

Romans: De-Creation & Re-Creation—Paradise Restored, Part 5

by David Orton

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EXPOSITION: Chapter 5:1–8:39

In the next four chapters Paul takes his Gospel to the next level, to its end game: from justification to glorification, from ch. 5 to ch. 8. In fact, his language now switches from the polemical to the confessional, to a declaration of the victory of Christ in history. Having established the juridical basis of man's reinstatement as a covenant-keeper (chs. 3, 4), he shows how the twin obstacles of sin (ch. 6) and the law (ch. 7) are now dealt with in Christ, opening the way for the earth to be restored as God's cosmic temple (ch. 8). And so, redemptive history moves from *de-creation* in Adam to *re-creation* in Christ: that is to say, from 'paradise lost' to 'paradise restored'. God's original purpose for man and the cosmos – for space-time history – is restored in Christ as the "last Adam" and the "second man". As the "last Adam" he is the terminal point of the old creation, marred by sin and death (1 Cor 15:45). But as the "second man" he serves as the beginning of a "new creation", characterised by righteousness and life (1 Cor 15:47; Col 1:18).

While ch. 5 logically emerges from chs.1-4, reaffirming justification as the basis for salvation and expounding its total certainty, chs. 5-8, nonetheless, is a literary whole, as reflected in our outline. This is evidenced by the apostle's bookending of them by two mirrored passages – 5:1-11 and 8:18-39 – that affirm, in the face of tribulation (inflicted by apostate Jewry and the pagan power-state), the present victory of Christ and his church. This is a message for those who live in space-time history. Three key words emerge from both passages: *justify* (5:1, 9; 8:30 [x2], 33), *glory* (5:2; 8:18, 21, 30), and *hope* (5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24 [x4], 25). Contra to the "Gospel according to St. Evangelical" – a truncated gospel focussed on getting to heaven – the believer is given more than the hope of eternal life through justification, he is also given the larger hope of creation (the space-time order) restored to the glory of God; that is to say, of God's *shekinah* glory dwelling in and governing the nations—God's will being done "on *earth* as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). This is not to deny the consummation and the age to come, and hence, a legitimate "now but not yet" tension; rather, it is to say that we have too conveniently deferred elements of the "now" to the "not yet", denying history – and, hence, the First Advent – its full eschatological significance. Justification, properly understood as a covenant category, provides the foundation for an eschatology of victory; a biblical philosophy of history that sees God's purpose for the cosmos fulfilled this side of the Second Advent; that is, *in* history—that sees man restored to God's original creation purpose and, hence, as his image-bearer and vice-regent over the earth, restoring it as God's cosmic temple (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8).

As the climactic fulfilment of the promise, it was Christ's First Advent that crushed Satan's head, destroying sin and death, and raising him victoriously to the right hand of the majesty, from where he presently Judges and Rules the nations (Eph 1; Col 1; Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:16; Ps 89:27; 2; 110). It is, thus, God's saving act in history. Sadly, this victory over his enemies has been, too conveniently, postponed by various eschatological schemes to the Second Advent and a post-historical millennium. Chapter 5:12-21 – the Adam-Christ parallel – is thus pivotal to Paul's eschatology, which is then explicated more fully in chapter 8 with creation liberated and history fulfilled in the ingathering of the Gentiles and the re-grafting of the Jews in chapters 9-11. God's original covenant purpose for man in Adam to extend the Edenic temple to the whole earth is restored in Christ. Justification and salvation *in* history lead to glorification *in* history—this is Pauline eschatology. Man is reinstated as a covenant-keeper, and as God's vice-regent extends God's reign – and hence God's glory – throughout the creation.

So, in light of 5:12-21, my so-called "over-realized" eschatology merely becomes someone else's "under-realized" soteriology. Through Paul's Gospel of Christ's victory over his enemies – sin and death – the Kingdom of God is realized in history. Death is merely the "*last enemy*" to be defeated at the consummation (1 Cor 15:25-26; Ps 110), signifying that throughout history Christ is progressively "destroying every rule and every authority and power" so that at the end he can "deliver the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor 15:24). But how is this wrought?—Through Christ's justifying work that reinstates the believer, and ultimately the nations, to covenant status and to a life of covenant obedience (Rom 1:5; 16:26; Is 2:1-4). In Christ, the believer now fulfils God's original creation mandate given to man: having received renewed covenant status through grace by faith, he can now obey and live in the covenant, and hence the covenant blessing of dominion, thereby, extending the Edenic paradise – the culture of heaven – to the whole cosmos (Gen 1:26-28; 2:9, 15-17; Lev 18:5; Mt 28:18-20). In this way, the Gospel "is the power of God for salvation" (1:16), not only for the eternal salvation of man but also for the whole created order, progressively

restoring it as the temple of the Lord, until the consummation when the "last enemy" – death – is climactically defeated in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:26) with our glorious entry of "the new heavens and the new earth".

The message of the section is powerfully reinforced by a chiasmic structure or ring cycle, a literary device, which appear not only in Scripture (e.g. the Flood narrative of Genesis) but also, for example, in epic poetry such as the Iliad and the Odyssey. This structure may posit two ideas, A and B, together with variants A' and B', being presented as A,B,B',A'. Hence in Romans 5-8 we have,

A 5:1-11 — assurance of future glory

B 5:12-21 — basis of assurance: solidarity in Christ

C 6:1-23 — the problem of sin

C' 7:1-25 — the problem of the law

B' 8:1-17 — basis of assurance: solidarity in Christ by the HS

A' 8:18-39 — assurance of future glory

As can be seen from this ring cycle, chs. 6 and 7 form a parenthesis between the main chs. 5 and 8. Accordingly, the chiasm demonstrates that the apostle argues justification as the assurance of glorification (A); that it guarantees, despite the problems of sin and the law (C, C'), a victorious future and hope for the people of God (A').

This section has also been the source of much confusion in regard to sanctification, mentioned twice in ch. 6 (v. 19, 22). Popular evangelical notions of sanctification, sourced in Wesleyan, Keswick, and Higher Life movements, have misinterpreted ch. 6 especially, viewing it as subjective and experimental, when, in fact, it is a continuation of the objective and positional, of the believer's position "in Christ", following on from ch. 5 and previous.

This has resulted in quick-fix formulae such as, "Let go and let God", reducing sanctification to an instantaneous faith transaction initiated at will – that is, autonomously (displaying overtones of semi-Pelagianism) – experienced subsequent to justification as a "second blessing" crisis-experience. This then produces a two-tier elitist Christianity: the "higher life" and its inevitable corollary, the "lower life"—the "spiritual" Christian and the "carnal" Christian. However, in the commentary on ch. 6 we will expose the exegetical flaws that have caused such a calamitous scenario. And, contra to the former view, we will show that Scripture teaches gradual mortification of the flesh – of increasing conformity to the image of Christ – for *all* believers, in the power of the Spirit.

[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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