

## Romans: Re-Creation by the Spirit—Paradise Restored, Part 5d

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EXPOSITION: Chapter 8:1-39

*Romans 8: The Climax of the Covenant*

As explained in the *Introduction* to this section (Chs. 5-8), this chapter reiterates and consummates Ch. 5. In the meantime, Chs. 6 and 7 have addressed the hurdles of sin and the law to the universal reign of grace introduced in Ch. 5 but now fully explicated in Ch. 8. The four chapters form a chiasmic ring cycle, developing a sequence of key thoughts, climaxing in Ch. 8 (see section *Intro.*). Through this cycle Paul takes his Gospel to its end-game: from justification to glorification. Having indicted man as a covenant-breaker and argued his case, man is declared guilty and condemned (Chs. 1, 2). But he then shows how Christ provides the juridical basis of man's reinstatement as a covenant-keeper (Chs. 3, 4) and its groundedness in the Adam/Christ correlation as the covenant structure of history (Ch. 5). He then parenthetically shows how the violated covenant, with its twin problem of sin (Ch. 6) and the law (Ch. 7), is resolved in Christ, freeing redeemed man to obey the creation mandate and restore the earth as God's cosmic temple (Ch. 8).

From a covenant perspective, the apostle has dealt with both its commands (Ethics) and consequences (Oaths), its stipulations and sanctions: *first*, he has addressed broken covenant in commands disobeyed (Ch. 1-2); *second*, covenant consequences in the death penalty for man as a covenant-breaker, showing Christ's death as substitutionary and propitiatory, satisfying God's justice and reinstating man's covenant status by grace through faith (Chs. 3-4); and, *third*, he addresses the vital aspect of living in covenant fidelity, of freedom from not only the penalty but also the power of sin (Chs. 5-7), showing that Christ has perfected humanity through his obedience to the Father, doing what Adam and his progeny failed to do. So, now, in Christ, the believer is able to obey God and his covenant commandments through the indwelling power of the Spirit. Hence, not only does man enjoy reinstated covenant standing but also restored covenant living; he can now walk with God in covenant obedience and enjoy the full covenant blessing of life for ever (see my comments Ch. 7). In this way the promise of the law is justified—obedience *does* result in life after all (Lev 18:5), on which we will expand in a moment. Chapter 8 demonstrates not only the resolution in Christ of covenant commands (Ethics) and covenant consequences (Oaths) but also, therefore, the relation of covenant to creation in the latter's renewal: the earth is restored – in all its fulness – as God's temple. And this is achieved through Covenant Succession, through sons and heirs who continue the Father's business (vss. 3, 14, 15, 17, 19, 23, 29, 32). Succession being the fifth and final component of the fivefold covenant structure: 1) Transcendence; 2) Hierarchy; 3) Ethics; 4) Oath; and, 5) Succession. This is conveniently conveyed through the acronym, THEOS (see Romans *Introduction* under *Outline & Structure*; *Intro* to Chapter 2:1–4:25; and comments on 5:12-21). Christ as the consummation of the covenant liberates the whole cosmos from the bondage of sin, from the curse (Gen 3:14-24), through the unveiling of the sons of God (vss. 20-23). And, hence, Romans 8 proves to be the *Climax of the Covenant* and the epistle, itself, *God's Manifesto for Paradise Restored*.

Significantly, John saw the covenant document in the right hand of the One seated upon the throne (Rev 5). Having been sealed with seven seals, properly interpreting this symbolism, it was a testament to be opened and executed on the death of the testator, promising the inheritance of a kingdom (Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p.76ff.). After exhausting the cosmos in search for one worthy to open it, eventually the Lamb of God, appearing as if slain, is found and presented with it by the One on the throne. Upon this epochal event, all heaven erupts with a new song, extolling the Lamb and the earthly dominion of the redeemed:

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

Revelation 5:9-10

Having ratified the covenant by his blood, Christ alone is worthy to open its seven seals, releasing its Covenant Oaths of curses

and blessings, of possession or dispossession of the inheritance, explaining Israel's covenant disinheritation announced by Jesus in Matthew 21. After the prophetic acts of cleansing the temple and cursing the fig tree, he tells the parables of the Two Sons and of the Tenants, climaxing the chapter in his oath: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (v. 43; also 23:37-39). The covenant, through its Oaths, on one hand disinherits but on the other executes the promised inheritance. It is, hence, the very title-deed to the cosmos (Ps 2; 22:7-8; 72:8-11; 89:27). Accordingly, at his ascension to the right hand of the Father both covenant blessings and judgements are released. From his new position he not only gives the Kingdom to the true Israel of God (see 2:28), but also takes it from those to whom it had previously been given but did not bear its fruit. And so, echoed by Revelation 5, to the former – "the people of the saints of the Most High" – it is declared that "their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them" (Dan 7:13, 14, 27). Pre-empting the next section of Chs. 9-11, dealing with ethnic Israel's status, but flowing from the watershed passage of 5:12-21, the true Israel of God, the One New Man in whom the dividing wall of hostility has been removed (Eph 2:11-22), is given dominion in the earth, fulfilling man's original creation mandate (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8; Mt 28:18-20).

#### *The Holy Spirit: Integral to God's Cosmic Purpose*

Fittingly, Paul's language has moved in this section from the polemical to the confessional which culminates in a declaration of the triumph of Christ and his church in history. In this chapter the work of the Spirit is seen as integral to God's cosmic purpose. The word "spirit" (*pneuma*) occurs twenty-one times, referring to the Holy Spirit in all but two (vss. 15a, 16b). This highlights the ministry and person of the Holy Spirit as central to God's purpose for history: that, as the executive agent of the triune God, he renews the cosmos, restoring man and his abode to God's original creation purpose. It is the omnipotent Spirit of God that brings creation and redemption to their fulness in Christ, restoring the earth as God's cosmic temple.

#### *Covenant Law and the Triumph of Life Over Death*

Allied to this theme of the work of the Spirit is that of the triumph of life over death, beginning in verse 2: "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (also vss. 6, 9, 10). Put simply, the Gospel fulfills the Edenic promise of the Tree of Life (2:9; 3:22; Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14). The apostle first introduced this theme in 1:17, promising that, "The one who by faith is righteous shall *live*" (ESV marginal rendering; author's emphasis); but is now picking it up from 5:10 – "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his *life*" (author's emphasis; also vss. 12, 17, 18, 21) – and continued throughout Ch. 6 (vss. 4, 11, 22, 23). Simply, Adam's disobedience produced death and Christ's obedience resulted in life: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation [death] for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and *life* for all men." (5:18; author's emphasis). This death/life antithesis between Adam and Christ is integral to the covenant structure of God's arrangement with man. Obedience to the covenant results in life, disobedience in death—in either possession or dispossession of the promised inheritance (Gen 2:17; Lev 18:5; Dt 4:1; 5:33; 6:1-3, 24; 8:1, 3; 11:9; 16:20; 30:6, 16, 19, 20; 32:47). Life or death, therefore, represent the *sanctions* (Oath) – the curses and blessings – of the fivefold covenant structure (THEOS); whereas one's obedience or disobedience relates to the *stipulations* (Ethics), the law of the covenant. Obey, and you shall live; disobey, and you shall die. Man's mortality is hence a covenant curse decreed and executed by God for his rebellion and violation of the covenant law (6:23; Gen 3:19; Ezk 18:4, 20). This explains why in Ch. 7, in dealing with the combined problem of sin and the law, Paul grapples with the paradox of his experience with the law: "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me." (v. 10; Lev 18:5; for the role of the law and law-keeping see my comments at 2:13; 3:20; Intro 5:1—8:39; Intro Ch. 7). As he explains in vss. 9 and 11 this is solely because of sin. The law is exonerated, it is holy, righteous and good (v. 12). The message of Ch. 8 is, therefore, that Christ is the consummation of the covenant; not only is the covenant reinstated *juridically* (v. 1) through Christ's obedience but also restored *vitally* (vss. 2-4); that is to say, the new humanity in Christ is now able to obey the commandments of the covenant and live in its full covenant blessings (vss. 5-14). The obedient "only begotten Son" (Heb 11:17; 1 Jn 4:9) is the covenant head of an obedient 'corporate son'—the church. This is the unveiling of sonship for which creation awaits, groaning with inarticulate expectation for the corporate Christ to come to full stature and to the final redemption of our bodies (8:15-23; Eph 4:11-14). Christ resurrected is the death of death; in him death is swallowed up in victory, and Paradise is restored.

As for the outline it falls broadly into three paragraphs which we have divided as: 1) *The Spirit of Life* (vss. 1-17), where the apostle amplifies, from 5:12-21 and Chs. 6 and 7, that our present covenant obedience and future glory is not only sourced in our solidarity with Christ and his dominion over sin but is also realised by the Spirit; 2) *The Spirit of Glory* (vss. 18-30), where he amplifies, from 5:1-11, that the whole of creation will be liberated because the children of God are not only predestined but also justified and glorified, being aided by the Spirit; and therefore, 3) the chapter climaxes in *Christian Victory Assured* (vss.

31-39) with a triumphal victory shout that no accusation nor circumstance shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord because he, who has died and was raised, now intercedes for us at the right hand of God. It is he who justifies, and none can condemn!

8:1-17—The Spirit of Life

**1** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* **2** *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*—Opening with “therefore now”, Paul indicates not only a connection of thought from the foregoing argument but also its present application – “now” – in Ch. 8. This argument concerns the forensic aspect of the work of Christ on the cross. Not only is this connection with the more immediate argument of 7:4-6 that once “we were living in the flesh” (v. 5) “but now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit ...” (v. 6) but also from 6:7, “For one who has died has been set free [*dikaiōō*] from sin.” “Set free” in 6:7 should be more literally rendered “justified” or “acquitted” from sin, as indicated by the ESV’s marginal gloss. This forensic aspect of the work of Christ is further strengthened by the phrase “in Christ” of v. 1 which connects back to 6:11: “So you also must consider [*logizomai*] yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *in Christ* Jesus.” *Logizomai* is a forensic term, meaning to reckon, to calculate, to account.

To “consider” therefore one’s self dead to sin is to calculate forensically, based on one’s position “in Christ”. By being taken out of Adam and placed into Christ (5:12-21), through baptism, we have entered into his death (6:3). To be “in Christ” is legal and positional; it is therefore an incontrovertible fact, that I am dead to sin – its penalty and power – and free from condemnation.

This tells us, as we have argued earlier, that while Chs. 5-8 deal with experiential victory over sin, as reflected in 7:4-6, it is grounded in the forensic aspect of Christ’s justifying work previously established by Paul in 3:21–4:25 and reiterated in 6:7, seeding the argument’s final conclusion in 8:1. As just mentioned, this is secured and explained by the Adam/Christ solidarities of either being “in Adam” (the flesh) or “in Christ” (the Spirit) in 5:12-21 and then applied to the believer in 6:3-14 through baptism into Christ, into his death and resurrection. Freedom from both the penalty *and* power of sin is grounded in the believer’s legal solidarity “in Christ”. There is no condemnation for the believer because they are, in fact, justified—acquitted and declared righteous before God.

This epochal shift in human history is signalled by “now” (3:21; 5:9; 6:22; 7:6). God has acted in Christ and brought salvation to man, no longer under the condemnation of sin—not only its penalty but also its power. Although, even the latter is itself a penalty, man in his obduracy having been handed over to the full sway of sin (1:24, 26, 28; Eph 4:19). Because the power of sin is itself a penalty for sin, it too must be dealt with by the forensic work of the cross. As Murray also notes:

... “condemnation” should be interpreted more inclusively than freedom from the guilt of sin. There is no need to suppose that this means departure from the strictly forensic import of condemnation. ... it is the judicial aspect that is in view in God’s condemnation of sin in the flesh. And it is this same judicial aspect of our enslavement to the power of sin that comes into view in verse 1. Our enslavement to sin is properly viewed as to the judgment to which we are consigned and there can be no release from this bondage, contemplated in its judicial character until sin as power receives its judicial condemnation in the cross of Christ and until the effectual application to us takes effect. Hence freedom from condemnation must embrace freedom from the judgment of sin’s power as well as the judgment of sin’s guilt. (Murray, *op. cit.*, p.282)

“Condemnation”, the Greek *katakrima*, is a forensic term denoting a judgment given and implying a sentence passed. The whole argument of the epistle, as a covenant lawsuit, establishes beyond doubt man’s guilt and condemnation before the divine court. But equally it also establishes the absolute sufficiency of Christ’s redemptive act to acquit him and declare him as righteous before the same court. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Both are courtroom declarations and, as decrees of the immutable God and Judge of all men, cannot be overturned. Wherever this surety, that God’s eternal sovereign decree lies behind redemption and the very declaration of one’s justification, is not taught nor apprehended the reflex is toward self-justification through sanctification. This then results in perfectionism, through various forms of devotional asceticism, pietism, and legalism. And then, with the culture’s rejection of justification by faith, it plays out in autonomous man’s law—in humanistic “righteousness” as a social construct, and then in pharisaic posturing and virtue signalling that have become all too common in the West’s increasingly vitriolic social discourse. Whereas Paul teaches that the law of God – obeyed in the power

of the Spirit – is the way of holiness, as we will discover in v. 2. Furthermore, Paul does not teach eradicationism or perfectionism. Rather, he teaches the reality of a fallen world; human experience under the challenge of what he describes as “sin that dwells within me” (7:17), which as we will see in a moment demands that it be “put to death” (8:13). Nevertheless, this means that, in our imperfection and failure, we must continually “reckon” ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God (6:11). We must constantly place our trust in the forensic certainty of our justification based on the historicity of God’s saving act in Christ, in his death and resurrection. As John encourages: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1). So, as Paul asserts: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!”

Opening v. 2, as previously pointed out in 7:14 & 15, the participle “for” presents the reason for a certain conclusion: you are no longer condemned because “the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death”. There is great confusion among commentators as to the meaning of “law” as it applies to the “Spirit of life” and likewise to “sin and death”. For example, many default to a Marcion view of Scripture positing the OT God as one of law and anger and the NT God as one of the Spirit and love. Responding to Kasemann’s radical discontinuity of the law and replacement by the Spirit, Rushdoony, while commenting on this verse, correctly poses:

If Paul is so hostile to the law, why does he twice use the word *law* in this one sentence? Did Paul believe that the law given to Moses was obsolete, and that some vague other law floated in space, to be revealed to us by the Spirit? Paul rather believes that the expressed word of God is His law and expresses God’s justice or righteousness. When we break God’s covenant law, it is sin and death to us; the law of sin works in us, because our rebellion against God leads us into the pursuit of death (Prov 8:36). In Christ, however, the law is in harmony with and expressive of the Holy Spirit of life, and it give us covenant blessings. (Rushdoony, p. 125).

In resolving this, we must ask: Is this verse referring to “law” as an operating principle that exercises authority or to the law of God?

To bring clarity we must appeal to the interpretive law (pun not intended) of context. The apostle is clearly presenting in v. 2 a choice of binary opposites, an antithesis. If Ch. 8 emanates from and then culminates Ch. 5, as we have previously argued, is there an antithesis presented there? An unhesitating, Yes!—The one between Adam and Christ (5:12-21). With the Adam/Christ antithesis as the controlling schema of the whole epistle we must consider our current antithesis in this light, Ch. 8 in the light of Ch. 5. Furthermore, throughout the whole epistle he has defended the law, climaxing in Ch. 7, and argued for the upholding of the law, never its abrogation (see comments 3:19, 20, 31; *Intro* Ch. 7). The covenant schema of Romans, flowing from the Adam/Christ analogy, precludes the possibility of the law’s revocation: God’s arrangement through both Adam and Christ carries commands; the covenant does not exist without commands and their consequences (see *Covenant Structure* in commentary *Intro*). And additionally, the default, rather than discontinuity is one of continuity between covenants – from Adam to Moses to Christ – unless otherwise specified by the NT (see my comments 3:8, 19-20; 5:20; and also Ch. 6 under *Law & Culture* for continuity of the law; see *Intro* to 2:1–4:25 for the covenant schemata of Romans, and also my comments on 3:2). Hence, the law of God, as universal and unchanging, flows through to the new administration of the covenant (3:31; Mt 5:17-19). There is one God with one law administered through various covenants. Although, Paul is possibly using the word “law” as a double entendre, a word play, combining both meanings: as an authoritative operating principle and as the law of God. He has just finished the previous chapter using the word in both senses (7:21-25). So now it is completely natural – although impressive in intellectual dexterity – to combine both meanings in the one. The law of God becomes a powerful operating principle in either domain, Adam or Christ.

That being said we can now consider the meaning of “law” in 8:2. We must conclude, therefore, that in the context of the epistle’s whole structure and argument thus far the “law” refers to the “law of God” given to Moses. Hence, v. 2 outlines two antithetical operations of the law of God in two antithetical domains: one, in Adam, operating as “the law of sin and death”; and the other, in Christ, operating as “the law of the Spirit of life”. For those in Adam, the law provokes covenant-breaking – sin – and, hence, condemns the sinner to death (7:8-9). Conversely, for those in Christ, empowered by the Spirit, the law provokes covenant-keeping and, hence, gives the believer life (7:10; Lev 18:5; see my comments above in *Intro* to Ch. 8 re the theme of *life*). While there is one law – the law of God – in both Adam and Christ, there are two responses: obedience and disobedience. Having been regenerated by the Spirit, those in Christ are now reoriented toward God. Their controversy with him has evaporated and they now desire to obey his law, as we will see momentarily in vss. 7-9 and have seen in 7:15-25. Not-only-so, they possess the power to do so: the indwelling Spirit motivates and empowers the believer to obey, resulting in more

life (6:4, 13, 22, 23; 8:6, 10). Jesus' promise to give abundant life is thus fulfilled (Jn 10:10). Paul's dilemma of 7:10 that the law promised life but only resulted in death is solved. As a teacher of the true Israel of God – those who would possess the world as the new Promised Land (4:13) – Moses sets before them the covenant choice between life and death:

See, **I have set before you** today **life** and good, **death** and evil. **If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God** that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then **you shall live** and multiply, and the LORD your **God will bless you** in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you life and death**, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life in order that you may live**, you and your descendants, **by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice**, and by holding fast to Him; **for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land** which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, 19, 20

The covenant choice between life and death has not changed. Set before Adam in the Garden and reiterated through Moses it flows through into Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn 5:24; also Gen 2:9, 15-17; Rom 6:23). Again, we see continuity rather than discontinuity between covenants. We will explore how this applies to Israel and to the nations in Chs. 9-11.

**3** *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*—Paul has previously established the limits of the law; it is unable to regenerate or change human nature; nor justify the sinner, rather it always condemns (3:19, 28; 4:12-15; 7:7-25). In Ch. 7 he also exonerates the law, despite its sin-enlivening effect, by indicting not it but the flesh for sin: "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" (v. 5). "The flesh" of 7:5 and 8:3 is not the body but rather a reference to autonomous man. Unregenerate and at enmity with God, man in Adam is unable to please God, nor obey his law as we will momentarily discover in vss. 5-8. Verse 3, however, shows that God has now done what the flesh and the law could not do. And he has done it by "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (also Gal 4:4), indicating that Christ's incarnational and redemptive act has condemned or judged sin. But in which way has this occurred? Has not the law already condemned sin? So why did Christ also need to condemn it and how did he do so? We have seen in Ch. 1 the sinner handed over to the power of sin and in Chs. 2-3 the sinner and sin condemned, as a judicial courtroom term, under the law and the consequent penalty of death passed. And then in Chs. 3-4 we saw how Christ's death expiated sin and propitiated God, cancelling sin's penalty, but what of its power? This is, hence, the topic of Chs. 6-8; with 6:3-14, rooted in 5:12-21, showing how Christ's death and resurrection has delivered the believer from the dominion of sin but is hindered by "the law of sin and death", as explicated in 7:7-25. While the law can judicially condemn sin, it cannot overcome it. So how did Christ condemn sin? *First*, as we have seen, he had to judicially do away with the *penalty of sin* through his expiatory work, and, *second*, especially related to his "in-fleshment", he destroyed the *power of sin*. In describing the latter, the apostle is being careful to qualify the nature and extent of Christ's identification with man by use of the phrase, "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh". The word "likeness", Greek *homoionoma*, meaning to be made in the image, resemblance or form of something, a representation. Elsewhere the apostle confirms this: "but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the *likeness* of men" (Phil. 2:7). Nonetheless in 8:3 he is more specific; not just generically "in the likeness of men" but more precisely "in the likeness of sinful flesh". Christ's identification with man's sinfulness is crucial for his full salvation and dominion over sin but, equally, so is his sinlessness. This tension, Paul is careful to protect. Christ was "truly man", one "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). He was a sin-bearer but never a sinner: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). While he was born of the virgin Mary, his conception, supernaturally wrought by the Holy Spirit was such that he did not inherit Adam's fallenness (1:3; 15:12; Mt 1:23; Lk 1:42; Gal 4:4; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 2:17; 4:15). He was, consequently, not subject, by virtue of his humanity, to the penalty nor power of Adam's original sin. He was "a lamb without blemish" (1 Pet 1:19). There are, thus, sacrificial connotations to the verse in concert with incarnational. The next phrase in v. 3, "and for sin", accompanied by the ESV's marginal gloss, "and as a sin offering", also actually rendered by the NASB, "and as an offering for sin", shows that Christ's incarnation was essentially a sin-offering but also integral to the

overpowering of sin, which, after all, is the context of our present section (Chs. 6-8). The phrase in the LXX invariably refers to a sin offering (Moo, p. 480). Without the judicial ground for sin's expiation in Christ's sin-offering the powers have a legal footing for their dominion (Col 2:13-15). As Jesus explained: "...for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me..." (Jn 14:30b, 31a). Though tested in the Temptation by the devil to disobey, he thrice states, "It is written", appealing to the inscripturated word of God as the canon of obedience to the Father (Mt 4:1-11). This is why he could declare, "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out" (Jn 12:31). And so, according to v. 3, "he condemned sin in the flesh", the word "condemned" used, according to Murray, "in the New Testament in the sense of consigning to destruction as well as of pronouncing the sentence of condemnation (cf. 1 Cor 11:32; 2 Pet 2:6)." (*op. cit.*, p. 278). Hence, Jesus announced, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18).

Christ's judgement of the *archon* of this world was, hence, executed as the covenant head of a new humanity, not so much as the Son of God but as the Son of Man. This is grounded in the epistle's watershed passage, 5:12-21. Under the covenant disobedience leads to dispossession (see comments 2:20). Hence, the necessity of Christ's sinless life and death; it was not only forensic in its expiation of sin's penalty but also of sin's power by his replacing of Adam as man's covenant head. As such, he has now obeyed the covenant requirements, and, as a sin offering, satisfied the covenant sanctions in his death and the covenant stipulations in his obedient life. The former deals with penalty and the latter the power of sin. The ground is, hence, removed for every accusation against man and for the demonic powers to rule over him. Satan and the powers are deposed and destroyed. The covenant is restored, and man is reinstated as God's vice-regent. Christ's obedient life has perfected humanity, such that those in him have "now become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Pet 1:4). Partakers not of his deity but rather of his humanity. Through the Spirit the believer has Christ's tested and perfected character indwelling and empowering them—that is to say, "the law of the Spirit of life" has set them free from "the law of sin and death" (v. 2). This, the law, apart from the incarnation of Christ and the regenerating power of the Spirit, could never do. And so, as Paul explains in v. 4, sin was both judged and destroyed in Christ as the new prototype man, "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us". "Righteous requirement", in Greek, *dikaioma*, refers to both the decree of the covenant law and the ethical behaviour it commands. As Christ's corporate body now walks out his perfected humanity in the earth, they too will overcome sin as a power, living in covenant obedience and bringing the liberty of the sons of God to the entire cosmos, as we will see shortly in vss. 18-25. But, as we will discover in vss. 5-17, those who are in Christ must first discover what it really means to be "led by the Spirit of God" (v. 14), upon which there is much misunderstanding.

**5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.—Flowing from the watershed passage of 5:12-21 and the antithesis between the two corporate structures of Adam and Christ, those who are "in the flesh" are those who are "in Adam", the unregenerate (see v. 9), and those "in the Spirit" are those who are "in Christ", the regenerate. Being "in the flesh", therefore, does not refer to the so-called "carnal" Christian, living on a lower level of experience, but rather to autonomous man, man in rebellion against God and living independently of his law-word. Although, when addressing the Corinthians he did address them as "carnal" or "fleshly". He was unable to speak to them as to "spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1). The apostle's corrective letter to the Corinthians confronted aberrant behaviours and mindsets as being "of the flesh", as those belonging to the world, the corporate Adam. Whereas, his letter to the Romans was not corrective but rather didactic. He is not accusing them of the same Corinthian behaviour but merely drawing out the antithesis between the flesh and the Spirit as that between the two covenant solidarities of Adam and Christ. Those therefore that are "in the flesh" or "in Adam", understandably, "set their minds on the things of the flesh" (v. 5), on the things that emanate from the mind of autonomous man (see my comments on the "mind" under *False Gospels* at Ch. 1:18-32 and comments on 1:21, 22, 28, 32). In v. 5 the word "mind", *phroneo* in Greek, is used once, meaning, "to direct one's mind to a thing" (Thayer); "to entertain sentiments or inclinations of a specific kind, to be minded; to incline to, be set upon, mind" (Mounce); in vss. 6 & 7 *phronema* is used three times, meaning, "what one has in mind, the thoughts and purposes" (Thayer); "frame of thought, will, aspirations" (Mounce). The mindedness that Paul refers to here is what we would today call a worldview. This is an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us. A person's worldview, knowingly or not, reflects how they would answer the "big questions" of human existence: who and what we are, where we came from, how we ought to live and the meaning of life. In short, a person's worldview answers the questions of origins, meaning, morality and destiny. A worldview inclines us toward certain kinds of answers and away from others. Like spectacles with coloured lenses, they affect what we see and how we see it. Worldviews determine our opinions on matters of ethics; what we think about abortion, euthanasia, same-sex relationships, environmental ethics, economic policy, and so on will depend on certain underlying pre-commitments, our worldview.

Worldviews, therefore, shape what we believe, how we interpret our experiences, and how we behave and relate to others.

When Paul, therefore, draws the antithesis between “the flesh” and “the Spirit” he draws it between two opposite and ultimate pre-commitments: the ultimacy of man on the one hand and the ultimacy of God on the other. Without exception, every individual possesses one of these two pre-commitments; it is the underlying, and often unspoken, presupposition behind their whole life and way of thinking. And this is regardless of its particular intellectual or philosophical packaging, or lack thereof. Moreover, while this antithesis operates on an individual level, it is essentially a corporate reality, grounded in the two antithetical covenant heads of Adam and Christ (see comments 5:12-21; 6:6). This plays out in two antithetical cultures, the redeemed covenant culture of the people of God and the culture of those hostile to God. While this is essentially the antithesis between the church and the world it is also the source of the culture-wars of the contemporary West. With the almost universal and complete rejection of the Christian consensus, inherited from one-and-a-half millennia of Western civilisation, its afterglow still antagonises the now dominate neo-pagan culture. Nevertheless, like leaven, the ultimacy of Christ and his Kingdom both infiltrates and inevitably dominates the whole (Mt 13:31-33). This has occurred before in the Gospel’s civilising affect on Europe and the world and will occur again. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God will again inform public policy, education, social ethics, and justice.

In the meantime, the conflict between flesh and Spirit continues, and not merely at a personal level. The Adam society, “this body of death” (7:24), in defiance of God’s ultimacy, inevitably promotes a culture of death: “to set the mind on the flesh is death” (v. 6; also 6:23; Gen 2:17); “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (v. 7). In commenting on these verses Rushdoony points out:

One of the deadly aspects of antinomianism is that it undermines God’s plain word concerning the way of life. The law tells us that there is a way of blessings or life, and of curses, or death (Deut. 28). Paul emphasizes these two ways.” (Rushdoony, p. 127)

“The mind set on the flesh” declares itself as autonomous, determining its own “positive” law, and, for example, in the name of “compassion” legislates for abortion and euthanasia, enforcing its tyranny of death from womb to tomb. The twentieth century, soaked in the blood of the masses, cries out to the twenty-first century, to us, “Heed the warning or die!” The cry of the slaughtered dead can be heard arising from Hitler’s Germany, from Stalin’s Soviet Russia, from Mao’s China, from Pol Pot’s Cambodia and from the American “slaughter of the innocents”—60,000,000 babies dead since 1973, not to mention the rest of the Western world. The death of God spells the death of man.

Whereas, by contrast, “to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (v. 6), resulting in social policies that protect life and peace. It was the Christians who rescued the babies of Rome from the cruel practice of “exposure”. Abandoned on garbage heaps, in sewerage drains, and under bridges they either died from hunger or cold or were killed by animals or “rescued” for slavery or prostitution. This practice was used in Rome in addition to abortion. More often than not it was sex-selective, prejudicing girls because of future dowry expense, or otherwise because the baby was deformed or just unwanted. Even the cultured statesman and orator Cicero (106-43 BC) in his *On the Laws* (3.8) states: “Deformed infants shall be killed.” The “deformity” could be an unwanted child (Latin, *expositi*—“left without shelter”), a sickly child, a deformed child or simply a wrong sex child. The Stoic philosopher Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) comments casually in *On Anger* (1.15): “...mad dogs we knock on the head...unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children at birth who are weakly and abnormal.” In *Politics* (7.1335b), Aristotle says:

As to exposing or rearing the children born, let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared; but on the ground of number of children, if the regular customs hinder any of those born being exposed, there must be a limit fixed to the procreation of offspring, and if any people have a child as a result of intercourse in contravention of these regulations, abortion must be practiced on it [the child].

Like the Jews, the early Christians were among the few in antiquity that did not practice the “exposure” of unwanted infants. Because man was made in the image of God, male and female, every human life, regardless of gender, was sacred. Exposure and abortion were considered to be violations of the fifth and sixth commandments and were viewed as murder. All the early major apologists addressed the issue of exposure, using it to show the Christian society as highly principled in its prohibition, as do other numerous early Christian writers. Clement of Alexandria dealt with it extensively and Origen briefly. Clement even

appealed to the Mosaic law's enjoinder to humanely care for one's animals (*Str.* 2.18.92 *SC38*: 104-105). When the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* (date range AD 130 to late 2<sup>nd</sup> century) wanted to demonstrate how Christians differ from other citizens, he pointed out that Christians "do not expose their offspring" (*Diog.* 5:6). And the *Didache* (date range AD 50-120), the earliest document of ecclesial protocol, specifically addresses abortion: "you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide" (*Did.* 2:2). Christians distinguished themselves from the rest of humanity by placing value on human life and by protecting the vulnerable. The catacombs are filled with tiny graves with the epitaph "adopted daughter of..." or "adopted son of..." inscribed on them. These inscriptions refer to the many babies and infants that Christians rescued from the garbage heaps over the centuries. Tertullian records that Christians rescued abandoned babies from the refuse and dung heaps and raised them as their own or tended to them before they died and gave them a decent burial. In time the Synods of the Church banned the practice and in AD 374 exposure of infants was also banned by the state. Apart from the regenerating power of the Gospel, the Adam society remains captive to its hostility toward God and his law-word, hence Rome's pagan cruelties despite its apparent sophistication (v. 7, 8).

By contrast the Christ society is not only spiritually alive, promoting and protecting life, but also at peace with God; for "to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (v. 6). Through a powerful operation of the Spirit their controversy with God has evaporated and God's wrath toward them has been propitiated by Christ's substitutionary work (3:21-26; 5:1-11). At peace with God, Paul exhorts them to be at peace with others: "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (14:19). They are peacemakers, living under the covenant blessing of God, thereby showing themselves as sons of God: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (*Mt* 5:9). Hostile toward God, autonomous man does not seek peace: "and the way of peace they have not known" (3:17). But the "Prince of Peace" (*Is* 9:6) has taken the initiative; he became man, bearing the sins of many (*Heb* 9:28). Offering abundant life and peace, he is the fulfilment of the Edenic promise that was originally mediated through the Tree of Life (2:9; 3:22; *Rev* 2:7; 22:2, 14) and reiterated in the Law (*Lev* 18:5). And so, Paul's Gospel proclaims that "we shall be saved by his life" (5:10 NASB). "Life" is, hence, the fulfilment of God's original plan in Adam but now accomplished in Christ. On the theme of *life*, see the *Intro* to Ch. 8 and comments on v.2.

**9** *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* **10** *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* **11** *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*—Paul now addresses the positive side of the flesh/Spirit antithesis. The individual believer and the redeemed society, however, are not "in the flesh but in the Spirit" and this is the case, as Paul says, "if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you" (v. 9). By this he refers to the regenerating and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. This is, therefore, the evidence of their forensic standing in Christ: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (v. 9). "Belong", *imi* in Greek, means, to be, exist. Without the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit one does not exist in Christ. Our existential relationship with him is by the Spirit and is the evidence of one's positional transfer from Adam and the dominion of sin into Christ. Consequently, to be "in the Spirit" is first and foremost judicial and positional before it is vital and experiential. In the context of Romans 8, the power of the Holy Spirit is given for victory over sin and thus for covenant obedience and Christian dominion. This fact should serve to demystify what it means to be "in the Spirit", saving the believer from pneumatic excesses and pseudo spiritualities.

In v. 10, "if Christ is in you", experientially by the Spirit (v. 9), "although the body is dead because of sin", referring to the believer's physical body, "the Spirit is life because of righteousness". The ESV is correct in applying *pneumato* the Holy Spirit, unlike the NASB, NIV, and RSV that render it anthropologically, as the human spirit. This accords far better with the immediate context of vss. 9 and 11 and the chapter context where *pneumais* consistently used of the Holy Spirit. Paul's application in v. 11 is that though the believer is still subject to mortality, the believer's present judicial position of being in the Spirit (v. 9), accompanied by vital experience of the Spirit's indwelling (v. 9), warrants their final bodily resurrection (v. 11). Simply put, flowing with the theme of the chapter, the Holy Spirit proves to be the agent of life whether in this age or the one to come. Contra to Lloyd-Jones, this does not necessarily exclude the possibility of physical healing before the resurrection. As the writer to the Hebrews says, we "have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (*Heb* 6:5). Apart from the final resurrection, the NT does not place a limit on the measure to which the power of the Kingdom of God can be experienced in this age.

**12** *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.* **13** *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.* **14** *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*—"So then" carries the force of "therefore"—an emphatic inferential. Paul is now giving practical application for

the first time that is inferred by his teaching in this chapter. From vss. 5-11 he has presented the flesh/Spirit antithesis, flowing from that of Adam and Christ in 5:12-21. Although, he is now picking up where he left off in 6:11-13. This also was practical application: *first*, in reckoning – that is, forensically calculating – upon the objective factuality of Christ’s death and the believer’s union with Christ in that death through baptism (6:2-4, 11); *second*, in not letting sin reign in our mortal bodies by coming under its passions (6:12); and, *third*, by not presenting one’s members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but rather presenting ourselves to God like those brought from death to life and our members as instruments of righteousness (6:13). And so, we owe no debt to the flesh to attempt to live by it for we will die (v. 13). Though we are embodied and susceptible to its physical needs and desires, it must be remembered that the “flesh”, while it includes our corporeality, embraces the totality of human existence in rebellion against God. The “flesh” is autonomous man living independently of God, governed by an underlying pre-commitment to his own ultimacy. It is certainly individual, but only as the individual exists and relates within the corporate structure of Adam. Our bodily existence only then serves to facilitate our autonomy and rebellion against God. This can play out from the more obvious sins of inordinate and illicit affections and desires of the body – for example, anger, murder, fornication, adultery, and gluttony – to the less sensational sins of the mind, of imaginations and reasonings raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5). The latter includes intellectual sins, worldviews and belief systems – and even theologies – that attempt to reason away the ultimacy of God. While sin is personal in its culpability, it is corporate in its outworking; sin is practiced by consorting with others in solidarity with the Adam community. Conversely, righteousness is practiced in solidarity with the Christ community, all flowing from the Adam/Christ antithesis of 5:12-21.

Verse 13 finally presents the key to victory over sin in all its forms: “but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds [*praxis*] of the body, you will live”. Far from the sanctification theories of the eradication and counteraction of sin, discussed in the *Intro* to Ch. 6, Paul teaches the mortification of sin; that through the power of the Holy Spirit the believer, as an act of covenant obedience, puts to death the practices of the body and thereby lives, in fulfilment of the covenant promise (Lev 18:5; see also my comments *Intro* Ch. 8 and 8:2, 5-8). Because the believer is dead to sin – even while sin remains alive to him – and is transferred from its dominion in Adam to freedom in Christ he or she no longer has to sin. They are not bound by it, enslaved under its dominion. Despite failure, as explicated in Ch. 7, they are no longer under the condemnation of sin and therefore only need to “reckon” upon their death to sin in Christ (6:11) to be assured of their freedom—freedom from both the penalty and power of sin. It must be stressed that to “put to death the deeds of the body” does not refer to ascetic or ritualistic practices for the purpose of increasing one’s spirituality and standing with God; for example, excessive fasts, rote prayers and invocations, excessive retreat, isolation and vows of silence, neglect or flagellations of the body, disregard or neglect of marriage or vocation and so on. Although, this is not to proscribe the regularity of normal spiritual disciplines such as private prayer, Bible reading, and public worship or special seasons of prayer or drawing aside. Rather, “putting to death the deeds of the body” demands obedience to the laws of God as the way of life; laws that are propositionally and definitively revealed in Scripture, both OT and NT, that provide God’s will for the whole of life.

Verse 14 then asserts: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God”. “For”, *gar* in Greek, indicates an affirmation and conclusion of the foregoing argument, carrying the force of “therefore” (see my comments re *gar* at 7:14). Paul’s teaching concerning the leading of the Spirit and sonship (v. 14), therefore, relate to victory over sin and obedience to the covenant so that one may live (vss. 1-13). And this leading by the Spirit leads us even through times of failure, as Ch. 7 has shown. While Paul’s Gospel calls one up to the standard of Christ, it is grounded and realistic. In a world where sin is alive and failure occurs, the apostle shows the way out, and that the Holy Spirit not only provides the desire to obey but also the ability, the power to “put to death the deeds of the body.” According to v. 14 both of these put proof to the fact that we are the sons of God. Even the smallest and most faltering desire to please God and obey him is the work of God’s Spirit. To be led by the Spirit, in the context of Romans, therefore, is not an esoteric pseudo spirituality of any kind. Nor is it an explicit reference to divine guidance, although, Scripture clearly testifies to the Holy Spirit’s role in directing the church; for example, the book of Acts is replete with such instances. But rather, it is to be led into covenant obedience to the dominion of Christ, despite the failures and vicissitudes of life, and so display the liberty of the sons of God to the powers and to a watching world. As Cranfield so aptly puts it, “The life which God promises is not a mere not-dying: it is to be a son of God, to live as a son of God, both now and hereafter” (Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 396). And as sons we are to do the work of our Father in heaven—loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us (Mt 5:43-45; also 5:16; Jn 5:17). Being led by the Spirit is toward an alternative Christian society demonstrating the wisdom and grace of God to the world (Eph 3:10). This demands, as already argued by this commentary, a world-and-life-view grounded in God’s revelation to man in the totality of Scripture, including his law (2 Tim 3:16).

**15** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if

children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.—“For”, *gar*, used here for the second time is significant. Some scholars argue that the first occurrence is argumentative, as in v. 14, and the second, v. 15, is explicative (see my comments 7:14-15). Verses 15-17 are therefore an elaboration of v. 14, presenting a further operation of the Spirit as a witness in regard to our sonship (v. 16), leading to inheritance (v. 17). As *life* was the dominant idea of vss. 1-13, *sonship* is of vss. 14-17. And they are joined at the hip; the believer now has *life* because they are *sons* of God, which is the connection of v. 13 to v.14. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to mediate both: life and sonship. And both of these are rooted in the forensic fact of v. 1, that, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

As a brief aside, but nonetheless of major significance in Paul’s Gospel, for Jews and Gentiles to be called the “sons of God” together, as Paul is now doing, demonstrates that the corporate Christ, the church, in whom “the middle wall of partition” between them is removed, has transcended and superseded ethnic Jewry as the true Israel of God (Eph 2:14 KJV; Gal 6:16); for the designation, son of God, up until now was exclusively used of Israel (9:4; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1). Having seeded this back in 2:28, Paul will continue to explicate it in Chs. 9-11.

Verse 15 presents an antithesis between two spirits: the “spirit of slavery”, which we as believers have not received, and the “Spirit of adoption”, which we have. Commentators differ as to what these might refer, but the answer must be determined by the governing antithesis of the whole epistle. This antithesis, which is between Adam and Christ, indicates that the “spirit of slavery” refers to the state of unregenerate man and the “Spirit of adoption” to the believer (5:12-21). The apostle confirms and compliments this antithesis by another in Galatians. Paul’s allegory of Hagar and Sarah equates the sons of the slave woman, Hagar, with those who are born of the flesh and under the law; and the sons of Sarah, as children of promise, born by the Spirit (Gal 4:21-31). Comparing the two types or allegories – Hagar and Sarah with Adam and Christ – those in Adam are sons of the slave woman, under the law, and those in Christ are the sons of the free woman and heirs. Both address relationship to the law and to the Spirit: one born of the flesh as a slave under the law and the other born of the Spirit as a son and heir. Hence, the “spirit of slavery” refers to the unbeliever’s relationship to the law and to the Spirit.

The next question is whether spirit, *pneuma* in Greek, refers to man’s spirit or God’s Spirit, as Greek did not differentiate between upper and lower case, in fact, upper was the only case when the original NT manuscripts were written. For the “spirit of slavery” most translators have chosen to render *pneuma* anthropologically, referring to the human spirit, and so, translated “spirit” as lower case, in harmony with other Pauline uses of *pneuma*, for example, a “spirit of gentleness”, and similar phrases (1 Cor 4:21; see also Rom 12:11; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 4:13; Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 1:7). Although the NASB differs by rendering both uses of *pneuma* in v. 15 anthropologically, as an inner attitude and disposition, to which Luther, Denney, Gifford, and Dodd, for example, as interpreters, would also agree (Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 295; Murray himself opts for the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of adoption”, along with numerous others including Calvin; Cranfield opts for the sentence not necessarily implying the actual existence of the “spirit of slavery” [*op. cit.*, p. 396]). While this may be correct for Paul’s other uses of *pneuma* just cited, is it correct for the verse under consideration? Context must always be the determiner. Because the Holy Spirit is integral to sonship and adoption in the chapter elsewhere – vss. 14, 23 – and because the chapter context is about the Spirit (vss. 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 23, 26, 27) it stands to reason that v. 15’s two references to *pneuma* refer to the Spirit and to adoption. Furthermore, when *pneuma* is used the only time in the chapter for the human spirit, Paul specifically prefaces it as “our spirit” distinguishing it from God’s Spirit, “the Spirit *himself*” (v. 16). We conclude, therefore, that the antithesis between the two “spirits” of v. 15 is between two operations of the Holy Spirit: one in Adam and the other in Christ, serving as the controlling antithesis of the entire epistle, and especially Ch. 8.

So, if that is the case, how does this antithesis work? The Holy Spirit functions as both gaoler and liberator: *first*, for all those in Adam, the Holy Spirit functions as a gaoler, conducting them into the penalty of sin for which they have been convicted under the law, into enslavement to sin itself and to death (1:24, 26, 28; 2:12, 15; 3:19, 20; 6:16-22; 11:8; Ezk 18:4, 20; Is 29:10; Ps 18:26); but, *second*, for those in Christ, he functions as a liberator, setting them free from their condemnation to the slavery of sin and the law into sonship (vss. 14-16; 5:5; 7:6; 8:2, 5, 13; Gal 4:1-7). So, the answer to the antithesis between the “spirit of slavery” and the “Spirit of adoption” is that it is a distinction between two opposite operations of the Holy Spirit, one in Adam for the unbeliever and the other in Christ for the believer. They are the difference between the Covenant Oaths of curses and blessings—the Holy Spirit executes both.

But there is still a question as to what it means for the believer to “not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear”, or as the NASB renders it, “you [the believer] have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again”. Lloyd-Jones, in concert with Puritans such as John Preston, holds that the “spirit of slavery” refers to the Holy Spirit, although he applies it exclusively

to the sinner's conversion experience under heavy conviction of the Spirit, accompanied by a deep, and sometimes overwhelming, fear of God and of judgement, which is especially marked in times of revival. The clincher, for Lloyd-Jones, being that the sinner does not normally feel any sense of bondage or fear in regard to God or their eternal state; they are hostile to God, dead in their trespasses and sins, insensitive to God and their true condition (8:7; Col 1:21; Eph 2:3-5). And so, from Lloyd-Jones perspective, the believer does not revert to this abject fear of judgement, or spirit of slavery, ever "again" (NASB); through conversion, under the conviction of the Spirit, they have been brought to repentance and to the Father, receiving instead the Spirit of adoption, they are now saved and secure in his affections. With this I would concur, with one qualification, that in light of the Adam/Christ antithesis the antithesis of v. 15 is inclusive of all those in Adam, as already argued, not just to those in the process of conversion under the influence of the Spirit.

Let me explain. While autonomous man is brazenly hostile to God and assertively confident in his own ultimacy he still must actively "...suppress the truth." But why must he? Paul continues, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (1:18-19). God's revelation is so clear in creation that "they are without excuse" (1:20). This revelation is supernatural and immediate to man's apprehension. In other words, it is not mediated by deductive reasoning but immediately – directly – by God's Spirit. While his whole environment is inescapably revelatory (1:20), including his inner life (2:15), his thought processes actively seek to suppress the clear knowledge of God; so much so, that there is no "excuse", in Greek *apologia*, meaning rational defence. In other words, he is morally culpable because there is no intellectual argument against the knowledge of God that is rationally coherent. Once God is subtracted from the equation man's physical and inner moral worlds lose coherence with reality. Apart from incoherent man-made myths, he is left with no explanatory power for what is. Despite there being no rational argument against the knowledge of God, man still persists in his hostility and resistance to God. Furthermore, this hostility is in the face of the Holy Spirit's clear and direct revelation of God. So, as argued above, all those in Adam are placed penally under God's wrath and, hence, under "the Spirit of slavery leading to fear". This revelatory knowledge of God manifests in man's innate fear of death and the judgement to come, playing out in various ways, ranging from pagan religions "propitiating the gods" to Western man's pronouncement of the "death of God". And so, the work of Christ "deliver[s] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb 2:15). This fear is evident in Paul's defence before Felix. Luke records that when he was "discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became *frightened*", in Greek *emphobos*, meaning to be thrown into fear, terrified (Thayer), although, for Felix there was no evident change even over the next two years (Acts 24:24-27). It would appear that Felix's suppressed knowledge of God and fear of judgement, already present through general revelation – *the book of nature* – was brought to the surface by Paul's reasoning with him through special revelation – *the book of Scripture*. Moreover, with the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit special revelation has markedly increased in its effect from the old economy, and perhaps, even general revelation: "And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn 16:8). So, as we have seen with Felix, that which is actively suppressed, as general revelation mediated by the Spirit, is brought to the surface through special revelation mediated by the Word and the Spirit, although not to the point of conversion. And so, Lloyd-Jones and the Puritans are right that the "spirit of slavery" is the Holy Spirit but not as right in applying it exclusively to the conviction of the sinner by the Spirit in the process of conversion. Rather, as we have shown, it applies to all unbelievers but apparently in varying degrees of intensity and effect, some are brought to conversion, others are not. And even then, those who are converted also experience the process of conviction in various degrees of intensity. Be-that-as-it-may, through a sovereign effusion of the Spirit of God, in deep conviction of sin and the judgement to come, they are brought through a sometimes lengthy experience of real fear, and occasionally depression and darkness, to finally receiving the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom they cry, "Abba! Father!" (v. 15 b; cf. Is 6:1-7). They are then secure in God's paternal embrace.

Verse 16 now explains why and how "we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" Lloyd-Jones rightly asserts that this verse is the keynote of the Protestant Reformed tradition. Along with v. 15 it deals with the believer's assurance of salvation, which, in the Roman Catholic tradition, is not taught; apart from the ministrations of the church one is never really assured of their eternal state, and even then, purgatory and the prayers of the saints are required.

In v. 15 "*we cry, 'Abba! Father!'*" but in v. 15 it is "The Spirit *himself* [who] bears witness with our spirit". One is our subjective response to the agency of the Spirit, "*by whom we cry*", the other is the Spirit's reciprocal response, affirming that we are indeed "the children of God". This reciprocity of spirit to Spirit provides a beautifully eloquent testimony to both the nature of God and man made in his image. God is quintessentially personal, revealing himself as the Father. And as such, is both sovereign and gracious by taking the initiative to pour his love into our hearts through the Spirit (5:5). Chapter 8:15 is our spirit's response, crying "Abba! Father!"—one of unabashed filial intimacy and affection. In v. 16 we see the Father responding to the believer, put colloquially, "high-fiving" him, and declaring "*Right on!*"

Paul is here referencing the Ninth Commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex 20:16; Dt 5:20). The law took great pains to hedge the testimony of a witness about with protections to assure its veracity. In fact, the law took this integrity so seriously that its penalty for bearing false witness was to suffer the same as for the crime accused (Dt 19:16-21). Hence, the Mosaic law of witness also stipulated that everything must be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Dt 17:6; 19:15). Moreover, the law adamantly proscribed any prosecution, regardless of the crime, on the evidence of only one witness (Dt 19:15). Even in the case of murder, the death penalty could not be carried out with merely one (Num 35:30; Dt 17:6). Nor could witnesses, and for that reason the courts, be moved by public opinion or a lynch mob mentality: “You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice” (Ex 23:2). This precludes positivist law decreed by the social morés of the time.

This is a wakeup call for the declining standard of justice in the West. Once grounded in the transcendent law of God through Moses, we now have positivist law grounded in man’s law as a social construct. Hence, the high profile case of Cardinal George Pell who, in 2018, was found guilty by the County Court of Victoria, in Melbourne, Australia, of homosexually raping two thirteen-year-old choir boys, twenty-two years previously, while fully clothed in the Archbishop’s vestments entailing multiple layers of surplice and robes in a crowded Cathedral, within a window of literally minutes, based on the accusations of the victim alone, in the absence of any other corroborating evidence or witness. Despite the trial judge’s warnings concerning the heat of public opinion surrounding the case triggered by the Catholic Church’s avalanche of priestly sexual abuse claims, the jury unanimously found Pell guilty. And this, also despite the previous dismissal of a hung jury. Claiming his innocence and the utter implausibility of the crime, the cardinal appealed to the Supreme Court of Victoria, which then upheld the jury’s verdict, despite one dissenting judge of the three tabling a two-hundred-page legal argument exposing the flaws of the case against Pell. In his estimation there was no case beyond reasonable doubt. The two unanimous judges based their decision exclusively on their perceived genuineness and reliability of the one witness—the victim, despite discrepancies in his testimony. The difference between the unanimous judges and the dissenting judge pivoted on this alone—the perception of the victim’s authenticity. At the date of writing Pell’s lawyers are now applying to be heard by the Federal Court of Australia, the nation’s highest court. Whether Cardinal Pell is in truth guilty or not, historically the judicial process is based on the presumption of innocence, that the accused remains innocent until *proven* guilty “beyond reasonable doubt”.

The entire fabric of God’s moral universe, from salvation to the justice of human courts, is thus, built upon the law of witness. Without it “truth is fallen in the street” (KJV) or according to the ESV, “Justice is turned back...truth has stumbled in the public squares” (Is 59:14). This is why the apostle writes to Timothy,

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is *the church* of the living God, *the pillar and support of the truth*.

2 Timothy 3:15, NASB (author’s emphasis)

The conduct of God’s household, *first* in its upholding and preaching of a forensic Gospel of justification, and, *second*, in its moral and judicial behaviour, provides “the pillar and support of the truth” in the world. So goes the church, so goes the world. If the Gospel, itself, is not seen for what it is, a covenant lawsuit displaying God’s principles of justice, how can the church display God’s justice to society and, hence, as Jesus instructed, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded” (Mt 28:20).

As a covenant lawsuit, the Gospel, therefore, demonstrates God’s justice to the world. At the very heart of the believer’s assurance of salvation, of his standing before God not only as a condemned and then acquitted sinner but also as a justified saint, is the law of witness. Beginning in God’s eternal decrees, he, *first*, witnesses that we are his sons by filling us with his Spirit; *second*, our spirit witnesses that we are his; and, *third*, the Spirit of God witnesses that our witness is true. The law’s ideal of three witnesses is met, and righteousness and justice are served (see comments on Justice in *Introduction* to Romans; also 1:11-12; 1:18; 3:8; 3:25 under *Propitiation Contended and Defended*; 3:26 under *Implications for Gospel and Culture*; Ch. 4 under *The Problem of Gospel Myopia*; 5:1-11, 12-14). Christ has shown himself as both “just and justifier” of those who believe (3:26). Therefore Romans 8:15-16 consummates the covenant lawsuit that Paul has prosecuted from the beginning of his epistle (see *Intro*, Ch. 2:1-4:25). Furthermore, as an adumbration of God’s righteous standards, the ancient Near Eastern process of adoption entailed the law of witness. The adopting father would declare before witnesses, “This is my son!” with the response, “You are my father!” Conversely, using the same process, a disobedient child could also be disinherited.

Verse 17, follows logically, “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (also Gal 4:7; Eph 3:6). Sonship guarantees heirship. Christ’s inheritance is thus our inheritance. The writer to the Hebrews declares, “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:2). As Christ’s co-heirs this means that “all things” are ours, and this includes the world which he has made, hence, the very nations and the ends of the earth, according to Psalm 2, as our possession (v. 8). “The promise to Abraham and his offspring” that he would inherit “the world” has been fulfilled (3:13), and in Christ his offspring and heirs we are (Gal 3:29). Through the preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of the nations to obey God’s holy laws, the people of God rule them as co-heirs and co-workers with Christ the “King of kings” (Mt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 3:9; 1Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10). Contra to Lloyd-Jones, who opines that this verse is not for this world but for the age to come, Romans itself teaches otherwise (see *Intro* Ch. 6, *Misreading the Epicentre of Romans*). Verse 17, referencing heirship, follows directly from its previous reference in 3:13-14, the promise to Abraham and his offspring of inheriting the world, which then leads into the watershed passage of 5:12-21, the Adam/Christ analogy, showing Christ as the new beginning of history, indeed, the progenitor of a new humanity to complete what Adam failed to do. So, Romans 8:17 picks up that theme. That which failed through Adam and also through Abraham’s seed according to the flesh, Israel, now succeeds through Christ. He is, hence, the divide of history, inaugurating a new order for the world. Through a new humanity, the corporate Christ, the creation mandate is now being finally fulfilled (see my comments on the *Cultural Mandate* at 1:3-4; 2:17-24; 3:26; 5:12-21; *Intro* ch. 6). This is to affirm the “now” but not deny the “not yet” of the “now/but not yet” tension of God’s Kingdom. It is *both*. The Kingdom *has been* definitively inaugurated in Christ, *is being* progressively advanced by the Spirit, and *will be* consummatively realised in the Resurrection (Mt 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10; 6:10; 6:33; 10:7; 11:12; 12:28; 13:33, 38, 41, 47; 16:19, 28; 24:14; 25:34 ; 21:43; Mk 1:15; 4:28; 9:1; Lk 12:22; Is 9:7; Ps 2; 110; 1 Cor 15:22-26, 50; Eph 1:18-23; Rev 11:15).

Even so, as we will see in the closing paragraphs (vss. 18-39), while there will be a quantum increase of God’s glory in the age to come, but also victory for the children of God and the renovation of creation in real-time history, despite suffering and persecution.

Although, there is a catch—“provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (v. 17b). Heirs must be trained; as with a royal family or business dynasty, the sons of God also must be trained in the Father’s business. Like our elder brother, we too, must be about our “Father’s business” (Lk 2:49, KJV). Ensuring the continuity of the Kingdom of God through the sons of God is the climax of the fivefold covenant structure: *Covenant Continuity* or *Succession* (see under *Structure* in *Intro* to Romans). To rule with Christ in this age and the one to come demands that we qualify through godly character, and character demands suffering. Thus Paul’s glorious proclamation of Christian hope in Ch. 5:

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:2-5

The Father’s discipline though, “For the moment ... seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:1–11

Nevertheless, without yielding to the disciplines of God we are rendered “illegitimate children and not sons”. They, and our yielding to them, are the proof of our sonship, for those who are “led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God” (v. 14). Our willing embrace of Father’s dealings is not only proof of our sonship but also the qualification of our heirship, and so we “share his holiness” and the “peaceful fruit of righteousness”. As Paul explained to Timothy, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him...” (2 Tim 2:12), affirming the same in our text: “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (v. 17b).

While the dealings of God have very personal application to every believer, they also have application to the corporate character of the larger church. As I have asserted in Ch. 7, these dealings are primarily designed to deliver the new humanity from the autonomy inherited in Adam but now terminated in Christ. Paul teaches that there will be a time in history when the redeemed community matures into the corporate man, arriving finally at the “unity of the faith” and the fulness of the stature of Christ (Eph 4:11-13, NASB). This demands a robust recovery of “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3, NASB)—of the apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42). Until then the church is in training, awaiting its full inheritance of the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; 9:24-27; Gal 5:21; Phil 3:12-16; Col 2:18; Heb 12:1). The Father is not going to entrust the Kingdom to an immature and undisciplined corporate son. One’s salvation or eternal state are not in jeopardy (Eph 1:11, 14; Col 1:5; 1 Pet 1:3-5), but rather one’s fruitfulness in this life and rewards in the next are (Mt 13:18-23; 1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:7-8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4). Personal salvation is not God’s end-game, but the Kingdom of God is—hence, Jesus teaching us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). Our salvation is merely the entrance to the Kingdom of God, it is the front door to “the household of faith”. Thus, the burden of the NT is not so much getting *us into heaven* but rather getting *heaven into us!* And from there into all nations and cultures of mankind so that they may learn to do the will of God (Is 2:2-4; Acts 17:26-31).

A postmillennial view of history teaches that history is not only the stage upon which God displays his Son but also his “manifold wisdom *now* through the church” (Eph 3:10; see postmillennial comments on 8:23). In other words, the church is mandated by God to both demonstrate and declare the wisdom of God—Law and Gospel—to angels and to men. And it is *now*, not in a future millennial age. This is the “mature man” of Ephesians 4:13 grown into “the full stature of Christ” and the “glorious church” of Ephesians 5:27 that is “without spot or wrinkle”. We are certainly not there yet! But as Paul instructed the Ephesians, until then we *maintain* the unity of the Spirit, and this is until we *attain* the unity of the faith (4:13, NASB). Despite the already great and lengthy history of the Christian church, the church is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Is 9:7); in other words, Jesus’ return is not imminent, as so many unhappily believe. But rather, over an even more extended period of history, God’s government will continue to increase in the church, unifying her in Spirit, in doctrine, and in mission until she becomes the most dominant cultural influence of the world until Jesus comes (see comments v. 23 for postmillennial view of time). Moreover, this corporate unity is grounded by Paul in the solidarity of the corporate Christ of Romans 5:12-21. And this corporate Christ is both the antitype and antithesis of the corporate Adam, of the world, mandating the church to succeed where Adam failed—doing God’s will on earth and completing its cultural mission (Gen 1:26-28; Mt 28:18-20). Although, as an aside, it must be noted that the *thesis* is God’s revelation to man and the *anti* is his rebellion against it, not vice versa. The world—governed by autonomous man—is thus antithetical to Christianity and the church. Nevertheless, when the people of God finally decide to “beat *their* swords into plowshares, and *their* spears into pruning hooks”, dwelling together as brothers in unity, God will command a blessing—*life* forever! (Ps 133:3; Lev 18:5). And with the imprimatur of God upon the corporate Christ the Gospel will prevail in the nations. Functioning as one body under especial effusions of the Spirit, the church will authenticate the Christian *thesis* with such universal power and authority that the rug will be pulled from every *anti*-Christian lie. With the Gospel’s universal conquest creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption into the freedom and glory of the children of God (v. 21). The apostolic unity of the church and the covenant blessings of obedience to covenant law—*life*—are joined at the hip (Dt 4:4-8; Lev 18:5; Eph 3:10). A foretaste of the age and the *life* to come!

The next paragraph (vss. 18-30), correctly interpreted, for which v. 23 is the key, will provide the basis for the postmillennial hope of Christ's victory in history. Verse 18 summarises the burden of the passage: our temporary sufferings cannot compare with the glory yet to be revealed. And this glory will not only be *consummated* in eternity but also *approximated* in history, and, as we shall see in vss. 18-25, is the Christian hope, reprising 5:1-5. Verses 26-30 then show how the Holy Spirit intercedes for the corporate Christ, that it be conformed to his own image and glory, according to God's predestined purpose. From beginning to end, the apostle's concern is for God's manifest glory (vss. 18, 30). Rushdoony accurately adduces this passage for a postmillennial view of history when he comments:

For St. Paul, history and eternity are closely related. This is true in the obvious sense that the godly go to heaven, and the ungodly go to hell, so that our lives have consequences, and the consequences of time are in eternity. It is also true in that the structures of our eternal life are developed in history, and the movements of history move to a climax in time and in eternity. Very specifically, for example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is our resurrection from the death of sin. We are the people of the resurrection. The whole of creation looks forward to its great redemption. One area of life after another is captured by the power of the resurrection until finally, the one remaining and last enemy, death, is destroyed, and the fulness of the resurrection world begins (1 Cor 15:23-27). (Rushdoony, p.135).

#### 8:18-30—The Spirit of Glory

**18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.—The burden of the passage is to show that having an eye for the glory, yet to be fully revealed, will render the Romans' present suffering full of hope (vss. 20, 24, 25). For Paul, it is a matter of perspective, a view for the long-term increase of God in history. This anticipated glory is such that creation waits for it with "eager longing" (v. 19); in Greek, *apokaradokia* meaning, to watch with head erect or outstretched, hence, Phillip's rendering, "the creation is on tiptoe...". And this glory will be made evident through the unveiling of the sons of God (v. 19). Having been "subjected to futility" by God because of Adam's disobedience (v. 20; Gen 3:14-19), creation's hope is to be set free from its consequent corruption through "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21). As Rushdoony comments:

The liberation of all creation awaits the apocalypse of man, man's assumption of his dominion mandate. "Because the creature (or, creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (v. 21). This corruption (*phthora*) means a state of decay, and inferior condition to a natural one. The natural condition of creation as God made it is a *very good* one (Gen 1:31). Its present fallen estate is an unnatural one because sin and death prevail. Man, by pushing back the realm of sin, increases the realm of life. Then at the end, God's mighty act destroys death forever. (Rushdoony, p. 137).

The very presence of the children of God in history progressively rolls back the curse from the physical creation. Verse 22 declares, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until *now*". That is to say, until the new order in Christ; with Christ's Advent it has *now* brought forth. To this the prophets testify, of "a new heaven and a new earth":

Then I saw a *new heaven and a new earth*, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for

these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Revelation 21:1–7 (author’s emphasis; see also, Is 65:17; 66:22)

With the coming of Christ, the first heaven and earth passed away. The Old Covenant order and the elementary things of the world (Gal 4:3, 9) have been removed and superseded by Christ. As the writer to the Hebrews explained:

At that time [the old covenant age] his voice shook the earth, but now [concerning the new covenant age] he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Hebrews 12:26–27

The Old Covenant order, according to Hebrews, has been shaken and removed, so that the unshakable, the New Covenant, may stand.

When Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple, in his Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24, the disciples immediately enquired as to “when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (v. 3). Then, in enumerating the signs, he explains, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains” (v. 8), and also utilises the prophetic imagery of the stars falling and the heavens being shaken:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:29–30

Jesus’ imagery of birth pangs and shakings in the heavens find their echo in Paul’s consummation of the covenant in Romans 8. Both images signify epochal transitions, of God’s judgements upon nations and kingdoms; for example, Isaiah in prophesying the imminent destruction of Babylon calls on the imagery of “a woman in labour” and of the sun, moon, and stars being darkened (Is 13:8, 10; see also Is 24:23; 34:4; Ezek 32:7–8; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15f; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph 1:15; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:12–17; 8:12).

As J. Stuart Russell argues, this OT imagery is not designed to be taken literally:

The slightest attention to the language of Old Testament prophecy must convince any sober-minded man that it is not meant to be understood according to the letter. First of all, the utterances of the prophets are poetry; and, secondly, they are Oriental poetry. They may be called hieroglyphic pictures representing historical events in highly metaphorical imagery. ... Social and political revolutions, moral and spiritual changes, are shadowed forth by physical convulsions and catastrophes; and if these natural phenomena affect the imagination more powerfully still, they are not inappropriate figures when the real importance of the events which they represent is apprehended. The earth convulsed with earthquakes, burning mountains cast into the sea, the stars falling like leaves, the heavens on fire, the sun clothed in sackcloth, the moon turned into blood, are images of appalling grandeur, but they are not necessarily unsuitable representations of great civil commotions,—the overthrowing of thrones and dynasties, the desolations of war, the abolition of ancient systems, and great moral and spiritual revolutions. (Russell, pp. 350–1).

Jesus was therefore predicting, not the destruction of the cosmos, nor his Second Coming and the end of history, but rather, his

“coming” in judgement on Israel, and the end of the Old Covenant “age”. And this occurred in AD 70, under Titus, with Jerusalem’s fall and the Temple’s destruction, only forty years on, fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy that “...*this* generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Mt 24:34). Replacing Israel in God’s firmament, the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Israel of God, was raised to the right hand of the Father from where he now comes “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—either in visitations of the Spirit or in divine judgement. And this, in fulfilment of the covenant oath, to either bless or to curse.

Therefore, the promised “new heaven and new earth” is here now; it was ushered in through Christ’s ascension and destruction of the Temple. The New Covenant and Christ’s Kingdom were inaugurated then, through the tumult of Israel’s judgement and the passing of the OT aeon. The death throes of the old are but the birth pangs of the new. The coming in glory of which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 and the glory, therefore, of which Paul speaks are one and the same. While, admittedly, it is also the glory of the age yet to come, of the resurrection, it is still the glory of the ascended Christ, the *firstfruits* of the resurrection, who, in real-time history, ascended to the Ancient of Days, and carved out a stone, without hands, and crushed the feet of the human image (Dan 2; also Ps 2). Because of this, the empires of autonomous man were definitively destroyed in the ascension: “...When he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men” (Eph 4:8, NASB). As the writer to the Hebrews says, we have “tasted the powers of the age to come” (6:5)—indeed, “the age to come” *has* invaded – and *is* conquering – “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4). In that sense, it is ‘Back to the Future’! May our eyes be opened to Paul’s great eschatological hope!

having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only *in this age* but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as *head over all things to the church*,

Ephesians 1:18–22 (author's emphasis)

Christ’s total authority and power “*in this age*” is the Pauline hope. And this, he says, is for the sake of the church for whom he is “head over *all* things”.

As an aside, but providing the clincher for a postmillennial view of history and enormous implications for the Gospel’s mandate, the presence of death, sin, procreation, and the normal pursuits of life in Isaiah’s prophecy of “the new heaven and new earth” present an insurmountable dilemma for the premillenarian (see Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, for a magisterial treatment of Postmillennialism; R.J. Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*). From their position, how can these things still function after the Second Coming and the Resurrection?

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.

Isaiah 65:17–23

Moreover, the fecundity of the earth and the longevity of man, portrayed by Isaiah are typical of the Deuteronomy 28 covenant blessings within history.

Therefore, rather than destroyed, the created order is renewed through the Gospel and, ultimately, in the consummation. In

view of this and the previous comments on biblical imagery, Peter's statement that "the day of the Lord" will be accompanied by "the heavens...pass[ing] away with a roar" and "the heavenly bodies...burned up and dissolved" must be seen, not as predicting the end of the material world, but rather, the end of the Old Covenant world (2 Pet 3:10, 12). Writing prior to the epochal events of AD 70, Peter is foreshadowing the imminent day of judgement upon Israel, and the dissolving of the Old Covenant economy in the destruction of the Temple. This is confirmed by his own interpretation that this is "according to [God's] promise" through which "we are waiting for *new heavens and a new earth* in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13). For Peter, the dissolving of the firmament is the coming of the new creation. This is then strengthened by his immediate referencing of Paul's letters, "when he [Paul] speaks in them of *these matters*" (vss. 15, 16), warning that they are "hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction". To the Corinthians, Paul declared that "...if anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come", according to the NASB marginal rendering (2 Cor 5:17; see also Gal 6:15). In other words, the "new creation" is already present in Christ and his church. The OT promise of the coming "new heavens and a new earth", fulfilled in Christ, as taught by Paul and the other apostles, was "hard to understand" because of the first-century Jewish expectation of their impending political deliverance and vindication by the coming Messiah. When, in fact, the Messiah had already come, in Jesus of Nazareth, and was about to come again, in final judgement upon Israel. They were about to be cast down from God's firmament, through the fall of Jerusalem and scattering to the nations, in fulfilment of the "new creation" promise. Consequently, Russell, in commenting on 2 Peter 3:13, confirms that in his view, the "new heavens and a new earth" of Peter is synonymous with that of John in Revelation 21: the *heavenly*, or spiritual Jerusalem – in contradistinction to the *earthly*, or physical Jerusalem – "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride", which Paul tells us is in Ephesians, is the church (5:25-32; Heb 12:22; Russell, pp. 324-5). Israel's function in the old covenant economy is superseded by Christ and his church. Unquestionably "the new heaven and the new earth" is synonymous with Paul's Gospel and the New Covenant era. And this era will entail not only one "in which righteousness dwells" but also the renewal of the earth's fecundity and productivity (Is 32:13-17; 35:1-7). The earth, as a Garden paradise, will be restored. And this, through the "revealing of the sons of God"—through the people of God fulfilling mankind's original creation mandate, liberating the planet from "its bondage to corruption". (see comments on the *Cultural Mandate*: 1:3-4; 2:21-24; 3:19-20, 26; 5:1-21; ch. 6 *Intro* under, *The Law of God, the Adam Belief-System, and Protestant Confusion*, and also, *Culturally Compromised by Misreading Romans*; 7:16-25 under *Romans 7: The Key to Cultural Dominion*; 8:15-17). This has severe implications for the so-called current "climate emergency" and its attendant hysteria. The Creator God, as sovereign and providential, has built into the creation a buffer-zone to absorb the impact of sin. Despite man's profligacy, his covenant through Noah guarantees that, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen 8:22). Rather than imminent global cataclysm, the earth is staring down the barrel of impending renewal through the power of the Gospel. Therefore, the earth will not be destroyed, not only in history but also at the final consummation, but rather, be transfigured, as it enters into the fulness of the resurrection.

Furthermore, the two-age schema of Scripture precludes the premillennial view and any potential doomsday scenarios; apart from their inadmissible appeal to Revelation 20, there is no other age mentioned in Scripture. As for the "1,000" years of Revelation 20, to arbitrarily wrest a number from what is a prophetic book replete with symbols and types and literalise it is to do hermeneutical violence to the text. On what legitimate grounds can that be done when the numbers of Revelation are patently symbolic, for example, the numbers "7" or "666"? So, what does the number "1,000" signify? Interpreting scripture with scripture, we already know that the Lord owns the cattle on "a thousand hills" (Ps 50:10). But if we literalise it, does that mean he doesn't own them on hill number 1,001? No, because we already know "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Ps 24:1), so it is clearly not literal but figurative. But figurative of what?—Of plenitude, superabundance, a superfluity. In other words, Satan is bound for an extensive period; therefore from the time of Christ to the consummation is an extensive period of, no doubt, many-many thousands of years. For the postmillennialist, in the words of the Rolling Stones, "Time is on my side".

To return to the text and v. 23 in particular. The phrase, "the firstfruits of the Spirit", certainly suggests that there remains a greater measure of the Holy Spirit to be experienced. This is a unique one-off reference to the Spirit as a "firstfruit" and has an obvious harvest connotation, signifying throughout the Bible the ingathering of the nations (Ex 23:16; 34:22; Jer 2:3; 51:33; Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13; Mt 9:37-38; 13:18-30; Jn 4:35). And while Paul teaches elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is given as a "seal" or "guarantee" of our full inheritance in the resurrection (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14), there is no suggestion in Romans 8 that "the firstfruits of the Spirit" is synonymous, that it speaks of an inheritance deferred to another age as commonly taught, with the believer, in the meantime, "groaning" in anticipation of deliverance from his mortal exigencies through the resurrection (Calvin, Lloyd-Jones, Cranfield, Moo). Indeed, the Ephesian reference just cited above leads into the apostle's great paean of Christ's present dominion and glory as "head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:14-23). Through his ascension the inheritance is realised in time and history. So, at the moment of regeneration and faith we are made fellow-heirs with Christ

(see comments v. 17), seated with him in his ascension glory, so that God might show the riches of his grace toward us throughout all ages (Eph 2:4-7). As argued previously at 4:13, God's promise to Abraham and his offspring was their inheritance of the world. Again, this is in real-time history. Although, admittedly, Paul does speak of a "groaning" to be free of our mortal bodies and to be "clothed with our dwelling from heaven" (NASB) or to "put on immortality" and that he has "given us the Spirit as a guarantee" of the same (2 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Cor 15:53-54). Nevertheless, the Romans 8 "firstfruits of the Spirit" is a unique reference and, moreover, "groaning...in the pains of childbirth until *now*", clearly refers to the manifestation of the sons of God in the "now"—in history. This will become more obvious with the exegesis below.

Conversely, Meyer correctly points out that Paul, by "the firstfruits of the Spirit", means:

...the Christians of that age generally, since in fact they—in contrast to the far greater mass of mankind, still unconverted, for whom, according to Joel 3:1, the receiving of the Spirit was still a thing of the future (11:25 ff)—were in possession of that, which first had resulted from the communication of the Spirit, and which therefore stood related to the *collective* bestowal as the *daybreak*. (Meyer, pp. 81-82)

Despite Godet's disputation with Meyer's position (Godet, pp. 96-97), Paul and other NT writers do teach that the early believers were a "firstfruits" (16:5; 2 Thes 2:13; Jas 1:18; Rev 14:4). The very notion of a "firstfruits" makes precisely Meyer's point: it is the "first" and in the OT cultus was offered to God as a token of the future full harvest (Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Lev 2:12, 14; Lev 23:9-14, 17, 20). As such, "the firstfruits of the Spirit" refers to the results of the first century outpouring of the Holy Spirit in anticipation of the harvest of history and the final "fulness of the Gentiles", with which Paul is so concerned (11:25), providing the very motivation for his epistle and proposed visit to Rome—the mission westward to the nations (1:8-16a; 15:24, 28). Hence, in concert with creation (v. 22), under the impress of the Holy Spirit, they, and we, "groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons", for the full harvest of the world and the public declaration that we are, indeed, the sons and heirs of God—when "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before [him]" (Ps 22:7).

However, as discussed above, our "adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" has invariably been relegated to the resurrection and to the age to come, despite Paul's already established emphasis on present sonship and heirship (vss. 12-17). To interpret scripture accurately we must apply the principle of context, of scripture interpreting scripture. This principle of context begins with the passage and chapter context and extends to the whole book context. We have previously taken pains to establish that 5:12-21 functions as the epicentre of the epistle, and is, indeed, a watershed, dividing the epistle, with the apostle's argument leading up to it and then flowing down from it on the other side. Chapter 5:12-21 is thus the governing influence on Ch. 8. The apostle's whole theological project is therefore sourced in the two corporate identities of Adam and Christ. As we have argued in Ch. 6, this determines the identity of the "body of sin" (6:6), not as our physical body but rather as the corporate Adam, the world, autonomous man organising himself apart from God (see *Intro* to Ch. 6, under *Exegetical Confusion of Romans 6:6*). So, as we come to 8:23 we discover the antithesis and counterpoint to the "body of sin" in what can be rendered as "our body of redemption"; the former – the body of Adam, and the latter – the body of Christ. It is important to note that while the personal pronoun "our" is plural, the noun "body" is singular in the Greek, contra to ESV's incorrect plural rendering as "bodies", exposing the dilemma faced by translators, who in this case have crossed the line as interpreters. Unfortunately though, a flagrant case of eisegesis, reading into the text the interpreters presupposed meaning. So, the plural ("our") are collected into the singular ("body"); hence, a collective or corporate body. Additionally, "body" is in the genitive case, the case of possession, which serves to qualify "redemption", signified by use of the word "of"; hence, our rendering: "the body *of* redemption". Furthermore, with "redemption" in the accusative case, signifying it as the direct object of the verb, of our eager waiting, as is also "adoption", the believers of the first century, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, anticipate the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the full harvest of the world, indeed, the collective universal "body of Christ", all those adopted as sons. God's "covenant of redemption" is fulfilled in Christ's "body of redemption". Finally, because "Of the increase of his government there will be no end" (Is 9:7), every generation of believers, like Paul's, will be animated by the Spirit in eager anticipation of the harvest of the world and the full complement of Christ's body. To this corporate reading of v. 23, Godwin agrees, denying also any reference to our physical bodies (p. 229).

Verses 24-25 conclude the Pauline eschatological hope: "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?" (v. 24). His hope, as exegeted above, is one of Christ's victory in history and can best be categorised as postmillennial; having received all authority in heaven and on earth, Christ is actively subduing every enemy until the last enemy, death, is destroyed in the resurrection (Ps 110; 1 Cor 15:24-26). This means he will receive the reward of

his suffering – the harvest of the nations – in history (Ps 22:27-31; 72:1-14; Is 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 53:11). As yet that victory is not fully visible, as the writer to the Hebrews elucidates:

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Hebrews 2:5–10

“At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him” which is precisely Paul’s point in v. 24, “For who hopes for what he sees?” This is not a fact of Gospel failure but rather of Gospel progress. Though Thomas may have reached the Parthian Empire, stretching from Armenia to Pakistan, and India earlier than AD 52, the first century believers – Romans written AD 55-56 – had not yet seen the global advance of the Kingdom of God in the conversion of whole nations and states. In fact, Paul’s mission to Rome and Spain, moving westward, did not bear fruit in transformed culture until centuries later in the conversion of Europe and the emergence of Christendom four-hundred years after the collapse of Rome in AD 401. Although, in AD 201, the first state to be Christianised was Osroene or Edessa in northern Mesopotamia, followed by Armenia in AD 301. Faith, as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”, is basic to Gospel advance and Kingdom growth (Heb 11:1). For the moment, especially in the contemporary West, like the Romans of the first century, we do not see the victory of the Gospel culturally. The pagan power state prevails. But its boastful dominance, as history has already demonstrated too many times, will be short-lived. The Gospel, as the power of God to salvation, will not only save multitudes but also nations and cultures as it continues to advance in the harvest of the world. Rather than fixating on the momentary crisis – although it may last several centuries yet – “we see him who *for a little while* was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor”. Although, he suffered in his death, made lower than angels, in the timing of God he was raised to life, conquering death and hell, being raised above all dominions and powers, over which he now actively rules. Christ and his co-heirs are consequently invincible in history, and likewise will rise to fulfil God’s earth purpose as his vice-regents. Despite apparent setbacks. Even though we do not presently see that total dominion, “we wait for it with patience”.

**26** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. **27** And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. **28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.—In light of the above reading of 8:18-25 we now have something to pray about! The groaning of prayer, “too deep for words”, from my experience, is a phenomenon of Holy Spirit visitation. During the Charismatic renewal in Sydney in the early 1970’s we were privileged to be a part of prayer meetings that soared in worship on the wings of spontaneous “singing in the Spirit” and simultaneously travailed in the deep groanings of the Spirit in intercessory prayer for the nations. It was through these meetings that God brought direction for the sending of an apostolic team to Manila, Philippines, to plant a work which became influential in that nation. This is the groaning and eager longing of both creation and Christian (vss. 19, 22, 23). Rather than merely the groaning of our mortality, it is an intercessory travail for the church which comes by the Spirit, “according to the will of God” (v. 27). With his vision of God’s sovereignty in history, the apostle can pray for the church’s victory over every enemy, including the pagan power state of Rome, knowing that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (v. 28). In addressing the Galatian church, he could say, “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (4:9, KJV). And so, as the saints suffer under Roman tyranny and Jewish persecution, he can pray in faith,

knowing that, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...” (v. 29). God is sovereign in our suffering; through it we are predestined to share the likeness of our elder brother. God’s sovereignty provides an unshakable faith and hope for the future, that those predestined in eternity will be glorified in history: “those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (v. 30). “But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Num 14:21, KJV).

8:31-39—Christian Victory Assured

**31** *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*—The apostle’s hymn to the triumph of the believer, in time and eternity, is a fitting climax to his whole argument to this point. Verses 31-34 extol the judicial certainties of the believer’s standing before God and man: chosen in God’s eternal counsels, God is *for* us and having ruled in our favour “all things” are ours. *God* has justified us, and *none* can accuse or condemn. Christ is sufficient! Verses 35-38 extol, therefore, the believer’s security in the love of God, that no circumstance nor power in all of creation, in time or eternity, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”  
Revelation 7:10

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[Part 5: Introduction—De-Creation & Re-Creation: \*Paradise Restored\*](#)

[Part 5a: Chapter 5:1-21—The Hope of Glory](#)

[Part 5b: Chapter 6:1-23—The Problem of Sin](#)

[Part 5c: Chapter 7:1-25—The Problem of the Law](#)

[Part 5d: Chapter 8:1-39—Re-Creation by the Spirit: \*Paradise Restored\*](#)

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