our spirit about our adoption (8:16). Smith convincingly argues that the adverb “likewise” in Romans 8:26 links to the Spirit’s work in 8:16 (See Geoffrey Smith, “The Function of ‘Likewise’ (WSAUTWS) in Romans 8:26,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49.1 [1998], 29–38).

us in our weakness.⁵⁸ For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words” (8:26). One does not have to be a Christian for long to know that many times it is difficult to know what to pray for in several situations, especially in the face of suffering. When a fellow brother is sick, we struggle with the question of whether to pray for his healing or pray that God will bring him home with the Lord with his faith intact. In circumstances like those, Paul says the Spirit helps us by interceding for us. The verb *sunantilamba/nomai*⁵⁹ means to come to the aid of someone or to bear someone’s burden. It is used three times in the LXX and has the sense of bearing an overwhelming burden for someone (Exod 18:22; Num 11:17; Ps 88:22). Thus, when we do not know what to pray for the Spirit *bears our burdens* for us before the Lord. The Spirit bears our burdens, Paul says, in that he intercedes for us with unutterable groanings (*stenagmo/v*).⁶⁰ Even though the groanings of the Spirit are unutterable and inexpressible, the God who searches the mind of the Spirit knows and understands the Spirit’s intercession because the Spirit intercedes according to God’s will (8:27). What a comfort for struggling saints! “The Spirit comes to the aid of believers baffled by the perplexity of prayer and takes their concerns to God with an intensity far greater than we could ever imagine. Our groans (v. 23) become his (v. 26) as he intercedes on our behalf.”⁶¹

The third ground of encouragement Paul gives to support us in suffering, as a path to glory, is that “we know that to those who love God, He works all things for good, to those who are called according to purpose” (8:28).⁶² By using the phrase “we know,” Paul assumes

⁵⁸ Weakness in the context refers to our ignorance in regards to what about which we are to pray.

⁵⁹ It is a translation of the Hebrew *acn*, which also means in the Qal stem, “to bear or carry a load or burden.” See Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* [BDB], (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), s.v. “נָשָׂא,” 669.

⁶⁰ *Stenagmo/v* is used in the LXX to describe the lament of the Israelites in Egypt longing for deliverance (Exod 2:24; 6:5). If Paul has this in mind, the use of the noun might suggest that the Spirit groans with us longing for our “exodus” from this world of sin into the glorious future.

⁶¹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, 187.

⁶² This verse can be rendered another way. The Greek reads thus “oi1damen de\ o3ti toi=v a0gapw=sin to\n qeo\n pa/nta sunergei= ei0v a0gaqo/n, toi=v kata\ pro/qesin klhtoi=v ou]sin.” I have taken the adjective *pa/nta* as the object of *sunergei=*, but it can also be understood as the subject, in which case it would mean that “all things work for good.” While this is a legitimate translation grammatically, it seems that Paul simply fronts *pa/nta* for emphasis with God as the implied subject of [Footnote continued on next page ...]

that this is common knowledge among believers. The Pauline assumption is that those who are in Christ know that for those who love God (with the love poured into their hearts by the Spirit according to 5:8) and for those called according to his purpose, God works all things for their good. The all things most likely include the suffering in 8:17–18. This good possibly has reference to the believer's conformity to Christ explained in verses 29–30.⁶³ The first two acts of God in 29–30 are foreknowledge⁶⁴ and predestination. These two acts were done for the ultimate purpose that those foreknown and predestined will share the likeness of Jesus (8:29a). Thus, God works good in suffering in that he conforms us to the likeness of his Son. Mounce rightly states, “As Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb 5:8), we too should expect our share of difficulties in the process of being conformed to his image.”⁶⁵ The goal of the conformity to God's Son is “so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Verses 29–30 further assure us of our salvation as they ascertain that God's redemptive purposes are irrevocable, since all whom he predestined he called, and those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified.

D. A Celebration of God's Unfathomable Love

Paul, having explicated the above massive work of God in redeeming his people, spends the next nine verses celebrating the deep and unchangeable love of God. This celebration of God's

the verb. Moreover, it is difficult to see how *all things*, which are incapable of independent action, can *work* for good. God as the implied subject of the verb seems to make the best sense. See also James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*. Vol 38A. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 494; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 180–181.

⁶³ All of the verbs (*proginw/skw*, *proori/zw*, *kale/w*, *dikaio/w*, *doca/zw*) are in the aorist, which are verbs with perfective aspects. The perfective aspect, according to Campbell, “provides an all-encompassing, or summary, view of an action” (Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal in Biblical Greek*, [Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2008], 34). For extensive and detailed examination of these acts of God in redemptive history, see Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 655–836.

⁶⁴ By foreknowledge, Paul means God's act of choosing or setting his love on believers before time began (Eph 1:5; 1Pet 1:20). This subject of foreknowledge is highly debated among scholars. For more on this subject see Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle To The Romans*, 531–533; Rudolf Bultmann, *TDNT* 1, 697–698.

⁶⁵ Robert H. Mounce, vol. 27, *Romans*, 188.

unshakable love further expresses God’s work in redeeming his people in that it portrays redemption as ultimately motivated and grounded in God’s love. For Paul, this love of God is most clearly displayed in that God did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all (8:32). In this celebratory section, Paul asks six questions which are designed to stop our mouths and unveil our eyes to the unfathomable love God. The first question is, “therefore, what shall we say to these things?” (8:31a). “These things” refer to the massive work of God described in the early part of the chapter, and it probably encompasses the previous chapters. In the immediate context, “these things” would include the truth that there is no condemnation for those in Christ (8:1), God did for us what the law could not do (8:2–3), God has given us his Spirit to indwell us (8:9–11), God has adopted us into his family (8:15–16), God has granted us grace to be co-heirs with Christ (8:17), God has secured a glorious future for us (8:18, 30), God has given us his Spirit who helps us in our weaknesses (8:26–27), God works all things for our good, that we may bear the family resemblance (8:28–29). In contemplating these above-mentioned massive works of God for us, Paul’s response to his first question is to ask five unanswerable and truth-loaded questions. The fact that Paul does not proceed to give us what we should say to “these things” suggests that the love of God is so deep that we cannot easily respond to it other than being stunned by its magnitude. Paul’s response to the question “what shall we say to these things?” is “if God is for us, who can be against us?”⁶⁶ (8:31). All of the above work of God in redemption proves that God is undeniably *for* believers, and it follows that no one or anything—including the list of formidable foes listed in 8:35, 38–39—can successfully be against us, because all whom God predestined will be glorified (8:30).⁶⁷ If God is for us, it does not really matter if something or someone *seems* to be against us, because

⁶⁶ In the Old Testament God is always said to be against a nation or people mainly because of their disobedience (Jer 21:13; 50:31; 51:25; Ezek 5:8; 13:8; 21:3; 26:3; 28:22; 29:3, 10; 35:3; 38:3; 39:1; Nah 2:13; 3:5). This OT background makes the statement that “God is for us” (or more precisely, “if God is for us”) all the more pregnant with rich and joy-giving meaning. For God to be “for us” means that he has dealt with our sins and he no longer holds them against us. God sent his Son and condemned sin in his flesh so that through him we will no longer bear his condemnation. In other words, God is for us because our sin-debt was paid by his Son (8:2–3, 32).

⁶⁷ Elsa Tamez, “Now No Condemnation: A Meditation on Romans 8,” *The Ecumenical Review* 41 no 3JI (1989), 446.

we know that God has guaranteed our glorification in such a way that he speaks of it as though it was already here.

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). The argument is from greater to lesser or from harder to easier.⁶⁸ If God did the greater act of love in sending his Son to die for us, it follows that he will also perform the lesser act of love by graciously granting us all that we need. God the Father killed his Son on the cross for our sins while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8). “God did not spare his own Son, because it was the only way he could spare us.”⁶⁹ The greatest and hardest thing that God could do was to give his Son, so if he could do that for us while we were sinners, then he can meet all our needs because that is lesser and easier.⁷⁰

Paul continues by incredulously asking, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Rom 8:33). God is the one who declares his people righteous based on his Son’s sacrifice for them, so who is to bring a legitimate charge against them? No one! There is no other superior tribunal who can bring this charge; God is the final Judge. Therefore Paul continues, “Who is to condemn?” No one can condemn because Jesus Christ died for our sins and is at the right hand of God interceding for us (Rom 8:34). The Spirit (Rom 8:26) and Christ are interceding for us, so no one can condemn us. The only One who could rightfully condemn us is now *for* us and as a result there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1). Paul’s excitement and celebration of the love of God rises so high that he resounds, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ” (Rom 8:35)? Paul goes ahead to give a list of possible things that could be considered as threats to God’s love for us. No hardship or powers can separate us from the love of God; in actuality those things strengthen God’s love for us.⁷¹ Paul began this chapter with “no condemnation”

⁶⁸ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 1995), 114.

⁶⁹ John Piper, *Future Grace*, 113.

⁷⁰ That it is easier for God to give us all things does not mean that every thing we ask for will be granted to us exactly as we desire. Piper correctly argues “The great promise of future grace, guaranteed in the logic of Romans 8:32, is that nothing will ever enter your experience as God’s child that, by God’s sovereign grace, will not turn out to be a benefit to you. This is what it means for God to be God, and for God to *be for* you, and for God to freely give you all things with Christ” (John Piper, *Future Grace*, 116).

⁷¹ Mounce argues, “Far from weakening the bonds of love, trouble and hardship strengthen them. Persecution drives the true believer to the arms of the one who knows from experience the full range of suffering” (Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, 191). This argument suggest that the Mounce is taking “love” in 8:35 as our love for God, but it seems most natural to read it as God’s love for believers since it has been the focus all through the chapter.

and ends with “no separation.” These dual declarations are based solely on God’s great work in redeeming us. The quotation from the Psalm 43:23 shows that hardship is not something that is new; saints of old have had to face the same things, but the good news is that in all these hardships “we are more than conquerors⁷² through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, we are complete and more than conquerors in all hardships.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that God is sovereign over salvation and that salvation solely depends on God’s work for those in Christ. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus because God, in Jesus, has condemned the condemnable and freed believers to lead holy lives and endure suffering since suffering is a means to glory. Believers in Jesus can be assured that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus because of the magnitude of that love and because our salvation is based solely on what God has done for us in Jesus. If God did not spare his own very Son but gave him on the cross for us all, he will graciously, with his Son, grant us all that we need to endure to the end and enter into glory. Salvation is from him, through him and to him so that to him will be the glory forever and ever, Amen!



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⁷²The hapax-legomena $\upsilon\rho\pi\epsilon\rho\kappa\iota\kappa\alpha/w$ is the heightened form of $\eta\iota\kappa\alpha=n$, with the sense of complete conquering (See *BDAG*, s.v. “ $\upsilon\rho\pi\epsilon\rho\kappa\iota\kappa\alpha/w$,” 1034).